

# The AA Glossary V1

To a newcomer, walking into an AA meeting can sometimes seem like entering a foreign country with its own language. Strange quotes, acronyms, and catchphrases are casually thrown about in normal conversation. To someone who has never heard them before, it's often very hard to follow along. It seems that what is needed is an AA to English dictionary for those just beginning in the program. This page is the start of one attempt at such a dictionary.

The following is a relatively short list of unusual terms sometimes heard around AA meetings. Please keep in mind the definition accompanying each term is only one person's interpretation and is approximate at best. These definitions were taken, adapted, and/or paraphrased from many sources but particularly from the books, *Alcoholics Anonymous, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, and *Getting Started in AA*, by Hamilton B.

A

## **AA Clubs:**

Facilities that are available for AA group meetings.

## **AA General Service Board (a.k.a. the Trustees)**

A board composed of fourteen AA trustees and seven nonalcoholic trustees serves to safeguard AA's Traditions and funds. The board has the responsibility of overseeing the General Service Office (GSO), AA World Services, Inc., and The AA Grapevine, Inc.

## **AA General Service Conference:**

A conference linking the AA groups to the General Service Office and Board. It serves as the group conscience for AA as a whole. Although the conference only meets for six days a year, the 135 conference members are active in conference affairs throughout the year. Conference members are elected as representatives from each of the ninety-one area assemblies. The assemblies themselves are elected by General Service Representatives (GSRs) from all AA groups.

## **AA General Service Office (GSO):**

The 'main library' of AA's shared knowledge and experience. It helps AA fulfill its primary purpose by:

- 1) providing service, information, and AA experience to groups worldwide;
- 2) publishing and distributing AA books, flyers, fact sheets, and pamphlets;
- 3) supporting the activities of the General Service Board;
- 4) carrying forward recommendations of the General Service Conference;
- 5) dealing with the general public.

### **AA General Service Representative (GSR)**

A person who serves as an individual group's link to the General Service Conference. Sometimes called 'the guardians of the Traditions', GSRs are elected from each AA group to serve on area committees. Delegates from these area committees are then elected to serve as members of the General Service Conference.

### **A.A. Grapevine, The:**

The monthly periodical for AA members is available by subscription. 'The Grapevine', as it is usually called, consists of a monthly calendar of AA events, regular features, and special articles on issues and topics of interest to AA members. It is sometimes called 'our meeting in print'.

### **AA Group:**

Any two or more alcoholics gathered together for sobriety provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.

### **AA Preamble:**

A statement that briefly explains the purpose of AA. The preamble is read at the beginning of most AA meetings. It is based on a portion of the foreword to the first edition of the Big Book.

### **AA World Services, Inc.:**

AA World Services, Inc. is a nonprofit corporation that manages the AA General Service Office, publishes all AA literature, and serves groups in foreign countries that do not have national headquarters of their own.

### **AA's Primary Purpose:**

To stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

### **A Vision for You:**

The title of chapter 11 of The Big Book. This phrase is often used to refer to the last three paragraphs of chapter 11 and is sometimes read at AA meetings.

**ABC's, The:**

From a portion of Chapter 5 of the Big Book. These are three basic concepts for AAs to master before progressing to Step Three:

- a) that we were alcoholics 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.

**Abstinence:**

Not drinking any alcohol at all. Abstinence, AAs believe, is the only treatment for the disease of alcoholism.

**Acceptance:**

One of AA's primary principles. AA members strive to accept the things in life which we can not change, including our alcoholism and inability to drink normally.

**Alcoholic Grandiosity:**

This phrase refers to an alcoholic's insistence on having his or her way regardless of the will of the Higher Power or the demands of reality. It is one's self-will running riot.

**Alcoholic Insanity:**

An untrue belief held by some alcoholics is that they can control their drinking or that somehow, someday they will be able to drink normally.

**Alcoholism:**

While there is no formal 'AA definition' of alcoholism, most of us agree that, for us, it could be described as a physical compulsion, coupled with a mental obsession. We mean that we had a distinct physical desire to consume alcohol beyond our capacity to control it, and in defiance of all the rules of common sense. We not only had an abnormal craving for alcohol, but we frequently yielded to it at the worst possible times. We did not know when (or how) to stop drinking.

The American Medical Association formally recognized alcoholism as a disease in 1972. In 1956, it had classified alcoholism as a 'treatable illness.' Alcoholism results from a genetic predisposition working in combination with psychological and environmental factors. There is no cure. Abstinence is the only treatment.

## Definition of Alcoholism

Approved by the Boards of Directors of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (February 3, 1990) and the American Society of Addiction Medicine (February 25, 1990).

Alcoholism is a primary, chronic disease with genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestations. The disease is often progressive and fatal. It is characterized by continuous or periodic: impaired control over drinking, preoccupation with the drug alcohol, use of alcohol despite adverse consequences, and distortions in thinking, most notably denial. Primary refers to the nature of alcoholism as a disease entity in addition to and separate from other path physiologic states which may be associated with it. Primary suggests that alcoholism, as an addiction, is not a symptom of an underlying disease state.

Disease means an involuntary disability. It represents the sum of the abnormal phenomena displayed by a group of individuals. These phenomena are associated with a specified common set of characteristics by which these individuals differ from the norm, and which places them at a disadvantage.

Often progressive and fatal means that the disease persists over time and that physical, emotional, and social changes are often cumulative and may progress as drinking continues.

Alcoholism causes premature death through overdose, organic complications involving the brain, liver, heart, and many other organs, and by contributing to suicide, homicide, motor vehicle crashes, and other traumatic events.

Impaired control means the inability to limit alcohol use or to consistently limit on any drinking occasion the duration of the episode, the quantity consumed, and/or the behavioral consequences of drinking.

The preoccupation in association with alcohol use indicates excessive, focused attention given to the drug alcohol, its effects, and/or its use. The relative value thus assigned to alcohol by the individual often leads to a diversion of energies away from important life concerns.

Adverse consequences are alcohol-related problems or impairments in such areas as: physical health (e.g., alcohol withdrawal syndromes, liver disease, gastritis, anemia, neurological disorders); psychological functioning (e.g., impairments in cognition, changes in mood and behavior); interpersonal functioning (e.g., marital problems and child abuse, impaired social relationships); occupational functioning (e.g., scholastic or job problems); and legal, financial, or spiritual problems.

Denial is used here not only in the psychoanalytic sense of a single psychological defense mechanism disavowing the significance of events but more broadly to

include a range of psychological maneuvers designed to reduce awareness of the fact that alcohol use is the cause of an individual's problems rather than a solution to those problems. Denial becomes an integral part of the disease and a major obstacle to recovery.

### **Alcoholism as a Progressive Disease:**

The term 'progressive' is used to describe alcoholism because, as a rule, it only gets worse over time.

### **Alcoholism as a Threefold Illness:**

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous describes alcoholism as a disease of the body, mind, and spirit.

### **Alcoholism Cure:**

This is a fantasy. There is no known cure for alcoholism. But there is treatment; abstinence. Abstinence is made possible one day at a time through membership in AA.

### **Amends:**

Doing what we can to repair the damage that our past behavior has caused. Making amends is an essential part of Twelve Step recovery. Under AA's Ninth Step and Tenth Steps, we make direct amends to people we have harmed in the past and to those we continue to harm.

### **An Easier, Softer Way:**

This phrase is taken from chapter 5 of the Big Book, 'We thought we could find an easier, softer way. But we could not.' Some AA members attempt to find an easier, softer way to recover from alcoholism than having to work the Twelve Steps.

### **Anger, Justifiable:**

Anger that we feel justified in holding on to because of the circumstances. According to the Big Book, there is no justification for remaining angry about anything. Often we 'justify' the anger so we don't have to look at ourselves and our part in creating it. The Twelve and Twelve remind us, 'It is a spiritual axiom that every time we are disturbed, no matter what the cause, there is something wrong with us. If somebody hurts us and we are sore, we are in the wrong also. But are there no exceptions to this rule? What about 'justifiable' anger? If somebody cheats on us, aren't we entitled to be mad? Can't we be properly angry with self-righteous folk? For us of AA, these are dangerous exceptions. We have found that justified anger ought to be left to those better qualified to handle it. Anger, though

inevitable on occasion, should be felt and then released as soon as possible lest it turns into resentment. When someone offends, we should say to ourselves 'This is a sick person, too. How can I be helpful?'

**Anniversary (a.k.a. Birthday):**

The anniversary of the date on which an AA member stopped drinking. The term 'anniversary' is generally used in the East and Midwest, and the term 'birthday' is used in the West and Southwest to mean the same thing.

**Anonymity:**

The AA concept of anonymity is expressed in this saying, 'Who you see here, what you hear here when you leave here, let it stay here.' Anonymity is so important to AA that the word 'Anonymous' is part of its name. To break anonymity is to reveal one's membership or someone else's membership in AA or to repeat something that was said by someone in an AA meeting. There are only four reasons for breaking your anonymity:

- 1) to help yourself stay sober;
- 2) to help someone else stay sober;
- 3) someone in your life needs to know;
- 4) to avoid telling a lie.

**Antabuse:**

An oral prescription drug that makes a person violently ill if he drinks alcohol. Antabuse is the brand name for disulfiram.

**Any Length:**

This phrase refers to an AA member's willingness to 'go to any length' to stay sober. It means being willing to do whatever is necessary to maintain sobriety and expresses the principle of putting sobriety first. The phrase is taken from chapter 5 of the Big Book, 'If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it- then you are ready to take certain steps.'

B

**Babies:**

This term affectionately refers to people new to AA.

**Balance:**

The term refers to the AA goal of achieving emotional, mental, and spiritual balance as a result of working the Twelve Steps.

**Big Book:**

The nickname was given to the book Alcoholics Anonymous. So named, because of the unusual thickness of the paper it was originally printed on. Although the book is now smaller, the nickname is stuck and is registered.

**Big Book Study Meeting:**

An AA meeting devoted to the study of the Big Book.

**Birthday:**

(See Anniversary)

**Blackout:**

A period of alcohol-induced amnesia extends from a few hours to a few days during heavy usage. While in a blackout, a person may appear to behave somewhat 'normally' but have no recollection of it later.

**Bondage of Self:**

Alcoholic self-centeredness and self-will. The phrase is taken from the Third Step Prayer in chapter five of the Big Book, 'Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will.'

**Box 4-5-9:**

The AA General Service Office's newsletter is the GSO's primary means of communication with the fellowship.

**Breaking Anonymity:**

To reveal one's membership or someone else's membership in AA or to repeat something that was said by someone in an AA meeting. There are only four reasons for breaking anonymity at a personal level:

- 1) it will help you stay sober;
- 2) it will help someone else stay sober;
- 3) people in our lives need to know;
- 4) to avoid telling a lie.

C

**Cafeteria Style:**

A reference to a saying borrowed from Al-Anon, 'Meetings are like cafeterias; you can take what you like and leave the rest.' At least as far as AA is concerned, there should be a few basic exceptions to this rule for those who wish to stay sober.

### **Came to Believe:**

This phrase is taken from AA's Second Step, 'Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.' It is sometimes broken down this way, 'Came, Came to, Came to Believe.' First, we came physically to AA meetings. After some time, we came to (our senses that is) and gave up our alcoholic delusions. And finally, we came to believe that we could be restored to sanity by a Higher Power.

### **Care of God:**

The phrase is taken from AA's Third Step in which we make a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.' The Twelve and Twelve states, 'the effectiveness of the whole AA program will rest upon how well and earnestly we have tried to decide to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him'.

### **Carry the Message:**

This expression is taken from AA's Twelfth Step, 'Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry the message to the message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.' It is also mentioned in the Fifth Tradition, 'Each group has but one primary purpose- to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.' It is the responsibility of each AA member to carry the message of recovery to the alcoholic who still suffers. Helping another alcoholic is one of the primary ways in which we stay sober.

### **Cash Register Honesty:**

A technical kind of honesty that means we don't steal. It is often compared to another, deeper kind of self-honesty and honesty with others about who we are which is necessary for recovery.

### **Central Office:**

A local coordinating office for AA groups. It also acts as a point of contact for the general public and as a clearinghouse for information on AA meetings and activities. In some cities (like here in Houston), it is called 'Intergroup.'

### **Chapter Five:**



The reference is to chapter 5, 'How it Works,' of the Big Book. Chapter 5 explains how AA works as a program of recovery. It lists the Twelve Steps and discusses in detail the first four Steps. A portion of the chapter is sometimes read after the preamble at the beginning of AA meetings.

**Character Defects:**

The defects of character which we try to identify in our Fourth Step inventory and which we try to eliminate as part of our recovery program. In the 'searching and fearless moral inventory' that we conduct in the Fourth Step, we identify a list of character defects in ourselves. In the Fifth Step, we admit these defects to God, to ourselves, and another human being. In the Sixth through Tenth Steps, we try to eliminate these defects with God's help and to make amends for the things we have done wrong.

**Chip System:**

The custom is followed by some AA groups handing out small medallions called 'chips' to mark various anniversaries of AA members' sobriety dates. Many AA members, especially newcomers, carry a chip with them as a constant reminder of their commitment to staying sober.

**Chips:**

Small medallions commemorating various lengths of sobriety; i.e., 1, 2, 3, 6, and 9 months; years and multiples of years. The first chip which is usually given out to a newcomer is called a 'desire' chip. A desire chip signifies the recipient's desire to stay sober for the next 24 hours.

**Civilian:**

AA slang for a non-alcoholic.

**Closed Meeting:**

An AA meeting that is 'closed' to nonalcoholics. Only alcoholics and those who think they may have a problem with alcohol are allowed to attend.

**Clubs:**

(See AA Clubs)

**Conference-Approved Literature:**

Literature that has been approved for publication by the AA General Service Conference. (Incidentally, neither this page nor this website has conference approval. Nor will it ever, I suspect)

**Confidentiality:**

Whatever is said in an AA meeting is strictly confidential and should not be repeated outside that meeting.

**Conscious Contact:**

This phrase is taken from AA's Eleventh Step, 'Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.' Keeping in touch with our Higher Power through prayer and meditation. Maintaining conscious contact with a Power greater than ourselves is a key element in AA recovery. Prayer and meditation are 'our principal means of conscious contact with God.'

**Constitutionally Incapable of Being Honest:**

This phrase is taken from chapter 5 of the Big Book, 'Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born that way. They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living that demands rigorous honesty. Their chances are less than average.' The ability to be honest with oneself is essential to recovery.

**Contempt Before Investigation:**

This phrase appears in a quotation of Herbert Spencer's contained in Appendix 2 of the Big Book, 'There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance- that principle is contempt before investigation.' The phrase is often used as a warning against being closed to new ideas. Open-mindedness is an essential part of recovery.

**Controlled Drinking:**

This phrase refers to a person's decision to restrict the number of drinks he or she has to some predetermined limit. It is sometimes used for alcoholics, but it does not apply to them. Alcoholics can not control their drinking problem by limiting the number of drinks they have as an alternative to abstinence. The Big Book states, 'We alcoholics are men and women who have lost the ability to control our drinking. We know that no real alcoholic ever recovers control.' It goes on to say, 'The idea that somehow, someday, he will control and enjoy his drinking is the

great obsession of every abnormal drinker. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity or death.'

### **Courage to Change:**

A phrase taken from the serenity prayer, 'God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.' Recovery is all about change, and change is all about courage. That's why those in recovery pray for the 'courage to change.' Courage is not the absence of fear, but the overcoming of it. Fear is a natural part of the disease of alcoholism; overcoming fear is a natural part of recovery. When we no longer fear itself, we begin to recover.

### **Cross-Addiction (a.k.a. Dual Addiction):**

Being dependent upon two different substances at the same time. AA welcomes those who are cross-addicted as long as one of those substances is alcohol. AA has a singleness of purpose- recovery from alcoholism. AA's third tradition states, 'The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.' Therefore, if you have a desire to stop drinking, regardless of any other problems you may have, you are welcome to join AA. Discussion at AA meetings, however, should be limited to topics directly related to your alcoholism and nothing else.

### **Cross-Talk:**

When one AA member directly addresses another member during the sharing part of an AA meeting and offers advice. In AA, we are expected to share our experience, strength, and hope with one another rather than offer advice or instruction. Therefore, it is against AA customs to engage in cross-talk during an AA meeting.

### **Cunning, Baffling, Powerful!:**

This expression comes from chapter 5 of the Big Book, 'Remember that we deal with alcohol- cunning, baffling, powerful! Without help, it is too much for us.'

D

### **Daily Inventory:**

Step Ten says 'We continued to take a personal inventory...'. This is the same kind of inventory we took in Step Four, except it deals with recent events only. Our goal is to reduce the cumulative damage our character defects cause; keeping us on an even keel. Some AA members feel that this is the only step that can be taken 'out of order', that is, practiced daily as soon as you enter the program. The thinking

here is to stop adding to our problems and start practicing doing things differently. Again this is only an opinion.

**Daily Reprieve:**

The word 'reprieve' means 'a temporary relief.' We have a daily reprieve from the symptoms of our alcoholism contingent upon the maintenance of our spiritual fitness. This phrase appears in chapter 6 of the Big Book, 'We are not cured of alcoholism. What we have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition.'

**Defects of Character:**

See 'Character Defects'

**Denial:**

A person's refusal to admit or accept that he or she is an alcoholic; denial is one of the symptoms of the disease of alcoholism. It is this symptom that makes recovery so difficult because denial must be overcome for recovery to take place. Denial is never completely overcome, however, and must be guarded against during recovery. There is a saying in AA, 'Alcoholism is a disease which convinces you that you do not have it.'

**Design for Living:**

The phrase comes from chapter 2 of the Big Book: 'A new life has been given to us or, if you prefer, a design for living' that truly works.' The phrase refers to the AA program of recovery and to the new life that it offers alcoholics.

**Desire Chip (a.k.a. Twenty-four Hour Chip):**

A medallion that's given out at AA meetings to anyone who has a 'desire' to stop drinking for the next 24 hours.

**Detox:**

Slang for 'detoxification,' the process by which some alcoholics begin to withdraw from the use of alcohol. Also used is a detoxification center.

**Discussion Meeting:**

An AA meeting in which a topic is suggested and individuals discuss their experience, strength, and hope concerning that topic.

**Double Winner:**

An AA member who is also a member of Al-Anon.

**Dr. Bob:**

The common nickname for Robert Holbrook Smith M.D., cofounder of AA.

**Drinking Dream: or Drunk Dream**

A recovering alcoholic's sleeping dream in which he or she drinks again. No one knows exactly what a drinking dream means, but it can be very disturbing to the alcoholic in recovery.

**Drunk-a-logue:**

That portion of an AA member's story that deals with the drinking period of his or her life.

**Dry:**

Being abstinent from alcohol. To those in AA, however, being 'dry' is just one small part of being 'sober'. Sobriety is a way of life-based on spiritual principles. To remain dry without changing intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually, is to be dangerously close to the next drink. The Big Book says, 'We feel that elimination of our drinking is but a beginning.'

**Dry Drunk (a.k.a. Dry Bender):**

A condition of returning to one's old alcoholic thinking and behavior without actually having taken a drink.

**Dual Addiction:**

See 'Cross-Addiction'

**Dual Diagnosis:**

An AA member who has an emotional or psychiatric disorder in addition to alcoholism. The other diagnosis may be major depression, manic-depression (bipolar disorder), personality disorder, panic disorder, and so on. Bill Wilson, AA's cofounder, was dually diagnosed with depression.

E

**Easing God Out (a.k.a. Edging God Out):**

This is what some AAs claim the acronym E.G.O. stands for. It is a reminder that it is God's will, not our own which guides our life in sobriety. When self-centered ego returns we have rescinded our decision to take the Third Step. Instead of 'turning it over,' we are 'taking it back.'

**Enabling:**

A term used to describe overly compassionate behavior toward an alcoholic. This works against a drinking alcoholic's recovery because it keeps him or her from having to deal with the consequences of his or her behavior. Examples of enabling are making excuses for the alcoholic, or cleaning up after one of his or her 'episodes'. The alcoholic needs to face all the unpleasant consequences of his or her drinking if he or she is to recover.

**Ex-Alcoholic:**

There is no such thing. In AA we might call ourselves ex-drunks as we do not drink anymore but we are still alcoholics. There is no known cure for the disease of alcoholism; even alcoholics in recovery are still alcoholics. They are simply nondrinking alcoholics.

**Experience, Strength, and Hope:**

The phrase appears in the AA preamble, 'Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.' When we share in AA about our recovery from alcoholism, we are expected to share our experience, strength, and hope. We should not offer advice, instruction, or therapy.

F

**Faith without Works is Dead:**

This phrase appears in chapter 6 of the Big Book, 'Now we need more action, without which we find that 'Faith without works is dead.'" This quote is often used to remind us that AA is a program of action.

**Fellowship, the:**

A common nickname by those in AA for Alcoholics Anonymous.

**Forgiveness:**

The act of giving up feelings of resentment toward someone. Forgiveness of those who have harmed us is an essential part of Steps Four and Five.

**Fourth Step Inventory:**

The 'searching and fearless moral inventory' suggested by AA's Fourth Step. The Fourth Step inventory is always done in writing.

## G

### **Geographical Cure (a.k.a Geographic ):**

While still drinking, an effort to cure our alcoholism by getting a 'fresh start' in a new location. It doesn't work. There is a saying around AA, 'Wherever you go, there you are.'

### **God as We Understand Him:**

See 'Higher Power.'

### **God of Our Understanding:**

See 'Higher Power.'

### **God's Time:**

The expression reminds us that the events of the world unfold according to God's time, not our own. When we grow impatient because the things we want are not happening fast enough to suit us, we try to remember that it is not up to us to set the timetable for God's events.

### **Grapevine:**

See 'AA Grapevine.'

### **Gratitude List:**

A written list of all the things for which we are grateful. When they are feeling scared, depressed, or self-pitying, some alcoholics make a gratitude list. It is usually effective in counteracting depression and self-pity.

### **Group Conscience:**

The mechanism through which an AA group makes decisions about matters affecting the group as a whole. The group makes decisions expressed through a meeting held for that purpose immediately before or after a regular AA meeting. Every member of the group is entitled to vote, and everyone is a member who so declares himself or herself.

### **Gut-Level Honesty:**

See 'Rigorous Honesty.'

## H

**Half Measures:**

This phrase is taken from chapter 5 of the Big Book, 'Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point.' It is a reminder that an 'easier, softer way' that tries to short-cut the Twelve Steps won't bring us the quality of recovery we seek. The phrase also reminds us to put our sobriety first.

**H.A.L.T.:**

An acronym that stands for 'Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired.' It is in these states that our resolve is the weakest. The acronym reminds us to always try to avoid these states to protect our recovery.

**Happy, Joyous, and Free:**

The quotation is taken from chapter 9 of the Big Book, 'We are sure God wants us to be happy, joyous and free. We cannot subscribe to the belief that this life is a vale of tears, though it once was just that for many of us.' To be happy, joyous, and free is one of the goals (and rewards) of our recovery from alcoholism.

**High Bottom Drunk:**

An alcoholic entering AA who has maintained most of the trappings of 'success'; a family, a home, a job, a car, reputation, health, etc. Almost everyone entering AA has hit some kind of emotional bottom, but for some, the social, legal, or financial bottom may be relatively high. The more one has managed to retain upon entering AA, the higher his or her bottom is said to be.

**Higher Power:**

A self-defined Power greater than ourselves to which we ultimately turn for assistance and guidance in our sober lives. In our drinking days, alcohol was the Higher Power. In sobriety, we choose a different kind of Power to fulfill our purposes. Since AA is non-sectarian, the definition of 'Higher Power' is left entirely to the individual AA member.

**Hitting Bottom:**

Reaching such a state of utter hopelessness that we become willing to admit complete defeat in dealing with our alcoholism. In such a state we become 'teachable,' and are willing to do whatever is necessary to achieve sobriety. The bottom we hit at the end of our drinking days is usually emotional and spiritual. It may or may not involve other complications such as poor health, and financial and legal problems.

**Home Group:**



The group that an AA member attends regularly and calls home. Our home group is our strongest link to the AA fellowship.

**Homer:**

A housebound or handicapped AA member. Since homers can attend a few AA meetings, they rely on the Big Book, telephone, or written correspondence to stay sober.

**H.O.W.:**

This acronym stands for Honesty, Open-Mindedness, and Willingness. These are the keys to recovery. Without openness, we won't listen to the principles of recovery offered to us. Without willingness, we won't act on what we hear. And without honesty, we won't see the problems that have to be faced and overcome for recovery to take place.

**Humility:**

'Perfect humility,' Bill Wilson wrote, 'would be a full willingness, in all times and places, to find and to do the will of God.' 'Without some degree of humility, no alcoholic can stay sober at all. Nearly all AAs have found, too, that unless they develop much more of this precious quality than may be required just for sobriety, they still haven't much chance of becoming truly happy.'

I

**I Am Responsible:**

This expression comes from the Responsibility Declaration adopted at AA's 1965 International Convention. The declaration reads, 'I am responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there. And for that I am responsible.'

**Identification:**

Identification is one of how we overcome the denial associated with our alcoholism. When an alcoholic in recovery honestly tells his or her story, and we can identify with him or her, our denial is momentarily overcome. This discovery formed one of the fundamental principles of AA: that one alcoholic could help another alcoholic stay sober.

**Insanity:**

AA's Second Step states we 'came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.' Sometimes in AA, we hear insanity defined as 'doing the same thing over and over but expecting different results.'

**Intergroup:**

A local coordinating office for AA groups. It also acts as a point of contact for the general public and as a clearinghouse for information on AA meetings and activities. In some cities, it is called the 'Central Office.'

**Intervention:**

The process by which family members and/or friends of an alcoholic get together and confront the alcoholic about the negative effects of his behavior. The goal of an intervention is to break through the alcoholic's denial of his problem and to motivate him to seek help. Intervention is often a means of assisting an alcoholic to hit his or her 'bottom' long before he or she would naturally.

**Into Action:**

This is the title of chapter 6 of The Big Book. AA is a program of action. Good intentions, intellectualizing, and theorizing aid the disease and not our recovery from it- if they are divorced from Action.

L

**Lack of Power:**

This phrase comes from chapter 4 of the Big Book, 'Lack of power, that was our dilemma. We had to find a power by which we could live, and it had to be a Power greater than ourselves.' As alcoholics, our central problem is powerlessness over alcohol. To overcome alcoholism, we must first admit that we are powerless over it. If we admit to that powerlessness, we are given the power we need.

**Legacies:**

See 'Three Legacies of AA.'

**Low Bottom Drunk:**

An alcoholic entering AA who has lost 'everything;' house, car, family, job, health, etc. Almost everyone entering AA has hit some kind of emotional or spiritual bottom but for some, the extrinsic circumstances may be particularly low. The more one has lost upon entering AA, the lower his or her bottom is said to be.

M

**Maximum Service:**

This phrase comes from chapter 6 of the Big Book, 'Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us.' How do we do this? The AA Preamble states, 'Our primary purpose is to stay sober and to help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.' The Fifth Tradition goes on to state, 'Each group has but one primary purpose 'to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.' Therefore, we in AA are of maximum service to God and others by staying sober and carrying the message to the suffering alcoholic.

**Meeting in Print:**

See 'AA Grapevine.'

**Meetings:**

An AA meeting is any two or more alcoholics gathered together for sobriety-provided, that as a group, they have no other affiliation. At the heart of AA recovery is the meetings. It is here that the members share their experiences, strength, and hope with one another and find recovery

N

**NaltrExone:**

A prescription drug that reduces the physical craving for alcohol in some alcoholics. To be effective, it must be combined with a regular counseling program including membership in AA. It is marketed under the trade name ReVia.

**Ninety in Ninety:**

This expression refers to the suggestion to newcomers that they make at least one meeting a day for the first three months of their sobriety.

O

**Old Timer:**

An AA member who has been continuously sober for a significant time. The definition of 'significant' is open to interpretation and varies widely. There are two basic prerequisites, however, for becoming an old-timer in AA:

- 1) Don't drink;
- 2) Don't die.

**One Day at a Time:**

This slogan describes one of AA's primary strategies for staying sober. For many alcoholics, the concept of permanent abstinence is too overwhelming an option. Most, however, believe that they could stay sober for a twenty-four-hour period, if necessary. We concern ourselves, therefore only with the day in which we find ourselves. If ever we feel we absolutely, positively must have a drink, we put it off until tomorrow or until the next fifteen minutes if necessary. This gives us time to call our sponsors, get to a meeting, or pray to our Higher Power to remove the craving from us.

**Open Meeting:**

An AA meeting that not just alcoholics but anyone interested in Alcoholics Anonymous may attend. The discussion at these meetings, however, is limited strictly to topics dealing with alcoholism.

**Open-Mindedness:**

That state in which the mind becomes 'teachable.' Without open-mindedness, we cannot make the changes in our thinking and perceptions that are necessary to achieve sobriety.

**Oxford Group:**

A spiritual, nondenominational, evangelical movement founded in 1921 by a Lutheran minister, Dr. Frank Buchman. AA began as an offshoot of the Oxford Group. Bill Wilson wrote that 'Early AA got its ideas of self-examination, acknowledgment of character defects, restitution for harm done, and working with others straight from the Oxford Groups...' Both Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob were members of the Oxford Group at the time of AA's founding.

**People, Places, and Things:**

Before recovery, we depended upon people, places, and things to make us happy or to change our lives. In recovery, we take that responsibility away from external events and place it on ourselves. The Twelve and Twelve says, 'It is a spiritual axiom that every time we are disturbed, no matter what the cause, there is something wrong with us.'

**Periodic:**

An alcoholic who stays sober for some time then loses control, goes on a spree, and then repeats the cycle.

**Pigeons:**

Apparently, it started with Dr. Bob, one of AA's two co-founders. He would refer to the people he did 12th Step work with as pigeons. When asked why, he explained that in wartime (remember this was a very different era) carrier pigeons - - also sometimes referred to as homing pigeons -- were used to send vital information back and forth across great distances -- sometimes across enemy lines -- and that information could literally save lives.

So the 12th Step work he was doing with people was like the vital information transmitted by those carrier pigeons of old. You sent them out, and they returned to you with a message which could potentially save your life.

I'm not one hundred percent sure of the accuracy of this origin story. After all, AAs are no less vulnerable to sweetening up our own history than any other group of humans. But whether it's fanciful or factual I can tell you this: It's apt.

Because that's exactly what happened to me today -- vital, life-saving information returned home to me from someone I had been sharing it with for years now -- and I got it just when I needed it.

**Pink Cloud:**

The temporary sensation of euphoria and well-being is characteristic of those who are new to AA and sobriety. For most, the pink cloud eventually dissipates. This heralds the time to get down to business and start seriously working the Steps.

**Power Greater than Ourselves:**

See 'Higher Power.'

**Powerlessness:**

See 'Lack of Power.'

**Prayer and Meditation:**

AA's Eleventh Step calls for 'prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him.' One common distinction between prayer and meditation is this: Prayer is speaking to God whereas meditation is listening for His answer.

**Preamble:**

See 'AA Preamble.'

**Primary Purpose:**

See 'AA's Primary Purpose.'

**Principles Before Personalities:**

This phrase comes from the Twelfth Tradition, 'Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.' It is the principles of the program, not its personalities, that guide recovery and keep us sober. We rely on the Twelve Steps and their principles rather than on one individual or group of individuals. Individuals, regardless of how charismatic, are only human. Our ultimate reliance is on our Higher Power.

**The program, the:**

This phrase refers to AA's Twelve Step program of recovery and, more generally, to AA itself.

**Progress Not Perfection:**

This is a paraphrase of a sentence in chapter 5 of the Big Book, 'We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.' When we try to do things perfectly, we are attempting to do the impossible. The tendency toward perfectionism is merely a reflection of our alcoholic grandiosity.

**Progressive Disease:**

See 'Alcoholism as a Progressive Disease'.

**Promises, the:**

See 'Twelve Promises.'

R

**Recovered Alcoholic:**

The foreword of the Big Book opens with this sentence, 'We, of Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book.' Those who use the term 'recovered' do so because they see themselves as having recovered from alcoholism for the one day in which they find themselves. The word 'recovered' in this sense is not interchangeable with the word 'cured.' There is no known cure for the disease of alcoholism.

**Recovering Alcoholic:**

But for semantics, a 'recovering' alcoholic is the same as a 'recovered' alcoholic. Those who call themselves 'recovering' alcoholics do so because recovery is an ongoing process that is never fully complete.

**Rehab:**

A slang word for a treatment center specializing in substance abuse. 'Rehab' is short for 'rehabilitation center.'

**Relapse:**

See 'Slip.'

**Resentment:**

Feelings of ill will that we hold for others usually as a result of some perceived harm they have done us. In recovery, we cannot afford to harbor resentments because they corrode our lives and can lead us back to alcohol. The Big Book says, 'It is plain that a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness. To the precise extent that we permit these, do we squander the hours that might have been worthwhile.'

**Rigorous Honesty:**

From chapter 5 in the Big Book, 'They [those who do not recover] are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty.' Rigorous honesty is characterized by the complete lack of intent to deceive one's self or anyone else.

**Road of Happy Destiny:**

This phrase is taken from chapter 11 of the Big Book, 'We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny.' The road is 'trudged' because recovery requires what sometimes seems like monotonous perseverance.

**Rule 62:**

From the Twelve and Twelve, Rule 62 is, 'Don't take yourself too damned seriously'

S

**Searching and Fearless Moral Inventory:**

See 'Fourth Step Inventory.'

**Self-Centeredness:**

The Big Book says, 'Selfishness- self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles.' According to Bill Wilson, recovery means 'destruction of self-centeredness.' The Twelve Steps help us achieve that goal.

**Self-Knowledge Is Not the Answer:**

This is a paraphrase from the Big Book, 'But the actual or potential alcoholic, with hardly an exception, will be absolutely unable to stop drinking based on self-knowledge. This is a point we wish to emphasize and re-emphasize...' We cannot achieve sobriety solely based on knowledge about ourselves and the disease of alcoholism. It requires working the Twelve Steps.'

**Self-Pity:**

Feeling sorry for ourselves or dwelling on our own problems. Focusing too much on the past causes depression. Focusing too much on the future causes anxiety. Focusing on right now keeps us grounded. We can get out of our problems by working with another sick and suffering alcoholics problems. The saying goes 'If you feeling down ask yourself who are you helping?' Another remedy is to write a gratitude list.

**Self-Seeking Will Slip Away:**

This characteristic is one of the Twelve Promises in the Big Book. It will come true for those who work their program. The promise means that we will seek to help others and follow God's will for our lives rather than seek fulfillment or our selfish desires.

**Self-Supporting through Our Own Contributions:**

This expression is from AA's preamble, 'There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.' AA does not solicit nor does it accept contributions from anyone other than AA members.

**Self-Will Run Riot:**

This phrase comes from chapter 5 of the Big Book, 'Selfishness- self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles... So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of a self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so. Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us!' The only solution we know is to work the Steps.

**Serenity Prayer:**



The Serenity Prayer reads in part, 'God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.' This prayer is often used as a mantra, of sorts, by AA members. It is a powerful tool for achieving balance when our emotions threaten to overwhelm us.

### **Service:**

Service is one of AA's Three Legacies. The Big Book states, 'Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us.' We are of service when we carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers through our words, attitudes, or actions.

### **Seventh Tradition:**

The Seventh Tradition (short form) states, 'Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.' AA accepts contributions only from its members. There are no dues or fees for AA membership. Donations are strictly voluntary. AA headquarters restricts annual donations from any AA member to a maximum of one thousand dollars. Anything over this amount or any donation at all from a non-AA member will be politely refused.

### **Sharing:**

This term is derived from the AA preamble, 'Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.' The term 'sharing' is often used to describe an individual's discussion at an AA meeting.

### **Shotgun Sobriety:**

As the phrase suggests, this type of sobriety is based on fear of drinking rather than on the application of AA principles. All of us in recovery have learned a healthy respect for the power of alcohol, but we do not live in terror of it. Long-term sobriety must be based on spiritual principles, not on fear of alcohol.

### **Simple Program:**

This phrase is derived from chapter 5 of the Big Book, 'Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves.' AA is a simple program for complicated people, so the saying goes. AA's Twelve Step program is simple because it works simply: one Step at a time and one day at a time. Simplicity in this sense, does not necessarily mean ease. Working the program requires an unwavering dedicated effort. Yet all

the strength and willingness to work the program is freely given to all those who sincerely ask for them.

**Slip:**

A common term for relapse- drinking alcohol again after a period of sobriety in AA. The term is often used as an acronym as well: S.L.I.P; Sobriety Loses Its Priority.

**Slippery Places (and Slippery Faces):**

Slippery places are a reference to actual places or emotional states in which we are more likely to slip. These are, of course, to be avoided if reasonably possible. Slippery faces refer to old drinking buddies; the company of whom we should avoid as well. Another similar term is 'old playgrounds and old playmates.' It is dangerous even foolish to put ourselves in situations where we are likely to be tempted by alcohol. Even if we believe we are now strong enough to resist temptation, we best resist temptation by avoiding temptation altogether.

**Smith, Robert Holbrook, M.D. (a.k.a. 'Dr. Bob'):**

1879-1950. Cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous. Dr. Bob created the first AA group in the world, AA Group Number One, in Akron, Ohio.

**Sobriety Date:**

Depending on who you ask; our sobriety date is the date on which we had our last drink or the date on which we sobered up from our last drink.

**Speaker's Meeting:**

An AA meeting featuring one or more designated speakers who share their experience, strength, and hope for the entire meeting. The speakers talk about what life was like before AA, what brought them to AA, and what their lives are like now.

**Spiritual Awakening (a.k.a. Spiritual Experience):**

The Big Book description is a 'personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism.' It also describes it as a 'profound alteration in [our] reaction to life,' and as an 'awareness of a Power greater than ourselves.' The difference between an awakening and an experience is that an awaking occurs over time whereas an experience happens suddenly.

**Spiritual Tool Kit:**

This metaphor comes from chapter 2 of the Big Book, 'There was nothing left for us but to pick up the simple kit of spiritual tools laid at our feet.' The tools to which it refers are the Twelve Steps, reliance on a Power greater than ourselves, and prayer and meditation.

**Sponsor:**

For those who are fond of acronyms, a S.P.O.N.S.O.R. is a Sober Person Offering a Newcomer Suggestions On Recovery. A sponsor is an AA member who serves as a mentor of sorts to a newcomer in the program. A sponsor typically helps a sponsee to work the Twelve Steps; shares his or her personal experience, strength, and hope; and helps the sponsee stay on the recovery track. Although not mentioned in the Big Book, per se, sponsorship has become widely accepted as a crucial part of the recovery program.

**Step Study Meeting:**

An AA meeting that focuses on a study of the Twelve Steps, usually at a rate of no more than one per meeting.

**Steps:**

See 'Twelve Steps.'

**Stinking Thinking:**

This phrase refers to an alcoholic's reversion to old thought patterns and attitudes. Stinking thinking may include, blaming others, alcoholic grandiosity, fault-finding, self-centeredness, and skipping meetings. Stinking thinking is a warning sign to an alcoholic that he is not working the AA program and he or she is getting precariously close to their next drink.

**Surrender:**

To surrender in AA is to effectively take the first Three Steps. It means

- 1) admitting that we are powerless over alcohol and that our lives have become unmanageable,
  - 2) coming to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity, and
  - 3) turning our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him.
- Surrender is the key to recovery. Only when we completely surrender are we willing to let a Power greater than ourselves restore us to sanity.

T

**Terminally Unique:**

An alcoholic's idea that his or her 'uniqueness' exempts him or her from some part of the AA program or the Twelve Steps. AA does not deny that each individual is a unique creation. However, as alcoholics, we have far more similarities than we have differences. There is an expression sometimes heard in AA which seems appropriate, 'Always remember that you are unique, just like everyone else.'

**Thirteenth Step (a.k.a. Thirteenth Stepping):**

There is no thirteenth step in the AA program. This term is used as a euphemism for inappropriate sexual advances by a member to a newcomer in AA (such as sponsors toward sponsees). Sponsors ought never to be sexually involved with those whom they sponsor. This is why it is usually suggested that (heterosexual) newcomers choose sponsors of the same sex, thereby avoiding the temptation. Also, it is sometimes suggested that newcomers not enter into new relationships for at least a year after getting sober. The reason is that sexual relationships are prone to elicit emotional extremes, making relapse more likely. The term 'thirteenth stepping' is always used in a negative sense.

**Three Legacies of AA:**

The Three Legacies of Alcoholics Anonymous are Recovery, Unity, and Service. These legacies are so-called because they have been passed down to us from the cofounders and old-timers of AA. The Legacy of Recovery is contained in the Big Book, the Twelve Steps, and the Twelfth Step work. The Legacy of Unity is contained in the Twelve Traditions. The Legacy of Service is contained in every act which helps AA function or which carries the AA message to those who need it.

**Traditions:**

See 'Twelve Traditions.'

**Treatment Center:**

A center specializing in the treatment of alcoholism and other addictions or disorders.

**Twelfth Step Call (a.k.a. Twelfth Stepping):**

This term describes directly carrying the AA message of recovery to an alcoholic who still suffers.

**Twelfth Step Work:**

This term comes from AA's Twelfth Step which suggests we carry the AA message of recovery to other alcoholics. Twelfth Step work may include making Twelfth

Step calls, sharing at AA meetings, sponsoring, and performing service work of any kind.

**Twelve and Twelve:**

This is a nickname for the book Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

**Twelve Concepts for World Service:**

The Twelve Concepts form the basis of AA's structure and describe how the various parts of Alcoholics Anonymous work together. These concepts were published in a booklet of the same name in 1962,

**Twelve Promises:**

This refers to a section of the Big Book that details the benefits AA members receive from having worked the first nine Steps of the AA program.

'If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are halfway through.

We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness.

We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it.

We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace.

No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others.

That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear.

We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows.

Self-seeking will slip away.

Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change.

Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us.

We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us.

We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. (AA Big Book, Pg.83-84)

**Twelve Steps:**

'AA's Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole.' The Twelve Steps are the basis of the AA program of recovery.

**Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions:**

The title of a collection of essays in book form published in 1952 by Alcoholics Anonymous as a supplement to the Big Book. It details, as its name implies, the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

**Two Stepper:**

Slang for an AA member who works the First Step and then jumps directly to the Twelfth, bypassing all those in between. Shortcutting AA's program of recovery by two-stepping, eliminates an essential part of recovery. Any resultant sobriety is therefore shaky at best.

U

**Unity:**

AA's Second Legacy of Service.

**Unmanageability:**

In the first Step, we admit not only that we are powerless over alcohol, but that our lives have become unmanageable. Only by accepting the unmanageability of our own lives can we open ourselves to change by a Higher Power.

W

**Wet Brain:**

An alcoholic whose drinking has caused such brain damage that he or she can no longer function in society and has to be institutionalized.

**#008000 Knuckle Sobriety:**

A desperate effort to stay sober solely through the exercise of one's own willpower. Unless one finally surrenders and begins to work the Twelve Steps, such an effort is usually doomed to failure.

**Willingness:**

Unless we are absolutely willing to listen, to change, and to work the Steps, we won't be able to stay sober in AA. Some have found it useful, even necessary, to pray for willingness to become willing.

**Wilson, William Griffith (a.k.a. 'Bill W.):**

1895-1971. Cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous and author of several books on the subject.