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**God and Higher
Power in Twelve Step
Recovery**

Royal College of Psychiatrists
Spirituality and Psychiatry SIG Conference 2024

What's God got to do with it?
Is there a place for God in Psychiatry?

Friday 15 March 2024



University of
Chester

Addiction

“A spiritual malady
with a spiritual
solution.”



Terminology

Addict/Alcoholic

Dr James Morris LSBU @jamesmorris24

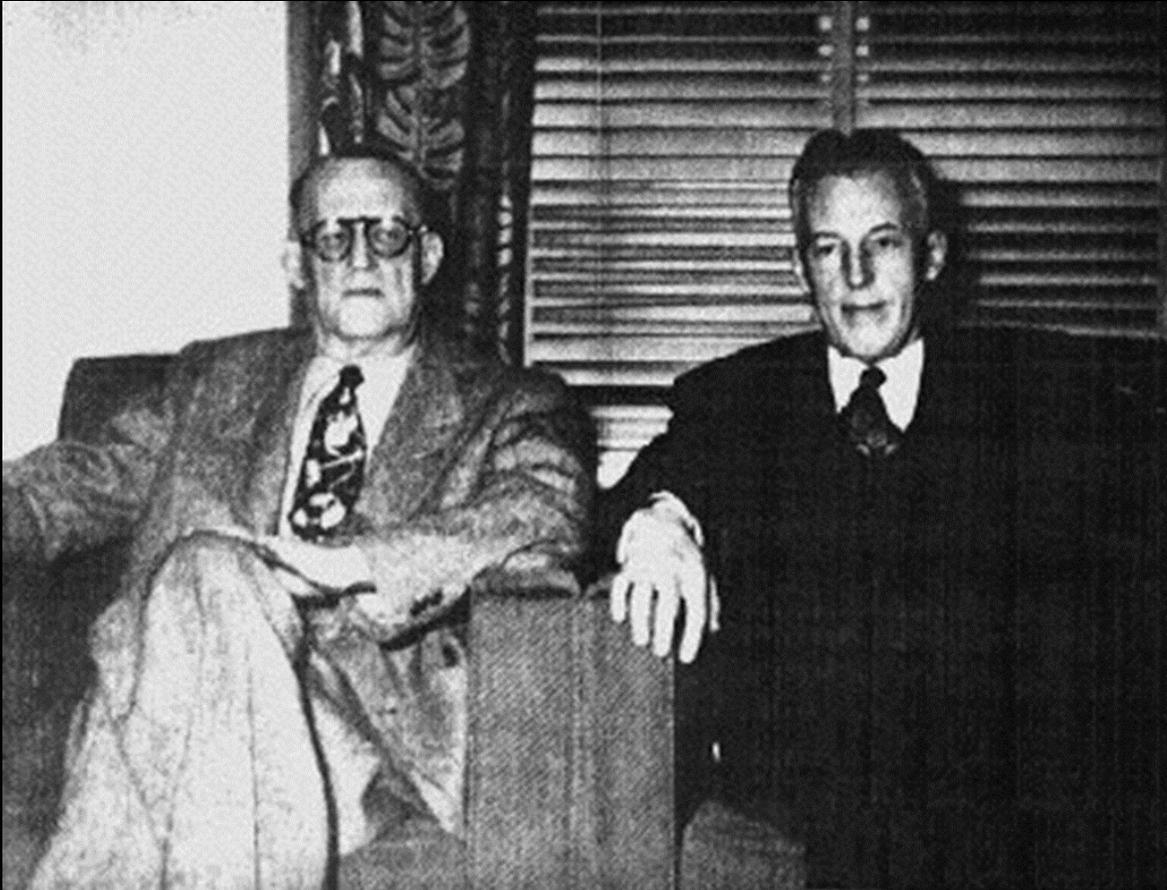
ADDICTIONARY

<https://www.recoveryanswers.org/addiction-ary/>

**Public Health language – Recovery
Community language**



Dr Robert Smith and Bill Wilson (1940)



Suddenly the room lit up with a great white light. I was caught up into an ecstasy which there are no words to describe. It seemed to me, in my mind's eye, that I was on a mountain and that a wind not of air but of spirit was blowing. And then it burst upon me that I was a free man. Slowly the ecstasy subsided. I lay on the bed, but now for a time I was in another world, a new world of consciousness. All about me and through me there was a wonderful feeling of Presence, and I thought to myself, 'So this is the God of the preachers!' A great peace stole over me and I thought, 'No matter how wrong things seem to be, they are still all right. Things are all right with God and His world.'"

(1957) *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*. New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. p63

Powerlessness

The primary
existential
condition of
addiction



“Three Pertinent Ideas”

- a) That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives
- b) That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism
- c) That God could and would if He were sought

Conversion or psychic/personality change?



GOD

**Group of Drunks
(i.e former 'drunks'-
members of AA)**

Also:

**Good Orderly Direction
Gift of Despair**



Transcendence

Vertical: *God, God as Father, Creator*

Horizontal: *'Friends in fellowship',
'Group of Drunks', 'Nature', 'Like the
Force in Star Wars', 'A better version
of myself'*

Ian

All the bad things that had happened to me in my life were his [...] fault. And this being the God I was brought up on. Catholic. I'm pleased to say I've been able to separate God from religion.



Ben

*I describe God in the
feminine because my
concept of 'life-giver' is
purported to the
feminine of all species I
know of[...]*



Jennifer

“I don't consider a Higher Power to be a personal being — anthropomorphic — nor an intelligent puppeteer in the sky directing the show. I do not conceive of HP as a santa god who rewards the good and punishes the naughty. Neither do I see this force as working for some and not others as in “There but for the Grace of God go I.””



Sophia

“The people in the fellowship have had a huge influence over my version of a HP, mainly by me not agreeing (for me) with a lot of HP versions I hear in AA. So by defining what my HP is NOT it has helped me define what it IS.”



Other Sources

The Lion King

Star Wars

A Course in Miracles

The Dhammapada

Jonathan Livingston Seagull

The Prophet Khalil Gibran

Co-dependent No More Beattie

The Dalai Lama

Babette's Feast (Film)

Les Miserables

The Bible

Julian of Norwich

Ken Wilbur

Eckhart Tolle

Richard Rohr

The Footprints Prayer

Hazelden Literature

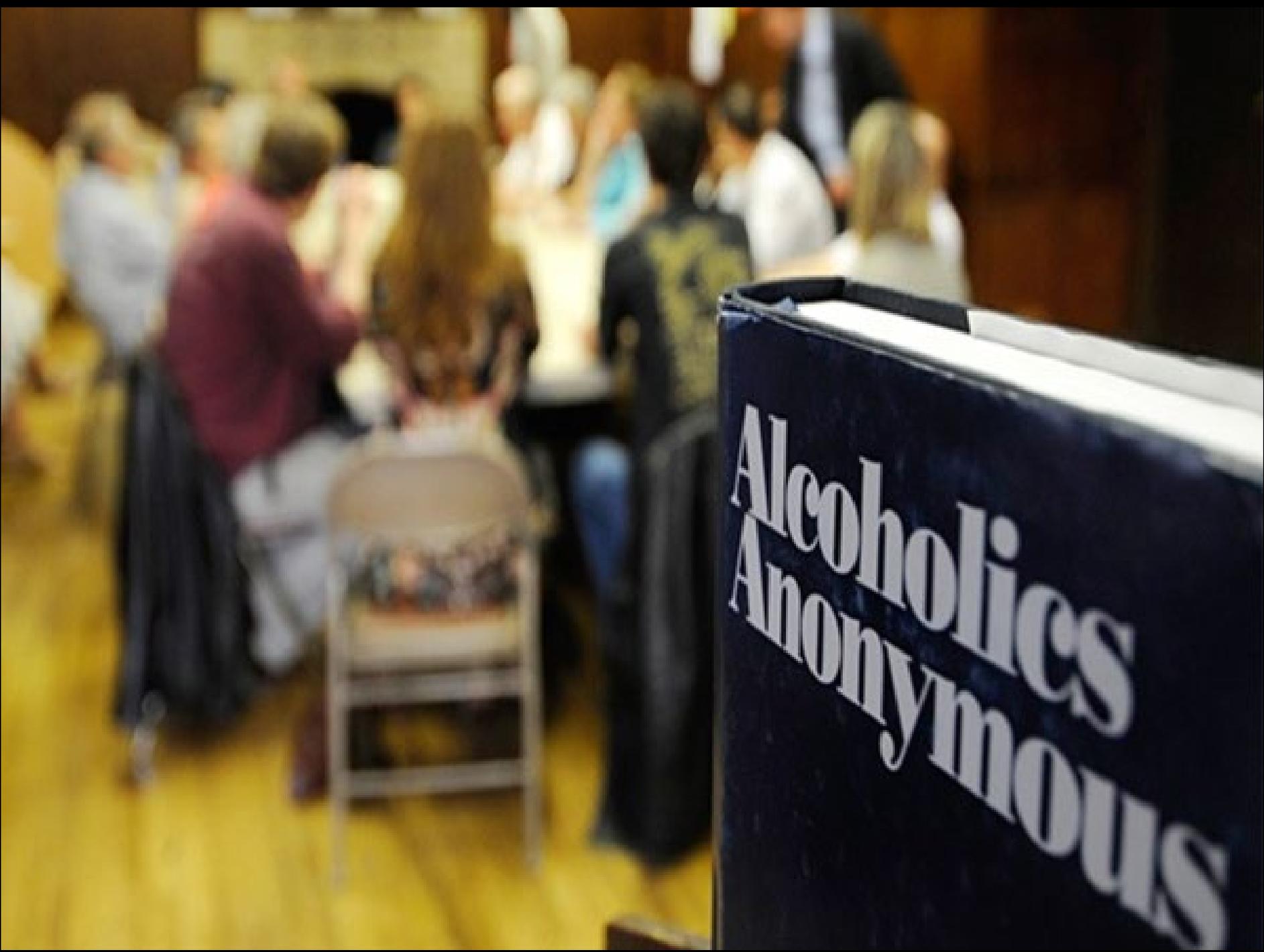
Spirituality of Imperfection Kurtz

The Secret

Marianne Williamson

Thich Nhat Hanh

**Alcoholics
Anonymous**



Ellie

“The old me drank. I needed to become a different person, one who could cope with life, who could manage my feelings of guilt and shame. The steps were a way, a framework for me to do that. For dealing with the past, and for developing the qualities that I needed, to have the strength not to head straight back to the drink at the first sign of a difficult emotion.”



THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

defects of
character,
fellowship,
higher power
spirituality

recovery capital
deficits,
adaptive social
networks,
frameworks of
meaning
self-efficacy.



“Community Philosophers” (Lipman, 2009)

“Ordinary Theologians” (Astley, 2002)

Thank you

To the participants in the *Higher Power Project* who have shared their stories of recovery.

@higherpowerproj

www.csarsg.org.uk

& to the **Sir Halley Stewart Trust**

(picture: lotus flower tattoo containing the NEDA eating disorder recovery symbol)

