

Humility... About Rightsizing

Introduction...

When I began working on this conference I was going to start to deal mostly with Honesty... a most important principle of AA.

As I began to read the passages about *Honesty* in the **Big Book** I quickly noticed that *Honesty* and *Humility* were frequently side by side. As I read about *Humility* I began to realize that *Humility* seems to be the key – without *Humility* I will never be truly honest.

Let's just examine two or three passages in the **Big Book** to see this.

Being treated for his alcoholism for the last time at the hospital Bill says:

There I humbly offered myself to God, as I then understood Him, to do with me as He would. I placed myself unreservedly under His care and direction. I admitted for the first time that of myself I was nothing that without Him I was lost. I ruthlessly faced my sins and became willing to have my new-found Friend take them away, root and branch. I have not had a drink since...

... My friend (a visiting friend from his school days) promised when these things were done I would enter upon a new relationship with my Creator; that I would have the elements of a way of living which answered all my problems. Belief in the power of God, plus enough willingness, honesty and humility to establish and maintain the new order of things, were the essential requirements. (BB, Bill's Story, P 13)

Notice that humility and honesty are tied together.

This happens again when the Big Book describes the Fifth Step...

What happens when people in the Program are not *humble* or *honest* enough when doing the Fifth Step?

They took inventory all right, but hung onto some of the worst items in stock. They only 'thought' they had lost their egoism and fear; they only 'thought' they had humbled themselves. But they had not learned enough of humility, fearlessness and honesty, in the sense we find it necessary, until they told someone else 'all' their story. (BB, P 73)

In the story entitled "It Might Have Been Worse," we come across *humility* and *honesty* once again in the same paragraph.

... It took me some time to realize that the Twelve Steps of A.A. were designed to help correct these defects of character and so help remove the obsession to drink. The Twelve Steps, which to me are a spiritual way of living, soon meant honest thinking, not wishful thinking, open mindedness, a willingness to try and a faith to accept. They meant patience, tolerance and humility, and above all the belief that a Power greater than myself could help. that Power I chose to call God. (BB, p 381)

So... I want in this talk to reflect on **Humility**... On our website I have also placed some reflections on **Honesty**.

Humility

What is humility?

Wikipedia describes humility this way:

Humility (adjectival form: humble) is variously seen as the act or posture of lowering oneself in relation to others, or conversely, having a clear perspective, and therefore respect, for one's place in context.

Bill E describes *humility* as "right sizing." (**As Bill Sees It**, #36)

St. Augustine said that humility is "truth."

I would describe humility as recognizing that life is not about us. We are not the center of the universe.

The **Big Book** describes an alcoholic individual as a person who wants to be the director of everything that goes on in life, a self-will run riot, full of self-centered fears. There is very little trust in God. (PP 60-63)

Humility reminds us that we are not God.

We have to dethrone our ego.

Ego deflation is a good description.

We don't have to be in control all of the time and have all of the right answers – that's reality.

Humility is about right sizing, about admission of powerlessness and about docility.

A few lines from a beautiful poem by Jessica Powers says it for me:

*I rose up from the acres of self
That I tended with passion and defended with flurries of pride
I walked out into the woods of God's mercy
And here I abide.*

Humility is realizing that we are not god and that we truthfully belong in the "woods of God's mercy."

The Steps get us there.

The Two Step Program

Regrettably some folks in AA have a Two Step Program...

Don't drink and go to meetings.

They still blame others, need control, constantly lick their wounds with the 'poor me's' and have little prayer or spirituality.

Many times they are judgmental and not forgiving,
they talk and don't listen,
they nurse grudges and resentments,
they are angry and not patient,
they worry about themselves and don't notice others,
and they don't pray – too busy!

It's about them...

Humility... the Truth

Humility gets us past the Two Step Program.

Humility helps us recognize our character defects which we began noticing in Steps Four and Five...

Lying, manipulating, anger, resentments, jealousy, lust, greed, arrogance, fear, self pity... and others.

Steps One thru Five are about the past...

Steps Six and Seven are about change...

Steps Six and Seven are about the future.

Our new life is not just about sobriety,

it's not just about not drinking...

it's about a new way of living...

Life in the Program is about transformation... change.

Change is not easy.

Once again we remember:

After a lifetime of self-centeredness and "do it my way or stay out of my way,"

change and growth, or what the **Big Book** calls a "spiritual awakening", is not something that happens automatically.

We want to get to the point where we are "entirely ready" to have our Higher Power remove our character defects so that we can change and grow and reach our goals... the Sixth Step

We can't get to this point without *humility*.

Can we trust our Higher Power?

That can be a tough one and it takes time

and it takes prayer and it takes *humility*.

Of course, God cannot remove our character defects if we keep on practicing them.

Now we can ask the **Big Questions:**

1) *Who Am I?*

A Story

A Child of God...

A seminary professor was vacationing with his wife in Gatlinburg , TN. One morning, they were eating breakfast at a little restaurant, hoping to enjoy a quiet, family meal. While they were waiting for their food, they noticed a distinguished looking, white-haired man moving from table to table, visiting with the guests. The professor leaned over and whispered to his wife, 'I hope he doesn't come over here.' But sure enough, the man did come over to their table.

'Where are you folks from?' he asked in a friendly voice.

? Oklahoma , ' they answered.

'Great to have you here in Tennessee , ' the stranger said. 'What do you do for a living?'

'I teach at a seminary,' he replied.

'Oh, so you teach preachers how to preach, do you? Well, I've got a really great story for you.' And with that, the gentleman pulled up a chair and sat down at the table with the couple.

The professor groaned and thought to himself, 'Great ... Just what I needanother preacher story!'

The man started, 'See that mountain over there? (pointing out the restaurant window). Not far from the base of that mountain, there was a boy born to an unwed mother. He had a hard time growing up, because every place he went, he was always asked the same question, 'Hey boy, who's your daddy?' Whether he was at school, in the grocery store or drug store, people would ask the same question, 'Who's your daddy?'

He would hide at recess and lunch time from other students. He would avoid going into stores because that question hurt him so bad. 'When he was about 12 years old, a new preacher came to his church. He would always go in late and slip out early to avoid hearing the question, 'Who's your daddy?' But one day, the new preacher said the benediction so fast that he got caught and had to walk out with the crowd.

Just about the time he got to the back door, the new preacher, not knowing

anything about him, put his hand on his shoulder and asked him, 'Son, who's your daddy?'

The whole church got deathly quiet. He could feel every eye in the church looking at him. Now everyone would finally know the answer to the question, 'Who's your daddy?'

'This new preacher, though, sensed the situation around him and using discernment that only the Holy Spirit could give, said the following to that scared little boy.. 'Wait a minute! I know who you are! I see the family resemblance now; You are a child of God.'

With that he patted the boy on his shoulder and said, 'Boy, you've got a great inheritance. Go and claim it.'

'With that, the boy smiled for the first time in a long time and walked out the door a changed person. He was never the same again. Whenever anybody asked him, 'Who's your Daddy?' he'd just tell them, 'I'm a Child of God.'

The distinguished gentleman got up from the table and said, 'Isn't that a great story?'

The professor responded that it really was a great story!

As the man turned to leave, he said, 'You know, if that new preacher hadn't told me that I was one of God's children, I probably never would have amounted to anything!' And he walked away.

The seminary professor and his wife were stunned. He called the waitress over & asked her, 'Do you know who that man was – the one who just left that was sitting at our table?'

The waitress grinned and said, 'Of course. Everybody here knows him. That's Ben Hooper. He's governor of Tennessee!'

Do we realize this?

Or is it all about us?

Other Big Questions...

2) How do I want to change?

3) How do I act? (As if)

4) What's holding me back?

5) What are my values?

6) What are my goals?

7) What is the purpose of my life?

We need *humility* to realize that *I can't, God can...*
with the help of others.

Humility expresses itself in the virtue of "docility," –
being teachable.

If we are not teachable how will we learn a new way of thinking, of acting,
and of living?

"Our way" got us where we are.

Our character defects are "our way."

How have they worked for us?

And remember... God cannot remove our character defects if we keep on
practicing them.

A fellow in AA that I know shared how "pain" got him teachable... what he
was doing was causing him a lot of pain –
there must be some other way of living life!

The **Process of Humility**

In the Book **As Bill Sees It** Bill describes how humility develops as we grow
in the Program:

*We first reach for a little humility, knowing that we shall perish of alcoholism
if we do not.*

After a time, though we may still rebel somewhat,

we commence to practice humility because this is the right thing to do.

*Then comes the day when, finally freed in large degree from rebellion, we
practice humility because we deeply want it as a way of life. (#211)*

Remember, I am a child of God

In this same book Bill describes the basis of all *humility*...

*For just so long as we were convinced that we could live exclusively by our
own individual strength and intelligence, for just that long was a working
faith in a Higher Power impossible...*

*The basic ingredient of all humility, a desire to seek and do God's will, was
missing. (#139)*

At another place in this book Bill describes what he considers 'perfect
humility'...

Absolute humility would consist of a state of complete freedom from myself, freedom from all the claims that my defects of character now lay so heavily upon me. Perfect humility would be a full willingness, in all times and places, to find and to do the will of God. (#106)

Remember, I am a child of God.

When we read **Twelve and Twelve** and its description of the Seventh Step we find ourselves in the midst of a whole chapter dedicated to 'humility'.

At the very beginning of this Chapter we read:
... The attainment of greater humility is the foundation principle of each of A.A's Twelve Steps. For without some degree of humility, no alcoholic can stay sober at all. (P 70)

In its treatment of the Seventh Step **Twelve and Twelve** says that as we continue in this Program...

We saw we needn't always be bludgeoned and beaten into humility. It could come quite as much from our voluntary reaching for it as it could from unremitting suffering. A great turning point in our lives came when we sought for humility as something we wanted, rather than as something we 'must' have. It marked the time when we could commence to see the full implication of Step Seven: "Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings." (P 75)

At the end of this Chapter on the Seventh Step we read:

The chief activator of our defects has been self-centered fear – primarily fear that we would lose something we already possessed or would fail to get something we demanded.

Living upon a basis of unsatisfied demands, we were in a state of continual disturbance and frustration...

The Seventh Step is where we make the change in our attitude which permits us, with humility as our guide, to move out from ourselves toward others and toward God. The whole emphasis of Step Seven is on humility. It is really saying to us that we now ought to be willing to try humility in seeking the removal of our other shortcomings just as we did when we admitted that we were powerless over alcohol, and came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity... (P 76)

Here we have another description of the **Process of Humility**.

Humility

THE A.A. Twelfth Tradition says:

And finally, we of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the principle of anonymity has an immense spiritual significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practice a genuine humility. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of Him who presides over us all. (BB, P 568)

Conclusion

Where have we gone in this talk?

Introduction

Honesty and Humility in the Big Book

I Humility

Def/Desc... We are not God... Right Sizing

II The Two Step Program

Don't drink and go to meetings

III Humility... The Truth

Humility and the Steps

The Big Questions... Who Am I?... A Story

More Big Questions

Humility and Docility

IV The Process of Humility

Books... **As Bill Sees It, Twelve and Twelve**

Addition to Conference on Humility... **On Honesty**

Description of Honesty

To be honest is to be real, genuine, authentic, and bona fide.

To be dishonest is to be partly feigned, forged, fake, or fictitious.

Honesty expresses both self-respect and respect for others.

Honesty imbues lives with openness, reliability, and candor;
it expresses a disposition to live in the light.

Dishonesty seeks shade, cover, or concealment.

It is a disposition to live partly in the dark.

Dishonesty would have no role to play in a world that revered reality and was inhabited by fully rational creatures.

However, human beings are not fully rational.

Human beings need both practice and study over time to become persons of integrity and effective goodwill.

Lying is an easy tool of concealment,
and when often employed,
all too easily hardens into a malignant vice.
Every social activity, every human enterprise requiring people to act in concert,
is impeded when people aren't honest with one another.

Honesty is best cultivated and developed and exercised in harmony with others.

The more it is exercised, the more it becomes a settled disposition.

It is a fundamental condition for human exchange and business,
for friendship, for all genuine community.

Honesty is the kind of person one is.

(See, **Book of Virtues**, William Bennett, Chapter 8, Introduction, PP 599-600)

Honesty The **Big Book** of A.A.

In Bill's story... Bill tells us about his becoming sober.

Here's an important part of his sobriety...

Belief in the power of God, plus enough willingness, honesty and humility to establish and maintain the new order of things, were the essential requirements.

Simple, but not easy; a price had to be paid. It meant destruction of self-centeredness. (BB, P 13-14)

In Chapter Five of the Big Book, "How It Works" we read:

Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. 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. 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 which demands rigorous honesty. Their chances are less than average. There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest. (BB, P58)

In the same Chapter when describing the Fourth Step the Big Book says:
We went back through our lives. Nothing counted but thoroughness and honesty. (BB, P 65)

A little further on in this same Chapter, when describing the Fifth Step, the Big Book speaks of a dishonest inventory in Step Four. Here's what it says:

They took inventory all right, but hung onto some of the worst items in stock. They only 'thought' they had lost their egoism and fear; they only 'thought' they had humbled themselves. But they had not learned enough of humility, fearlessness and honesty, in the sense we find it necessary, until they told someone else 'all' their story. (BB, P 73)

The Big Book goes on to describe why psychologists had trouble helping many alcoholics...

We have seldom told them the whole truth nor have we followed their advice. Unwilling to be honest with these sympathetic men, we were honest with no one else. (BB, P 73)

When describing the alcoholic to employers the Big Book says:

... When drinking, or getting over a bout, an alcoholic, sometimes the model, sometimes the model of honesty when normal, will do incredible things... (BB, P 140-141)

There's a wonderful story on PP 297-303 entitled "Home Brewmeister."

Listen to this description of dishonesty:

... My wife accompanied me on my visit and the doctor really told me some things that in my state of jitters nearly knocked me out of the chair. He talked about himself, but I was sure it was about me. He mentioned lies and deceptions in the course of his story in the presence of the one person in the world I wouldn't want to know such things. How did he know all this? I had never seen him before, and at the time hoped I would never see him again. However, he explained to me that he had been just such a rummy as I, only for a much longer period of time. (BB, P 302)

Another story sums up this way:

If I were asked what in my opinion was the most important factor in being successful in this program, besides following the Twelve Steps, I would say Honesty. And the most important person to be honest with is Yourself. (BB, PP 367-386)

Another storyteller puts it this way:

I know the biggest word for me in A.A. is 'honesty.' I don't believe this program would work for me if I didn't get honest with myself about everything. Honesty is the easiest word for me to understand because it is the exact opposite of what I've been doing all my life. Therefore, it will be the hardest to work on. But I will never be totally honest – that would make me perfect, and none of us can claim to be perfect. Only God is. If I work on it every day, it will be easier to be honest with myself. Then getting and staying honest with other people will come automatically. (BB, P 482)

One woman says this about honesty.

I learn more of that foundation stone of character, which is honesty. I learn that when we act upon the highest conception of honesty which is given us, our sense of honesty becomes more acute. (BB. P 507)

