

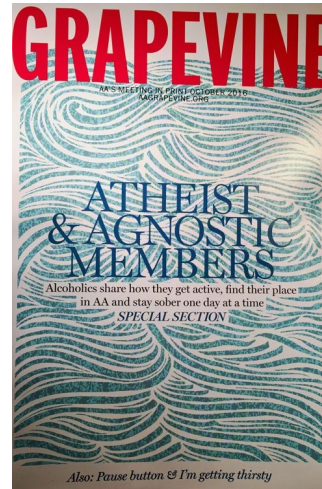
A.A.— A Kinship of Common Suffering

Newcomers are approaching AA at the rate of tens of thousands yearly. They represent almost every belief and attitude imaginable. We have atheists and agnostics. We have people of nearly every race, culture, and religion. In A.A. we are supposed to be bound together in the kinship of common suffering. Consequently, the full individual liberty to practice any creed or principle or therapy whatever should be a first consideration for all of us. Let us not, therefore, pressure anyone with our individual or even our collective views. Let us instead accord each other the respect and love that is due to every human being as he tries to make his way to the light. Let us always try to be inclusive rather than exclusive; let us remember that each alcoholic among us is a member of AA, so long as he or she so declares.

**Bill W.—A.A.
Grapevine, July, 1965**

Check out the October 2016 issue of The Grapevine.

We have been working with A.A. to try get more literature published that appeals to non-believers.



“ . . . This was the great contribution of our atheists and agnostics. They had widened our gateway so that all who suffer may pass through regardless of their belief or lack of belief.”

— Bill W. in A.A. Comes of Age, 1957

This pamphlet was produced by the We Agnostics Group of A.A. in Tempe, Arizona

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What is secular Alcoholics Anonymous?

Hint: Secular means not religious.



Check out our website:

SecularAA.org

What is secular A.A.?

Secular A.A. is a movement within Alcoholics Anonymous that seeks to widen our gateway so that all who suffer may pass through and find long-term sobriety in A.A. regardless of their belief or *lack of belief* in a God.

This movement traces its roots to one of A.A.'s first agnostics, Jimmy B., who helped convince A.A. co-founder Bill W. to substitute the term "Higher Power" for God and add the words "*as we understood Him*" in the 12 Steps outlined in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous.

He was also the driving force behind our Third Tradition: "The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking."

Secular meetings are not new. Quad A (A.A. for Atheists and Agnostics), began in Chicago in 1975 and spread to other large cities. Today there are nearly 400 secular A.A. meetings a week in the United States and many others worldwide.



A typical secular meeting may read the A.A. preamble and then what is becoming known as the secular preamble:

"AA agnostic/secular meetings endeavor to maintain a tradition of free expression, and conduct a meeting where alcoholics may feel free to express any doubts or disbeliefs they may have, and to share their own personal form of spiritual experience, their search for it, or their rejection of it. In keeping with AA tradition, we do not endorse or oppose any form of religion or atheism. Our only wish is to ensure suffering alcoholics that they can find sobriety in AA without having to accept anyone else's beliefs, or having to deny their own."

Of course, each group is autonomous and chooses its own readings and format.

Why do you need your own meetings?

Many of us have found long-term sobriety in traditional A.A., but we have not always felt welcomed or comfortable. We were frequently told that if we didn't find God, we were going to die. Well, we didn't and we haven't. We have had many newcomers and people who previously left A.A. come through our doors and find sobriety, who say they would not be sober if secular meetings did not exist. Today, fully one-third of Americans under the age of 30 identify as atheist, agnostic, or no religion. They walk into a meeting, see the word God on the wall, and walk out. But A.A. *is* for them, if they have a desire to stop drinking. We emphasize that A.A. is a fellowship, not a strict set of beliefs. We are similar to other special purpose groups in A.A., such as gay/lesbian or young people's meetings. At our meetings, no one is forced to join in or conspicuously opt out of a prayer. We believe in "To Thine Own Self Be True," as quoted on many A.A. medallions. A lot of us continue to attend traditional A.A. meetings as well.

What about the 12 Steps? How can you be A.A. without following them?

A.A. co-founder Bill W.'s thinking evolved on many issues subsequent to writing the Big Book. In a 1946 Grapevine article he wrote that, "so long as there is the slightest interest in sobriety, the most unmoral, the most antisocial, the most critical alcoholic may gather about him a few kindred spirits and announce to us that a new

Alcoholics Anonymous group has been formed. Anti-God, anti-medicine, anti-our recovery program, even anti-each other – these rampant individuals are still an AA group *if they think so!*"

In *A.A. Comes of Age* he reminded us that, "A.A.'s Steps are suggestions only. A belief in them as they stand is not at all a requirement for membership. This liberty has made A.A. available to thousands who never would have tried at all had we insisted on the Twelve Steps just as written."

Members who choose to work the Steps are free to word them in a way that is meaningful to them, generally preserving the principles embedded in them.

What are you trying to accomplish?

First of all, we are *not* trying to change or criticize anyone who stays sober with a belief in a Higher Power. If that works for you, fantastic! We are reaching out to people who don't have that belief and likely never will. We want them to know sobriety is possible regardless of belief or disbelief. A.A. membership is shrinking while the population is growing. We believe that secular A.A. will reach alcoholics who would not come to A.A. otherwise. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety. The power of one alcoholic sharing with another works, regardless of belief. When *anyone* reaches out, we want the hand of A.A. to be there.