



## Rebellion Dogs Blog, January 2018

### *Your Best Thinking got you where!?!? Freethought, AA and Conflict Resolution*

Online bullying led to the suicide of a youth and I was moved by what I read. It was an Australian child; of course, it could be anyone's daughter or sister. In a striking reaction, the father invited the perpetrators to the funeral. I read on the BBC website:

One in five children in Australia say they were bullied in the past year.

In his emotional Facebook post, written on Sunday, Dolly's father, Tick Everett, gave no details of the bullying, but said she had wanted to "escape the evil in this world".

He said he hoped the attention on Dolly's death last week might "help other precious lives from being lost".

He also invited the bullies to her funeral, saying: "If by some chance the people who thought this was a joke and made themselves feel superior by the constant bullying and harassment see this post, please come to our service and witness the complete devastation you have created."

On Wednesday, the family released a statement to media outlets saying Dolly had been "the kindest, caring, beautiful soul".<sup>i</sup>

Wow. A lot of parents wouldn't want the perpetrators anywhere near their grieving friends and family. In part, the dad wanted those who took his daughter to suffer from the loss, too. I see this not so much as revenge but an understanding (wisdom). In a corrupt system – as bullying is – everyone engaged in the corrupt system, victims, persecutors, enablers and rescuers are all controlled by the corrupt system. In an elaborate sense, everyone engaged in the system is corrupted, is victimized by the corruption. It's natural to demonize the perpetrator and who can blame those who suffer for feeling angry or vengeful; full stop. Trauma and grief have stages and the perspective (and empathy) demonstrated by the suffering father, is remarkable.

But this Australian father wants the corrupt system, that took his daughter, to end. He doesn't want the system taking any more victims. That demands an understanding of the system; that asks the seemingly unthinkable – empathy for your perpetrator. Resolution requires truth and reconciliation.

I can't avoid a 12-Step slant; I didn't learn everything I know in an AA meeting, but 12-Step culture intervened in my accelerating trip down a dead-end street. It gave me a chance to stop, to think, to breath and learn to think *more better*. I've been persecuted by injustice in my life. Also true is that I am a white male in a world that offers me privilege at the expense of others. Example: Everyone In 12-Step communities have been discriminated against; there remains a persistent stigma foist upon we addicts. How many people with eating disorders have not been body-shamed? Have you ever tried asking the pastor where your local AA meeting is or the facilities coordinator in the local library if you Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous group can meet there every week, maybe right after daycare, just before Palates? If you haven't, can you imagine the fish-eye you might get from someone who's also the landlord to parents and child-care professionals? Are sex and love addicts a bigger risk to toddlers than a random group from the public? I don't know. But what do you think the general attitude is towards people with sexual compulsions looking for a place to hang out?

Here's a personal example: I've faced discrimination. As a youth – I was 14-years-of-age at my first meeting and sober by age 16 – I had older members roll their eyes at me, dismissively. Also, as someone who is skeptical about the popular AA belief that a loving, intervening higher power is the agency to our sobriety, I have faced the typical suggestion that I am the one with a closed mind, I should save time (and my life) by seeing it their way. I've been told that my candidly expressed views could be damaging to impressionable newcomers. You know and I know that it's wrong to treat minority atheists any differently than the majority theists but you and I also know it happens. But for me, I walk out (or storm out – my choice) of that meeting and I'm a peer among peers on the streets. My beliefs or lack thereof are invisible to the crowd outside. Now let's consider a woman in a meeting who expresses the injustice of AA literature that treats her as the second-sex who is told her feminism is an outside issue... She can storm or walk out of the meeting too, but she walks onto the streets of a city or town that still pays her \$0.75 on the dollar for the same work a man does and where she's inclined to be objectified and judged without even opening her mouth. A woman alcoholic's suffering from systemic discrimination doesn't end her victimhood when she rejects the meeting. So that's very different than my predicament isn't it? I walk out the door, leave discrimination behind and re-join privilege.

Creating a better society requires thought and empathy and cooperation. I'd like to strike up a conversation about such things. The relationship with thinking and recovery is evolving. AA, of course had something to say about thinking and addiction – denial, distortion, rationalization, these are thinking traps that have led some to think of addicts as having a different brain than others, "That's your addict's brain taking there, boy." I do find it remarkably powerful how, that while in addiction, with all the harmful consequences that ought to repel me from continued self-destruction, quite irrationally, I rationalize, minimize, postpone or avoid help and stay married the pay-off despite the diminishing returns and mounting consequences. It is hard for me to remember how compelling and habitual my own addictive cycle was. When I hear it, I relate to the idea that addiction seized control of the bridge (to borrow a *Star Trek* term) and I seemed powerless to help myself. Yes, that's the same brain that I rely on to avoid temptation today, to make measured, healthy choices for myself, and to guide me to being a helpful member of my family, home-group and society at large.

I've borrowed from author/brain scientist/addict Marc Lewis, [\*Memoirs of an Addicted Brain: A Neuroscientist Examines His Former Life on Drugs\*](#) & Doctor Vera Tarman, [\*Food Junkies: The Truth About Food Addiction\*](#) who have shared on Rebellion Dogs Radio about chemistry and science of a brain hijacked by addiction. Long before YouTube videos and Ted Talks about neuroscience and addiction, the idea of addiction distorting or circumventing brain functions had at least a metaphorical place in addiction/recovery talk. Here's a clip of what we learn since 1939; this is now covered in the first week in treatment or easily accessible from browsing the web. We have a whole language around "your brain on drugs" now:

In the brain, pleasure has a distinct signature: the release of the neurotransmitter dopamine in the nucleus accumbens, a cluster of nerve cells lying underneath the cerebral cortex. Dopamine release in the nucleus accumbens is so consistently tied with pleasure that neuroscientists refer to the region as the brain's pleasure center. All drugs of abuse, from nicotine to heroin, cause a particularly powerful surge of dopamine in the nucleus accumbens. ... Addictive drugs provide a shortcut to the brain's reward system by flooding the nucleus accumbens with dopamine. The hippocampus lays down memories of this rapid sense of satisfaction, and the amygdala creates a conditioned response to certain stimuli. ...According to the current theory about addiction, dopamine interacts with another neurotransmitter, glutamate, to take over the brain's system of reward-related learning. This system has an important role in sustaining life because it links activities needed for human survival (such as eating and sex) with pleasure

and reward. The reward circuit in the brain includes areas involved with motivation and memory as well as with pleasure. Addictive substances and behaviors stimulate the same circuit – and then overload it.”<sup>ii</sup>

Our addiction/recovery community’s understanding of thinking and recovery evolves. By the time *Alcoholics Anonymous* was written, we had slogans, folk-therapy to help reconceptualization in early recovery, which in today’s language is in part the “cognitive” component of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Let’s talk for a moment about what might be my favorite AA slogan:

“Think, Think, Think...” Show me another AA slogan that doesn’t get the respect it deserves. Everyone loves, “Easy Does It,” and “Live and Let Live.” I’ve seen sober club houses that hang “Think, Think, Think” upside down. What is that supposed to mean? Meditation isn’t Step One in AA so perhaps it’s a more advanced tool in the kit than, “First Things First.”



On the other hand, some of our members have reduced AA’s creed into bumper-sticker rebuttals. One member who quotes the *Big Book* is contradicted by another member quoting the *Big Book*, both borrowing an authority that neither the book nor its author(s) laid claim to. Have you seen the Monty Python’s Flying Circus skit called “Cheese Shop?”<sup>iii</sup> Fans of the comedy troop have made up a Cheese Shop game from this skits premise. Here’s how the game works: player 1 is buyer. you come up with a type/brand of cheese. Player 2 is the shopkeeper; you come up with a new excuse why that cheese isn’t available, today. Whoever runs out of cheese varieties or excuses first, loses. AA members could bet each other a second cup by seeing who runs out of AA slogans first. Sounds like fun? Try it with a friend. Someone’s buying coffee refills; maybe it won’t be you.

From meetings like these – that most of us know where to find – whereby members spout out AA platitudes as keepers of the holy grail, some critics of *AAism* label AA as anti-intellectual. This characterization asserts that members who gather together to gang up on freethought with a bludgeoning of well intended, yet out-of-context quotes from the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* is disparaging towards a more individualized approach to recovery. This could be a CA meeting, an AA meeting and of course some

NA bleeding deacons delight in wielding *Basic Text* quotes with the same smack down insensitivity towards neophytes or NA titan vs. NA titan.

How many AA slogans are there? Some would say, "Three, because the *Big Book* says so:"

We have three little mottos (p 135, *Alcoholics Anonymous* "The Family Afterward") which are apropos:

*First Things First*

*Live and Let Live*

*Easy Does It."*

Others would say, "Five," because GSO has added two to your *AA Literature Catalogue*. Look up specialty item, MS04 Slogans (Set of 5) \$4.50. Along with the three slogans mentioned above, we AAs added:

*But for the Grace of God*

*Think, Think, Think*

These two additions, viewed with the hindsight of today's polarized society, do these two add-ons seem to have evolved from two diametrically opposing camps in the rooms of AA? In today's context, "God" and "thinking" seem to some people to be juxtaposed coping mechanisms. But going back to the meetings I attended in mid-1970s indoctrination into AA, these five slogans in their AA stylized letterings and humble frames, hanging on a wall, this is what I see when I close my eyes and think, "What does an AA meeting look like?" Not only were these five mottos ubiquitous in the day, I remember them as yellowed – they had been there for a long while before I got there.

So, who wins the "how many slogans are there, officially" debate?

In 1980 the General Service Conference looked to resolve this issue and the Literature Committee was recommending that defining "the slogans" be added to *As Bill Sees It*. The Conference said, "No." Why? Here was the thinking at the time:

"The suggestion to add to the book *As Bill Sees It* a definition of the slogans not be accepted because it was felt that the slogans may be defined in many different

ways." *Advisory Actions of the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous 1951 - 2012*, p. 69

So, back to thinking... Here's one of the great misunderstandings of AA platitude-nation: "Your best thinking got you here." The suggestion is that you ought to not rely on your reasoning because, "Now, now, didn't *your best thinking* fail you, delivering you and your compromised situation to the doorway and then a chair inside a 12-Step meeting?"

Don't trust your thinking; get a second opinion, trust the group, trust Yahweh *as you understand Him*.

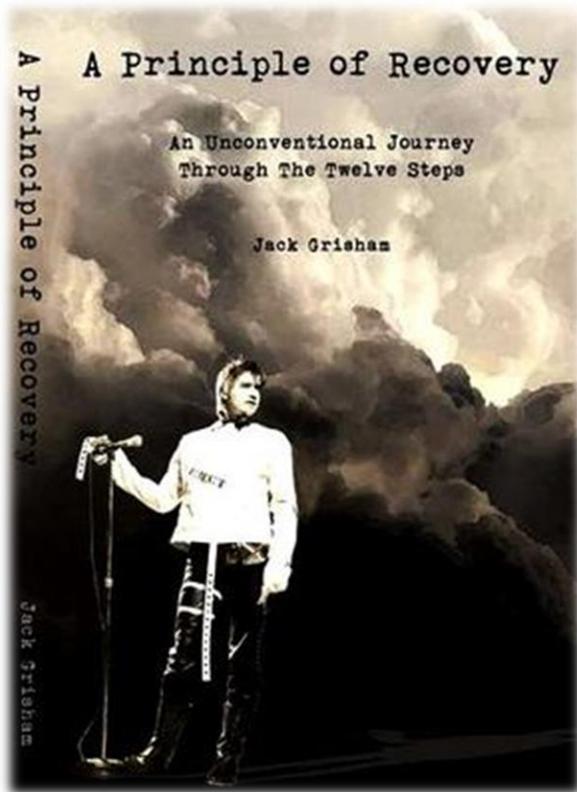
Fact checking: It wasn't my best thinking that led me from indulgence to addiction and the risky, reckless life that necessitated some form of intervention. It was my *impulsive* thinking, not my *best* thinking whereby my addiction thrived and me – not so much in the thriving department. My life was nearly snuffed out. Impulsive thinking is to be avoided; "best thinking" is something to strive towards, something to cultivate.

## **Deep thoughts... addicts write about thinking and mind:**

I interviewed Jack Grisham about his book, *A Principle of Recovery*. If you haven't already heard the show, there's a link below (You'll also find interviews with Marc Lewis and Dr. Vera Tarman mentioned above).

As a totally unrelated aside, inside this "thinking" aside, around the 18-minute mark of the podcast, Rebellion Dogs Radio Episode 19, you'll hear Jack G and me talking – I am in the home studio of Rebellion Dogs and Jack is heard calling in from Huntington Beach California over the phone – and you'll hear my call-waiting notice (from my phone) go off. I didn't take the message, of course. I continued on with our discussion. It was bad news. It was the Royal Canadian Mounted Police calling from Saskatchewan to notify me that my mom had died. It was October 28, 2015 that I interviewed Jack Grisham. Every time I hear that recording and that call-waiting tone sounds off, I think of my mom. My mom's a writer, too. She is also one of the two editors I relied on for *Beyond Belief: Agnostic Musings for 12 Step Life*. That "beep, beep," gets me every time. It got me now. Anyway, back to Jack.

Jack Grisham who has a Punk Rock something to say about a good many things, doesn't shy away from thinking and AA. In fact, he makes a pretty good case to rebut those, "Your best thinking..." automatons. Jack, like many of us, points to the *supreme leader* and *his Big Book* for validation.



“... we’ve awakened, we’ve become aware that a life based on selfish will is one of pain and strife. Our thinking *has* changed – maybe only slightly as we are still new, but it’s changed enough to move forward. We’ve had an awakening and been given a new mind and now, a new way of thinking. On pg. 86, Bill hits us with this:

‘On awakening **let us think** about the twenty-four hours ahead. We **consider our plans** for the day. Before we begin, we ask God to **direct our thinking**, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonesty or self-seeking motives. Under these conditions we can **employ our mental faculties** with assurances, for after all God gave us **brains to use**. Our **thought-life** will be placed on a much higher plane when our

**thinking** is cleared of wrong motives.’

Seven times he asks us to think. Seven times, in one paragraph – read it. If I turned a paragraph like that into an editor I’d be called up on redundancy. Bill seemingly didn’t care. He wanted to develop our thinking...” Jack Grisham, *A Principle of Recovery: An Unconventional Journey Through The Twelve Steps* (2015)<sup>iv</sup> p. 133

Jack Grisham 2016 Rebellion Dogs Book Review in *Renew Magazine*<sup>v</sup>

Jack Grisham as Guest on Rebellion Dogs Radio Episode 19<sup>vi</sup>

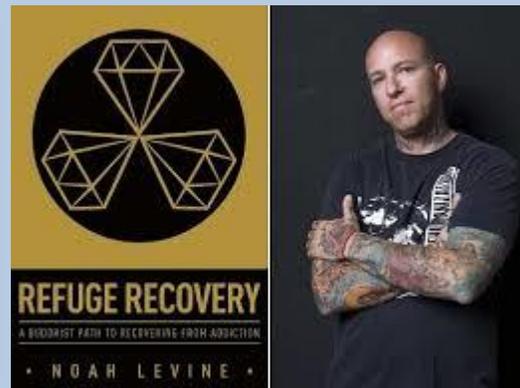
So, these 12-Step members, who liberals might call anti-intellectual, can they also find confirmation for their biases in the Bill Wilson words on page 86? First, the bolding in the *Big Book* quote above is Jack G’s highlights (bolded in the pages of *A Principle of Recovery*). I am sure that some *Big Book* zealots don’t find thinking to be repulsive or counterproductive to sobriety, what about some of the others who see the devil holding court in the playground of alcoholic’s thoughts?

If there is a class of members we dare look down at as anti-intellectual, they would highlight their own choice words and phrases. It’s just as easy to downplay the pro-

thinking ideas. The same page 86 passage also says, “we ask God to direct our thinking (we don’t rely on our free will)” and that the brain we have is a gift from God. This argument pits *God’s will* as diametrically opposed to the alcoholic’s *self-will*. Most believers wouldn’t see freethought disciplining our self-will to serve us better as demonic, blasphemous or un-AA. Members who characterize the thinking alcoholic as on a slippery slope are a minority (not a majority), a vocal minority who might hold themselves out as representing AA as a whole; I don’t think so.

Worth noting, various AAs with various worldviews have found success in AA. Skeptics, zealots and every variety of belief-construct and IQ score have the miracle (or cause and effect) of AA to *prove* they’re right. Many are the paths from addiction to recover, in AA meetings and in the ever-growing larger recovery community beyond 12-Step meeting walls.

The Refuge Recovery approach to thoughts is a wholistic one. While addicts have a proclivity to impulsive thought and snap judgement such as, “What a lucky break!” or “This is the worst luck!” the whole point of recovery is to learn better coping strategies. Noah Levine writes about “intentional nonreactivity” and in a chapter on Mindfulness/Meditation, we’ll find:



“Rather than reacting with our usual attachment or aversion, taking everything personally and felling the need to do something about it, we relax into the experience, seeing it clearly and simply letting it be, just as it is.

This is important on two levels. First, we become intimate with our mind states and with how they affect our mood and actions. Second, we begin to see more and more clearly that states of mind and emotions, like everything else, are impermanent.” Noah Levine, *Refuge Recovery: A Buddhist Path to Recovering from Addiction* (2014)<sup>vii</sup> p 81

So, the think, think, think idea or mindfulness is about first, taking a more scientific or critical or even curious look at our thoughts (along with feelings and sensations). Instead of impulsive reaction, I’ve learned to ask if what I’m observing is as it appears, what else could it mean, why do I see it as either good or bad? Secondly, as Noah

Levine suggests, I remind myself that feeling are not facts; I think of them as indicator lights. How I feel may change. Sometimes a wider view, including what might be going on for others in the scene, may lend some context.

Here is personal example of how exercising mindfulness, problem solving and/or thinking situations through, is something that I've learned to do better, thanks in part to what I've learned in the rooms. This is a small, interpersonal issue but I hope that dealing with this better, can help me with more global issues than this petty personality clash.

It bugs my ass when someone starts to share with, "What you need to do, if you're going to stay sober, is..."

I don't want to be told what to do; I don't think 12-Step meetings have teachers and students; we are equals, we are peer-to-peer. So, anyone who sounds like they are instructing, intimidating or dominating, I get my nose out of joint. "Tell your own experience," I think. "AA has no expertise, we merely have our individual experiences."

I sometimes get just as bent out of shape with "We" talk; "We, in our turn, sought the same escape with all the desperation of drowning men," "We will be amazed before we are half way through..." The nice thing about talking in *we*-authorship is it includes, or aims to include, the reader with the larger group. Isolation is a common problem for newcomers to recovery. Addiction is a demanding mistress and many have suffered a loss of intimacy as we isolate and deny, lie & minimize when it comes to talking to others. So, it's good to try to, or want to, make the reader (or another member) feel included. The downside to a narrative like, "We stood at the turning point..." is that some readers will surmise, and even promulgate the erroneous idea, that we have some universal experience. The idea that we are the same, we are having a collective experience, is not true at all. I believe we may be a fellowship of common suffering. That said, while the labels are the same – fear, shame, self-loathing, resentment, self-pity – the particulars remain unique and individual (not universal). Recovery is a pathless land; no two members share the same clean/sober path. No two people who follow the same suggestions find identical results. Similar themes? Yes. Identical needs, process or results? No.

## **Utilizing Mindfulness Where Reactiveness Comes So Naturally**

Here's how mindfulness or "intentional nonreactivity" helps me. So, let's say a member at a meeting starts sharing with "We" or "You;" I feel hostility – a knee-jerk reaction. Could there be a difference between the way this member is expressing themselves and

the message meant from her/him/them? Assuming I catch myself, I picture this person sharing their own personal experience through the lens of their own biased explanation. That's the message, regardless of pronouns. Members might use the word, "You," or "We" but they mean I or me. Could it just be a language thing and have nothing to do with them presuming to teach newcomers? Can I interpret what she/he/they are saying instead of getting hostile or defensive? Isn't it fair to say that what's being said is, "This is what worked for me and I really feel strongly about it."

So, I can let the We/You thing go or I can cross my arms and clench my teeth. Those are my choices, aren't they? If I overlook the pronouns and finger-pointing, maybe there are some take-aways from what my fellow traveler is sharing that I can benefit from. And maybe I don't care for or relate to what is said; is it possible that someone else will be helped to stay sober another day by what they have to say?

Then, there's how I get touchy about some 12-Step literature, AA's *Big Book* for instance. Personally, there are principles I support underneath the wording I am sometimes disproving of, within AA's Twelve Steps. Letting go is just as effective as Letting go and letting God – that's not two separate ideas, one is secular and one is religious. But it's the same principle. As for our Steps and any benefits they yield; are they only accessible for theists? Or were the Steps, back in 1939 written *by* theists in the native tongue of theists at the time? The underlying principles transcend a belief in supernatural guidance in the lives of women and men. Because the explanation of the Steps – in *Alcoholics Anonymous* – is written in Judeo/Christian language will I protest about inequality, or shall I translate them in the language of my worldview? Everyone has to translate something in the *Big Book* to personalize the narrative. If and when I'm attending a meeting that reads or refers to the book, I have the right to interpret any way I want, or go to a different meeting.

I want to make a distinction, here. AA is discriminatory. Having a book that members tout as the "basic text" of *the AA way* which is blatantly theistic, favors those who believe in a personal higher power. As long AA stays stuck in a 1939 explanation of the world, which cared little for anywhere or anyone beyond the Ohio – New York corridor that made up our membership, we'll appear naïve or arrogant to many religious adherents from the rest of the world. Imagine how AA founders might have felt if they were sent to a mosque to find their sobriety. "Keep an open mind; Allah of your understanding; don't be argumentative; If you've had enough of booze, you'll kneel to the East and praise Allah."

To a feminist, youth or member of the LGBTQ community, there are greater barriers in *Alcoholics Anonymous* than to a white, middle-class, middle-aged, heterosexual man. Suggestions for modernization of AA language (including the 164 pages of the *Big Book*) may go unheard or be met with hostility. While a gender identifying/sexual-orientation/de-stigmatizing/creed and culture neutral language would clearly be fair, and I argue, more effective to AA's sworn purpose, the tyranny of the majority is an unyielding opposition that is arguably, evidence of AA systemic discrimination. I am against such discrimination. For the sake of the fellowship and in terms of standing up for my own rights, I oppose such discrimination. In the recent Ontario Human Rights case (Larry K vs. Intergroup & AA World Services), we learned that failing to accommodate members based on creed (just like sexual orientation, gender, disability, race and other identified characteristics) is a violation of the law. We are protected by and bound by the Human Rights Code. I am for the law; I am for fairness. When confronted by the tribunal, AA yielded. Other than the legal fees and hurt pride from kicking up a fight and losing, AA really didn't lose. Other groups or AA as a whole, the imaginary victim that anti-atheist AA's claimed to defend, never suffered the imaginary injury or indignity projected by a rigid, rule-making Intergroup

If it came down to a vote, I would vote for a newly written *Alcoholics Anonymous*, written with modern, culturally inclusive wording. Add a newer "Doctor's Opinion" while we're at it, along with psychological and therapeutic updates. So, when the vote comes up, let me know. In the meantime, I have a choice every day to voice dissatisfaction with what is read and/or interpret accordingly.

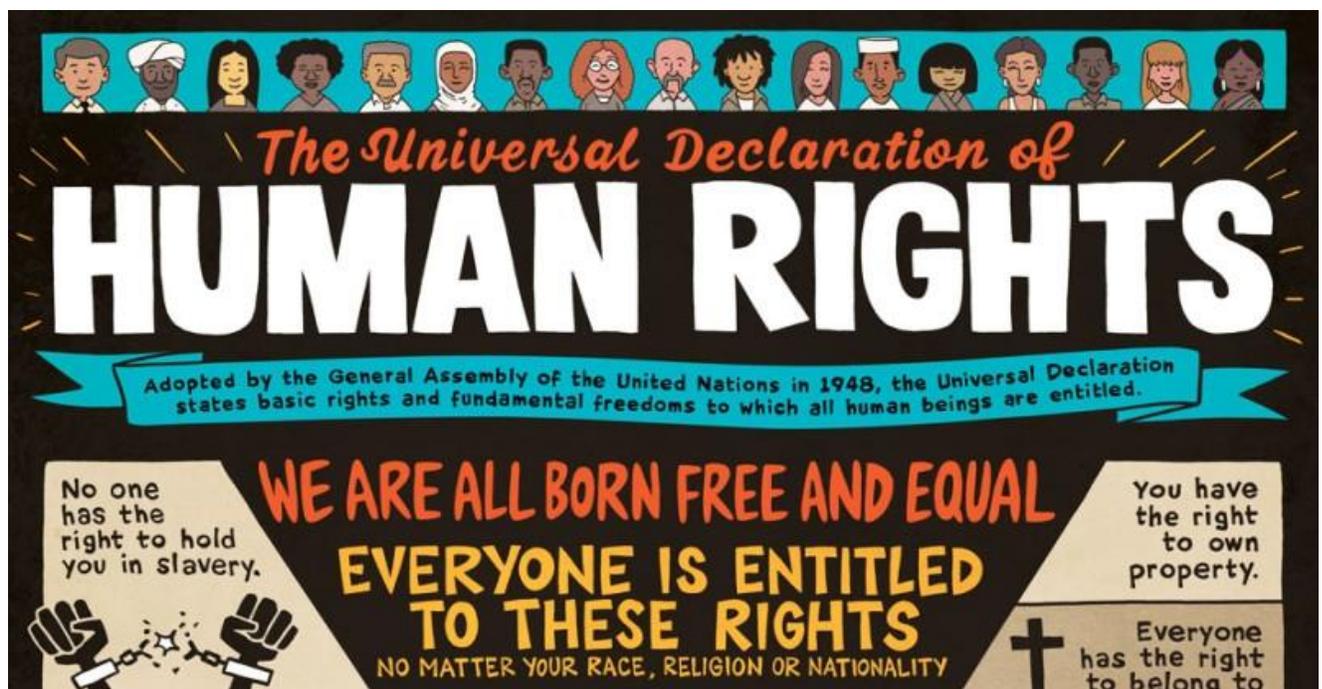
Thinking more about this of course, I can ignore the *Big Book* completely and have a perfectly happy AA life. No one checks AA member's homework. I am sure there is a larger percent of membership than we think who never worked the Steps to didn't complete them. Not every member has read *Alcoholics Anonymous* and *the 12 & 12* in their entirety. I certainly know plenty who have candidly dismissed the Steps along with any form of psycho-babble navel gazing. Others still want a thorough self-assessment but there are more therapeutic options now than ever before.

So, if I feel strongly about our literature being discriminatory, why not rail against those who demonstrate this harassment and discrimination? To do so is to personalize the complaint. The problem is a corrupt system. Even those who protect it and/or are entitled from it are also *victimized* by this corrupt system or limited or controlled by it. To fault people for finding comfort in the theistic view of recovery dripping with early 20<sup>th</sup> century outdatedness isn't helpful. That isn't in any way, solution-based. I need – we need – the majority (who do relate to the 164 pages, as written) on our side to right a

ship that is veering off course. AA intended to be a refuge for everyone. In the context of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century middle America, AA did welcome everyone – all the white hetro guys. Seriously, it was a different time then and I argue that AA was ahead of our time in terms of accommodating anyone who had a desire to stop drinking.

Some of our literature and some of our meeting rituals have not changed with the times. We've discussed the nature of AA literature before. Our literature is sub-standard because it is sexist, hetro-normative, theistically biased, American-centric, etc. Again, I'm for following AAs principles of inclusion, love, service. I'm for laws such as the Human Rights Code in Canada and civil, rights enshrined in the Constitution of the United States of America and UK's Equity and Human Rights Commission. Every developed world has their code; the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights says:

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."<sup>viii</sup>



I find something poetic and profound with the 3 ThinkKs: looking at Think, Think, Think hanging on the AA meeting wall. I struggle with:

- A) my impulse thoughts
- B) how I think I ought to feel and
- C) how I really think and feel about something.

Then there is the question of what others need, think, feel and what impact do I have on their rights? Often tribunals in domestic matters or diplomats in international matters, navigate competing needs. How does one individual or group's right get elevated without impinging on the rights of another?

For women to vote the support of men was needed. USA civil rights required the advocacy of the white majority. For change to take place the system ought to be demonized; not the benefactors of such injustices. Tyranny of the majority presents challenges. How does a minority or individual overcome an angry, frightened, hasty or indifferent majority? Since 1975, atheists and agnostics have lobbied the General Service Office of USA/Canada for a pamphlet; you're likely aware this petition will be heard once again in April of 2018. The trustees' Literature Committee has already begun preparations. Over ten times this benign request has been entertained by previous committees and it's always been denied. Was it fear? Haste? Indifference? Ignorance? Hostility? I don't know; that never makes it into the *General Service Conference Final Report* that is available to all AA members to read. Only the outcome of advisory actions, financial data and edited versions of speeches and reports are printed or reported.

Who's seen any of the latest David Chappelle routines? In a comedy club in LA, Chappelle gets real; that's how he describes it; others would say he offended everyone. He talks about oppression, discrimination, Black Lives Matter and Me Too headlines. American football player Colin Kaepernick's protest movement against police brutality merits a shout-out. USA civil rights, the #MeToo movement and Apartheid are all discussed. Trigger alert: Many have been offended or incensed by Chappelle's critique of group-think (political correctness), public outrage and issues that any audience would surely line up on one side or the off these topics. Many comics would stay the hell away from this hot-politico.

Neither for nor against, here are some uncensored highlights from Chappelle's latest – and maybe last for a long time (depending on how it goes for him):

“Every fucking person who takes a stand for someone else gets beat down and we watch, over and over and over again and we watch. ... We should fight for one another... real talk, man. It's not a racial thing; it's about us making our society better. It's like these women who are coming forward (Me Too); we say

they're brave and many of them are ... That's a huge omission from the narrative; this wouldn't have gone as far if some women weren't willing to do it. You can't expect every woman to hold the line. Some women can carry things heavier than others. We should fight for one another; we should forgive the ones who are weaker and support the ones who are stronger. Then we can beat the thing.

You [guys] keep going after individuals; the system is going to stay intact. You have to have men on your side. I'm telling you right now; you're going to have a lot of imperfect allies.

Ladies, I want you to win this fight. I've got a daughter so I'm rooting for you; if you win she wins. I don't know if you're doing it just right but who am I to say. I don't think you're wrong, but you can't make a lasting peace this way. You got all the bad guys scared; that's good. But the minute they're not scared anymore it will get worse than it was before. Fear does not make lasting peace; ask black people.



Without irony, I'll say this: the cure for L.A. is in South Africa. You motherfuckers need truth and reconciliation with one another. The end of apartheid should have been a fucking bloodbath by any metric in human history, and it wasn't. The only reason it wasn't is because Desmond Tutu and [Nelson] Mandela and all these guys figured out that if a system is corrupt, then the people who adhere to the system, and

are incentivized by that system, are not criminals. They are victims. The system itself must be tried. But because of how the system works, it's so compartmentalized as far as information, the only way we can figure out what

the system is, is if everyone says what they did; tell them how you participated.”  
Dave Chappelle, *E-qua-nim-i-ty & the bird revelation* Netflix (2017)

The front cover to summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada<sup>ix</sup>, in block letters, reads:

## “Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future”

This is the 2015 report on a 100-year lasting residential school program that targeted indigenous youth, separating them from family culture and indoctrinating children into the legally dominant Euro-Christian society. Within the report, 6,000 victim testimonies are heard including cases of sexual, physical and emotional abuse. *Truthing* was intended not to shame and blame. As a nation that prided ourselves on a reputation of democracy, peace and kindness, we – the majority – had to take our own inventory and hear from those we had harmed. Those who had been discriminated against, harassed, abused and dehumanized, needed to be heard. The aim of honoring truth was in aid of reconciliation.

I attended the 2017 Indigenous Health Practice and Research Conference in Hamilton, Canada. One of the speakers, a York University professor, Maya Chacaby<sup>x</sup> said something that sounded both poetic and profound to me. She is Anishinaabe, Beaver Clan from Kaministiquia (Thunder Bay, Canada) and she refers to Canadians in two categories: indigenous and settlers. What can settlers do who care about truth and reconciliation? Maya Chacaby says, “Get un-settled.” True-that; confronting my own privilege and the historical oppressive context of it is ... unsettling. I have committed to trying to mindfully be more un-settled.

Honoring the truth and reconciling is akin to taking inventory and making amends? These are also good themes for group inventory (or fellowship-wide inventory) and how to right wrongs and/or improve our society. We need to unabashedly record and face truth, as victims and perpetrators of harms done to us, to ourselves and to others. Recovery peer-to-peer programs aim to make a better future – we embody a program of action. A better future, as far as I’m concerned involves thinking globally and acting locally. I’m an atheist in AA. Yes, I welcome an AA whereby literature better addresses underrepresented minorities. I will lobby for this. Also, what can I do, in my home group, in my larger 12-Step community, in my own way, taking into consideration my skills and limits? Not every improvement requires consensus or waiting around for others.

David Chappelle reflected on South Africa overcoming Apartheid without revenge upon the ruling white class. Would I be happy to see the dawn of a new, inclusive 12-Step community without calling out those who have promulgated our systemically discriminatory ways? Yes, I am. It helps to see them as – in a way – victims – or controlled by – the same oppressive system. What enjoyment can there be from fear-based stewardship that stifles any attempt to try something different? In an unfair, unbalanced system like AA, it's not like there is financial reward for being a *Big Book* fundamentalist. There is no 1% because there is no wealth. Winning – if there are winners and losers of a dysfunctional system, doesn't look like what I think of as *winning*.

History hints that a fellowship, refusing or avoiding accommodation of reasonable requests from minorities, sets a course for reification, a hardening of the attitudes leading to our own self-engineered extinction. Many would blame outside forces for our demise but only our own intolerance and unwillingness would be to blame for our downfall. Old-fashioned AA and Tradition-talk includes, unity. What does unity mean in our increasingly multicultural, label-resisting society? I think, think, think unity is best achieved by accommodation. Our current system, from the group to our General Service service structure, requires the many to give their blessing to the few. The literately-challenged can't have a simplified *Big Book* without the approval of those who will never read or need the book. A contemporary title for the Gay and Lesbian AA pamphlet requires the cooperation of the hetro-normative majority. Maybe, I think, think, think it would be better to try a policy of accommodation where decisions-by-substantial-unanimity have held us back.

Human Rights Tribunals favor requests for accommodation when asked. The exception would be when granting them causes undue hardship to the larger society. Yes, there will be time, expense and growing pains to any accommodation. While that's hardship, is the not the kind *undue* hardship that would bankrupt or render an organization dysfunctional. In AA for instance, following the General Service Conference in April, every new advisory action costs money and takes time away from limited staff and volunteers already doing their share. So, if change for the better costs money and takes time, that's not *undue* hardship; that's simply the price we pay for progress. There should be hardship when it comes to bettering AA. Any claim of undue hardship ought to hold the onus of proof.

For example, the plain-text request for an easy-reading *Big Book* would have cost money and taken time. That isn't undue hardship. I am inclined to believe that this request was denied because of fear – not a fear about what would happen but a catastrophizing of

what could happen, “If we make changes for this group then the women and the trans-genders and the atheists will all want changes and our message will be lost.”

Accommodation will change the way things are. “But it’s always been this way,” is a poor excuse to not grow, improve and widen our gateway. Why fear change? There is no basis for slippery slope (or opening the flood-gate) arguments for not accommodating most requests made of 12-Step fellowships coming from underrepresented minorities. Remember one of the objections to listing Gay/Lesbian meetings? “If we start listing these meeting what’s next – child molester AA meetings?”

The anger and polarization that this catastrophizing brought, delayed the agenda for a whole year. That argument wouldn’t be entertained or have derailed the Conference in an accommodation model. Accommodation would have proceeded this way: “We’ll allow the Gay/Lesbian group to hold themselves out as such. Then, if – and we mean if – an AA meeting for child molesters asks to be so-identified, we’ll deal with that at the time.”

Slippery slope arguments are not rational; they are raised from hidden emotional catastrophizing. To use 12-Step folk-language, “That’s your disease talking there buddy. Turn it over; Easy does it.”

"Since my release, I have become more convinced than ever that the real makers of history are the ordinary men and women of our country; their participation in every decision about the future is the only guarantee of true democracy and freedom." Nelson Mandela 1990. *The Struggle is My Life*

The struggle is our life. I’ve heard some say, “the struggle and hardship IS the spiritual journey.” Archbishop Desmond Tutu was the chairman of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which was created by Nelson Mandela’s Government of National Unity in 1995 to help South Africans come to terms with their extremely troubled past. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was the chairman of South Africa’s TRC in this is his guidance on forgiveness, informed I’m sure by his own personal story.

To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. It is also a process that does not exclude hatred and anger. These emotions are all part of being human. You should never hate yourself for hating others who do terrible things: the depth of your love is shown by the extent of your anger.

However, when I talk of forgiveness I mean the belief that you can come out the other side a better person. A better person than the one being consumed by anger and hatred. Remaining in that state locks you in a state of victimhood, making you almost dependent on the perpetrator. If you can find it in yourself to forgive then you are no longer chained to the perpetrator. You can move on, and you can even help the perpetrator to become a better person too.”<sup>xi</sup>

The examples are out there. I’ve seen an unfortunate inclination for AA to look only to our own history for clues; how limiting. Learning from others is not – I don’t think – an outside issue. As Uncle Bill W thought, thought, thought, with over 20 years of sobriety:

“A.A. was not invented! Its basics were brought to us through the experience and wisdom of many great friends. We simply borrowed and adapted their ideas.”

Thanks, thanks, thanks, Bill W. We’ll try to keep your pioneering ways alive in AA.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-42631208>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.helpguide.org/harvard/how-addiction-hijacks-the-brain.htm>

<sup>iii</sup> Based on a Monty Python sketch Cheese Shop, a purchaser enters a Cheese Shop and asks for various cheeses only to be disappointed by various excuses as to why that cheese type isn’t available in the store today. Some people – Maybe even Monty Python’s Flying Circus in book form—have turned the skit into a game of skill. Who will run out first, the customer listing cheese types or the shop owner coming up with original excuses. The original skit was performed in audio and TV forms. Here is one: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3KBuQHHKx0>

<sup>iv</sup> [https://www.amazon.com/Principle-Recovery-Unconventional-Journey-Through/dp/0692520538/ref=as\\_sl\\_pc\\_ss\\_til?tag=rebelogspubl-20&linkCode=w00&linkId=HBEMLVACQRECWHDK&creativeASIN=0692520538](https://www.amazon.com/Principle-Recovery-Unconventional-Journey-Through/dp/0692520538/ref=as_sl_pc_ss_til?tag=rebelogspubl-20&linkCode=w00&linkId=HBEMLVACQRECWHDK&creativeASIN=0692520538)

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.reneweveryday.com/principles-of-recovery-from-the-punk-rock-pulpit/>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://rebelliondogspublishing.com/rebellious-radio/blog/a-book-a-principle-of-recovery-a-comedy-show-sober-but-never-clean>

<sup>vii</sup> [https://www.amazon.com/Refuge-Recovery-Buddhist-Recovering-Addiction/dp/0062122843/ref=as\\_sl\\_pc\\_ss\\_til?tag=rebelogspubl-20&linkCode=w00&linkId=7MMQGES2X2DE72X5&creativeASIN=0062122843](https://www.amazon.com/Refuge-Recovery-Buddhist-Recovering-Addiction/dp/0062122843/ref=as_sl_pc_ss_til?tag=rebelogspubl-20&linkCode=w00&linkId=7MMQGES2X2DE72X5&creativeASIN=0062122843)

<sup>viii</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>

<sup>ix</sup> [http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Honouring the Truth Reconciling for the Future July 23 2015.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Honouring%20the%20Truth%20Reconciling%20for%20the%20Future%20July%2023%202015.pdf)

<sup>x</sup> Maya Chacaby <http://www.amikobiin.com/>

<sup>xi</sup> <http://theforgivenessproject.com/stories/desmond-tutu-south-africa/>