Beyond the 'Big Book' . . . Beyond the 'Inner Dialogue' . . . Beyond the Confines of the 'Self'

The 'Big Book' of Alcoholics Anonymous is, of course, our most valuable resource in early recovery, offering, as it does, a complete guide for rapidly taking the newcomer through the Twelve Steps so that he or she may be released from active alcohol addiction. But how effective is it, in and of itself, for working with the 'alcoholic who still suffers' years (and, perhaps, many years) into sobriety as he or she continues to struggle, not with the obsession over alcohol, but with 'the bondage of self'?

Realistically, there are many within the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous (and its sister organizations), and many returning to these rooms sober, whose spiritual experiences have not been so 'deep and effective' as to relieve them from the obsessive nature of the mind. There are those, too, who have had illuminating spiritual experiences only to fall from such spiritual heights and who continue to struggle to recapture what they once had. These are the 'still suffering' alcoholic addicts with minds that no longer obsess over alcohol but, rather, minds that obsess about the ordinary human trials and tribulations of life - the instinctive drives for security, sex and society - in their many varieties. The 'Big Book' is necessarily silent about such men and women, as it was written so early in the experience of the then-recovering alcoholics.

Bill Wilson thought that perhaps the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions would help those, like himself, 'who had begun to run into life's lumps in other areas than alcohol.' Indeed, a decade or so into his own sobriety, when he wrote the second book, 'he was suffering almost constant depression and was forced to confront the emotional and spiritual demons that remain 'stranded' in the alcoholic psyche.' ("Pass It On," pages 352 and 356.)

'The problem of the alcoholic centers in his mind,' we read in the 'Big Book' of Alcoholics Anonymous. Thus, for the alcoholic addict who is 'still suffering' in sobriety, it is crucial that he or she comes to terms with the self-centered nature of ordinary human consciousness. That is, he or she must transcend the 'egoic self' in order to experience the inner quiet and peace that is inherent to our nature. To do so, however, it is first necessary, that he or she recognize and then learn to let go of the mechanical and learned nature of our 'ordinary' self-centered thinking.

As spiritual teacher and author, William Holden recently blogged on The Huffington Post:

'Awarement to our original enlightened nature involves interrupting the ordinary flow of linear, language-based, thinking so that we can rediscover 'the mind within the mind'. Focusing on external circumstances or teachings is not what triggers the moment of (spiritual awakening), in other words. Rather, it is focusing on the absence of internal commentary. Because it is impossible to 'think' without words, this practice of stopping the flow of running commentary on our lives involves cultivating a mindset of no-thought...
(wu-nien) in an attempt to experience each moment as it is without silently talking to ourselves about it."

"Individual selfhood is expressed in the self's capacity for self-transcendence and not in its rational capacity for conceptual and analytic procedures."

Reinhold Neibuhr - Theologian/Author of the "Serenity Prayer"

"The only right and legitimate way to such an experience is that it happens to you in reality and it can only happen to you when you walk on a path, which leads you to a higher understanding. You might be led to that goal by an act of grace or through a personal and honest contact with friends, or through a higher understanding of the mind beyond the confines of mere rationalism."

Letter from Carl Jung to Bill Wilson - Jan. 30, 1961

If the alcoholic addict still suffering in sobriety is to 'move beyond the confines of mere rationalism' and overcome the obsessive nature of the mind, and the problems in life which it presents, he or she may be well advised to look beyond the 'Big Book' and more deeply into the many and varied spiritual and religious paths that complement the Twelve Steps. This may require moving even beyond the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions and other A.A. literature, and further into the realm of the spirit, being quick to see where religious people may be right and making 'use of what they to offer: 'Big Book,' page 87.

In the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (at page 98) Bill W. points out that a logically interrelated practice of 'self-examination, meditation and prayer' will, in effect, allow the practitioner to access the hidden depths of our being, yielding him or her 'an unshakeable foundation' for spiritual living. The Twelve Steps are designed to let us practice this spiritual methodology effectively.

The "maintenance of our spiritual condition' (and with it the ability to move beyond the small and suffering 'self') if practiced over time is the solution to the real problem of the alcoholic addict, the problem centered in his or her mind. It is a solution that all spiritual and religious traditions point to (as outlined in the audio clip, attached below), a solution that moves the alcoholic addict beyond his or her 'painful inner dialogue.'