

The "lost Commandment," the Twelve Steps, and

The "Happiness Part"

by Bernard B. Smith



I FOUND myself thinking of many things—of those exciting, early struggling days when AA was taking form; of the many friendships that AA has made possible for me, a non-alcoholic. And I thought of the Finger of God determining our course, and the words, "Finger of God," brought to mind the Ten Commandments. I found myself reading the Divine Law as though for the first time, with the heart of AA and the brain of the law, which is my profession.

And I thought then that, while all remember, even if all do not observe, all of the "shall not" in these Commandments, few remember the one or two "shalts" of the Ten Command-

* An excerpt from a Talk by Bernard B. Smith, then Chairman of AA's Board of Trustees, at the Fourth General Service Conference.

ments. One great "shall" is the Commandment, "Six days shall thou labor, and the seventh day, rest." The "Ten Commandments" is a single instrument, not ten separate commandments. The effect of the loss of this Commandment of *affirmative* action on all the *negative* "shall not" Commandments in the Divine Law cannot, therefore, be overlooked.

In the period when the Ten Commandments were written men worked in the fields as I did when I was a boy, from dawn to dusk, and if the seventh day was spent at rest, the "shall not" or prohibitory Commandments were not difficult to follow. "Lead us not into temptation"—"Six days shall thou labor and the seventh day, rest" was one of God's ways of not leading us into temptation. But by society's unilateral abrogation of this divine Commandment

the "shall not" now become difficult to observe. And so, with the 40-hour, five-day week, we developed something that the Ten Commandments did not contemplate—a leisure-time society.

I believe that our Twelve Steps were spiritually conceived to meet the challenge of this reality—the reality of the development of a leisure-class society to whom the socially accepted ideals had become grossly materialistic. I like to think that our Twelve Steps—twelve "shoulds" and not "shalls"—are a bridge in the gaping gulf in the Divine Law caused by the lost commandment.

Recently, I looked up the definition of "happiness" in my new, unabridged dictionary. To my surprise, the first definition there listed is "good luck, good fortune, prosperity." This materialistic definition is manifestly the antithesis of the kind of happiness that we in AA possess. The *second* definition in that dictionary, however, I found directly applicable to the kind of happiness we in AA believe we can maintain through living by the philosophy of AA's Twelve Steps. This definition reads: "A state of well-being characterized by relative permanence, by a dominantly agreeable emotion, ranging in value from mere content to positive felicity, and by a natural desire for its continuation."

It is measured in terms of this definition that I believe that those who live by the principles of AA

achieve a higher measure of happiness than any class or group of people to which I, as an individual, have ever been exposed. I thought a good deal about this definition. I knew that the definitions contained in a dictionary follow current socially accepted usage. I was disturbed by the fact that the first definition of happiness should be defined today as "good luck, good fortune, prosperity." So I examined a number of dictionaries published in the 1890's, and I found that the word "prosperity" appeared in none of these dictionaries under the definition of "happiness." I then happened upon a standard dictionary published in 1927. By this time, the definition "good luck, good fortune, prosperity" not only appeared, but had reached second place. By 1943 it had reached first place, supplanting that definition of happiness by which we in AA prefer to be counted, and a totally material conception of happiness now held undisputed sway over modern society.

Our Twelve Steps, therefore, judged by the socially accepted standards of happiness of this age, are steps backward—yes, backward into the universal heart of men, back into the spirit of man. I will believe that the world has moved forward when our dictionaries are revised backward.

Recently I was flying over the deserts of our great Southwest Here and there, almost out of nowhere, were tiny patches of lush green

growth, surrounded by great expanses of brown, lifeless desert. I thought of the great springs of water lying under this desert expanse which, if tapped, would cause the entire desert to flower. And I thought, God provides the water but we have to dig the wells. Those green, lush patches, I likened to our groups, where, with the faith derived from our Twelve Steps, we dug the wells that caused a patch in the desert of life to flower. And I thought how we learned that we alone could not transform the desert in which we lived, we could not dig that well alone. For in AA the whole is truly greater than the sum of all its parts. The infusing power of the group, of our Fellowship, draws something more out of each of us than any of us by himself can supply, and each of us in turn draws out of the spiritual reservoir of our Fellowship the added courage and will which makes each of us the stronger, and our Fellowship the greater.

I thought then of our General Service Conference, which provides channels between the wells of each group so none can go dry, of our general services that shore up the channels and keep them in repair and extend them as new AA cases are formed. I thought of what the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous can mean to the future of human society. Our Fellowship is an island of hope for the life of the spirit, a kind of Fellowship to which in time man, beset by the material-

ism and commercialism of this electronic age, must one day turn to survive.

We owe an obligation to society to insure that this ideal Fellowship which we possess survives, that this flame of faith, this beacon light of hope for the world, must never be extinguished. We need to insure the recovery of the alcoholic who still stumbles in the darkness one short block from this room. We need to insure the recovery of a child being born tonight, destined to alcoholism. We need our General Service Conference to provide, in keeping with our Twelfth Step, a permanent haven for all alcoholics who, in the ages ahead, can find in AA that rebirth which brought us back to life. We need it because we, more than all others, are conscious of the devastating effect of the human urge for power and prestige which we must insure can never invade AA. We need it to insure that the doors of the halls of AA never have locks on them so that all people for all time that have an alcoholic problem may enter these halls unasked and feel welcome. We need it to insure that Alcoholics Anonymous never asks of anyone who needs us what his or her race is, what his or her creed is, what his or her social position is.

We need it because, in the words of Pope Pius XII, "Every people and every race which has been formed on earth today has an equal right to say, 'Our Father, Who are in Heaven!'"