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Before trying to answer the question "What *is* the AA message?", maybe it would be useful to ask: "Is there *an* AA message?", one which can be stated simply and on which everyone can agree? In my twenty years in the Fellowship I have discovered no such universal message.

When I first became aware of the "message" reference embedded in the Twelfth Step, I was puzzled by the wording. It spoke of "*this* message,"

to be carried to others, but there was no mention of a message in the preceding Steps to explain the word "*this*." When I finally received an insight that resolved my problem, it came from a rather unlikely direction — not from an experienced, tolerant old-timer, but from an abrasive, short-fused newcomer who exercised the group's collective fund of "Live and Let Live."

At a discussion meeting on the

Get the Message?



subject, he made one of his typical out-of-turn interjections: "What's the big problem?" he growled. "The sentence says 'Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message,' et-cetera, etcetera. That clearly means just what it says, namely, that you'll get a spiritual awakening if you work the Steps, and *that's* the message you carry to others. Period."

I don't know if anyone else at the table bought the idea, but I did — and still do. And the experience did more than just resolve my puzzlement about this message. It pointed up (and not for the last time either) that good things in AA can sometimes come in rather unattractive packages.

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