

NERAASA 2009 — PORTLAND MAINE  
A REPORT TO THE NORTHEAST REGION  
ON THE CURRENT CONDITION OF A.A.  
BY THE NORTHEAST REGIONAL TRUSTEE  
(Edited for the Internet)

In making a report to my Area after the 46<sup>th</sup> Conference, I used an analogy comparing Alcoholics Anonymous with a great spiritual ark. I think of arks as vessels whose existence was inspired by God, Himself. The most famous Arks are the Ark of Noah and the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of Noah was a clumsy vessel which became the savior of life from the deluge. The Ark of the Covenant was a vessel which protected the written law from outside contamination. I expressed the belief that Alcoholics Anonymous should always be like the Ark of Noah, plying the seas of alcoholism, being available to save drowning victims, no matter how many past chances those victims had at coming on board the Ark. God's will for this great Ark is reflected in the winds and tides which shake our vessel furiously whenever we make decisions of direction in opposition to His Will. Fortunately, He allows U-turns.

Individually, our Steps take us from the powerlessness of the First Step to the Power of the Eleventh Step where we seek knowledge of God's will for us through prayer and meditation. "Therefore, we of Alcoholics Anonymous are certain there is but one Ultimate Authority, a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience." <sup>1</sup> Of all of our literature, Concept X appears to address this idea most deeply. "The principle of ultimate authority runs clear through our structure. This is necessary because all of our affairs and activities have to head up somewhere for final responsibility. Ultimate authority is also needed so that each worker or classification of servants knows where and who the final boss is."

"If, however, ultimate authority is not qualified by delegated authority, we then have the reverse result. Where there is no delegated authority, the Groups would be

directing their Delegates on every important vote; the Delegates would similarly turn the Trustees into a timid committee which would receive point-blank direction on just about everything; the Trustees would then install themselves as the sole directors of the service entities and commence to run them by directives. The corporate executives would become small czars, pushing the working staffs about. In short, such a misuse of ultimate authority would add up to a dictatorship in which every classification of A. A. servants would have large responsibilities, but no real or certain authority, and hence no capability of effective decision and leadership with which to operate." <sup>2</sup> Our Tenth Concept then tells us, "All of this is fully implied in A.A.'s Tradition Two. Here we see the 'group conscience' as the *ultimate* authority and the 'trusted servant' as the *delegated* authority. One cannot function without the other. We well know that only by means of careful definitions and mutual respect can we constantly maintain a right and working balance." <sup>3</sup>

I believe that I was privileged to be present at one of the most historic moments in the annals of Alcoholics Anonymous. Clearly reflected by the unanimous selection of *Spirituality — Our Foundation* as the theme for the 47<sup>th</sup> Conference, Alcoholics Anonymous, in the group conscience of the Fellowship as a whole, faced its own fears in 1996 and "made a decision to turn its will and its life over to the care of God as we understood Him." <sup>4</sup> It reaffirmed that our Fellowship is an Ark of Recovery for the alcoholic who still suffers, not an Ark for the Preservation of Doctrinal Rigidity. At the 46th General Service Conference, the miracle of continuing spiritual awakening became tangible, and our bonds to one another were freshened and strengthened as Alcoholics Anonymous listened to the language of its own heart and took the Third Step. We must do it again!

In the words of former A.A. General Service Board Chairman Bernard B. Smith, "I regard the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous as the outstanding spiritual phenomenon of our century. I see in the concept of living which is embodied in Alcoholics Anonymous a glorious hope for all of mankind. For the members of this

Fellowship are truly witnesses of the living truth that man can live the life of the spirit and still function in a materialistic world." <sup>5</sup>

I fully support that vision for those of us who have gotten the message. I have had the privilege of being a sponsor to several members whose lives ended prematurely. One died of stroke which took him suddenly and instantly, two died slowly and sadly of AIDS and one died unexpectedly and violently of a self inflicted gunshot wound. The first three were sober at their deaths, but the suicide victim was drunk when he shot himself in the head with a handgun on a street corner. I identified his body in the morgue, and as I looked on his countenance, I knew that alcohol had pulled the trigger and that he had not found the peace he sought by ending his life. I know that God loves him unconditionally. I also know that my friend never got our message. Although we can't carry the drunk, we can ask ourselves if our message was less attractive to him than it should have been. We can ask if it was denied to him and millions like him by what we of this Society have either done, or failed to do in achieving our primary purpose.

Our book, Alcoholics Anonymous, "makes clear three pertinent ideas:

- a) That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives.
- b) That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism.
- c) That God could and would if He were sought." <sup>6</sup>

We seek our Ultimate Authority because we must. "There is God, Our Father who very simply says, 'I am waiting for you to do My Will.' The other authority is named John Barleycorn and he says, 'You had better do God's Will or I will kill you.'" <sup>7</sup> At the Group level, the level from which our whole Society receives its direction, we seek Him in the group conscience which contains the voices of our newest members. We hear Him in the whispered voice of the drunk who says, "Help me!" We respond by offering complete freedom, the most awesome gift of a God who could have made us perfect, but Who values freedom more than perfection. As expressed in Warranty Six of the Twelfth Concept, "Freedom under God to grow in His image and likeness will ever be the quest of the (sic) Alcoholics Anonymous. May our General Service Conference

always be seen as a chief symbol of this cherished liberty."

"To a man [and woman], we of A.A. believe that our freedom to serve is truly the freedom by which we live—the freedom in which we have our being." <sup>8</sup>

Can our Society whose members are "not cured of alcoholism . . ." but who ". . . have a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance our spiritual condition" <sup>9</sup> handle a foundation of spirituality? If we follow the advice of Dr. Bob in his last address and remember that "none of us would be here today if somebody hadn't taken time to explain things to us," <sup>10</sup> and remember his last words to Bill, "Let's not louse this thing up, let's keep it simple!" <sup>11</sup> We can. Groups are charged with the conduct of daily maintenance on their own foundation of spirituality in order to "keep on the firing line of life . . . and God will keep us unharmed." <sup>12</sup> The Group must always be the heartbeat of love and service.

I think that we of Alcoholics Anonymous know that a loving God has saved us from ourselves in order that we might do His Will. The method of knowing His Will for us is called Group Conscience. The method by which our Ultimate Authority expresses Himself is essentially captured in this little poem which I have taken the liberty of adapting to our needs, and whose author happens to be anonymous:

"I sought my soul, but my soul I could not see.

I sought my God, but my God eluded me.

I sought [another alcoholic] <sup>13</sup>, and I found all three." <sup>14</sup>

The essay with which I opened this address is how I believe our literature directs us to function. The Conference is the Group Conscience of our Fellowship and the General Service Board is the strong arm of the Conference. We are asked to have love and tolerance as our code. Our common welfare is supposed to come first. Personal recovery depends on A.A. unity. We shouldn't be personally punitive.

We, the current members, have the opportunity to maintain the traditional integrity of the General Service Board. The Class A Trustees are a special group of Trusted

Servants who bring extraordinary talents which are available far beyond the quarterly Board meetings.

The Class Bs who are classified as Regional and at-large get assigned based on capability and custom. The General Service Trustees are primarily assigned to serve four years on AAWS and or the Grapevine. It is an honor to serve in whatever capacity we are assigned. We Class B Trustees owe our lives to this Society yet we can be childish emotionally sensitive and grandiose.

We of the North East Region are in as good a shape as is possible for any group of alcoholics who depend on AA. We have had the service of a good man in . . . our General Manager for the past 10 years, and the service of a deeply caring man in Leonard Blumenthal, our outgoing Chairman of the General Service Board. We are fortunate to have the service of our new General Manager . . . who brings all the qualities of experience and ability that Bill describes in his essay on leadership found in Concept IX. We can look forward to the expansion of our strong tradition of leadership by the example our incoming Chair of the General Service Board, Ward Ewing. With their leadership and the support of Staff, Appointed Committee Members, Directors, Trustees, Delegates, indeed all members of our society contributing their very best to the common welfare of AA as a whole, our personal recovery will have a foundation of bedrock.

It has been a long time since I had a drink, but drinking was only a symptom and not drinking is not a cure. We are given a daily reprieve based on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Let us pray that the God of our understanding will keep the seas calm so our Ark of Fellowship might fulfill its primary purpose. Support our leaders as they listen to the Voice of a loving God and guide our Group Conscience to be the shining beacon of love and service that our co-founders called us to be.

“Abandon yourself to God as you understand Him. Admit your faults to Him and to your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit . . . and we will continue to

meet in support of our code of love and service to others . . . as we trudge the Road of Happy Destiny.

May God bless you and keep you—until then.”<sup>15</sup>

Northeast Regional Trustee  
Portland, Maine  
22 February 2009

## References

1. *Language of the Heart*, page 78, last line.
2. *The A.A. Service Manual*, “The Twelve Concepts, Concept X,” page 44.
3. *The A.A. Service Manual*, “The Twelve Concepts, Concept X,” page 47.
4. *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, “Step 3,” page 34.
5. 1997 Report & Charter Background Material, Letter from Michael Alexander.
6. *Alcoholics Anonymous*, Third Edition, page 60.
7. *A.A. Comes of Age*, page 105, lines 28, 29, 30.
8. *The A.A. Service Manual*, “The Twelve Concepts, Concept XII, Warranty Six,” page 74.
9. *As Bill Sees It*, page 27, lines 2, 3.
10. *Dr. Bob and the Good Old Timers*, pages 337, 338.
11. *Pass It On*, page 342, lines 29, 30.
12. *Alcoholics Anonymous*, Third Edition, page 102, line 28.
13. Original quotation says [brother].
14. *Came To Believe*, “Evidence of a Miracle,” page 97, lines 1, 2.
15. *Alcoholics Anonymous*, All editions, page 164, last 2 paragraphs.