

# HOW

A publication of Indian River Central Office

Volume 24, Issue 12

HOW  
December 6, 2004

## An Open Mind Unlocks the Door

In the past years of association with AA I have heard much about the virtues we must acquire and the defects we must eliminate. However, little is said about the "key" which unlocks the door. .. open mindedness. Occasionally it is mentioned in passing with relation to spiritual things and God, but do we not need to apply all that we learn to our every day living? The 12th Step says [try to] "*practice these principles in all our affairs.*" It has been my sad experience to find very little real open mindedness among my fellow travelers. Many of my associates will be indignant and perhaps even have some resentments but I see what I see, and hear what I hear, and have even been guilty of the same fault.

Open minded is defined as "ready to hear," "open to suggestion." I have heard an AA say: "We must keep an open mind," and no longer than 30 minutes later I have heard that same AA insisting his opinion was right and being very definite about it. Also, we sometimes insist our associates are not doing things as we believe they must be done. This is lack of open mindedness.

I don't believe we can cheat. We are using a spiritual Truth when we attempt to utilize the 12 Steps to straighten out our life, and I believe we will pay a heavy price if we do not heed the laws laid down by Truth. Therefore, let us place this virtue where it belongs among the important things we need to practice in our daily contacts. Let us always remember that in every man there is good and that we may learn something good from the worst. Let us always remember that each person is an individual and for him, his opinions may be right. Each one of us must find God as we understand Him, each one of us must straighten out his life as we see it in accordance with God's plan, not mine or yours.

I have found it absolutely impossible to disagree with everything a speaker says. I have always found at least one thought which I could add to my storehouse of knowledge as I listened to another ex-drunk, even if it is only the knowledge of what not to do.

Let us keep an open mind when one of our brothers has trouble, for we would have to know everything he thinks and all the external forces which enter his life to judge him. Even then it would be a risk. Let us learn to listen with an open mind to everyone we come in contact with and thus take away a new thought to mediate upon and perhaps add to our own storehouse. Somewhere along the line in life we will need to draw heavily upon this storehouse, when the chips are down, if we would remain sober.

No person completes a lifetime without one day having to prove beyond all shadow of doubt the Truth he professes for himself. The Divine Plan so arranges it. If you come into AA and refuse to keep an open mind you will miss an education in philosophy. Perhaps you do not refuse but are just unaware... you must become aware if you are to stay sober.

Let us keep an open mind when we talk with the new person so that we will be able to do the greatest good. Let us remember that we are all individuals. We did not all drink for the same reason and we do not all have the same character defects or problems, so we must at times set aside our own fixed opinions and listen if we are to help. We can all state what we would do if we were in another's place, but would we? I have found that many times in the past year I was unable to do the very things I preached to others. There are times when we must, of course, advise and guide and as adults we should be able to know when to listen and when to talk.



To me, contact with other members is a sounding board for new ideas, an exchange of opinions and I must listen, as well as talk, if I am to continue to learn and progress. If I do not, I shall find myself thinking in circles, having fixed opinions and, Brother, then it won't be long unless I wake up and get busy. I must free my mind, be receptive to opinions and ideas from

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# 12 Twelve XII

## STEP

**"Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."**

Maybe there are as many definitions of spiritual awakening as there are people who have had them. But certainly each genuine one has something in common with all the others. And these things which they have in common are not too hard to understand. When a man or a woman has a spiritual awakening, the most important meaning of it is that he has now become able to do, feel, and believe that which he could not do before on his unaided strength and resources alone. He has been granted a gift which amounts to a new state of consciousness and being. He has been set on a path which tells him he is really going somewhere, that life is not a dead end, not something to be endured or mastered. In a very real sense he has been transformed, because he has laid hold of a source of strength which, in one way or another, he had hitherto denied himself. He finds himself in possession of a degree of honesty, tolerance, unselfishness, peace of mind, and love of which he had thought himself quite incapable. What he has received is a free gift, and yet usually, at least in some small part, he has made himself ready to receive it.

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## TRADITION

**"Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities."**

1. Why is it a good idea for me to place the common welfare of all AA members before individual welfare? What would happen to me if AA as a whole disappeared?
2. When I do not trust AA's current servants, who do I wish had the authority to straighten them out?
3. In my opinions of and remarks about other AAs, am I implying membership requirements other than a desire to stay sober?
4. Do I ever try to get a certain AA group to conform to my standards, not its own?
5. Have I a personal responsibility in helping an AA group fulfill its primary purpose? What is my part?
6. Does my personal behavior reflect the Sixth Tradition -- or belie it?
7. Do I do all I can do to support AA financially? When is the last time I anonymously gave away a Grapevine subscription?
8. Do I complain about certain AAs' behavior -- especially if they are paid to work for AA? Who made *me* so smart?
9. Do I fulfill all AA responsibilities in such a way as to please privately even my own conscience? Really?
10. Do my utterances always reflect the Tenth Tradition, or do I give AA critics real ammunition?
11. Should I keep my AA membership a secret, or reveal it in private conversation when that may help another alcoholic (and therefore me)? Is my brand of AA so attractive that other drunks want it?
12. What is the real importance of me among more than a million AAs?

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## CONCEPT

The Conference shall observe the spirit of A.A. tradition, taking care that it never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds and reserve be its prudent financial principle; that it place none of its members in a position of unqualified authority over others; that it reach all important decisions by discussion, vote, and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that its actions never be personally punitive nor an incitement to public controversy; that it never perform acts of government, and that, like the Society it serves, it will always remain democratic in thought and action.

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## TREATMENT: GROUP COMMITMENTS

ALCOHOPE  
5925 37th St, Vero Beach, FL 32966

CENTER FOR EMOTIONAL & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH  
(CEBH)  
1190 37th St, Vero Beach, FL 32960

**TUESDAYS:**  
 South Vero Dec 14  
 Candlelight Dec 21  
 Early Risers Dec 28  
 Easy Does It Jan 4  
 Free & Easy Jan 11  
 Friday Young People's Jan 18  
 Indian River Men's Jan 25

**SATURDAYS:**  
 Easy Does It Dec 11  
 Friday Young People's Dec 18  
 No Commitment Dec 25  
 No Commitment Jan 1  
 Indian River Women Jan 8  
 King's Highway Jan 15  
 Midnight Oil Jan 22

**MONDAYS:**  
 Friday Young People Dec 13  
 Indian River Thursday Dec 20  
 Indian River Women Dec 27  
 Noontime Recovery Jan 3  
 Safe Harbor Jan 10  
 South Vero Jan 17

Jan 24  
 Jan 31  
 Feb 7  
 Feb 14  
 Feb 21  
 Feb 28

CARRY THE AA MESSAGE!  
 FOR INFORMATION CALL TRISH: 794-1972

2004 ~2005

## ALKATHON SCHEDULE ~ NEWPORT CLUB

TIME	CHRISTMAS	NEW YEAR'S
4 - 6PM	King's Highway	ODAAT
6 - 8PM	Vero Beach Men's	Discovery Women's
8 - 10PM	Indian River Women's	Candlelight
10 - 12AM	Free & Easy	Royal Palm
12 - 2AM	I Am Responsible	Indian River Thursday
2 - 4AM	Vero Beach Men's	Vero Beach Men's
4 - 6AM	Vero Beach Men's	Vero Beach Men's
6 - 8AM	Friday Night Young People	Easy Does It
8 - 10AM	Easy Does It	Safe Harbor Women's
10 - 12PM	Indian River Men's	Noontime Recovery
12 - 2PM	Vero Beach 12&12	New Awakening
2 - 4PM	South Vero	Early Risers



# F Y I ... and Pass It On!

2004 ~ 2005

## HOLIDAY ALKATHONS

FROM 4PM CHRISTMAS EVE DAY TO 4PM CHRISTMAS DAY  
AND  
FROM 4PM NEW YEAR'S EVE DAY TO 4PM NEW YEAR'S DAY  
NEWPORT CLUB ~ VERO BEACH

AND

FROM 2PM CHRISTMAS EVE DAY TO 6PM CHRISTMAS DAY  
AND  
FROM 2PM NEW YEAR'S EVE DAY TO 6PM NEW YEAR'S DAY  
OLD CITY HALL, 1225 MAIN STREET, SEBASTIAN

*Sponsored by the participating Groups of Indian River Central Office*

### NEED SUPPORT OPEN DISCUSSION MEETINGS:

#### Monday 6PM

Newport Club  
Outside Room

#### Thursday 7PM

The Source Mission  
1872 Commerce Ave  
Vero Beach

### BIG BOOK STUDY GROUP

Open  
Beginners  
Big Book  
Non-Smoking

### NEEDS SUPPORT

THURSDAYS 7PM

CHURCH OF CHRIST  
33rd Ave & Route 60  
Vero Beach

### NEW GROUP

WEDNESDAYS  
7:30PM

VERO BEACH STEP &  
TRADITION

CLOSED 12x12 BYOB\*  
DISCUSSION

SALVATION ARMY  
DINING HALL

2655 5th ST SW  
(Corner of 27th Ave  
and 5th St SW)

Entrance to building on  
5th St SW side

\* Bring Your Own Book

### SEBASTIAN YACHT CLUB TEMPORARILY CLOSED

#### MEETING PLACES FOR YACHT CLUB GROUPS AS FOLLOWS:

		GROUP	NOW MEETS
Saturday	9AM	Man to Man	Pavilion in the park across from Yacht Club
Tuesday Friday	12PM	Lunch Bunch	St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church 901 Clearmont St
Wednesday	8PM	Ossabaw	St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church 901 Clearmont St
Friday	6:30PM	Discovery Women's	Sebastian United Methodist 1029 West Main St

ALL OTHERS PLEASE CALL CENTRAL OFFICE (562-1114)  
TO REPORT NEW INTERIM MEETING LOCATIONS

### NEW AWAKENING GROUP

### NEEDS SUPPORT

NOW MEETS  
ONLY

**Monday  
Wednesday  
Friday**

ALL OPEN MEETINGS  
7:30AM

CHURCH OF CHRIST  
33rd Ave & Route 60  
Vero Beach

### NEEDS SUPPORT

**NO B.S.  
WOMEN'S GROUP**

MEETS TUESDAYS  
7PM

NEWPORT CLUB  
TV ROOM

### NEWPORT CLUB

#### HOLIDAY EVENTS

Christmas Day Dinner  
Come one, come all  
1-4PM

New Year's Eve Dance  
9PM

Tickets = \$5

### VERO BEACH GROUP

SUNDAYS 8PM  
OPEN

DOUBLE SPEAKER  
MEETING

ST. HELEN  
CATHOLIC CHURCH  
**NOW NON-SMOKING**

To publish announcements of birthdays being celebrated by your Group's members each month, please bring list of names and numbers of years to Central Office and put in filing cabinet in folder labeled "*HOW Editor*," send via e-mail to [irhow@yahoo.com](mailto:irhow@yahoo.com), or use link from website at [indianriveraa.freesevers.com](http://indianriveraa.freesevers.com).

<b>ROYAL PALM GROUP</b>			<b>DISCOVERY WOMEN'S</b>			<b>INDIAN RIVER THURSDAY</b>		
<i>Celebrates Last Monday</i>			<i>Celebrates Last Friday</i>			<i>Celebrates Last Thursday</i>		
Rod R.	16		Jenna L.	10		Kathy L.	18	
Jerry R.	28		Cathy M.	12		Debbie F.	20	
<b>BAREFOOT BAY</b>			<b>ODAAT</b>			Mary Ann C.	23	
			<i>Celebrates Last Friday</i>			<b>SERENITY HOUSE</b>		
James M.	7		Gerard P.	2		Denise L.	16	
Sandy K.	14		George R.	3		<b>VERO 12 &amp; 12</b>		
Al F.	36		Karen M.	5		Debra U.	2	
<b>FREE &amp; EASY GROUP</b>			Sue S.	13		Tom H.	4	
<i>Celebrates Last Thursday</i>			Allene M.	13		Carole N.	18	
Mike M.	7		Anne K.	15		<b>EASY DOES IT</b>		
Joe R.	12		Bert C.	17		Jinny J.	13	
Greg P.	28		Carole C.	19		<b>SAFE HARBOR WOMEN'S</b>		
<i>November:</i>			Paul H.	20		Jan McC	2	
Quentin C.	5		Dana McC.	21		Patricia L.	2	
<b>SOUTH VERO GROUP</b>			Vivien B-L	22		Mary An E.	4	
<i>Celebrates Last Wednesday</i>			<b>INDIAN RIVER MEN'S</b>			Mary C.	18	
Tim P.	3		Jim Mc	17		<i>November:</i>		
Greg W.	3		<b>BIG BOOK STUDY GROUP</b>			Kate H.	2	
Gus J.	3		Joe R.	22		Gina B.	4	
Tony G.	6		<b>BEACHSIDE BEGINNERS</b>			Marion S.	11	
Tyrone B.	11		<i>Celebrates Last Tuesday</i>			Shirley V.	28	
Carole C.	19		Elizabeth K.	13		Marilyn G.	32	
<b>NOONTIME RECOVERY</b>			Joan W.	29		<b>SURFSIDE</b>		
<i>Celebrates Last Friday</i>			<b>INDIAN RIVER WOMEN'S</b>			Gus J.	3	
Carolyn K.	1		Judy W.	10		Kevin G.	6	
Mary Ann E.	4		Allene M.	13		Mary A.	16	
Dick G.	5		<b>HIBISCUS MONDAY NIGHT</b>			Bob O'N.	18	
Clyde H.	17		Andy C.	2		Jim W.	20	
Greg P.	28		Steve M.	8		Tom P.	22	
Herb R.	28		<b>I AM RESPONSIBLE</b>			<b>HAPPY AA BIRTHDAY!</b>		
<b>MIDNIGHT OIL</b>			Anjie D.	1				
Bob M.	8		Kevin C.	1				
<b>KING'S HIGHWAY</b>			Sheryll S.	10				
Beverly R.	25							



## 12 TIPS ON KEEPING YOUR HOLIDAY SEASON SOBER AND JOYOUS

1. Line up extra AA activities for the holiday season.
2. Be host to A.A. friends, especially newcomers.
3. Keep your A.A. telephone list with you all the time.
4. Find out about the special holiday parties, meetings, or other celebrations given by groups in your area.
5. Skip any drinking occasion you are nervous about.
6. If you have to go to a drinking party and can't bring an A.A. with you, keep some candy handy.
7. Don't think you have to stay late.
8. Go to church, any church.
9. Don't sit around brooding.
10. Don't start now getting worked up about all those holiday Temptations.
11. Enjoy the true beauty of holiday love and joy.
12. "Having had a . . ." No need to spell out the Twelfth Step here, since you already know it.

*Excerpt from Box 459 Bulletin Board*

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other AAs as well as from God. This, I think, is closely linked with self-centeredness. Perhaps it is the end result of lack of open mindedness. It is no doubt the first step down the ladder we have so laboriously climbed. Add to your inventory at night, "Have I been open minded today?" And if you haven't, look back over the day and see just how much you might have learned. If you have, I'll bet you find you have several new thoughts or ideas to add to your storehouse.

In Cleveland, during the Convention, I heard much about the "Four Absolutes:" Honesty, sincerity, love and humility. I fail to see how we can ever acquire any one of them without first opening our minds and being receptive. This is what we did when we admitted our powerlessness and asked for help. We opened our minds so that "A Power greater than ourselves" could come in. This is what we do in the 11th step when we meditate.

Let us apply this "open mindedness" to our everyday life as well as to God. If we do we will find ourselves far richer in thought as the years go by.

J.W., Jacksonville, FL  
August 1952

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## Vinny's Christmas

It was Christmas Eve 1961. I had been sober for two years and our house was brimming with the holiday spirit. My mother was visiting with my niece and nephew, who were in their early-teens. My wife was busy in the kitchen preparing our holiday feast. The children were awaiting Santa Claus. We had a perfectly shaped live tree. The strings of lights had been tested and we had plenty of extra bulbs. As we sat around the living room, I was with the spirit of Christmas. There was only one problem--it was my meeting night.

I went through a litany of justifications for not going to a meeting. Thoughts were flying through my mind at super speed. Finally, I stopped and sought advice from my Higher Power. I got up from the couch and announced that I was going to the meeting. I asked my niece and nephew to trim the tree. They were elated.

I stationed myself at the meeting room door as a greeter. I was feeling kind of smug about coming to the meeting, but nobody commended me. It was just another meeting night. Then an old friend of mine, a man named Vinny, approached the doorway. He had a bloody kitchen towel wrapped around his hand and he looked as if he had seen better days. His clothes were a mess and he was shaking.

I asked him what had happened and he told me that he had come home drunk and his wife had tried to stab him with a carving knife.

The bleeding had stopped and the meeting was about to start. We decided to get in at least the first part of the meeting before going to the emergency room. Vinny began to calm down as the meeting started but soon he got edgy and we left at halftime.

We did a lot of talking and I found out that after five years of sobriety, he decided to have "just one" with the guys from work. The result was predictable.

At the emergency room, we were told we would have a very long wait. I called our wives. Vinny's wife told me not to dare bring him bring him home but she finally agreed to let him

*...Continued on page 8*



## A Most Happy Christmas

When my sponsor made his initial call on me, he made it clear that the AA program was spiritual rather than religious and he assured me that I would receive spiritual help to solve my drinking problem if I would thoroughly follow the AA path.

He gave me a copy of the "Twelve Suggested Steps" and the "Four Absolutes" and suggested that I govern myself accordingly. He also suggested that I attend at least one meeting a week and as many more as possible.

The following night I went to my first meeting and the secretary told me that now I was a full fledged AA. The speaker talked about the "spiritual side" of AA but my mind was so befuddled he might as well have lectured on the fifth dimension.

Days passed in rapid succession and lengthened into weeks. Despite frequent discussions on spirituality, it remained a mystery to me. Men related personal spiritual experiences that were nothing short of miraculous and I secretly envied them, wondering when mine would come.

Weeks lengthened into months and not the slightest sound of angel wings fluttering 'round and about me, despite the fact that I attended the meetings regularly, made Twelfth Step calls, and was living more in accordance with the Divine Plan than ever before in my entire life. I used to lounge on the davenport at night, watching the lights in the old fashioned chandelier and hoping they would flare up in a dazzling brilliance. Excepting for a bulb burning out occasionally nothing ever happened. Sometimes I even felt a little bitter about it. The lights had brightened up for our co-founder Bill W.--why couldn't they perk up for me?

Months passed by without incident and at times I became panicky. What if I had missed the boat? The Christmas season came and still no spiritual experience.

Each year my company gave a lavish party on the afternoon before Christmas and I used to look forward to this "brawl" as the gala event of the season. But this year things were different. While the boys were whooping it up at the office I was home making more work for my wife by helping (?) her with the household chores. Later in the afternoon, she went out to deliver some gifts and I went to my room to meditate and take inventory.

I had been sober since February and was enjoying my sobriety more each day. Suddenly it occurred to me that this was the first time since my drinking

became serious that I was sober and happy at the same time. Then I began to tear that thought apart.

None of my friends or relatives could give me sobriety with happiness. The doctor, psychiatrist and clergyman couldn't do it and needless to say I couldn't do it myself. By simple deductive reasoning I came to the conclusion that I must be getting help from Somewhere.

Then I thought of all the good things that had come to me in the past year. . .

My wife and I had found happiness that was based on our mutual interest in AA and although a nonalcoholic, she inspired me to place AA above all other interests.

My health was good and my income ample for comfortable living.

It was good to face people without a feeling of shame or fear.

It was good to know that I had attained a normal place in society and was helping others to do the same.

It was good to know I had regained my self-respect and that of my friends, relatives and associates.

Then I remembered two definitions from my pocket dictionary--*spiritual*: pertaining to heavenly and, *heavenly*: to good.

Came the light! Not the dazzling brilliance I expected but an inner light that enabled me to see two things clearly. The help I was "getting from Somewhere" was the spiritual help my sponsor had talked about.

The good things that had come to me, other than things material, were evidence that I had been enjoying a spiritual experience almost from the beginning but had completely failed to recognize it as such.

My meditation was brought to an abrupt close when I realized that my room was filled with smoke. As I rushed downstairs to investigate I remembered that the mince pies were to be taken from the oven at four o'clock.

They were baked to a glossy black but it would take more than burned pastry to mar the happiest Christmas Eve of all.





*Continued from page 6...*

come in and change his clothes.

The scene at Vinny's house was worse than I had anticipated. Their Christmas tree was lying on its side. Pieces of broken ornaments and light bulbs were ground into the rug. Packages were smashed, and there was one large box that had the outline of a shoe crushed in the middle of it. Vinny's wife was blaming *me* for everything that had happened. I tried to smooth things over. I agreed to take Vinny home with me but asked if we could have a cup of coffee first. She agreed and as we talked the volume of our conversation slowly lowered. At last she agreed to let him stay the night and thanked me for bringing him home.

It was dawn when I got back to my own home. The children had outdone themselves. The tree was beautiful. My wife seated me in my favorite chair where I had a full view of the staircase and brought me a cup of coffee. I recounted the events of the night as we awaited the children. She understood.

We heard the scurrying of little feet on the stairs. The children, still in their pajamas, came half-way down and stopped. Their mouths were open and their eyes sparkled. They ran the rest of the way down the stairs and just stood there, transported by the sight of the Christmas tree. Then the rest of the family came down for the opening of the presents.

My wife clasped my hand.  
Words were unnecessary.

George S., Southampton, NY  
December, 1993  
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## Our Program

The A.A. Program of Recovery as outlined in the 12 Steps is so simply written that almost anyone who can read can understand it easily without the aid of a dictionary. Yet compressed into this brief program of only two hundred words, is the wisdom of the ages--a proved plan for living a good, useful, and happy life.

Insofar as we of Alcoholics Anonymous are concerned, and especially with reference to the 1st and 12th Steps, it was gotten up in this form especially for alcoholics, but it is a pattern for living or a way of life that is suited for and available to all mankind everywhere and at all times.

Yet these precepts or guideposts to right living, so simply stated and so easily read, were not easily come by. They were learned and discovered the hard way--by bitter experience--by man's foolish efforts to promote his own welfare and happiness at the expense of others. It can't be done! We live in a universe so designed as to make this forever impossible. Its laws, unlike man-made rules and regulations, can never be broken, but can and do, when we oppose them, break us. That is a purely scientific statement. And absolutely true! But the great religious teachers, or moral instructors of mankind, have never thought it wise nor feasible to give strictly scientific explanations for their teachings but have instead appealed to man's sense--his conscience.

They have put their own hard won knowledge and the accumulated wisdom of the race into the simplest and fewest words. The Golden Rule, The Sermon on The Mount, and The Ten Commandments are our own best examples of this. In every age and among every race, these teachings, though they may have been couched in different terms or presented in a different form, are substantially the same.

The rich residue of them all are embodied in our own 12 Steps. If we have faith in the 12 Steps and accept them absolutely without reservation, they will most assuredly work.

If we try to reason them out and understand them, before we are willing to work them, we shall never get anywhere.

We must DO before we can KNOW. That is the meaning of experience. And we shall never attain to a "spiritual experience" until AFTER we have put into practice "in all our affairs" the whole of our program--the 12 Steps--and until we seek through continued prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand Him.

Lee C., Portland, OR  
August, 1947  
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$$\dots Ed \vdots$$


**CHARLES E. TOWNES HOSPITAL**  
222 Central Park West  
New York 24, N. Y.

PAGE 65  
Volume 2  
AGE 38

NICKNAME *S. S. Wilson*

ADDRESS *102 Clinton St. B'klyn - NY*

RELATIONSHIP RELATIVE ADDRESS PHONE

EMPLOYED BY ADDRESS PHONE

ACCOMPANIED BY

REASON FOR ADMISSION *Age 160 Book 2-8*

ADMITTED DATE *12-11-34* TIME OF ADMISSION *4:30 PM* DISCHARGED DATE *12-19-34* AMOUNT PAID *\$12.50*

REPORTS SIGN FROM DATE RETURNED TO DATE

FEE *12.50* TO HIM PAID *12.50* DATE PAID *12/14/34* BY WHOM *RW* TO WHERE



## Every Day is Christmas

The seventeenth Christmas for Alcoholics Anonymous is here. Considering all that has happened since AA's first Christmas in 1935, no words can portray the meaning of Christmas 1952. The only thing of which we're really sure is that we have given of ourselves, and have received gifts that no imagination can fully describe. Guided, we are sure, by an all generous and wise Providence, AA's message of hope has been carried into nearly every corner of the earth. The Christmas drama of giving and receiving has been re-enacted everywhere and still goes on.

Many of us in AA are of the Christian faith, though not all. We have Jews who look to Jehovah; agnostics who hopefully look to the AA group as their Higher Power; and there are Indians upon our Western plains who regard the Great Spirit as their guide. Now that we have opened tiny beachheads on the shores of Asia, we have no doubt that some of our brothers and sisters there reverence Buddha and others Allah. It is a comforting fact of our life together that none of these differences has ever disturbed us. Indeed, it can be said that they have, in some subtle and mysterious way, bound us even more firmly together. The insurance of that bond is our common kinship in suffering, and our universal release from it by the kind of giving that demands no reward.

So, by whatever name we may call it, the spirit of Christmas is in us all. How best to give and how to receive with ever more gratitude is our common aim. We'd like to practice the spirit of Christmas the year around. Therefore, we shall especially ask ourselves at this season: "What more can we *find* in order that we shall have more to *give*?" Since personal example is one of the great energies by which AA spreads, let's have a quick look at the life of a man who became able to practice the spirit of Christmas every day in the year.

He was born in Italy centuries ago. The age in which he lived was almost as confused and baffling as our own. His first attempt at living was just like ours. He ran away from life as fast as he could, and by nearly the same means. Few, it was said, could romance more gaily than he, shake the dice with Dame Fortune with more abandon, nor clatter his wine flagon on the table more loudly. He probably had a pretty good time doing it, too, at least for a while. Bit by bit, though, he got fed up. During a long siege of illness he hit bottom, even as we alcoholics do.

One day he said to himself, "Suppose that in all things I try henceforth to do exactly as my Master would have done." This was the vision that gripped him, and he set foot on the new highroad. Some of his friends were amused, and others were deeply concerned. Some said it wasn't practical; others thought he had gone out of his mind. But by living one day at a time, teaching and sharing as he went, with no thought of reward for himself, he started a movement that deeply affected the whole world of his day; it reached into every level of society. He gave all he had, and that inspired others to do likewise. He brought true comfort where there had been none.

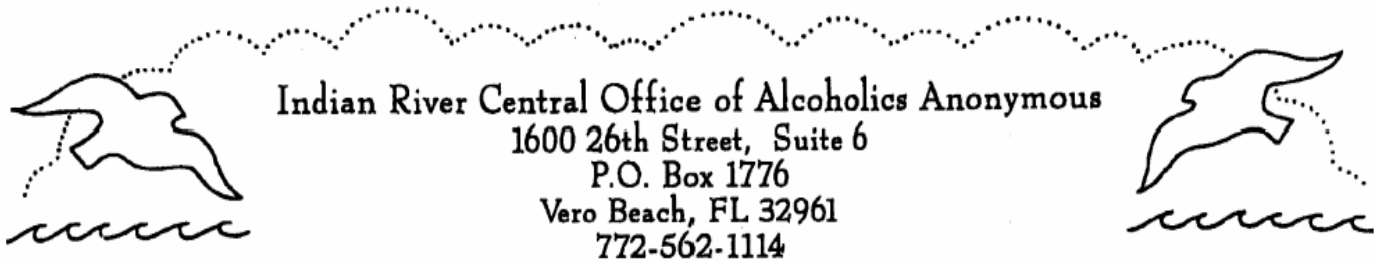
And how did he do this? The prayer he so often spoke tells us. Here it is:

*"Lord make me a channel of Thy Peace That where there is hatred. . . I may bring love That where there is wrong. . . I may bring the spirit of forgiveness That where there is discord. . . I may bring harmony That where there is error. . . I may bring truth That where there is doubt. . . I may bring faith That where there is despair. . . I may bring hope That where there are shadows. . . I may bring light That where there is sadness. . . I may bring joy. Lord, grant that I may seek rather to Comfort. . . than to be comforted To understand. . . than to be understood To love. . . than to be loved For. . . it is by self-forgetting. . . that one finds It is by forgiving. . . that one is forgiven It is by dying. . . that one awakens to Eternal Life."*

The lesson that Francis leaves us is clear and no example could be brighter. "Freely ye have received; Freely give" and. . . a Merry Christmas!



## HOW



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