

The Point | CURRENT ISSUE

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Monthly articles on recovery and fellowship written by members of A.A. in San Francisco and Marin.



Giving It Away: Tradition Three

March 1, 2019 by Claire A

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Made a Decision

March 1, 2019 by John W.

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Abandoning the Ego

March 1, 2019 by AA SF/Marin Intergroup

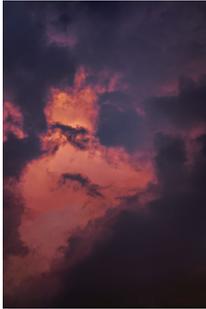
Another way of looking at the third step by Anonymous We don't believe that any two people in the A.A. program have settled into a concept of a higher power that is identical in every respect. Alcoholics have been off the grid for such a time that their concept of everything must be recalibrated into ... [Continue reading Abandoning the Ego](#) →



Simple Program, Complicated People

March 1, 2019 by The Point

by Rick R. Desperation has been the great motivator for me with respect to the thoroughness that I have applied since the day I surrendered and came to Alcoholics Anonymous searching for solutions to my out-of-control drinking problem. Not everyone that comes to A.A. has that degree of desperation. That, I believe, is the difference ... [Continue reading Simple Program, Complicated People](#) →



Behind the Car, Pushing

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So this part of Step Three feels like a little breather in the process of doing the work. I also like the end: "...as we understood Him." Ah. A god of my understanding. And what exactly is my understanding of "God"? God is mysterious: by definition, a mystery isn't knowable. What's more, God is infinite: ... [Continue reading Behind the Car, Pushing](#) →

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by Carla H.

How hard was Step Three for me? When my sponsor suggested I put God in the driver's seat, instead of myself, I asked, "So I'm riding shotgun?"



Leonardo Yip

The small, still flame at the center of my being

“You’re not even in the car,” she smiled. “You’re outside, in back, pushing.” I can’t steer my own life? No thanks, I said silently. But I kept my mouth shut, listened to my sponsor and was willing to take her suggestions about the Third Step. Sigh.

With God in the driver’s seat and me doing the footwork, here was another example of my powerlessness (beyond Step One). I was at least willing to be willing. And it has worked out for me. Putting my Higher Power in the driver’s seat helps me let go, accept, turn anything over, and just be of service. I like the way the Third Step begins: “Made a decision...” which means we thought about it. Didn’t necessarily do it.

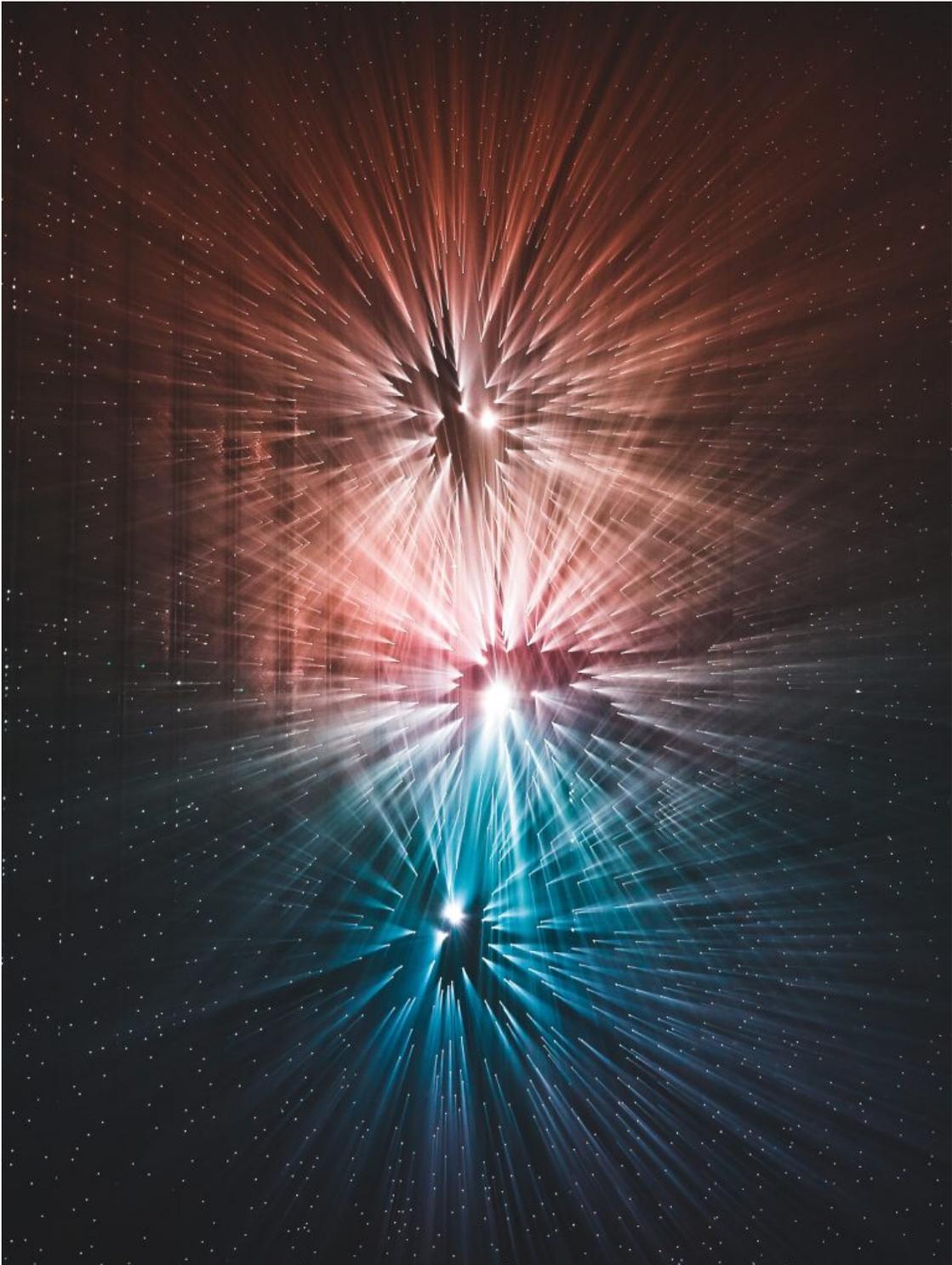
Images of these deities were mostly human, sometimes shape-shifting into animals

I chose my Higher Power at this point, at my sponsor’s suggestion. I read a lot of Greek mythology when I was a kid. Loved it. I knew the Greeks and Romans had lots of gods and goddesses, each of whom ruled over a certain area of life. Made sense to me then—and now. Images of these deities were mostly human, sometimes shape-shifting into animals, but mostly human. Sensible: a god would be wise to appear to mortals as one of us. We wouldn’t be afraid. Nice. Hence, Jesus. So my Higher Power has three aspects: Serena Williams; a golden retriever; a small, still flame at the center of my being. As my sponsor told me, “Your HP always has your back. Always. So give yourself an HP you

can count on." Mine looks like Serena. Strong, beautiful, skillful, strategic, hard-working, kind, and soft-spoken, she can take on anyone or anything that challenges me. She does for me what I cannot do for myself. She always has my back.

The golden retriever: Even though I'm not a dog person, I know golden retrievers are often service dogs. Since my only job in life is to be of service, a retriever can show me how it's done. Years ago, I heard a dog expert say, "Dogs are the only animals who are perfectly happy to play second banana to a human." I have much to learn from that: a happy second banana. Sounds like an aspect of humility to me.

A happy second banana



Leonardo Yip

The small, still flame at the center of my being is a phrase that I heard someone share at a meeting. I resonated with it and thought, Oh, yes, that sounds like a relatable version of the burning bush in the Old Testament. That's the image I use when I'm praying or if I am especially anxious about something. The minute I visualize a small, still flame at the center of my being, my breathing slows down and I become calmer. Which makes it easier to put my HP in the driver's seat.

Photos by Leonardo Yip and Dewang Gupta

Simple Program, Complicated People

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by Rick R.

Desperation has been the great motivator for me with respect to the thoroughness that I have applied since the day I surrendered and came to Alcoholics Anonymous searching for solutions to my out-of-control drinking problem. Not everyone that comes to A.A. has that degree of desperation. That, I believe, is the difference in the various degrees of success we have when it comes to abstaining from alcohol.



By some miracle, I woke up one morning with no other options

The reality is not everyone gets it on their very first attempt. With time comes understanding. Once I got beyond the initial stages of recovery it became very clear to me alcohol didn't cause my problems (although it had eventually become a problem). My troubles started surfacing long before I ever started drinking. I now realize the drinking masked most of my mental and emotional difficulties for a long time but, as it happens, my tolerance for alcohol started to dissipate and the heavy drinking became an obvious problem.

I failed at marriage, jobs, friendships, parenthood and trust with just about everyone that knew me. I burned so many bridges that finally I had no place to turn. By some miracle, I woke up one morning with no other options and desperately called A. A. for help. I was finally ready. From that day on, over 49 years ago, I have never wanted a drink again. The obsession to drink has never showed its face again. I recognized the reasons drinking seemed to work in the early days and how the mental and emotional problems were exposed when I stopped. My issues would need to be addressed if I was ever going to be at peace with myself and with the world around me.

I had to relearn how to be a husband, a father, a brother, a friend

Fortunately from that very first day, I avoided denial about my condition and embraced what I recognized to be, the solution to my disease. The pathway to the future of contentment I enjoy today is the result of the thoroughness I

applied to every facet of my life. I had to relearn how to be a husband, a father, a brother, a friend, an employee, a neighbor, a partner, and a citizen. I had to become an asset and not a liability.

Become an asset, not a liability

I must question my motives for everything I do to assure I stay on the unselfish side of the ledger. It was helpful to revisit the spirit of the things that I learned as a child in church, in school, and in the Boy Scouts and apply these principles where the selfish and dishonest habits had once ruled my life. I came to understand how my ego had taken over all of my mental properties. My conscience slowly regained control.

With time comes understanding

The program of Alcoholics Anonymous was there when I was ready to throw in the towel. It helped me recognize all of these changes. It doesn't go into detail about how to meet the noble goals of being a good husband, father or friend. So I had to learn the details of these neglected issues from other experienced sources.

It was a process of reprogramming my inner self with components of right living. These things take time. They don't happen overnight, but I couldn't let that stop me from beginning this new journey. I found a new purpose for living. I am extremely grateful the program of Alcoholics Anonymous was established in time to save this broken spirit and turn it into the person that I am now. Today I override my ego and simply live by the dictates of my conscience.

Abandoning the Ego

aasfmarin.org/abandoning-the-ego

AA SF/Marin Intergroup



Another way of looking at the third step

by Anonymous

We don't believe that any two people in the A.A. program have settled into a concept of a higher power that is identical in every respect. Alcoholics have been off the grid for such a time that their concept of everything must be recalibrated into some form of strategy that they can work with, whether or not anybody else understands the linguistics they use to describe it. Taking Step Three is deciding to abandon our failed ego-driven insanity and to find another source of principles and behaviors to replace them.

I get an uncomfortable feeling if it starts going religious

Some of us return to the religion of our youth, while others may struggle with that idea and settle for an approach that is more practical in nature. We in Alcoholics Anonymous see examples of success in a variety of different

approaches when it comes to turning our will and our lives over to a power greater than ourselves. If it wasn't this way, where would the agnostic and the atheist go to get relief from this terrible disease?

I get an uncomfortable feeling at a meeting when it starts going overly religious and I see a new member squirming in his seat. I was the one described in Step Two in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* who had "tried religion and found it wanting." Had I not read that line, I may not have stayed with the program.

I wish I could tell you who or what ... but I can't



Photos by [Austin Schmid](#) and [Tyler Nix](#)

Having the option to come to terms with this issue has opened the gate to a path that has worked for me. Page 34 in the *Twelve and Twelve* states, "This is the way to a Faith that works." I simply combined that with the line on Page 27: "You can, if you wish, make A.A. itself your higher power." When I addressed it in that way, I had no problem moving on with the rest of the Twelve Steps. I am not driven away by anything that I've read in The Big Book or the *Twelve and Twelve*. I have not wanted a drink since I entered the program and the only answer I could come up with was the influence of A.A in my life.

Find these principles in most historical philosophies

For a guy who couldn't conceive of a day without alcohol, to a guy who has never wanted a drink since: This was all I needed to know about God. I wish I could tell you who or what God is, but I can't. I have researched things that I have heard concerning how the A.A. program came to be what it is today. The

thing that had the most influence on me concerning this issue was *The Sermon on the Mount* by Emmet Fox, which heavily influenced the founders of A.A. regarding how to address spirituality and how to apply it.

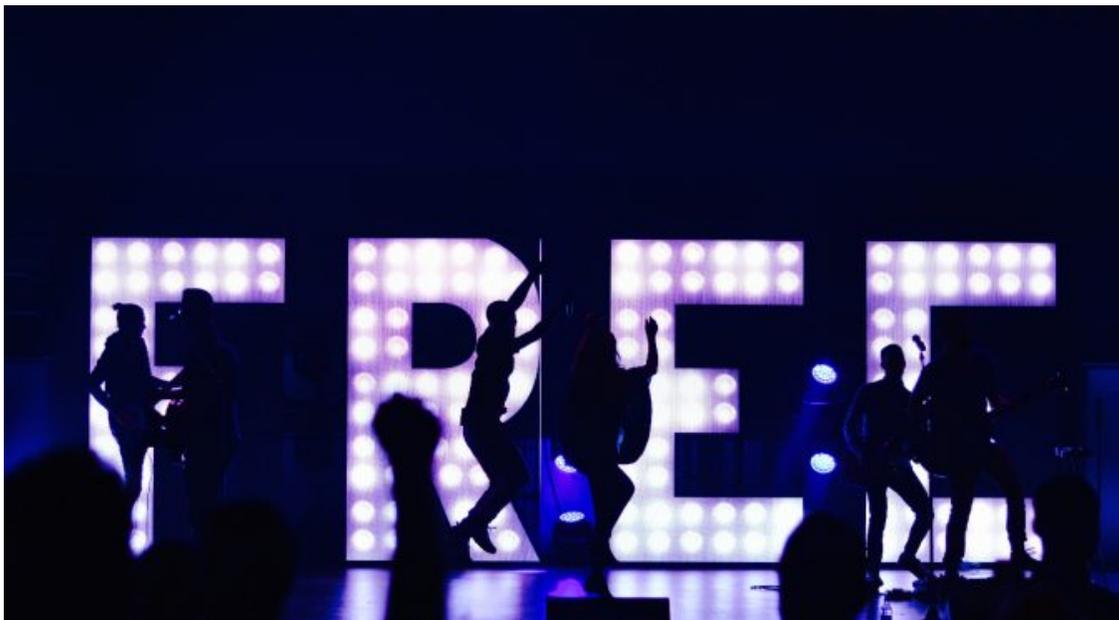
The *Grapevine* article of Feb. 1996, "Emmet Fox and Alcoholics Anonymous," explains these things. I have read that book upwards of 10 times and it defines and reinforces all the principles that we learn in A.A. When I pray, I simply ask God for guidance and for the strength to carry what comes to me as the answer that I seek. When I do it in that way, I become a better listener and the answers come to me eventually. I believe that I practice principles that are consistent with Christian teaching as well as any Christian I know but I don't consider myself a Christian. I find these principles in most historical philosophies. I've studied Plato, Socrates and Aristotle, who lived 350 years before Christ, and they are not unlike the values of most religions.

As the result of all my studies, I have settled into a way of life based on unselfish principles and values that govern all my motives and actions. It has led to a life of meaningful purpose and a peace of mind that I never thought possible.

Progress and Paradox

aasfmarin.org/progress-and-paradox

Henry Y



by Henry Y.

I've just returned home from a long day at my internship, followed by a two-hour evening class. As soon as I pulled out of the parking garage to head home, I attached to an aggressive and impatient energy and rode it all the way home. I studiously found a couple of opportunities to blare my horn, as it was clear that others around me didn't know what they were doing and needed to be shown what was what.

Life forced my hand

Why do I share this? One, because it is fresh in my mind and body. Two, because it runs in direct opposition to a very old, very hard belief that my spiritual path ought to be one of continual progress. But even this doesn't quite get at it. Progress in this formulation means a readily apparent and easy-

to-gauge ascent from bad to good. So when I find myself angrily weaving through traffic in my rush to wherever, I come up against the hard wall of reality.



Photos by [William White](#) and [Louis Hansel](#)

Losing a father I shared a complicated dynamic with ... laid bare the reality

The reality is, my anger is something that I have a hard time dealing with. It is not new, but it does not quite jive with how I see myself—my progress in A.A. and in the world—like it did when I was younger. How can a so-called negative emotion exist if I'm meant to be healing? My mind has a difficult time reconciling paradox.

What is new is the increasing untenability of living out of this anger. I am afraid to look behind the anger because there is a deep well of sadness that I do not like to acknowledge, but I have begun to listen to the voice that tells me that this is where true healing occurs. None of this is linear, although I can point to the sudden and tragic death of my father two years ago as a ready cause for sadness. I also know that in some ways that experience merely tapped into what was already inside of me.

Life forced my hand—I have to deal with the loneliness, the sadness and the tyrannical inner judge throughout the day. Naively, prior to his death, a certain part of me believed I had basically got myself sorted and it would be just

bumps along the road from here. Instead, it felt like someone threw the spike strip under my car.

This day would have come eventually, I am convinced of that. Losing a father with whom I shared a complicated dynamic has laid bare the reality that the only one who can truly hurt me is me. I now hear that voice of criticism more clearly and witness the degree to which it permeates my everyday life. It is not stronger than it used to be; I'm just a better listener.

Listening more means I have the option to feel its full emotional impact in a way that is ultimately cleansing. My current challenge in the meandering, unpredictable process of healing is to allow myself to use this option.

Made a Decision

aasfmarin.org/made-a-decision

John W.



by John W.

Before, it had always been so linear. When confronted with a problem or looking for a solution, I applied my best analytics to the circumstances and made a decision. If things turned out bad, I had a drink, and the mistake didn't seem as glaring. If things turned out well, I had a drink. One was after all entitled to "take one's comfort" (in my case it was of the "Southern" variety) after a successful venture. Of course before the decision was confronted or chosen, I had to have a drink to allow me to get focused on the problem, to clear away the distractions, as I once explained to my bartender. My problem was that while one had never been enough, one too many had never been more than enough.

Work like your life depended upon it



Photos by [Earth](#) and [Giovanni Calia](#)

When finally driven to A.A., and not on a string of victories, a man had tried to help. He answered one of my calls when no one else was doing that. We talked about my predicament, wife, job, children and, of course, my drinking. He said I likely would not believe it, but if I were willing to follow a few simple suggestions, my life would change. He further predicted it would be in ways I could not now imagine or believe possible. I had responded: "Yeah, but, you see my circumstances are different," and then I would explain things to him. His name was Mike.

This badinage continued for a bit. To each observation about the unmanageability of my life served by Mike, I would volley a “Yeah but,” retort. Like a Wimbledon champion on the court with a rank amateur, he ran me from side to side, base line to net. I was always a step too slow or a return too weak. Every point I thought I made was shredded by Mike’s simple observation of the truth I had obscured by my denial. My “Yeah buts” had met their match.

Respect the drowning man would give the sailor who hauled him to safety

So I asked him what I would have to do to be as successful as he had been in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. He replied, just work the steps like your life depended upon it, because it does. And you’ll be OK.

With newfound conviction, I hooked up with a sponsor and we started the process. My “day at Wimbledon” had broken down most of my barriers. My sponsor took care of the last vestiges of grandeur and denial. But still my thinking was linear. Still I expected that “treat” to focus, to console or to congratulate. That pattern demanded change. So I asked my sponsor: What do you have to replace this process, that is me—that is all I have ever known? It was then we discussed The Decision. While turning over my life seemed to make sense, I had become convinced it was unmanageable, turning over my will was not the same thing.

Since by then I had learned the suggestions worked, I was willing to try. As it had worked with the drink, now I was to live this new life I had been given by the same spiritual principles that had saved it. What an order, can I go through with it?

I have come to believe that the journey I have walked so far, one step at a time, one day at a time, demands that I repay that power which brought me here. I have learned I must do so with the respect and honor a drowning man would give the sailor who had hauled him to safety from the foaming sea. I can offer nothing less for the life I was so freely given. Still the doubt is there, the “Yeah but” rears its hooded head, ready to strike with cobra’s speed and infuse the venom of doubt into my veins. I know not what works for others, nay only what has worked for me, where my only defense against this lethal apparition is to say something like: “God, I offer myself to thee...” However, I can also truly say it works. It really does. This is a change, neither imagined nor predicted, but with which I can live today.

Giving It Away: Tradition Three

aasfmarin.org/giving-it-away-tradition-three

Claire A



by Claire A.

The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

It's such a simple statement, but I've found that it's not that simple. Yes, anyone who wants to stop drinking is welcome in A.A. "We may refuse none who wish to recover" (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, p. 189). That part is simple. We welcome anyone who wants what we have.

We actively welcome anyone who walks in the door, shaking their hand and asking their name, wishing to keep sober ourselves by sharing our experience, strength and hope. But how do we know who wants to recover? This is a question that has niggled at me for a long time, and sometimes niggles at me still. How can we tell who is ready to put aside her own ideas and try A.A.'s way? How many times have we watched people come into the rooms, state they want to recover, get drunk again, and return to repeat the same process? Does this person really want to stop drinking?



Photos by [Emmanuel Bior](#) and Alexander McFeron

Maybe they have wrecked lives

How many people come in to A.A. saying they want to stop drinking, and they would: if only. If only they had the job, the relationship, the home, the car, the money. Do these people want to get sober? To me, this question is what drives home to me over and over again the cunning, baffling and powerful nature of alcoholism.

Anyone who sits in the rooms of A.A. for a few meetings can see it is possible to desperately desire to stop drinking and be incapable of "getting it." Have we not all been there? Moaning "How did it happen again? Why can't I just stop?" Who hasn't, figuratively at least, pounded their fist on the bar in utter bewilderment at being drunk again without meaning to? Where would A.A. be if alcoholics couldn't fall down repeatedly and still be welcomed back into the rooms?

No idea what path anyone else is on

Well, it would be a smaller group, that's for sure. And a less compassionate, less honest group. If I am truly honest, I know that relapse is always waiting for me. I get a daily reprieve based on the maintenance of my spiritual condition, and my spiritual condition is contingent on working with others. I need other alcoholics for my sobriety. They don't need to be sober.

Yes, it's a joy when a newcomer grabs hold of the program and makes progress in recovery! But my sobriety is not contingent on that outcome. I need only give away what was freely given to me. To me, Tradition Three teaches faith. I have no idea what path anyone else is on. I don't know what their experience is. Maybe they have wrecked lives, gone to jail, attempted suicide. I don't know. I also don't know what is in anyone else's heart, whether they really want to stop drinking and live sober, or whether they are just looking for a place to recover from the last bender, if they have even thought it through that far. It doesn't matter.

It didn't matter when I came into the program. No one grilled me on whether I really wanted to stay sober, or whether I was faking. They called me on my excuses, yes. They told me I could stay sober no matter what. And when I came into A.A., I knew very little about anything except that I wanted to stop drinking. I had no idea how, or what A.A. really was. Thanks to Tradition Three, all I needed was the desire to stop. I didn't have to have or be anything else.