

Big Book Comes Alive Study Group

Joe & Charlie Audio Workshop

WEEK #4

The Dr.'s Opinion

(Session04a - 12:25 minutes)

We start looking at what the problem actually is. And most of us are absolutely amazed to find out what the problem is because most of us felt before we came here that it was a matter of willpower. And after all we had enough willpower that we ought to be able to control our drinking. And we found out that willpower didn't work and we assumed that we were just crazy. Or maybe we thought it was moral character, and maybe we thought we were just sinful rotten people. Now why wouldn't we think that, that's what everybody had told us up to this point? Throughout the history of human kind, they've been trying to find out for thousands of years what alcoholism is.

You know you really can't do anything about a problem, until you understand the problem.

And most of the people that tried to determine what alcoholism is were not alcoholics to start with. And they were the ones that said it was a lack of will power. They said if you'll just use your will power like we do you wouldn't drink that way. They're the ones said it was moral character, they're the ones who said it was sin. We alcoholics didn't say those things; hell we just kept on drinking and let them worry about what it is. Alcoholism is not anything new. You will find references to alcoholism as far back as human history has recorded. And one of the oldest recordings of human history is to be found in the bible. And in the book of Proverbs in the bible there's some information there about alcoholism.

Now, the book of Proverbs was written by a fellow named Solomon. And you all remember Solomon was a very, very wise, very learned individual. He might have been the first social worker the world had ever seen. Yeah, whenever people had a problem they went to Solomon to get the answer for it. And apparently somebody asked him one time about alcoholism, cause he describes us in the Proverbs (23:29).

He said,

*Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has wounds without cause?
Who has redness of eye? They that tarry long at the wine.*

J & C Everybody was a wino in those days; they didn't have the hard stuff like we got it today.
He said,

You will be as one who stoopeth in the midst of the sea.

J & C Remember how you used to lay down in bed and that old bed start moving around on you.
Or that sleepeth at the top of a tall mast.

J & C You know the way a mast sways back and forth. And he said,
You will say they have beaten me and I felt it not.

J & C And he surely knew some of us men, he said,
And thine eyes shall behold strange women.

J & C Alcoholics really haven't changed very much have they?
And thine heart shall utter perverse things.

J & C Like trust me honey, please trust me. He said, and yet,

They will arise in the morning and seek it yet again

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Almost a perfect description of alcoholism as we know it today, but he didn't have an answer for it, cause he didn't know what caused it. And we've had medical people; spiritual people throughout our history try to determine what alcoholism is. There was a doctor named Dr. Trotter that lived in England long time ago, and he said that I believe alcoholism is an illness, but he couldn't explain what it was, therefore they didn't have an answer for it. There was a doctor who lived here in the United States named

Dr. Benjamin Rush. He's one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, he wrote a paper on alcoholism, described the alcoholic, and he said he felt it was an illness too. But he couldn't name what it was, he couldn't determine it, so he had no solution. It's only in this century that we have been able to find out what alcoholism is and then once we found out what it is then we could find a solution to it. And I don't think we alcoholics today who are in A.A. realize how lucky, lucky we really are, to be living in the period of time where we found out what alcoholism is and we found out the solution to it. And as I look at our history, which we're going to be doing a lot of this weekend, I'm convinced in my mind that God got tired of seeing people like us die from alcoholism and he took various different people from around the world and gave us these pieces of information that allows us to recover from that condition today. And I think one of the first persons that he used was this little doctor called Dr. Silkworth.

When Dr. Silkworth was in medical school he became very interested in the alcoholics. But when he got out of medical school he learned like most doctors did it was very difficult to make a living working with alcoholics. Most doctors do not like to work with alcoholics, they said then and they say today that an alcoholic will not tell you the truth. That's certainly true isn't it? And they said they will not do what we tell them to do. And that's certainly true isn't it? But they said the main reason we don't want to work with them is they won't pay their bills. So Dr. Silkworth, in order to find a way to make a living had to go off into another field, but always interested in we alcoholics. And he became very successful in his field.

But in the late 1930's, 1920's we had of course the great stock market crash and Silky had everything he owned invested in the stock market, and he lost it just like everybody else did. Lost the good job he had and he had to find a job somewhere, and Charlie Towns from the Towns Hospital who Silky had met before through his interest on/in alcoholics offered him a job. He said why don't you come to work here and I'll pay you thirty dollars a week and room and board and you can help me in working with other alcoholics/working with alcoholics. So Silky went to work in the Towns Hospital in 1930, and he began to work with people like us and began to see us come into the hospital, terrible, terrible, physical and mental condition. And he begin to withdraw us from alcohol, build the body up, and etc., and 60 or 90, 30/60/90 days later he would see us leave the hospital in reasonably good shape and then a month or two or three or four later he'd see us come back in, in worse shape than we were before, continually going in and out, in and out, in and out, in and out. He also noticed some people that he worked with who drank like we drank, but did not go in and out, in and out, and in and out. He also noticed other people who drank moderately and safely, and he began to say there's something different about these alcoholics. There's something different about the body. Apparently alcohol does something to them that it doesn't do to normal people. And he began to develop this little idea that

when you put alcohol in your body it produces an actual physical craving that makes it impossible for us to stop drinking.

But he also said even in those days,

that's not the real problem of the alcoholic; he said
the real problem is that the alcoholic cannot keep from drinking.

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He said people who are heavy drinkers, people who are moderate drinkers, if they want to quit drinking they just quit, and it don't bother them at all. But he said

it seems as though the alcoholic, after they quit, the mind begins to play tricks on them,
and begins to think about one or two drinks and how it makes them feel.

And he said that idea becomes so powerful that it overcomes the idea that they can't drink, and they take a drink and end up drunk every time.

He said now if you can't drink safely,
and if you can't keep from drinking,
then you're powerless over alcohol

Now we don't know whether Bill Wilson was the first one he told that to or not, but we know Bill was probably the first one to act on that information. Then after Bill got sober, and after Dr. Bob got sober, and after Bill Dobson (**A.A. Number Three - p.182 Big Book**)

got sober and after the first 40 got sober based on that information and decided to write the book, they went to see Dr. Silkworth and said will you let us put that information in the book so that other alcoholics can see what their problem is too. And they said will you write some of it for us, and the Doctor said yeah, you can use it and I'll write some of it under one condition, that we will call it "The Doctor's Opinion". He said I can't prove it, there's no facts behind it, so we'll just have to call it an opinion. And he said, by the way, don't use my name. He said they'll throw me completely out of the medical profession if you use my name on this deal.

In 1956 when they came out with a Second Edition, 1955 and 1956 they came out with a Second Edition, by that time the Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association had recognized the fact that Alcoholism is an illness. And Dr. Silkworth said in the Second Edition, you can put my name in it now. So for the Second and Third you've got Silkworth, but in here you don't. Let's look at what the Doctor had to say for just a little bit. Let's go to Roman number page twenty-four, that's xxiv, I didn't know that when I got sober. He said,

Big Book p. xxiv, par. 2 *"The physician who, at our request, gave us this letter, has been kind enough to enlarge upon his views in another statement which follows. In this statement he confirms what we who have suffered alcoholic torture must believe---that the body of the alcoholic is quite as abnormal as his mind."*

J & C Now we know

there's no „must“ in the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous,
but there are a lot of „musts“* in this book called, "Alcoholics Anonymous"
and there's one of the first ones,

"We must believe---that the body of the alcoholic is quite as abnormal as his mind."

Now this is the first time we can find anywhere in written history, the reference to the fact that the body is affected as well as the mind. Everything up until this time, they had talked about the mind only. Weak will, moral character, sin and etc. But here we see a statement that says the body is quite as abnormal as the mind. I think he's telling us two things,

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1. That the body is affected also, and I think he's also saying
2. The mind is abnormal, when it comes to alcohol. We react to it different physically and also mentally in an abnormal manner.

And we'll talk about both of those; the first one we're going to look at is the body. It said

Big Book p. xxiv, par. line 13 *"It did not satisfy us to be told that we could not control our drinking just because we were maladjusted to life, that we were in full flight from reality, or were outright mental defectives. These things were true to some extent, in fact, to a considerable extent with some of us. But we are sure that our bodies were sickened as well. In our belief, any picture of the alcoholic, which leaves out this physical factor, is incomplete.*

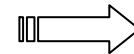
The doctor's theory that we have an allergy to alcohol interests us. As laymen, our opinion to its soundness may, of course, mean little. But as ex-problem drinkers, we can say that his explanation makes good sense. It explains many things for which we cannot otherwise account."

The Dr.'s Opinion

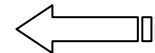
(Session04b - 08:45 minutes)

J & C Now, if the purpose of a textbook is to transfer information from the mind of one human being through the written word to the mind of another human being, then it stands to reason that the transference of that information is going to be based upon the understanding of the words that are used.

If the writer of the book uses a certain word and understands it this way



the reader of the book reads that word and understands it this way



a different understanding then the information that comes through is going to be garbled and incomplete information. And there seems to be a few key words in the Big Book, that many of us have had difficulty with, and I think the first word we've had a real problem with is this word,

Allergy

Well most of us when we come here we assume already we know what an allergy is, I know I did.

I knew if you were allergic to something and you got around it or you ate it or you drank it or something like that, that there would be some physical manifestation or indicator of that allergy. For instance if you eat strawberries and you're allergic to them you'll break out in a rash, the rash being the manifestation of that allergy. If you're allergic to milk and you drink it you'll have a bad case of dysentery, the dysentery being the manifestation of that allergy. If you're allergic to certain plants such as ragweed's, and you get around them, your eyes, nose, itch, water, and you start sneezing. The itchy, watering eyes, nose and the sneezing, that's the manifestation of that allergy. So I knew if you were allergic to something there would be something there that you could see.

you don't see our allergy
you feel it, and only we
alcoholics feel it.

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So they came to me and they said Charlie, you got an allergy to alcohol and you'll never be able to safely drink it again. And I said how in the hell can I be allergic to alcohol; I'm drinking a quart a day. How can you possibly drink that much of something you're allergic to? And I said besides that when I drink alcohol I don't break out in a rash, and I don't have a bad case of dysentery. Once in a while I might depending on what I had been drinking, but usually I didn't. Nor did it make my eyes, nose, itch, water, and cause me to sneeze. And I said I don't understand what you're talking about, you need to explain that to me. And they said well you don't need to understand; they said all you gotta know is you can't drink it.

Well today I think I know why they told me that, I don't think they understood it a bit better than I did.

And I went from person to person to person to person, trying to get somebody to explain this allergy to me, and all they would say is what difference does it make, forget the damned allergy, don't drink and you'll be all right, keep coming to meetings. Now if you're an alcoholic like I am with a keen, intellectual, alcoholic mind and you got a question like that dangling out here in front of you, if you don't get the answer to it, sooner or later it's going to drive you out of your mind. And one day in sheer desperation I went to a source of information that has never failed me since that time. I went to the dictionary and I looked up the word allergy and I found several different definitions of it (the way you do with any word depending on how you use it). But I think I found the one that fit me exactly when it said,

An allergy is an 'abnormal' reaction to any food, beverage, or substance of any kind.

An abnormal reaction. So I began to look back over my drinking history to see where I was abnormal, and to my amazement I found out, I don't know what's normal and what's abnormal.

The only thing I knew about drinking was the way I drank and the way those people drank who drank with me. If they didn't drink like I did, we didn't drink together.

So to find out what's normal to see if I'm abnormal, I have to go to the normal, social, temperate moderate drinker; those that drink alcohol and do not get in trouble with it. And I asked them to describe to me how they feel when they take a drink. And they said we come home from work, tired, tense, wrought up from the day's work, we can have a couple of drinks before dinner.

We begin to get a relaxing, comfortable feeling. We'll go ahead and have dinner, and we probably won't drink any more that night. Well, I don't feel that way when I drink alcohol.

The only difference between normal and abnormal is how the majority of people react to substances of any kind.

Whenever I take a drink of alcohol it passes over my lips, my lips begin to tingle immediately. Hits my teeth and they kind of chatter up and down. Strikes my tongue, and I can feel it begin to grow, and expand and swell. Hits my cheeks and they kind of flutter in and out.

At the same time it's passing through my sinus cavities up into my forehead and I begin to get a feeling up here in my forehead, which is absolutely, indescribably, wonderful.

Now, I didn't swallow the damn stuff yet, I just got it in my mouth.

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When I swallow that alcohol and it starts down through my esophagus, great things begin to take place. The first thing that happens is my chest begins to grow and expand, and gets bigger and bigger. Hits my stomach and just literally explodes like a bomb. Immediately I feel it racing through my arms, and they get longer and longer; hits my hands and fingers and they begin to tingle and vibrate. The same time it's racing through my arms it's racing through my legs, their getting longer and longer, I'm getting taller and taller and it hits my feet and toes and they get a hot, intense burning, exciting get up and go somewhere and do something feeling. I don't understand a comfortable, relaxing feeling when you have a drink.

These people told me something that blew my mind for me. They said Charlie, whenever we have a couple of drinks we begin to experience a feeling of dizziness, a feeling of being out of control, and they said we don't like that feeling.

Therefore, one or two drinks is all we want to drink. How many times have you and I tried to get them to drink more and they said oh, no, no, I feel this already, or oh, no, no, no, this is making me dizzy, I don't want anymore. So today I realize that's the normal reaction to alcohol. You see for most people when they put alcohol in the system it hits the stomach, it immediately goes into the bloodstream, immediately goes to the brain. And for a normal drinker it acts as a downer, it's a sedative.

It's supposed to give them a slightly tipsy out of control feeling. Now when it goes into my stomach, into my bloodstream, into my brain, instead of me getting a slightly tipsy out of control feeling, alcohol for me (the alcoholic) acts as an upper, its a stimulant,

and my brain gets a very exciting, in control feeling. They have two drinks and they want to go to bed. I have two drinks and by God I want to go to town, immediately. I react to it differently mentally.

And another thing they told me is that when we have a couple of drinks not only do we get a slightly tipsy out of control feeling, they said we begin to experience a feeling of nausea, they said we don't like that feeling and therefore one or two drinks is all we want to take. How many times have you tried to get them to drink more and they say oh, no, no, this is making me sick, I don't want anymore of it. That's the normal reaction to alcohol.

Alcohol is a toxic substance; a destroyer of human tissue

When you put it in your body, your mind and body is supposed to react to it with nausea and say puke it up and get it out of here.

When I put it in my body, instead of my body experiencing the feeling of nausea, my body experiences an actual physical craving which demands more of the same.

Their body said puke it up, mine said put some more in here.

So not only do I react to it differently mentally, but I also react to it differently physically.

Now the only difference between normal and abnormal is what the majority of people do. If the majority, nine out of ten, react that way, one out of ten reacts the way I do, then

my reaction is considered to be abnormal,
therefore I'm considered to be allergic to alcohol.

You can't see it, you can only feel it, and only alcoholics feel it.

You see I kept looking for the rash; I kept looking for the dysentery.

No you don't see our allergy, you feel it and only we alcoholics feel it.

Joe.