

**Excerpt from "Came to Believe - No Man Is An Island, p118 - 120:**

I was spiritually bankrupt long before A.A. entered my life and long before alcoholism took over like a parasite under my skin. I had nothing, no faith at all to cling to. I had no faith in man, because along with my drinking I had lost faith in myself. I trusted no one, for others were but a mere reflection of my own self, and I could not trust *me*.

I got sober in A.A., and, like a miracle, the warm flood of reality I had feared for so long flowed over me, and I was no longer afraid. I began to wonder why. Along with sobriety, something new had come into my life.

I began to have *concern* for others. This word 'concern', along with its sister *consideration*, was an alien thing to me. I had believed myself capable of falling in love; I had thought myself a loving mother; but these emotions, I now perceive, had been reflections of my own self-interest. Nothing penetrated beyond myself. I began, in early sobriety, to feel *compassion* for other drunks, then for my children, then for my ex-husband. This compassion, a feeling accompanied later by love, opened up the door to a huge fortress within me which had been forever locked.

Now this was the strange thing; I was not, in sobriety, returning to my former state. I was not resuming a well state which I had left when I began to drink alcoholically. I was becoming, as I heard it put one, weller, than well. In probing (via the Fourth Step) into my own personality, I found a new substance inside me. It had never been there before, even in childhood. Either a stone or an empty hole had been where it should have grown.

Now something was taking root. I began to *feel* for others, to be able, for very brief moments, to put myself in their shoes. New worlds opened up. I began to understand the world about me. I was not the center of the universe. (What a calamity it seemed to discover that!) I was part of a gigantic, wonderful mystery. I could not probe it, because I knew nothing about it. I could only circle it with a childlike curiosity. I am still circling about it. I shall never, nor shall any of us, discover the secrets of the universe. But we can *accept* their mystery, our part in them, and our lives and deaths, as something spiritual beyond our understanding.

I began to watch my children. They were small, important people. I realized that I had never treated them while I was drinking as anything more than little machines I had created, as if I had erected part of a Meccano set and been proud of it. I saw them begin to blossom as my treatment of them changed. I reached out a hand to help someone, sometimes even only by listening, and I felt a strange contentment at being able to help an incredible discovery for me!

I learned my own version of what spirituality is. It does not mean I have to be like the saints who claimed to have direct advice and visions from God. It means I have to be concerned with my fellowman; through this alone can I receive the grace of God, my Higher Power, for, in the words of John Donne, so long before A.A., 'No man is an island.'

I began to feel a safety in my new spiritual feelings, until I was shaken up one night by an A.A. friend who said, "All right, so you can apply the Third Step and accept a spiritual belief in God

to your personal life, but how can you accept the terrible calamities which happen around us every day?"

I was faced again, perilously, with the questions of my religious, but non-spiritual childhood, how can I accept a belief in a God who allows such monstrous crimes against man as the black scenes at Buchenwald, Dachau, Hiroshima? I began to think frighteningly of death and suffering, not my own, but all humanity's. I began to read beyond A.A.'s literature for answers.

Fortunately for me, before I had read too much about the subject of spiritual beliefs (an area which was only leading me to confusion), I realized that I was asking for too much too soon. Wisely, I left the philosophy books to minds more capable than mine. I could not risk further mental confusion. I returned to the teachings of A.A., which had already saved me from a life of torment.

I needed to look no further than the Twelve Steps and the powerful wording of our Serenity Prayer, "to accept the things we cannot change." My personal answer is there in the word "accept." Accept man's place in the universal scheme. Accept my life as one minute particle of the whole. None of us can ever fathom the glories and the uncharted regions of the universe. But we *can* live on earth and love one another. We can let in the beginnings of *concern*, *compassion*, *consideration*, and watch ourselves grow. With the tools and guideposts of Alcoholics Anonymous, we can learn a little of this precious gift - our gateway to human spirituality.

*New York, New York*

**Excerpt from "Came to Believe - The Belief Will Come", p46 - 48:**

In the beginning, I rejected any part of the A.A. program that referred to God in any manner. I even remained silent when they closed the meetings with the Lord's Prayer. (I didn't know the words, anyhow.)

Looking back, I don't think I was an agnostic, nor do I think I was an atheist. But I do know this: I couldn't accept any of "the God bit," nor did I want to come to believe or have any spiritual awakening. After all, I had come to A.A. to get sober, and what did all this truck have to do with that?

Even with all my stupid arrogance, you still loved me, held out your hand of friendship, and, I'm sure, used cautious wisdom in trying to reach me with the program. But I could hear only what I wanted to hear.

I remained dry for a number of years, and then, as you may already have guessed, I drank again. It was inevitable. I had accepted only those parts of the program that fitted into my life without effort on my part. I was still the self-centered egotist I had always been, still full of all my old

hatreds, selfishness, and disbelief - just as lacking in maturity as I had been when I first arrived at A.A.

This time, when I came to in the hospital, I had absolutely no hope. After all, you had told me that A.A. was the last hope for the alcoholic, and I had failed - there was nothing else. At this very point, my sister chose to send me a clipping from a Sunday-school paper. No letter, just the clipping: "Pray with disbelief; but pray with sincerity; and the belief will come."

Pray? How could I pray? I didn't know how to pray. Still, I was ready to go to any lengths to get my sobriety and some semblance of a normal life. I guess I just gave up. I stopped fighting. I accepted that which I did not really believe, much less understand.

I started praying, not in any formal way. I just talked to God or, rather, cried out, "Dear God, help me. I'm a drunk." I had nowhere left to turn, except t this God I did not know.

I don't recall any immediate, dramatic change in my life. I do recall telling my wife how hopeless it all seemed. At her suggestion, I began rereading the Big Book and the Twelve Steps, and now I found in these much I had never found before. I didn't reject any of it. I accepted it just as it was written. Nor did I read anything into it that wasn't there.

Again, nothing changed overnight. But, as time has passed, I have acquired a blind and, yes, childlike faith that, by accepting a God I don't understand and the program of A.A. just as it is written, I can maintain my sobriety one day at a time. If I am to have more than this, it will come as time goes by, just as other good things have come.

I no longer find it necessary, as I did for years, to prove my disbelief in God by my every thought and deed. Nor do I find it necessary to prove myself to others. No, the only accounting and the only proving I have to do is to myself and to God, as I understand Him (or don't understand Him). I'm sure that I shall err from time to time, but I must learn to forgive myself, as God has forgiven me for my past.

I think I have had a spiritual awakening, as undramatic as it may have been, and that it will go on and on as long as I continue to practice this program in my daily affairs. To me, there is no "spiritual side" to the program of Alcoholics Anonymous; the entire program is spiritual.

In my view, some of the evidences of a spiritual awakening are: maturity; an end to habitual hatred; the ability to love and be loved in return; the ability to believe, even without understanding, that Something lets the sun rise in the morning and set at night, makes the leaves come out in the spring and drop off in the fall, and gives the birds song. Why not let this Something be God?

*St. Petersburg, Florida*