

A Course in Miracles and Alcoholics Anonymous

Anonymous

There is so much these perennial philosophies have in common it is hard to know where to begin. I suppose I should start by explaining to anyone not acquainted with Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) that it has Traditions to protect the fellowship. This is also true of the over 300 recovery groups in existence who base their program on the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of A.A.

One Tradition is that A.A. has no opinion on outside issues; hence, the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy. So I should stress that I only speak for myself and in no way am I representing A.A.'s opinion on any issue and, in particular, on *A Course in Miracles*.

Another of these Traditions is for members to maintain their anonymity on the level of press, radio, and film. This is a spiritual principle to protect present and future members. It keeps present members from being caught in ego and assures new members that they do not have to be public about their membership.

Now that the housekeeping is out of the way, I can share some humble thoughts. A.A. and ACIM are both based on ancient teachings, ideas, and truths. They were both divinely inspired. In the case of ACIM, Jesus dictated to Helen what to write exactly. In the case of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, it was written by the group conscience of the first 100 people that found sobriety. They both brought to the world new ways to look at the concept of God, how humans relate to God, and to each other.

The Cause is in the Mind, the Solution is Spiritual

Most people go on a spiritual quest because they are experiencing pain or discomfort. I find it fascinating that both texts identify the cause of unhappiness as being in the mind. In the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, they talk of the hopeless situation of the alcoholic where that once a drink is taken, they cannot stop. "We know that while the alcoholic keeps away from drink, as he may do for months or years, he reacts much like other men. We are equally positive that once he takes any alcohol whatever into his system, something happens, both in the bodily and mental sense, which makes it virtually impossible for him to stop. These observations would be academic and pointless if our friend never took the first drink, thereby setting the terrible cycle in motion. Therefore, the main problem of the alcoholic centers in his mind, rather than in his body." pp. 22-23

The solution for the alcoholic is a spiritual experience. This is explained as either happening quickly or over time but, "With few exceptions, our members find that they have tapped an unsuspected inner resource which they presently identify with their own conception of a Power greater than themselves. Most of us think this awareness of a Power greater than ourselves is the essence of spiritual experience. Our more religious members call it "God-consciousness." " pp. 567-8

The Course is always stressing that the deceived mind needs to be undone. The Workbook lessons undo the thoughts so that the Holy Spirit can guide a willing participant. "Both miracles and fear come from thoughts. If you are not free to choose one, you would also not be free to choose the other." Chapter 2 VII. 3:1-2

I find the Workbook Lessons and the Twelve Steps of A.A. to be very similar in this regard. Both are a way to create ego deflation so that a new guide can enter. It is a willing surrender, usually brought on by many years of spiritual distress. Both are asking for a complete and all encompassing change in perception. "The purpose of the workbook is to train your mind in a systematic way to a different perception of everyone and everything in the world. The exercises are planned to help you generalize the lessons, so that you will understand that each of them is equally applicable to everyone and everything you see." Workbook Intro, 4: 1-2

The echoes of complete surrender are heard in recovery as well. In the paragraphs immediately preceding the Twelve Steps in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* one finds phrases such as, "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." p. 58, "Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely." p. 58, "Without help it is too much for us. But there is One who has all power-that One is God. May you find Him now!" p. 59 and finally, "Half measures availed us nothing." p. 59

New Concepts of God

Just before a co-founder of A.A. stopped drinking, he was very anti-religion, having lost faith, and developed an intelligential dependence on science. When a drinker as bad as he was paid a visit, and was so visibly well it was undeniable, he was faced with the question of God being the answer. As he says himself, "I could go for such conceptions as Creative Intelligence, Universal Mind, or Spirit of Nature but I resisted the thought of a Czar of the Heavens, however loving His sway might be. I have since talked with scores of men who felt the same way. My friend suggested what then seemed a novel idea. He said, "Why don't you choose your own conception of God?" That statement hit me hard. It melted the icy intellectual mountain in whose shadow I had lived and shivered many years." p.12

Most adults experience hardships and disappointments. I found it very difficult to break from my concepts of God from childhood. I was raised to believe God had a Son and that Son loved little children. I was also taught that God sent his only Son to save our sins. As a child I would wonder, if it is God surely he can make another Son? It sure would relieve some of the guilt I felt in that God's only Son had to die for me.

"If the crucifixion is seen from an upside-down point of view, it does appear as if God permitted and even encouraged one of His Sons to suffer because he was good. This particularly unfortunate interpretation, which arose out of projection, has led many people to be bitterly afraid of God." Chapter 3, I. 1:5-6

This is where ACIM comes in and saves the day because God did not ask Jesus to die for me.

Another sticking point throughout my adulthood was when I did feel sadness or grief and prayed to God for help, I felt conflicted. I believed that God created this world and took people to heaven when He saw fit. He also did not prevent hurtful things from happening to me or to those I loved. How could I pray to a God that I believed caused the harm in the first place? Why would I believe He would be helpful now after being such a bad so and so before?

The concept in ACIM that God does not know of this world was so healing for me. Now I could pray for help, not to get what I wanted, but for help and then turn to the Holy Spirit for guidance. God no longer was a heartless entity that caused or did not prevent tragedy. God is love and wants only love for me.

The Cause of Pain Is Our Own

Alcoholic Anonymous gave me the permission to choose a loving caring God and ACIM explained why that was true. This led me to ask, then where does the pain come from? This is another common thread of belief within ACIM and A.A.-our pain is of our making. A.A. puts it this way in the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, "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? Nor were we ever skillful in separating justified from unjustified anger. As we saw it, our wrath was always justified." p. 90

The Course agrees that we are incapable of judging correctly. "In the end it does not matter whether your judgment is right or wrong. Either way you are placing your belief in the unreal. This cannot be avoided in any type of judgement, because it implies the belief that reality is yours to select *from*." Chapter 3. VI 2: 10-12. If we are unable to judge, then we literally do not know what is "good" or "bad" for us, and therefore, what is pain or non-pain. It further goes on to explain, "Whenever you are not wholly joyous, it is because you have reacted with a lack of love to one of God's creations. Perceiving this as 'sin,' you become defensive because you expect attack. The decision to react in this way is yours, and can, therefore, be undone." Chapter 5 VII. 5:1-3

The Happy Destiny and Happy Dream

I want to end this short discussion on the positive note that both philosophies propose. A big focus of both is on undoing ego and behaviours that are rooted in habit and deep beliefs. The ego must be brought to light, seen and then discarded. This clears the way to join with our fellows. This is how both texts end:

"Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. 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 you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny. May God bless you and keep

you-until then.” *Alcoholics Anonymous* p. 164

“Not one illusion is accorded faith, and not one spot of darkness still remains to hide the face of Christ from anyone. Thy Will is done, complete and perfectly, and all creation recognizes You, and knows You as the only Source it has. Clear in Your likeness does the light shine forth from everything that lives and moves in You. For we have reached where all of us are one, and we are home, where You would have us be.” Chapter 31, VIII. 12:5-8

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