

Big Book Comes Alive Study Group

Joe & Charlie Audio Workshop

WEEK #3

Preface

(Session03a - 08:31.)

J & C Table of Contents. Okay, let's go over for just a few moments to the Preface, Roman numeral xi. And the second paragraph on Roman numeral xi,

Big Book p. xi, par. 2 "Because this book has become the basic text for our Society and has helped such large numbers of alcoholic men and women to recovery, there exist a sentiment against any radical changes being made in it. Therefore, the first portion of this volume, describing the A.A. recovery program, has been left untouched in the course of revisions made for both the second and the third editions."

J & C And I think there's two ideas there. First when we see the words "basic text." I think we're alerted to the type book we have in front of us. All kinds of books in the world today. You got novels, novels written on fact, novels written on fiction. Biographies, autobiographies, concordances, many kind of books. But we also have a book called a textbook, and many of us don't have very fond memories of textbooks. Every time I saw the word textbook all I could think about was cheat, I don't know why. Remember about how back in school when we used a text book, we had to read and study and do things you didn't want to do, take tests and all that kind of jazz. Lots of work involved in it. And for some people in A.A. today the very idea of a textbook just completely turns them off.

But if you would take a textbook in it's simplest form--really all it is, is a means of taking information from the mind of one human or a group of human beings, put it down in the written word then transfer that information to the mind of another human being who's using the text book. And that's all teaching is. A lot of people today say you can't teach in A.A., I don't see why you can't. Teaching is nothing more than transferring information from the mind of one person to the mind of another, increasing the knowledge of the one who's being taught. We all teach everyday and we're all being taught everyday. I don't see how in the world we could ever sponsor and help anybody if we couldn't teach them what we already know. And that's what a textbook does too. A textbook usually assumes that the reader of the book will have very little knowledge of the subject matter. It normally starts at a very simple level. Then as the knowledge of the reader increases, the material presented becomes more difficult.

The idea of a textbook on mathematics. Let's say my friend Joe here knows nothing at all about mathematics. He can't add, he can't subtract, he can't do any of those things. Oh, he can count. In fact he can probably count to twenty-one if he's standing there naked and got everything where it belongs, he might make 21. Twenty and a half actually.

If I handed him a textbook on mathematics and I said, Joe, I want you to go to Chapter Five and work the algebra problems. Now being a good fellow he would go to Chapter Five and look at them but he can't even add and subtract, they just look like marks on paper to him. But if I said, Joe, Chapter 1 in this textbook on mathematics deals with the value of numbers and addition and subtraction. If you'll read it and study it, and let me help you, by the time you're through with Chapter One you'll know how to add and subtract and sure enough he learns how to do that. And then I say now let's go to Chapter Two. Based on what you've learned in One, you can go to Chapter Two and learn how to multiply and divide and sure enough he does that. And then I say, now you can go to Chapter Three and you can learn fractions and decimals and we gradually prepare his mind for the new information in Chapter Five.

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I think

the greatest mistake being made in A.A. today,
the newcomer comes to the door
we hand him the book
and we say go to Chapter Five and do what it says and you'll be okay

And they go to Chapter Five and they run into a series of algebra problems.

Step One says, "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol -- that our lives had become unmanageable." The newcomer says, man I'm not powerless over anything. They have no idea what we mean by that statement (because we've directed them to Chapter 5 (Step 3).

Step Two says, "We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity". The newcomer says, don't tell me I'm crazy. Yeah, I do stupid things when I'm drunk, but when I'm sober I'm like other people.

They have no idea what we mean by that statement.(because we've directed them to Chapter 5 (Step 3).

But if you're not powerless and you're not nuts, then you don't need (Chapter 5) Step Three to be thinking about turning your will and your life over to the care of something you don't understand in the first place. We present them with an impossible situation.

If we can do nothing else this weekend, I hope we're going to be able to get over (realize) the idea of the value of The Doctor's Opinion and the first four chapters.

There is where we learn what the problem is.

There is where we learn what the solution is.

That prepares us for Chapter 5. **"You see Chapter 5 starts with Step 3"**.

It's very difficult to start with (Step) 3, unless you've got (Step) 1 and (Step) 2 behind you.

Hopefully we'll be able to see that. I think the other thing that is so important,

Big Book p. xi, par. 2 " *"*

...there exists a sentiment against any radical changes being made in it."

J & C The first edition of the Big Book, "Alcoholics Anonymous", and by the way this happens to be a 2nd printing of it. You'll notice how big this 2nd printing is. The actual lettering size is the same as your book today, but you'll also notice it that it had very wide margins on the pages. The alcoholic mind says the bigger the book, the better it'll sell. And that's why they call it a Big Book. They printed it on the thickest, cheapest old paper they could find. Cheap paper is thick, it's real thick, and you'll notice how thick this book actually is. It doesn't say a bit more than the book does today, but you know actually the thicker it is, certainly the more money it's worth. I think I can see their ideas behind some of this. What really amazes me is you notice the color on the dust jacket. I can just see some alcoholic in New York City walking down the street with this under his arm trying to remain anonymous. The brighter the color the quicker it catches the eye, and the better it.... I can see Bill Wilson all through this book, real

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The first printing came out in 1939. By 1955 the fellowship had changed. The stories in the back of the book were there for the newcomer to be able to identify with. In '55, since bottom had come up, age had come down, more and more women coming in, they said we need to change those stories in the back of the book. So in 1955 they deleted some stories, added some more, came out with a second edition, but the recovery section remained the same.

1976 they did the same thing. Deleted some stories in the back of the book, added some more, came out with a third edition, but the recovery section remained the same.

Now, I think what's so important for me today is whether I'm reading a first, second, or third edition--we have never changed the recovery section. I wonder why we've never found it necessary to change it. Because it works, doesn't it, yeah you betcha. And why does it work?

Three reasons I think.

1. Alcoholics haven't changed a bit. They still get drunk, they get in jailhouses, they get in divorce courts, they get in knife fights, they get in gun battles, they get in car wrecks, they get in penitentiaries, they get in cemeteries. They're still doing the same dumb things today that they did back in 1939. Haven't changed a lick.

2. Alcohol hasn't changed. The names have changed. The bottles have changed. The colors have changed. But alcohol is the same thing today it was in 1939.

3. Human nature never changes. It's the same today as it was in 2000 years ago. And that's what this book deals with. It deals with alcoholics, alcoholism and human nature.

Therefore, we've never found it necessary to change it. I think that's probably one of the greatest miracles of Alcoholics Anonymous. You know how we love to change things. Everybody that's ever read it's certainly has re-written it at least twice in their minds. Collectively though, we've never found it necessary.

Joe?

Preface

(Session03b - 12:39 minutes)

Let's go to the Foreword to the First Edition, Roman numeral page xiii . It said,

Big Book p. xiii, par. 1

“We, ...”

J & C and I think that's probably the largest word in Alcoholics Anonymous. We can do what I can't do.

Big Book p. xiii, par. 1 “We, of Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body.”

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J & C They're already beginning to tell us again what the problem is, it says a seeming hopeless state of mind and body, and a little later on tonight we'll learn to separate those two ideas, the body from the mind, and to talk about them in great detail. And it says,

Big Book p. xiii, par. 1 "To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book."

J & C You'll notice that the words, "*precisely how we have recovered*" is in italics. Charlie would have you to believe that that it's squiggly writing, it isn't, it's italics. Squiggly writing. Anytime you see squiggly, you got me doing it now, any time you see italics in this book it becomes very, very important, probably ought to read it again. And it says "precisely". Later on in the book we're going to find words such as specifically, exactly, with clear-cut directions. So this book is not a book on just about how to recover from alcoholism,

this book is going to tell us
precisely, specifically, exactly, with clear-cut directions
on how to recover from alcoholism.

And if I want to recover from alcoholism, guess what, I need
to do it precisely, specifically, and exactly, and try to follow the clear-cut directions best I can,
otherwise I may not recover from alcoholism.

I think we see a couple of things here that's extremely important. First, "We are more than one hundred men and women". Most books that I read have been authored by one person, and when I read a book authored by one person, if I see something in there I don't agree with it, with my keen intellectual alcoholic mind I usually say who in the hell are they to think they're smarter than I am. And I just ignore it. But I've got to realize with the Big Book, that if I'm going to argue with it, I'm going to be arguing with one hundred people, not one.

The first forty said, Bill we want you to write the book, you know more about it than anybody else, you've been sober longer than anybody else, which by the way was just a little over 3 years at that time. But they said Bill this is not to be your book; it's to be our book. And as you write those chapters we want to see them, and we will add to, delete from, and change around whatever we want to. When we're through with it, it'll be the collective knowledge, experience and wisdom of all forty of us. By the time the book was published that forty had changed to one hundred. So if I'm going to argue with it today, I'm going to be arguing with one hundred men and women, not just one person. And it's going to be one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body.

Which brings in the word "recovered".

I hear people argue about this all over the world.

Can you recover from Alcoholism?

Well the book says you can.

It said the first one hundred had recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body.

Now I'll never be cured of alcoholism, I will always have the physical allergy, I'll never be able to safely drink alcohol again. But before I came to A.A., not only could I not drink it safely, but I couldn't keep from drinking it. And the resulting fact was I lived in an absolutely hopeless state of mind and body. And

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I came to A.A. and I applied the program of action in this book and I no longer live in that hopeless state of mind and body. I still can't drink, but by golly I can stay sober. Now I'll never be cured of alcoholism, but I have recovered from the state of mind and body known as alcoholism. And you're going to see the word recovered and recovery all the way through the book several times. I think that's important.

The other thing that is so important is to show other alcoholics precisely how we have done that. You know if I, if I went to an A.A. potluck meeting and let's say you've made a strawberry cake, which happens to be my favorite kind of cake. Just in case you ever make, ever make me one that's the kind I like, and I bite into that cake, and God it's just perfect. The texture's right, the taste is right, everything is just right about it. And I say, who made this cake? You'd probably say, I did. And I'll say, will you tell me how and you say, yeah I'll be glad to. And you'll sit down and write out for me a precise, specific, clear-cut set of directions on how to make that cake. You'll tell me the ingredients to put in it, the quantity of the ingredients, the sequence in which to mix them together, the temperature at which to bake it, and how long to bake it.

Now, if I take your instructions in my kitchen and I follow them precisely as you made them out, when that thing comes out of the oven and cools off and I bite into it, I think I can expect it to taste exactly like your cake tasted.

But if I get your directions in my kitchen and my keen, intellectual, alcoholic mind starts working, it may say, well I'm not sure about six eggs, maybe we oughta just put four in there. Instead of two cups of sugar, I believe it would be better with three. Instead of baking it at 375, surely four and a quarter would be better. Instead of baking it for eighteen minutes, I need to bake it for twenty-five. Now when it comes out of the oven and I bite into it, you betcha I'm going to be biting a piece of cake. But I wonder how closely it would resemble your cake, which was my reason for making it in the first place.

A precise, specific, clear-cut set of directions, on how to recover from alcoholism.

We've been around A.A. long enough to know and clearly understand you can't make anybody do anything that they don't want to in A.A. The only one requirement for membership in Alcoholics Anonymous is a desire to stop drinking. You can stand up in an A.A. meeting and say I don't like you people at all, can hardly drink your lousy old coffee, and every time I read your Twelve Steps I vomit, but I'm going to be a member of A.A. because I've got a desire to stay sober and nobody can say a word about that. But that's dealing with membership and the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

If you want to recover from alcoholism there are some things you're probably going to have to do And
that's what this book deals with.

It doesn't deal with membership and the fellowship.

It deals with recovery from alcoholism.

And if we were to do as these first one hundred did,
then surely we can expect to receive what they got,
recovery from a hopeless condition of mind and body known as alcoholism.

Big Book p. xiii, par, 1

*“For them, we hope these pages will prove so convincing that no further authentication will be necessary. We think this account of our experiences will help everyone to better understand the alcoholic. Many do not comprehend **that the alcoholic is a very sick person.** And besides, we are sure that our way of living has its advantages for all.”*

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J & C And that statement, “many do not comprehend that the alcoholic is a very sick person”, very important to me. Cause when I come to Alcoholics Anonymous I used to stand in the back of the room and I looked down at my feet and I was ashamed, and I had become everything I detested in a human being. Certainly thinking that I had an illness of alcoholism was not one of my thoughts. My thought was something like this, „I feel like a no good rotten SOB and I’m guilty of everything in the world, so I must be a no good rotten SOB“, and I thought that was what alcoholism was; turns out that it wasn’t.

You know I’ve been married and divorced to two women, seven times.

Would you repeat that?

Yeah, two of them seven times. Phyllis only admits to two of them but I divorced her once and it wasn’t even my turn. She was three, the first one was four, the second was three. I’m not sure that’s a record, but I’ll bet it’s getting pretty close to it, what do you think. I’ve heard some people beat that one. But my first wife she was a great old gal and I used to drink and go places, I was one of those traveling drunks you know, and I didn’t come back right away either.

They used to have a statement around my group that said, „He who leaves and does not return, stays gone a long time“, and that was me. And from time to time I’d get drunk and go places and I’d come home as if I’d never been away.

And when I got home I looked out in my yard and all my stuffs laid out in the yard. And you all know what I mean by stuff don’t ya? Dirty under shorts, dirty shirts, un-ironed clothes, you know they never throw out anything that’s cleaned and ironed, I don’t know why that is. They’d file for divorce on me and put a restraining order, make off with the money, make me madder than hell.

And I’d say, after all I’d done to them, after all I’d done for them, they treat me like that. So one time I was gone a while and I decided, I was trying to get back home you know and I was serious so I went to the preacher that my first wife was going to at that time and I had a little conversation with him. And he said Joe, what seems to be your problem he asked me. And I didn’t know what the problem was, if I knew well I would have told the man cause I was serious and I said well I’ll tell you what I think the problem is, and it’s her. If you lived with her, you’d drink too I said. Well he gave me a prescription, a solution. He said you must, and boy did he emphasize that word, you must have faith in these things and he laid them out for me.

Well I couldn’t have any faith in those things, you know why? Because I didn’t even believe them. How can you have faith in something that you don’t even believe? Thank God for the second step so I could come to believe, but that was to happen some time later.

So later on I met and married my other wife. We met in a bar, The Zebra Lounge; I can almost smell it now. And we were introduced and she looked at me, she said you know Joe you look like my third husband. I said my God how many have you had and she said two. Well I liked her right away. And we started drinking and having fun and doing all those things, and then it wasn’t long after we got married well she started throwing my stuff out in the yard, filing for divorce, getting a restraining order. Well this time I went to a psychiatrist and set down and talked to him, paid him seventy-five dollars an hour and he said Mr. McCoy, for seventy-five dollars an hour they’ll call you mister. He said Mr. McCoy what seems to be your problem, well I didn’t know what the problem was, so I told him what I thought it was, it was

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her and her, if you lived with those two you'd drink too I said. Well he gave me a prescription, he thought I had a valium deficiency, he didn't mention not drinking so I took the valium and continued to drink and I got into real trouble now, I mean really trouble. I got to where I didn't know the difference between my job and the bar, I didn't know the difference between my wife and your wife, and my wife and my girlfriend, I got everything all mixed up, got into a lot of trouble. So

by the time I come to the doors of Alcoholics Anonymous
I had become everything I detested in the human being.
I did not like who I had become and I was very, very sick
It wasn't until after I got into listening to,
and the description of Dr. Silkworth's opinion on alcoholism
that I began to understand what I had here, and it wasn't that I was a no-good rotten SOB.
I had an illness called alcoholism, a physical allergy coupled with an obsession of the mind

and somehow or other that information helped me overcome some of these ideas that I had. And as I look back now and I know more about this, you know the very first sixteen printings of this book, "Alcoholics Anonymous", The Dr.'s Opinion is on Page 1. 1955 in the second edition, they moved the Dr.'s Opinion out of the Page 1 and put it into the Roman numeral sections. And you all know we don't read the Roman numeral section do we? Who does? And I think that most of us in Alcoholics Anonymous got away from the idea of the Dr.'s Opinion and just looked at Bill's Story, page 1.

But the information in The Dr.'s Opinion is so important to me and to the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous because the rest of the book is going to tell us how to recover from the condition of the body and the mind that Dr. Silkwood described. And I said, I was alcoholic for about two years and I didn't even know what an alcoholic was really.
