

A Sociological Analysis of Commitment Generation
in Alcoholics Anonymous

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SUMMARY

This paper utilizes a conceptual framework of commitment generation in voluntary organizations formulated by Rosabeth Moss Kanter in order to provide a sociological explanation for the success of Alcoholics Anonymous in the treatment of alcohol abuse. This paper demonstrates that Alcoholics Anonymous is systematically organized around the processes of sacrifice, investment, renunciation, communion, mortification and transcendence. An examination will be made of how those processes function to generate and sustain a strong commitment to sobriety among its members. In addition, consideration will be given to how those processes function to submit to social control salient aspects of collective life that have implications for commitment, including identity, interpersonal intimacy, work, recruitment, sanctions, extra-group ties and ideology.

Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) is purportedly an effective means of treating alcoholism among intellectuals as well as among blue-collar workers [e.g. 1, ch. 4; 2]. It is the purpose of this paper to provide a sociological explanation for the success of Alcoholics Anonymous in the treatment of alcohol abuse.

Why does this not particularly genteel or fashionable, lay organizations that inveighs no financial charges on its members enjoy success in restoring many alcohol abusers to sobriety? The nineteenth-century social theorist Emile Durkheim has given us a clue to the solution of this question. In such classic works of sociological analysis as *Suicide* [3], *Division of Labour in Society* [4], and *Moral Education* [5], Durkheim makes one point persistently: that the source

and staying power of pleasures for conformity lie in the social bond between an individual and the collectivity. The strength of the social bond is the key. To the extent that the social bond between an individual and a conventional social order is strong, anti-social actions of various sorts, such as suicide, delinquency or alcohol abuse, are deflected; to the extent that it is weak, the individual is accordingly unconstrained, free to act in anti-social ways destructive to self and others.

This view of human behavior is based on the fundamental sociological axiom that a group - i.e. two or more persons sharing sustained interaction, shared goals and a sense of solidarity ('we-ness') - has characteristics that its individual members do not. A group is more than the sum of its parts, more than the sum of

its members' personality traits. A group is a power greater than self. Group membership is a potent source of identity and behavior transformation; it affects the way we conceive of and evaluate self, others, and the physical and social world around us; it is capable of deflecting lines of action that a person otherwise might engage in of encouraging other forms of action. As Durkheim phrased it many years ago: 'We are moral beings to the extent we are social beings' [5, p.64]; and as A.A. members phrase it today: 'I can't stay sober but we can.'

This line of analysis leads us to consider how A.A. fosters a commitment to ways of life and living based on sobriety among people for whom alcohol has been a basic ingredient of life.

Obviously it is an extremely difficult and complex task to try and determine the reasons why any one individual behaves the way he or she does, and attempting to determine the motivations of a group of people is even more challenging. However, because Alcoholics Anonymous has been in existence for almost half a century, has its own literature, and regularly holds meetings, it has developed a social history. It should be rather clear, then, that over a period of time we could observe what goes on at those meetings and from direct observations draw certain inferences, if not firm conclusions, as to how the organization fosters a commitment to sobriety among its members.

From the onset, some basic observations can be made concerning commitment in

general, the most basic of which is that generating and sustaining it are not easily accomplished. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter succinctly indicates in her book, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective*, to do those things an organization: needs to set in motion processes that reduce the value of other possible commitments and increase the value of commitment to the...group - that is, processes both detaching the person from other options and attaching him to the community. The person must give up something as well as get something in order to be committed to a community...The person must invest himself in the community rather than elsewhere and commit his energy and resources there, removing them from whatever else they may be invested, or from whatever alternatives exist for commitment. Commitment thus involves choice - discrimination and selection of possible courses of action. It rests upon a person's awareness of excluded options, on the knowledge of virtues of his choice over others. A person becomes increasingly committed both as more of his own internal satisfaction becomes dependent on the group, and his chance to make other choices or pursue other options declines [6, p.70].

In essence Kanter is drawing our attention to the specific ways voluntary groups can organize so as to generate and sustain commitment. Her conceptual framework isolates six concrete social practices or pieces of social organization useful in this regard, which she terms sacrifice, investment, renunciation, communion, mortification and transcendence. By analyzing the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous in terms

of Kanter's conceptual framework, we can better understand how that organization fosters a commitment to sobriety among its members.

Sacrifice

Accord to Kanter, the process of 'sacrifice' refers to giving up something considered valuable or pleasurable in order to belong to the group; it is detaching process[6]. The basic and obvious sacrifice in A.A. is complete abstinence from alcohol, one day at a time. The personal admission, 'I'm powerless over alcohol,' is the first step in A.A. recovery.

Many members also find that refraining from the first drink entails sacrificing or giving up things other than alcohol itself - e.g. the use of such mood - altering chemicals as marijuana, cocaine, diet pills and amphetamines, sleeping potions, cough medications containing alcohol, and tranquilizers, avoiding, at least for a while, the regular New Year's eve party, the company party, the family Christmas gathering, and after-work drinks with co-workers. The apparent simple process of learning not to 'set oneself up' for that first drink thus involves becoming aware of and then refraining from diverse lines of activity that previously had been part of one's life, but which if only for today are not conducive to sobriety. It involves sacrifices to the ego: I am an adult - or educated, refined, urbane, capable, cosmopolitan, sophisticated - and hence can control and enjoy my drinking. It entails relinq-

uishing attitudes that promote rather than deflect the consumption of alcohol - e.g. conceptions and perceptions of one's past drinking history as well as of what constitutes relaxation, a romantic evening, and so forth. The process of sacrifice thus touches upon many aspects of members' lives.

The fellowship alleviates the sting of the sacrificial process in a number of ways. First, it is called something else. The term 'sacrifice,' as such, is rarely heard or read. Instead, what amounts to sacrifice is referred to affirmatively, in terms of recovery as a life changing process entailing altered attitudes and the giving up of old, dysfunctional ideas. Second, extrinsic rewards abound in the form of encouragement for even small gains. Thus, newcomers may literally be applauded for the progress they do make and oldtimers for the progress they have made. Everyone is reminded of 'easy does it, but do it,' that if one bur 'goes through the motions, the emotions will follow,' and that sobriety is not for those who want it or for those who need it, but for those willing to go to any lengths' to get it.

By focusing attention on the more pleasant aspects of the recovery programme, recruitment on the basis of putative norms also functions to reduce the sting of the sacrificial process. Whereas a norm is a rule or guideline for behavior that is backed by positive and negative sanctions, a putative norm is a device used to recruit persons into socially useful yet intrinsically punishing institutions.

For instance, few would deny that the military is a socially useful institution, for national defense, for international peace keeping, and for staking out and maintaining imperialistic claims. Nonetheless, military service also entails behaviors not inherently satisfying, e.g. obeying orders that make no sense, bombing civilian populations, being stationed in vermin-infested or snowbound backwaters, and so forth. For this reason, recruitment occurs partly on the basis of punitive norms: the negative aspects of membership are soft-peddled and the positive accentuated. 'Join the navy and see the world,' is thus an example of a punitive norm, making military service sound like a luxurious vacation in exotic lands.

As with the military, so too with Alcoholics Anonymous. A.A. is a socially useful institution: it rehabilitates many quondam problem drinkers to sober, useful and productive lives. Yet, few who have been or who are members would deny that participation entails behaviors that are painful and punishing. Hence, A.A. also recruits, at least partly, on the basis of punitive norms. 'Keep coming back; it gets better!' is just one of the putative norms that highlights the positive and artfully downplays the sacrificial, renunciatory and mortificatory behaviors. 'It's a simple program,' and 'Sobriety means freedom from as well as freedom to' serve a similar function. So, too, does the institution of the newcomer's meeting.

It is customary that whenever a person is present for his or her first three

meetings, that the topic of discussion focus on the sharing of experience, strength and hope with each other. This entails telling 'what it was like, what happened, and what it is like now' - i.e. what it was like when one was drinking alcohol ('practicing'), how one got into A.A., and what it is like now that one is sober. The thrust of the newcomer's meeting invariably is not on how sorely painful a process either getting sober initially or maintaining sobriety is, but on improvement, on how much better life is now (sober) than when drinking alcohol.

Investment

Kanter describes 'investment' as an attaching process whereby a person gains a stake in the group [6]. The investment in A.A. is of time and energy and is promoted in a number of ways. Members are encouraged to 'get involved' - to make coffee, wash cups or ashtrays, wipe the tables, straighten or put away the chairs after the meeting; to give their phone numbers to newcomers of the same sex; to participate in the monthly steering committee meetings; to chair meetings after 90 days continuous sobriety; to get a 'sponsor' when they are new and to be a sponsor after having achieved a period of continuous sobriety; to become part of the answering service; to engage in a variety of 'twelfth-step work' (to carry the message about A.A. recovery). Through investment, individuals become integrated with the group, become part of rather than apart from it.

Furthermore, the message is disseminated that when 'profits and losses' are

considered, the costs of leaving the fellowship are greater than the costs of remaining. Frequently used adages that serve such a function are 'My worst day sober is better than my best day drunk,' 'There is no situation I couldn't make worse by taking that first drink,' and 'Alcoholism is progressive and so is sobriety.' At the same time, members share their own experiences, of which the A.A. literature is replete, that when they stopped going to meetings on a regular basis, they grew away from the fellowship, felt apart from rather than a part of it. Many of these same persons share that they subsequently took that first drink and in time found themselves once again lacking in control over alcohol. The message is clear; one needs to participate in the group in order to reap the reward. As A.A. members say: 'This is a programme you don't graduate from.'

Renunciation

Kanter describes 'renunciation' as a detaching process, whereby one relinquishes interpersonal allegiances that potentially undermine the group's primary purpose or function [6]. Groups with any degree of stability or identity of necessity face and take a stand in some way on the issue of intimacy and exclusive attachments both outside the group and within it. The reasons for this are several.

Generating and sustaining commitment consume time, energy, loyalty, and emotional involvement, resources finite in amount. Investing those resources in one line of

activity necessarily limits the resources available to invest elsewhere. Then, too, there is the problem of 'subunit withdrawal.' Within the larger group, subunits whose solidarity is based on ties not shared by everyone in that larger group are the sorts of units particularly prone to withdraw from involvement with the group. Thus, dyadic withdrawal, friendship withdrawal, and familial withdrawal pose a potential threat to group cohesiveness and survival. Additionally, the group cohesion can be severely weakened by jealousy, envy, and hostility generated by such exclusive, private and intense relationships as sexual or romantic-love dyads. For these reasons, groups of all sorts attempt to regulate intimacy in some way.

They institute practices or policies that set limits on how much and what kind of intimacy and exclusive attachments are permissible or desirable.

Renunciation is a key process in the recovery programme of Alcoholics Anonymous. Although the fellowship has many married and unmarried dyads and even more members whose friendship networks include persons not in the fellowship, the group regulates intimate, exclusive ties in a number of ways. First, newcomers are encouraged to have their family members and other intimates become involved in Alanon or Alateen, organizations not officially affiliated with A.A. Designed for persons not themselves alcoholic in close contact with persons who are, involvement in these organizations makes it more likely that the kith and

kin of A.A. members support rather than undermine the member's sobriety and commitment to the fellowship. Second, ceasing to engage with friends or family in activities that involve 'slippery places' or setting oneself up for that first drink in itself can weaken if not eliminate prior interpersonal allegiances. Substantial restructuring of prior friendship networks is thus a frequently observable result of the A.A. recovery programme. Many members unwilling to go to this particular length also fail to develop sufficient commitment to the primary purpose of the fellowship, and they drink again.

Intimate ties are further regulated despite the official policy regarding sex set forth in the 'big book,' Alcoholics Anonymous, that: 'We want to stay out of this controversy. We do not want to be the arbiter of anyone's sex conduct' [7,p.69]. Unmarried or otherwise unattached newcomers are frequently encouraged to refrain from getting involved in sexual or romantic relationships, both with persons outside the fellowship and within it, during the first year of continuous sobriety. This norm of non-involvement applies to newcomer-newcomer as well as to newcomer-oldtimer dyads.

Non-involvement is promoted, in part, by the common practice of limiting the sponsor relationship to same-sexed persons. The sponsor-sponsee dyad contains substantial therapeutic, cathartic components. As physicians, clerics and psychiatrists have long been aware in their relations with

patients, parishioners and clients, such relations are particularly prone to romantic or sexual cathexis. In a predominantly heterosexual social order, that occurrence is made less likely when the therapeutic dyad is same-sexed. Also, the sexually congruous dyad gives the newcomer a confidant to tell any pressing, if salacious, details of one's life history, since to do so more widely in the collectivity risks engendering prurient designs in persons for whom sexual entanglements hold an attraction.

Violations of the normal noninvolvement do occur. A particular in-house term, 'thirteenth stepping,' is used by members of the fellowship to refer to these infractions. This term indicates that violating the norm of non-involvement entails actions that lie beyond the pale of the fellowship's 12 suggested steps of recovery. One engages in 'thirteenth stepping' when one engages in sexual or romantic dalliance with a fellow member who has less than a year's continuous sobriety.

Concrete social practices help mitigate the effects on newcomers and on the group of thirteenth stepping. One of the fellowship's traditions reminds members to 'place principles before personalities,' which in this instance means that thirteenth-stepped members need to place the principles of sobriety and meeting attendance before whatever negative feelings they may be experiencing or perceiving. Additionally, another fellowship's tradition encourages members to let go of such resentments or hostilities, reminding them

that group cohesiveness-unity as A.A. calls it-is the key to personal recovery: 'Personal recovery depends on A.A. unity.'

Communion

It is 'communion,' in part at least that fills the void created by renunciation. Kanter defines the attaching process of communion as bringing members into meaningful contact with the collective whole [6]. Alcoholics Anonymous promotes communion through homogeneity, regularized group contact, ritual, and communal Labor [6]. Let us look briefly at each of these in turn.

Particularly in a group whose membership is otherwise as diverse in age, religious affiliation, ethnicity, educational, economic and occupational status as Alcoholics Anonymous, communion is facilitated by a homogeneity or constancy among members with respect to at least one salient background variable. That variable in A.A. is a common experience of personal powerlessness over alcohol.

Yet even that similarity may be difficult for newcomers to perceive. Hence, the collectivity utilizes devices that facilitate the perception and acceptance of a homogeneity of experience between self and fellow members, thereby binding together persons of otherwise disparate backgrounds and forging a bond of solidarity between 'low bottom' members who have lost much and 'high bottom' members who, by comparison, as yet have not. For instance, this communion-facilitating function is served by the maxim, "Look for the similarities and not the

differences.' This imparts the message that the salient fact is not how much one drank, or what one drank, or how frequently one drank or for how many years, or whether one experienced 'blackouts,' or even how much one lost in terms of family, friends, income or social standing while drinking. The important fact is that one is personally powerless over alcohol. A similar function is served by the maxim that 'It takes what it takes' to admit personal powerlessness over alcohol. Some need several drunk-driving convictions, divorces, jailing, firings from jobs and bar-room brawls, as well as innumerable attempts at controlling and enjoying drinking. Others need few or none of these in order to make a similar admission.

Communion is also promoted in A.A. by affording members varied, frequent, and predictable opportunities to come into meaningful contact with the group as a whole. Monthly steering committee meetings provide a forum for the public airing of issues and problems in the business and social life of the community and give each member the opportunity to influence the setting of daily policy, since in the spirit of participatory democracy the vote of a person with one day's or several decades' sobriety counts the same. Daily participation meetings, weekly newcomer's and step-study meetings, monthly potluck dinners and speaker meetings, alcathons and 'group-conscience' meetings (to air pressing group problems) on an as-needed basis, and picnics and other recreational events also serve communion functions. As Kanter points out:

Frequent group meetings and member attendance at a large number of community events...serve a communion function simply because they bring together the entire collectivity and reinforce its existence and meaning, regardless of the purpose of the gathering. Participation in such events makes a member more involved in the group, keeps him informed of events, gives him a greater sense of belonging...[6,p.99].

Ritual is another communion-facilitating mechanism. Groups of all sorts find it useful to affirm at regular intervals their common ties and sentiments through collective participation in ritual. Ritual provides symbols that express, uphold and reaffirm their solidarity, promote esprit de corps and provide a sense of continuity across time. In this there is little difference between troops of boy scouts saying their pledges of allegiance to the flag and their oath of membership, or groups of feminists commemorating the 1973 and 1983 U.S. Supreme Court decisions on abortion, an assembly of Christians celebrating important events in the life of Jesus Christ, or a group of recovering alcoholics attending an A.A. meeting. In all these activities, the solidarity of the larger group is celebrated. Such celebrations bind members to the group that they need and which needs them, thereby contributing to communion.

Alcoholics Anonymous abounds in ritual. Before each meeting, members communally observe a moment of silence and then recite a serenity prayer. At the opening of each meeting, the organization's preamble is

read by the chairperson, and the organization's 12 suggested steps of recovery and the 12 traditions are read by those assembled. At the close of each meeting, members join hands and communally recite another prayer, followed by the affirmation, 'Keep coming back; it works.' The fellowship celebrates its members' A.A. birthdays, and a distinctive language or jargon not in common use outside symbolically binds the members together.

Communal labour also promotes communion. It gives concrete manifestation to feelings of belonging and involvement with the group and generates an appreciation of equality among members by affirming the primacy of membership in the group over extra-group affiliations. Within the collectivity, extra-group statuses simply do not count. Outside, one may be a bank president, attorney, manual labourer or recipient of public assistance. Within the fellowship, members are equal - alcoholics staying sober who help other alcoholics achieve sobriety.

Allocating communal tasks without regard to extra-group statuses expresses and affirms that equality. Also, there is a tendency for all members to perform all tasks. These tasks, whether washing coffee cups or holding office, are performed without pay and are frequently rotated. Frequent rotation of jobs enhances communion since it prevents particularistic ties from forming or solidifying between person and function and gives all members an equal opportunity to be of service, to hold positions of trust as well as to perform menial tasks.

Mortification

Investment of self in the collectivity, willingness to engage in sacrifice, renunciation and communion as part of membership in the group, and internalization of its principles such that one tries to practice them throughout one's affairs represent significant changes in a person's behavioral and attitudinal patterns. Willingness initially to make those changes, and having made them to persist with them a day at a time, are more likely to the extent that those new patterns are, or come shortly to be, consonant with one's perception of self. For this reason, the detaching process of 'mortification' is basic to collectivities of many sorts, from military boot camps, officer candidate schools and total institutions generally to religious communities, sensitivity-training, consciousness-raising and encounter groups.

As described by Kanter, mortification involves exchanging a former conception of self - or, as psychologists would call it, a former 'identity' - for a new one defined and formulated by the collectivity [6]. In this transformation, those sentiments, ideas and principles held in common by the collectivity becomes central, integral parts of self.

For this to transpire, the group needs to furnish a set of criteria for evaluating the self, to provide concrete opportunities for the individual to reassess his or her previous life in terms of them, to perceive that in significant respects his or her

previous life and self were lacking, and to undo and cast off those aspects and replace them with new ones offered by the group. To the extent that these things are accomplished, individual commitment to the collectivity is generated and sustained. Supporting the group's precepts and values, though not a social-psychological necessity, becomes highly probable, precisely because commitment to and affirmation of self and collectivity have become largely coterminous.

Alcoholics Anonymous systematically promotes the mortification of self in several ways. A.A.'s primary mortification mechanism is a comprehensive, ongoing system of self-reevaluation, self-criticism and confession. This system is contained in A.A.'s steps to recovery.

Thus, in step four, members make a 'searching and fearless moral inventory' of self in terms of principles or guidelines supplied by the group. No aspects of one's life, even one's innermost secrets, are left unexamined. One admits fears, angers, resentments, jealousies, failings, imperfections, defects of character and shortcomings in all parts of one's life, throughout one's life course. Taking this personal inventory in terms of principles supplied by the collectivity acknowledges that the collectivity has the legitimate right both to be present in the internal states of the individual and to provide standards by which to measure self and to gauge one's growth. By more clearly perceiving what one has been, one derives a clearer conception of what aspects of

self one may wish to cast off or delete. The process of constructing a new identity thus entails concrete acts that humble and mortify the old one. This function of mortification is well expressed in the adage commonly heard in Alcoholics Anonymous: 'We surrender to win; we die to live.'

Self-evaluation, self criticism and confession are further promoted in the fifth step. This step asks members to bare their souls to social feedback in a face-to-face encounter. Members make private spheres public through the ritual of admitting to another person and to a power greater than self the exact nature of their shortcomings as revealed in step four. This step is thus a secular act of confession encompassing the entirety of one's prior life course. At the same time, the tenth step supplies the opportunity for self-criticism, self-evaluation and confession on a current, ongoing basis.

These processes are carried yet further in other of A.A.s steps of recovery. Steps six and seven focus on the member's inner, private, intrapersonal world and provide the means for the member to delete and strip away dysfunctional aspects of self. These lifelong steps also place the member in a position of dependence on a power greater than self to accomplish these feats of identity transformation, thereby binding the individual more closely to the group.

Steps eight and nine focus on the outer, external, interpersonal world of experience. These steps ask members to construct a list of the persons they have harmed,

to become willing to make amends to them all, and to make those amends wherever possible. The old self is thus further mortified by admitting to those directly involved the exact nature of one's prior wrongs and by making amends for those acts.

Another mortification mechanism in Alcoholics Anonymous is the use against members who drink alcohol of sanctions that humble the member before the community and that indicate to the rest of the collectivity that retaining sober status is always problematic. For instance, the informal policy that the member who has had a 'slip' (i.e. drank alcohol) declare at a meeting that this occurred, and why, serves not only to mortify the member who slipped, but reminds all other members of the axiom basic to this recovery programme that they have but a daily reprieve from active alcoholism that is dependent upon staying in fit spiritual condition. Mortification functions are also served by not allowing confessed slippers to participate in a community activity such as chairing meetings until they once again have 90 days of continuous sobriety, by taking away their keys to the meeting hall, by scratching their prior A.A. birthday dates from the logbook and writing in their new dates of sobriety, and by not allowing them to hold office in the collectivity until a certain length of sobriety has been reached.

Mortification is also aided by a stratified order that distinguishes among members on the basis of their achievement in practicing the

principles of the collectivity in all their affairs. Although Alcoholics Anonymous allegedly is a 'society of equals' that fails to accord status on the basis of such extra-group ties as occupation or educational attainment and on the basis of such particularistic attributes as expertise, intelligence, wit or charm, nonetheless on an informal level the collectivity does accord deference on 'spiritual grounds,' with the more spiritually committed and hence higher status members receiving greater deference. According to this informal system of spiritual stratification, the 'two-stepping' member is lowly committed and hence not highly esteemed, practicing only the first step and that part of the twelfth involving carrying the A.A. message to other alcoholics. At the same time, members who have taken the more difficult fourth and fifth steps receive greater deference, members of long standing are regarded with awe by new people, and old-time members with good programmes become legendary figures. This system of spiritual stratification functions to reward mortification, thereby making it more desirable in the eyes of the less committed.

Transcendence

There is a certain division of labour in the group-induced process of identity transformation. The identification and casting off of dysfunctional aspects of self are accomplished by mortification, while acquiring, achieving and taking on new aspects of self consonant with the principles and sentiments

of the group are facilitated by the attaching process of 'transcendence.' The differing functions of mortification and transcendence are well stated by Kanter:

Transcendence is a process where by an individual attaches his decision-making prerogative to a power greater than himself, surrendering to the higher meaning contained by the group and submitting to something beyond himself. Mortification opens the person to new directions and growth; transcendence defines those directions. Mortification causes the person to 'lose himself;' transcendence permits him to find himself in something larger and greater [6, p. 74].

Transcendence pervades the entire recovery programme of Alcoholics Anonymous. As members themselves say: 'A.A. is a spiritual programme. A.A.s message is that the root of the alcohol abuser's problem is over reliance on a philosophy of self-sufficiency, variously termed "selfishness," 'self-centeredness,' 'self-will run riot' or 'bondage of self;' the effectiveness of the entire programme of recovery therefore rests on the extent to which one becomes and remains willing, a day at a time, to turn one's will and one's life over to a power greater than self.

In A.A., transcendence is promoted in a number of ways, perhaps most obviously and pervasively through its belief system or ideology - those sentiments and ideas held in common by members of the collectivity. Contained in A.A.s books and pamphlets and disseminated verbally in meetings, A.A.s ideology or belief system justifies the

group's patterns of behavior, its values, its goals, ways of life and living; it justifies the individual's surrender to the group at the same time that it justifies any 'demands' made on the individual as part of membership by reference to a principle greater than self, thereby imbuing them with symbolic and transcendent meaning. Following a practice ubiquitous among collectivities of tying belief system to great personages of historical importance who by implication confer their approval on the organization, Alcoholics Anonymous refers to that power greater than self as 'God as we understood him,' 'a higher power,' or simply 'God' for short.

The belief system of Alcoholics Anonymous also functions as a system of behavioral guidelines that gives direction to the acts, attitudes and self-concepts of its members. By providing members with concrete suggestions for dealing with specific situations, even the most mundane in terms of the values and principles of the collectivity. For instance, ingesting nutritional foods on a regular and consistent basis, getting sufficient rest, dealing constructively with angers and resentments as they arise, and structuring pleasurable social interactions into one's daily round of activities are no longer mundane, inconsequential acts. They become concrete observances of the 'H.A.L.T.' of the A.A. programme - not getting too hungry, angry, lonely or tired, and hence are indices of personal growth and transformation. Transcendence-facilitating functions are also

served by encouraging members to attend a meeting to find a solution whenever they experience any type of living problem whatever, whether large or small. 'If you have a problem, go to a meeting' is basic A.A. philosophy. The programme thereby seeks to infuse its belief system into every facet of its members' lives.

Transcendence is further facilitated by tradition. Tradition defines A.A.'s belief system and steps of recovery as they exist as though should be. Tradition thereby denies those not already committed to the programme the legitimacy of suggesting or implementing changes in it. Thus, the 'big book' chronicles precisely how the first 100 members of the organization achieved and maintained their sobriety, and the programme unequivocally and clearly asks members to submit to the principles followed by the original founding members:

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...At some of these we balked. We thought we could find an easier, softer way. But we could not. With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start. Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely [7,p.58]

The institution of 'spiritual awakening' also facilitates transcendence. What A.A. terms spiritual awakening in essence is a process of ideological conversion, whereby members are not asked and are not expected to accept all at once or immediately the concept

of transcendence, let alone to practice it in all their affairs. Instead, the fellowship stresses that, sometimes quickly and sometimes slowly, one internalizes and becomes committed to the movement's ideology in spite of oneself, if one is but willing, gets into action and perseveres. The process of ideological conversion thereby affords and legitimizes the time members need for identity transformation to occur and ideological commitment to develop gradually.

Conclusion

In somewhat less than half a century, Alcoholics Anonymous has grown from 100 to over one and a half million members. It is successful in restoring many problem drinkers to sobriety because it manages to forge and sustain a strong bond between the individual and the collectivity. A.A. accomplishes this through its social organization, the ways the group itself is put together.

This voluntary organization is so structured as to maximize commitment among its participants. It is systematically organized around the processes of sacrifice, investment, renunciation, communion, mortification and transcendence. These are powerful commitment generating and sustaining mechanisms.

These processes also function to subject to social control those aspects of collective life that have implications for commitment, including individual identity, interpersonal intimacy, work, group contact, recruitment, sanctions, ideology and extra-group ties.

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