Chapter 4

WE AGNOSTICS

In the preceding chapters you have learned something of alcoholism. We hope we have made clear the distinction between the alcoholic and the non-alcoholic. If, when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely, or if when drinking, you have little control over the amount you take, you are probably alcoholic. If that be the case, you may be suffering from an illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer.

Now that you've read the first three chapters of this book, we hope you have learned something about alcoholism. You may also know the difference between an alcoholic and a non-alcoholic. If you're still unsure if you're an alcoholic yourself, there are two simple ways to tell.

1. If you have tried your hardest to stop drinking and couldn't do it, you are probably an alcoholic.
2. If, once you start drinking, you have no control over how much you drink, you are probably an alcoholic.

Being an alcoholic means you are suffering from an illness that cannot be cured with medicine or therapy. And as we've mentioned before, the only way to permanently control your drinking is to create a personal connection with a Higher Power.

To one who feels he is an atheist or agnostic such an experience seems impossible, but to continue as he is means disaster, especially if he is an alcoholic of the hopeless variety. To be doomed to an alcoholic death

or to live on a spiritual basis are not always easy alternatives to face.

If you are an atheist or an agnostic, you might feel like you are being forced to make a choice that will turn your world upside-down. To be doomed to die an alcoholic death or to find a way to live a spiritual life is not an easy choice to make. We are here to tell you that connecting with a Higher Power is both possible and absolutely critical to your recovery.

AGNOSTIC: Someone who neither believes nor disbelieves in the existence of God or gods, or is unsure if one exists.

Remember the stories of other alcoholics you read in earlier chapters? If you look back over those stories, you'll see that many of the people in them also wanted to skip "the God stuff" in stopping their drinking. They thought they could get sober without finding a Higher Power that they trusted to help and guide them. How many of them succeeded? None. Still, we know that choosing between living your entire life as an alcoholic or becoming a spiritual person can be difficult.

But it isn't so difficult. About half our original fellowship were of exactly that type. At first some of us tried to avoid the issue, hoping against hope we were not true alcoholics. But after a while we had to face the fact that we must find a spiritual basis of life —or else. Perhaps it is going to be that way with you. But cheer up, something like half of us thought we were atheists or agnostics. Our experience shows that you need not be disconcerted.

Many people have had a hard time with this choice. In fact, nearly half of us were atheists or agnostics when we first formed our Fellowship. We tried to avoid the issue of spirituality at first. Eventually we realized it was the only way to begin recovering. We found our own ways to think about spirituality, and created our own definitions of a Higher Power. As you work through A.A., you may find yourself doing something similar.

HIGHER POWER: A force or power that is stronger than you are. Something that influences events in the universe.

If a mere code of morals or a better philosophy of life were sufficient to overcome alcoholism, many of us

would have recovered long ago. But we found that such codes and philosophies did not save us, no matter how much we tried. We could wish to be moral, we could wish to be philosophically comforted, in fact, we could will these things with all our might, but the needed power wasn't there. Our human resources, as marshalled by the will, were not sufficient; they failed utterly.

But you may be thinking that there must be a non-spiritual way to overcome your alcoholism. Something similar that doesn't involve God. But if changing a few behaviors or thinking more positively could cure alcoholism, many of us would have recovered a long time ago. Instead we found that—no matter how hard we tried—relying only on ourselves and our willpower always completely failed.

Some of us spent years of our lives trying to get sober. But the only thing that made a difference was finding a connection to a Higher Power.

Lack of power, that was our dilemma. We had to find a power by which we could live, and it had to be a *Power greater than ourselves.* Obviously. But where and how were we to find this Power?

A Higher Power can guide your journey

Here is why we think that spirituality is the only way to deal with alcoholism: As alcoholics, we are powerless against our alcoholism. We are powerless to control our drinking. Which means that in order to change our drinking habits, we cannot just rely on ourselves. We

don't have the right kind of power, and that is exactly our problem! We need to connect with some sort of power outside of ourselves that can guide us. And it needs to be *a Power greater than ourselves*.

But where and how do we find this Power?

Well, that's exactly what this book is about. Its main object is to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself which will solve your problem. That means we have written a book which we believe to be spiritual as well as moral. And it means, of course, that we are going to talk about God. Here difficulty arises with agnostics. Many times we talk to a new man and watch his hope rise as we discuss his alcoholic problems and explain our fellowship. But his face falls when we speak of spiritual matters, especially when we mention God, for we have re-opened a sub-ject which our man thought he had neatly evaded or entirely ignored.

Well, that's exactly what this book is about. It was written to help you find a Power greater than yourself that will help you solve your problem. If you are an agnostic or an atheist, this may worry you. Much of this chapter will talk about how you might start to connect with God on your own terms.

Plenty of new A.A. members have doubts about spirituality at first. When we talk to alcoholics who haven't started the program yet, we bring up the subject of God very carefully. At first, these new people look eager and hopeful as we explain how the program works. Then their faces fall when we bring up spirituality, especially when we mention God. Often this is because we have opened a topic that newcomers would rather avoid or ignore.

We know how he feels. We have shared his honest doubt and prejudice. Some of us have been violently anti-religious. To others, the word "God'' brought up a particular idea of Him with which someone had tried to impress them during childhood. Perhaps we rejected this particular conception because it seemed inadequate. With that rejection we imagined we had abandoned the God idea entirely. We were bothered

with the thought that faith and dependence upon a Power beyond ourselves was somewhat weak, even cowardly. We looked upon this world of warring individuals, warring theological systems, and inexplicable calamity, with deep skepticism. We looked askance at many individuals who claimed to be godly. How could a Supreme Being have anything to do with it all? And who could comprehend a Supreme Being anyhow? Yet, in other moments, we found ourselves thinking, when enchanted by a starlit night, "Who, then, made all this?'' There was a feeling of awe and wonder, but it was fleeting and soon lost.

We know how this feels. We have had those same concerns ourselves.

Some of us in A.A. have been extremely anti-religious. Some of us connect the word "God" to ideas we were forced to accept during our childhoods. If those ideas didn't make sense to us back then, we may have rejected the idea of God completely. We started to believe that faith and trusting a Higher Power were signs of weakness. We saw war, destruction, and pain in the world. We found it hard to believe that God would let these things happen. We looked at people who claimed to be godly, and felt we couldn't trust them.

But at other times we felt differently. When we stopped to enjoy the magical beauty of nature, we felt like a Higher Power must exist. We looked up at the stars and wondered who made them. We felt filled with amazement in those moments.

Yes, we of agnostic temperament have had these thoughts and experiences. Let us make haste to reas-

sure you. We found that as soon as we were able to lay aside prejudice and express even a willingness to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we commenced to get results, even though it was impossible for any of us to fully define or comprehend that Power, which is God.

Whatever you feel and believe about God right now, someone else in the program has believed the same thing. We can promise you that. If you pray every day and believe that God guides your life, you are not alone. And if you are a strong atheist and dislike religion, you are also not alone. Others in A.A. have felt what you are feeling, too, and may even feel it right now.

Here's something that helped those of us who felt uncomfortable with the idea of a Higher Power: We don't have to use anyone else's spirituality as a model. We can decide for ourselves how we want to think about the Higher Power that guides us.

Much to our relief, we discovered we did not need to consider another's conception of God. Our own conception, however inadequate, was sufficient to make the approach and to effect a contact with Him. As soon as we admitted the possible existence of a Creative Intelligence, a Spirit of the Universe underlying the totality of things, we began to be possessed of a new sense of power and direction, provided we took other simple steps. We found that God does not make too hard terms with those who seek Him. To us, the Realm of Spirit is broad, roomy, all inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding to those who earnestly seek. It is open, we believe, to all men.

When, therefore, we speak to you of God, we mean your own conception of God. This applies, too, to other spiritual expressions which you find in this book. Do not let any prejudice you may have against spiritual terms deter you from honestly asking yourself what they mean to you. At the start, this was all we needed to commence spiritual growth, to effect our first conscious relation with God as we understood Him. Afterward, we found ourselves accepting many things which then seemed entirely out of reach. That was growth, but if we wished to grow we had to begin somewhere. So we used our own conception, however limited it was.

Define "God" on your own terms

When we joined the program, we found out we didn't have to immediately accept that God, or any Higher Power, exists. We just needed to keep an open mind about spirituality and faith. As we learned more about the program, some of us slowly became more spiritual. Others had very sudden and unexpected experiences of faith! At the beginning, all that was needed from us was openness.

We found that as soon as we allowed ourselves to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we could change. Even if we couldn't explain or understand that Power, it still helped us recover.

We needed to ask ourselves but one short question. "Do I now believe, or am I even willing to believe, that there is a Power greater than myself?" As soon as a man can say that he does believe, or is willing to

believe, we emphatically assure him that he is on his way. It has been repeatedly proven among us that upon this simple cornerstone a wonderfully effective spiritual structure can be built.*

That was great news to us, for we had assumed we could not make use of spiritual principles unless we accepted many things on faith which seemed difficult to believe. When people presented us with spiritual approaches, how frequently did we all say, "I wish I had what that man has. I'm sure it would work if I could only believe as he believes. But I cannot accept as surely true the many articles of faith which are so plain to him." So it was comforting to learn that we could commence at a simpler level.

We were also relieved to learn that we didn't need to accept someone else's ideas about God. Our own ideas and feelings were all we needed. Then we could connect with a guiding Higher Power. As soon as we opened our minds to a Creative Intelligence, a Spirit of the Universe that watched over everything, we began to feel a new sense of direction. We found that God didn't make it hard for people to connect or get spiritual help. We found spirituality to be a big, friendly, welcoming space. We truly believe it is open to all people.

GOD AS WE UNDERSTOOD/UNDERSTAND GOD: Your own ideas and feelings about a Higher Power. A version of faith that feels true and powerful to you.

So when we use the word God in this book, we mean your own ideas of God. This also applies to other spiritual words and phrases you'll find in this book. They are all referring to your thoughts and feelings about God, and no one else's. If you feel any doubts about God or religion, we hope those doubts won't stop you from beginning this recovery journey.

We also hope those doubts won't stop you from asking yourself honestly what God means to you.

When we first began to recover, this was all we needed to start growing spiritually. We just needed to decide what God meant to us. Then we needed to reach toward that idea of God the tiniest little bit. After that, we felt able to accept many things that had seemed impossible before. That was growth. And all growth must start somewhere, so we started with our own ideas about God. It didn't matter how simple or small they seemed at the time.

Back then, we just needed to ask ourselves one question: "Am I willing to believe that there is a Power greater than myself?"

And if you are an agnostic who has doubts, you need to ask yourself that question now.

As soon as you can say that you're willing to believe, we promise that you're on the right track. Again and again, we've seen open-mindedness change people for the better. Accepting the idea that God may exist is all you need to start building a spiritual practice for yourself.

We learned that the only thing we needed was a willingness to believe God may exist. Before that, many of us thought we wouldn't be able to benefit from the spiritual basis of the program. We were worried that we would need to accept things on faith that felt difficult to believe. When we heard people talking about how spirituality benefited them as recovering alcoholics, we found ourselves thinking, "I wish I felt that way, too. I'm sure it would work for me if I believed in the same way that they believe." Because of these concerns and stresses, we were relieved to learn that we could begin our relationship with God at a simpler level. We just needed to find and embrace a version of faith that felt true and powerful to us.

Besides a seeming inability to accept much on faith,

* Please be sure to read Appendix II on “Spiritual Experience.”

we often found ourselves handicapped by obstinacy, sensitiveness, and unreasoning prejudice. Many of us have been so touchy that even casual reference to spiritual things made us bristle with antagonism. This sort of thinking had to be abandoned. Though some of us resisted, we found no great difficulty in casting aside such feelings. Faced with alcoholic destruction, we soon became as open minded on spiritual matters as we had tried to be on other questions. In this respect alcohol was a great persuader. It finally beat us into a state of reasonableness. Sometimes this was a tedious process; we hope no one else will be prejudiced for as long as some of us were.

Let go of resistance to faith

On top of struggling with faith, we often felt stubbornness and prejudice against religion. Whenever someone brought up the topic of spirituality in conversation, we would get angry or defensive. We had to learn to let go of that habit. Some of us resisted at first, but decided that being open to spiritual discussion was important. We saw that we might be destroyed by our alcoholism if we didn't create a relationship with God. We decided that changing our thinking about spirituality was better than the alternative.

The reader may still ask why he should believe in a Power greater than himself. We think there are good reasons. Let us have a look at some of them.

You may still be asking yourself why you should believe in a Power greater than yourself. We think there

are many good reasons. Let's have a look at some of them.

The practical individual of today is a stickler for facts and results. Nevertheless, the twentieth century readily accepts theories of all kinds, provided they are firmly grounded in fact. We have numerous theories, for example, about electricity. Everybody believes them without a murmur of doubt. Why this ready acceptance? Simply because it is impossible to explain what we see, feel, direct, and use, without a reasonable assumption as a starting point.

Many people demand facts before they make a decision. We all accept all kinds of theories and assumptions, so long as they are supported by facts. For example most of what we believe about electricity and how it works is based on theories. We happily accept what scientists tell us about electricity. Why? Because otherwise we can't explain what we see, feel, and use. We need to use a reasonable assumption as a starting point.

Everybody nowadays, believes in scores of assumptions for which there is good evidence, but no perfect visual proof. And does not science demonstrate that visual proof is the weakest proof? It is being constantly revealed, as mankind studies the material world, that outward appearances are not inward reality at all. To illustrate:

Gravity is another example. So is Einstein's theory of relativity. We believe in many assumptions that are supported by facts, even if there's no proof that we can see with our own eyes. In fact, science has shown us that visible proof can be weak or misleading. The more we learn about how our world works, the more we understand that how something *looks* and how it *is made*

may be very different from each other. Here's an example to make this idea clearer:

The prosaic steel girder is a mass of electrons whirl-

ing around each other at incredible speed. These tiny bodies are governed by precise laws, and these laws hold true throughout the material world. Science tells us so. We have no reason to doubt it. When, however, the perfectly logical assumption is suggested that underneath the material world and life as we see it, there is an All Powerful, Guiding, Creative Intelligence, right there our perverse streak comes to the surface and we laboriously set out to convince ourselves it isn't so. We read wordy books and indulge in windy arguments, thinking we believe this universe needs no God to explain it. Were our contentions true, it would follow that life originated out of nothing, means nothing, and proceeds nowhere.

When people talk about something solid, they may use something like a steel beam as an obvious example. But a steel beam is made up of invisible particles whirling around at incredible speed. These tiny particles behave in predictable ways. They are governed by scientific laws that apply to everything in the world. Based on the facts that scientists have used to back up this theory, we have no reason to doubt it.

We can accept this theory without seeing proof with our own eyes. So why can't we also accept the idea that our world is protected by a powerful God that we cannot see? You can indeed see these with microscopes. So why can't we also believe that our world is guided by a Power greater than ourselves? Many of us stubbornly cling to the idea that our universe needs no God to explain its mysteries. If that's true, we might as well believe that life originated out of nothing, means nothing, and is going nowhere.

Instead of regarding ourselves as intelligent agents, spearheads of God's ever advancing Creation, we agnostics and atheists chose to believe that our human intelligence was the last word, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and end of all. Rather vain of us, wasn't it?

Those of us who are agnostics and atheists don't believe that a Power greater than ourselves affects our choices and lives. We believe we are in total control. Doesn't that sound a little arrogant?

We, who have traveled this dubious path, beg you to lay aside prejudice, even against organized religion. We have learned that whatever the human frailties of various faiths may be, those faiths have given purpose and direction to millions. People of faith have a logical idea of what life is all about. Actually, we used to have no reasonable conception whatever. We used to amuse ourselves by cynically dissecting spiritual beliefs and practices when we might have observed that many spiritually-minded persons of all races, colors, and creeds were demonstrating a degree of stability, happiness and usefulness which we should have sought ourselves.

Those of us who started our A.A. journeys as agnostics and atheists felt this way once. We thought our own brains were the only power in our lives. We are asking you now to open yourself up to other ideas about the world. We are asking you to rethink your negative beliefs about organized religion. We have learned that even imperfect faiths have given hope and meaning to millions of people all over the world. People of faith understand what life is all about. The ideas that shape their lives

make sense.

Instead, we looked at the human defects of these people, and sometimes used their shortcomings as a basis of wholesale condemnation. We talked of intolerance, while we were intolerant ourselves. We missed the reality and the beauty of the forest because we were diverted by the ugliness of some of its trees. We never gave the spiritual side of life a fair hearing. In our personal stories you will find a wide variation in the way each teller approaches and conceives of the Power which is greater than himself. Whether we agree with a particular approach or conception seems to make little difference. Experience has taught us that these are matters about which, for our purpose, we need not be worried. They are questions for each individual to settle for himself.

We used to look down on them. We would make fun of their spiritual beliefs and practices to amuse ourselves. We would look at their natural, normal imperfections and decide that they were bad and wrong. We did all of this instead of accepting them as human beings. Instead of recognizing that many spiritual people had lives that were stable and happy.

We accused faithful people of being intolerant and prejudiced, when we were being intolerant and prejudiced ourselves. We saw a few bad people who claimed to be godly, and assumed all godly people were just as bad. We were unfair when we thought about the spiritual side of life.

On one proposition, however, these men and women are strikingly agreed. Every one of them has gained access to, and believes in, a Power greater than himself.

This Power has in each case accomplished the miraculous, the humanly impossible. As a celebrated American statesman put it, "Let's look at the record."

Where we all agree

We have let go of our prejudices about faith. We have learned to accept that there is a Power greater than ourselves in the world. Each of us understands that Power in a different way. We have learned that we don't need to have particular ideas about God. We can create our own beliefs about how and when God is working in our lives. We don't need to believe the same things as other people. We can decide for ourselves how we want to think about the Power greater than ourselves that guides us.

Here are thousands of men and women, worldly indeed. They flatly declare that since they have come to believe in a Power greater than themselves, to take a certain attitude toward that Power, and to do certain simple things, there has been a revolutionary change in their way of living and thinking. In the face of collapse and despair, in the face of the total failure of their human resources, they found that a new power, peace, happiness, and sense of direction flowed into them. This happened soon after they whole-heartedly met a few simple requirements. Once con-

fused and baffled by the seeming futility of existence, they show the underlying reasons why they were making heavy going of life. Leaving aside the drink question, they tell why living was so unsatisfactory. They show how the change came over them. When many hundreds of people are able to say that the consciousness of the Presence of God is today the most important fact of their lives, they present a powerful reason why one should have faith.

> However, there's one thing that we all agree on. We now believe in a Power greater than ourselves, and that belief has helped us recover. Millions of alcoholics will tell you that believing in and respecting a Power greater than themselves helped them make huge changes in their lives. When they felt despair and faced total failure, their own minds and feelings were not enough to change their situations. But because of their faith, they could change. They found that a new power, peace, happiness, and sense of direction flowed into them. Before they were always confused and felt that life was pointless, even when they weren't drinking or drunk. These people now say that their relationship with God and spirituality are the most important forces in their lives. We feel this is a powerful reason for anyone reading this book now to open themselves to the idea of faith.

This world of ours has made more material progress in the last century than in all the millenniums which went before. Almost everyone knows the reason. Students of ancient history tell us that the intellect of men in those days was equal to the best of today. Yet in ancient times material progress was painfully slow. The spirit of modern scientific inquiry, research and

invention was almost unknown. In the realm of the material, men's minds were fettered by superstition, tradition, and all sorts of fixed ideas. Some of the contemporaries of Columbus thought a round earth preposterous. Others came near putting Galileo to death for his astronomical heresies.

Over the last several hundred years, people have made more discoveries and created more amazing inventions than we did in all the time before that. Why would this be? Especially when we know that people were just as smart back then as we are now? It is because not everyone had access to science and research. As a result, many people's minds were full of superstitions and outdated ideas. For example, many people who lived at the same time as Christopher Columbus did not believe the earth was round.

We asked ourselves this: Are not some of us just as biased and unreasonable about the realm of the spirit as were the ancients about the realm of the material? Even in the present century, American newspapers were afraid to print an account of the Wright brothers' first successful flight at Kitty Hawk. Had not all efforts at flight failed before? Did not Professor Langley's flying machine go to the bottom of the Potomac River? Was it not true that the best mathematical minds had proved man could never fly? Had not people said God had reserved this privilege to the

birds? Only thirty years later the conquest of the air was almost an old story and airplane travel was in full swing.

Knowing this, we should rethink our own prejudices. Aren't we being just as unreasonable about spirituality as these ancient people were about science and discovery?

Think of it this way: When the Wright brothers built and flew the first airplane in 1903, most American newspapers were afraid to write about it. All other inventors had failed to make machines that could fly. Another man had built a flying machine that sank to the bottom of a river. At the time, the best mathematical minds had "proved" human beings could never fly. Many people believed that God only wanted birds to have the ability to fly.

But just 30 years after the Wright brothers' first flight, airplanes were everywhere. Air travel was normal. Minds that were closed before … were forced open.

But in most fields our generation has witnessed complete liberation of our thinking. Show any longshoreman a Sunday supplement describing a proposal to explore the moon by means of a rocket and he will say, "I bet they do it—maybe not so long either." Is not our age characterized by the ease with which we discard old ideas for new, by the complete readiness with which we throw away the theory or gadget which does not work for something new which does?

As more and more science and technology became part of our lives, people everywhere became more

accepting. Things we once thought were impossible became common. If you were to take a news story about plans to explore the moon using robots, and show it to a warehouse worker, they would say, "I bet they'll do it. Probably in the next couple of years." The time we live in is more open to change. We are comfortable replacing old ideas with new ones. We are happy to throw away old theories or inventions that don't work anymore, and exchange them for new ones that do.

We had to ask ourselves why we shouldn't apply to our human problems this same readiness to change our point of view. We were having trouble with personal relationships, we couldn't control our emotional natures, we were a prey to misery and depression, we couldn't make a living, we had a feeling of uselessness, we were full of fear, we were unhappy, we couldn't seem to be of real help to other people—was not a basic solution of these bedevilments more important than whether we should see newsreels of lunar flight? Of course it was.

At A.A., we had to ask ourselves why we haven't had the same attitude toward spirituality. If we are able to embrace new ideas and discoveries, why not new views on God? After all, we were struggling with our lives at just about every level. We truly needed help. We were having trouble with our relationships, we couldn't control our emotions, we felt miserable and depressed. We couldn't earn money or hold onto jobs, we felt useless and afraid, and we were unhappy. We couldn't even help other people. If connecting with a Higher Power could help us solve even a few of these problems, wasn't that worth exploring? Of course it was.

When we saw others solve their problems by a simple reliance upon the Spirit of the Universe, we

had to stop doubting the power of God. Our ideas did not work. But the God idea did.

We saw other people solve their difficult problems by finding their own connection to spirituality. And then we knew we had to stop doubting the power of God. Our ideas did not work. But the God idea did.

The Wright brothers' almost childish faith that they could build a machine which would fly was the mainspring of their accomplishment. Without that, nothing could have happened. We agnostics and atheists were sticking to the idea that self-sufficiency would solve our problems. When others showed us that "God-suf-

ficiency'' worked with them, we began to feel like those who had insisted the Wrights would never fly.

Think back to the Wright brothers for a moment. Their strong belief that they could build a flying machine was the reason they kept trying. It was the reason they succeeded. Without that strong belief, nothing could have happened. We agnostics and atheists hung onto the idea that our own power would solve all our problems, including our drinking. Other alcoholics told us that help from God had worked for them. Then we realized we were being as closed-minded as the people who had insisted the Wrights would never fly.

Logic is great stuff. We liked it. We still like it. It is not by chance we were given the power to reason, to examine the evidence of our senses, and to draw conclusions. That is one of man's magnificent attributes. We agnostically inclined would not feel satisfied with a proposal which does not lend itself to reasonable approach and interpretation. Hence we are at pains to tell why we think our present faith is reasonable, why we think it more sane and logical to believe than not to believe, why we say our former thinking was soft and mushy when we threw up our hands in doubt and said, "We don't know.''

Logic is great stuff. We liked it. We still like it. And we still believe that using reason, looking at evidence, and using our senses to make decisions are all important. We agnostics would never accept an idea that didn't seem reasonable and logical. This is why we are trying so hard right now to show you that faith is reasonable. We want to show you why we think it is more sane and logical to

believe in God than not to believe.

When we became alcoholics, crushed by a self-imposed crisis we could not postpone or evade, we had to fearlessly face the proposition that either God is everything or else He is nothing. God either is, or He isn't. What was our choice to be?

The question of faith

When we became members of Alcoholics Anonymous, we could no longer avoid the question of faith. Did we believe ... or not? Is God everything or nothing, and how were we to choose?

Arrived at this point, we were squarely confronted with the question of faith. We couldn't duck the issue. Some of us had already walked far over the Bridge of Reason toward the desired shore of faith. The outlines and the promise of the New Land had brought lustre to tired eyes and fresh courage to flagging spirits. Friendly hands had stretched out in welcome. We were grateful that Reason had brought us so far. But somehow, we couldn't quite step ashore. Perhaps we had been leaning too heavily on Reason that last mile and we did not like to lose our support.

Some of us had already found our way to faith through the program. Those people gave us hope for ourselves. We felt like they had already crossed over a long bridge, while we were waiting to find the courage to cross on our own. We could see the shore where they stood, and felt hopeful. And when we saw them waving, holding out their hands in welcome, we began to cross. We began to move toward accepting that a Power greater than

ourselves truly did exist.

But when we reached the far side of the bridge we couldn't step ashore. Our love of logic and reason held us back from accepting our faith.

That was natural, but let us think a little more closely. Without knowing it, had we not been brought to where we stood by a certain kind of faith? For did

we not believe in our own reasoning? Did we not have confidence in our ability to think? What was that but a sort of faith? Yes, we had been faithful, abjectly faithful to the God of Reason. So, in one way or another, we discovered that faith had been involved all the time!

We made ourselves think more closely about faith as an idea. We had believed in our own ability to think and be reasonable. Wasn't that a kind of faith? It was. Up to this point, we had been faithful to a "God of Reason." In a way, faith had been part of our lives for as long as we could remember!

We found, too, that we had been worshippers. What a state of mental goose-flesh that used to bring on! Had we not variously worshipped people, sentiment, things, money, and ourselves? And then, with a better motive, had we not worshipfully beheld the sunset, the sea, or a flower? Who of us had not loved something or somebody? How much did these feelings, these loves, these worships, have to do with pure reason? Little or nothing, we saw at last. Were not these things the tissue out of which our lives were constructed? Did not these feelings, after all, determine the course of our existence? It was impossible to say we had no capacity for faith, or love, or worship. In one form or another we had been living by faith and little else.

Then we realized we had also been worshippers. We worshiped people, feelings, things, money, and ourselves. At certain moments, we felt feelings of worship for natural beauty: things like the sunset, the

sea, or a flower. Most of us had fallen in love at some time in our lives. Love itself is a kind of worship. Love is a feeling that is not based in logic or reason. Seeing this, it became clear that worship had also been with us all along.

Imagine life without faith! Were nothing left but pure reason, it wouldn't be life. But we believed in life—of course we did. We could not prove life in the sense that you can prove a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, yet, there it was. Could we still say the whole thing was nothing but a mass of electrons, created out of nothing, meaning nothing, whirling on to a destiny of nothingness? Of course we couldn't. The electrons themselves seemed more intelligent than that. At least, so the chemist said.

Hence, we saw that reason isn't everything. Neither is reason, as most of us use it, entirely dependable,

though it emanate from our best minds. What about people who proved that man could never fly?

> It became impossible to say we were unable to feel faith, or love, or worship. We saw that the most important experiences and emotions in our lives were built on faith. We saw that if we built our lives around reason alone, it wouldn't be life at all. We saw that reason wasn't the most important force in the world. In fact, reason can't always be trusted even when it comes from brilliant thinkers. Remember that several brilliant mathematicians proved that humans would never fly. And the Wright brothers still succeeded.

Yet we had been seeing another kind of flight, a spiritual liberation from this world, people who rose above their problems. They said God made these things possible, and we only smiled. We had seen spiritual release, but liked to tell ourselves it wasn't true.

> We began to see another kind of flight: People whose faith helped them rise above their problems. They told us God made these things possible, and we only smiled. We had seen people freed from alcoholism through their experience of faith. We met people who told us their belief in God had set them free. But we felt more comfortable telling ourselves those things weren't real.

Actually we were fooling ourselves, for deep down in every man, woman, and child, is the fundamental idea of God. It may be obscured by calamity, by pomp, by worship of other things, but in some form or other it is there. For faith in a Power greater than

ourselves, and miraculous demonstrations of that power in human lives, are facts as old as man himself.

We were lying to ourselves. Deep down in every person is the simple and powerful idea of God. It may be hidden by personal problems or by worship of other things, but it is still there. Faith in a Power greater than ourselves has existed for as long as humans have existed.

We finally saw that faith in some kind of God was a part of our make-up, just as much as the feeling we have for a friend. Sometimes we had to search fearlessly, but He was there. He was as much a fact as we were. We found the Great Reality deep down within us. In the last analysis it is only there that He may be found. It was so with us.

We finally saw that faith in some kind of God was as natural as the warm feelings we felt for our friends or partners. Some of us had to search long and hard, but we always found our faith eventually. God's existence was as clear and true as our own existence. We connected with God deep inside of ourselves.

We can only clear the ground a bit. If our testimony helps sweep away prejudice, enables you to think honestly, encourages you to search diligently within yourself, then, if you wish, you can join us on the Broad Highway. With this attitude you cannot fail. The consciousness of your belief is sure to come to you.

God is within you already

We share these thoughts and feelings with you because we hope they will clear away your prejudices. We hope

they will help you think honestly, and encourage you to look inside yourself for your own faith. Then, if you want to, you can join us on our journey toward recovery.

In this book you will read the experience of a man who thought he was an atheist. His story is so interesting that some of it should be told now. His change of heart was dramatic, convincing, and moving.

We'd like to share with you the experience of a man who thought he was an atheist, but had a change of heart that was dramatic, convincing, and moving.

Our friend was a minister's son. He attended church school, where he became rebellious at what he thought an overdose of religious education. For years thereafter he was dogged by trouble and frustra-tion. Business failure, insanity, fatal illness, suicide—these calamities in his immediate family embittered and depressed him. Post-war disillusionment, ever more serious alcoholism, impending mental and physical collapse, brought him to the point of self-destruction.

Our friend was a minister's son. He attended church school, where he acted out and made trouble. He felt overwhelmed by his religious education and rebelled against it. As he grew older, his whole life was full of trouble and frustration. His family members had failed businesses, many struggled with their mental health, some became seriously ill, and attempted suicide. Seeing all of these terrible problems made him feel bitter and depressed. His drinking, mental illness, and physical illness, all made him consider suicide himself.

One night, when confined in a hospital, he was ap-proached by an alcoholic who had known a spiritual experience. Our friend's gorge rose as he bitterly cried out: "If there is a God, He certainly hasn't done anything for me!'' But later, alone in his room, he asked himself this question: "Is it possible that all the religious people I have known are wrong?'' While pondering the answer he felt as though he lived in hell. Then, like a thunderbolt, a great thought came. It crowded out all else:

''Who are you to say there is no God?''

One night, when he'd been checked into a hospital, he

was talking with another alcoholic who had experienced a spiritual awakening. Our friend felt angry and disgusted. He cried out, "If there is a God, then that God certainly hasn't done anything for me!" Later, alone in his room, he asked himself this question: "Is it possible that all the religious people I have known are wrong?" As he wondered about this, he felt like he was in hell.

Then, like a flash, a great thought appeared in his mind. It made all other thoughts disappear: *"Who are you to say there is no God?"*

This man recounts that he tumbled out of bed to his knees. In a few seconds he was overwhelmed by a conviction of the Presence of God. It poured over and through him with the certainty and majesty of a great tide at flood. The barriers he had built through the years were swept away. He stood in the Presence of Infinite Power and Love. He had stepped from bridge to shore. For the first time, he lived in conscious companionship with his Creator.

This man fell out of bed onto his knees. He immediately felt overwhelmed by a feeling that God was present in the room with him. It poured over him and through him. The mental barriers he had built against faith were swept away. He had stepped from bridge to shore. For the first time, he was awakened to a Power greater than himself.

Thus was our friend's cornerstone fixed in place. No later vicissitude has shaken it. His alcoholic problem was taken away. That very night, years ago, it dis-

appeared. Save for a few brief moments of temptation the thought of drink has never returned; and at such times a great revulsion has risen up in him. Seemingly he could not drink even if he would. God had restored his sanity.

This powerful experience transformed our friend forever. On that very night, his alcoholism disappeared. Except for a few moments when he felt tempted, his desire to drink never returned. And whenever he felt tempted, he also felt very strongly that drinking would be a huge mistake. The idea of drinking made him sick to his stomach. He could not drink even if he wanted to. God had restored his sanity.

What is this but a miracle of healing? Yet its elements are simple. Circumstances made him willing to believe. He humbly offered himself to his Maker—then he knew.

Even so has God restored us all to our right minds. To this man, the revelation was sudden. Some of us grow into it more slowly. But He has come to all who have honestly sought Him.

When we drew near to Him He disclosed Himself to us!

Doesn't this story describe a miracle of healing? Its elements are so simple. Events in this man's life made him willing to believe. He humbly offered himself to God. After that, he was changed forever.

We members of A.A. know that God helped us find our sanity again. Some of us connect with God suddenly and in a flash, as our friend did. Some of us grow into it more

slowly. But God has come to all who have honestly sought a connection with a Power greater than themselves.

When we allowed ourselves to become closer to God, we found God!