BEYOND BELIEF: Sensible Spirituality in Treatment and Recovery

A Conversation with John McAndrew and Joe C
12 Step Language for CENTURY 21

- Look outside our doors: Dramatic shift in religious/spiritual views in this decade
- Today, 12-Step literature has evolved and our recovery community is more accommodating
- “Experience trumps explanation.” - Rev. Ward Ewing
Reality can be so complex that equally valid observations from differing perspectives can appear to be contradictory.
What paradigm/worldview do you bring to issues of substance use disorder & recovery?

Our worldview informs our beliefs; our beliefs are expressed in how we feel and think.

* http://melschwartz.com/
... 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? (AA, We Agnostics, p 53)

The next generation of substance and process addicts seek recovery options without the need to adopt anyone else’s beliefs - nor deny their own.
Change is afoot just outside our door…

The Headlines:

- **New York Times** (May 2015)  
  *The Rise of Young Americans Who Don’t Believe in God*

- **Independent** (January 2016)  
  *No Icelanders Under 25 Believe God Created The Universe, Poll Claims*

- **Harvard Divinity School** (December 2015)  
  *American “Nones” On The Rise*

- **Washington Post** (April 2011)  
  *Why Do Americans Still Dislike Atheists?*
### Recent Studies

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Demographic Changes Over Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gallup 1948—2015</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Judeo/Christians: 95% Other religions: 0% None/Undesignated: 5%</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx">poll/1690/religion.aspx</a></td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Judeo/Christians: 74% Other religions: 6% None/Undesignated: 21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>YouGov poll (United Kingdom)</td>
<td>Belief in God</td>
<td>&quot;Do you believe in God or a higher power?&quot; UK vs. other countries</td>
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<td>Pew Research Non-theists</td>
<td>Increase from 2007 to 2014</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/05/RLS-08-26-full-report.pdf">www.pewforum.org/files/2015/05/RLS-08-26-full-report.pdf</a></td>
<td>Silent Gen: (1928—1945)</td>
<td>Increase in atheist/agnostic/nones: 11% (+2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baby Boomers (1946-1964)</td>
<td>17% (+3%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gen-X (1965-1980)</td>
<td>23% (+4%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Millennials (1981-1996)</td>
<td>35% (+10%)</td>
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Q: There is a lot of talk about God, though, isn't there?

A: The majority of A.A. members believe that we have found the solution to our drinking problem not through individual willpower, but through a power greater than ourselves. However, everyone defines this power as he or she wishes. Many people call it God, others think it is the A.A. group, still others don't believe in it at all. There is room in A.A. for people of all shades of belief and non-belief.

from "A Newcomer Asks..." (AA pamphlet, p.24)

You can, if you wish, make A.A. itself your 'higher power.' Here's a very large group who have solved their alcohol problem. In this respect they are certainly a power greater than you, who have not even come close to a solution. Surely you can have faith in them. Even this minimum of faith will be enough.

from Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (p.27)
Early Secular Expression of AA’s Steps

The first reported No-God interpretations of the Twelve Steps are celebrated by Bill W. in the chapter on “Unity” in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (p.81). In the 1940s AA’s message spreads throughout the world. Buddhists exercise their artistic liberty, granted by Tradition Four, by removing the word “God” from the Twelve Steps so that the program of recovery could work within the framework of their non-theistic worldview. In 1957, Bill W. writes …

*To some of us, the idea of substituting ‘good’ for ‘God’ in the Twelve Steps will seem like a watering down of A.A.’s message. But here we must remember that A.A.’s Steps are suggestions only. A belief in them as they stand is not at all a requirement for membership among us. This liberty has made A.A. available to thousands who never would have tried at all had we insisted on the Twelve Steps just as written.*

(Bill W, 1957)
Secular AA meetings - No God? No Problem

as listed on www.agnosticNYCaa.org

[Graph showing the increase in Secular AA meetings from 1997 to 2016]
OnLine Gamers Anonymous

21st century problem, 21st century language

1. We admit we have been powerless over gaming, and that our lives have become unmanageable. Principle - Honesty and Acceptance

2. Dare to believe that there lies within Us the Power to restore balance to our lives. Principle - Hope

3. Seek the help of someone qualified in counseling or someone that we trust from experience to be capable of helping us. Principle - Trust

4. Really take a good look at our lives, and make a searching and fearless inventory. Principle - Action and Courage

5. Fully admit to a trusted or qualified person or support group our understanding of the exact nature of our problems. Principle - Integrity

6. We become willing to let go of our addictive patterns of behavior and start over. Principle - Willingness

7. Actually ask for help to remove our shortcomings from any person or persons or group that we feel are qualified to provide that help. Principle - Humility

8. Make a list of persons that we have harmed, during our gaming, and become willing to make amends to them (including ourselves). Principle - Love

9. Make direct amends to such people wherever possible. Principle - Justice

10. Continue to take personal inventory, and when we are wrong, promptly admit it. Principle - Perseverance

11. Find and study something that we find amazing. Realize that there are ways of living that can bring us a deeper degree of personal fulfillment. Principle - Beauty

12. Having become aware of where we really ended up, how far down we went, and having discovered that there was a way out once we were willing to face our fears and come back to our real lives, we help others and share our story, and we help ourselves by practicing these principles in all of our affairs. Principle - Service

12 Principles of OnLine Gamers Anonymous for atheists & agnostics
Step 1: I admit that I am powerless over a personal addiction which is controlling my life.

Step 2: I have found a power that is greater than I am which can restore my sense of peace.

Step 3: I agree to turn my will over to the "Higher Power" as I define it.

Step 4: I will make a fearless and honest review of my life, my values, and my goals.

Step 5: I admit to a "Higher Power", to myself and to another human being, what was wrong with my choices.

Step 6: I am committed to having my addictive behavior removed by a commitment to a "Higher Power".

Step 7: I humbly ask my "Higher Power" to be with me as a constant reminder toward recovery from my addictive behavior.

Step 8: I will make a list of all the people whom I have hurt and will make peace with them.

Step 9: I will return to others what is owed them as long as it would not cause them harm.

Step 10: I will continue to evaluate my own actions and admit to myself what choices were wrong.

Step 11: I will continue to commit to my "Higher Power" through meditation and reflection, while following through with my recovery.

Step 12: As I continue my journey in recovery, I will share these steps with others while continuing to make them a part of my life.
It’s not just, “Is there, or isn’t there a personal higher power?”
It is not just a matter of finding an authentic way to articulate ourselves in recovery.

What is our relationship with our worldview? AND what style do we employ for existential questions?

There isn’t just a North/South pole; where do we fall on the West/East pole?
What is our reasoning style or personality?

Concrete vs. Abstract
Binary vs. Complex
WEST vs. EAST
Gnostic vs. A-gnostic
Reductionist vs. Holistic
Absolutist vs. Relativist

Reductionist vs. Holistic
Absolutist vs. Relativist

Concrete vs. Abstract
Binary vs. Complex
WEST vs. EAST
Gnostic vs. A-gnostic
Reductionist vs. Holistic
Absolutist vs. Relativist
Natural worldview

Concrete - Supernatural Worldview - Abstract

C-N - A-N - C-S - A-S
It’s A Great Time for 12 Step Literature...
Keep The Conversation Going…

Connect with Rebellion Dogs Publishing
RebellionDogsPublishing.com/bookstore
http://twitter.com/Rebellion_Dogs
https://www.facebook.com/RebellionDogs/

Joe Chisholm: 416-239-8737

World Directory Secular AA meetings:
http://www.agnosticaanyc.org/worldwide.html

International Agnostic/Atheist AA Conference
Austin November 11th – 13th
http://www.waaftiaac.org/

Join the mailing list to keep up to date on workshops,
blogs, podcasts and a 21st C. look at 12 Step life,
now with less dogma and more bite.

“Rebellion dogs our every step at first.”  -Bill W.
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A SENSIBLE SPIRITUALITY...

...has to do with the quality of our relationship to whatever or whomever is most important in our life.

Paul Bjorklund, Hazelden 1983
What makes sense?
Religious Preference? ✓

✓ Not!

✓ None of the Above

✓ I’m Done with all that.”
A SENSIBLE SPIRITUALITY

must look through these lenses…

physical

mental

emotional
Spirituality

is not a belief system or a way of thinking, but an experiential, compassionate approach to dealing with life on life’s terms.
Sensible Spirituality asks:

How do we share the experience we have had?

What language shall we use?
The Story of How
More Than
One Hundred Men
Have Recovered
From Alcoholism

The Story of How
Many Thousands
Of Men and Women
Have Recovered
From Alcoholism

Thank you, Flo R.
‘spiritual’

experience… remedy… plane… life…
tools… help… answer… principles…
approach… basis… matters… expressions…
terms… growth… structure… principles…
things… beliefs… practices… liberation…
release… awakening… progress rather than
perfection… step… disease… malady…
feature… discoveries… condition…
program of action… hilltop… status…
ground… way of life… activities…
deficiencies… program… understanding…
intoxication… growth… infancy…
justification… development… make-
believe… convictions… tangent…
mode of living…
CONSIDERATIONS:
CONSIDERATIONS:

- Religious
- Cultural
- Gender
- other

*What is ‘spiritual?’*
grief

‘conflicting feelings caused by the end of, or a change in, a familiar pattern of behavior.’

from *The Grief Recovery Handbook*, Friedman and James
...conflicting feelings...
some losses...

DEATH
- a child
- a (former) spouse
- a pet
Moving
Abortion
Starting school
Marriage
Graduation
Empty nest

Addiction
Major health changes
Incarceration
Retirement
Financial Changes-(positive or negative)
Shared Holidays
Legal problems
more losses...

Relationships:
- Friendship
- Marriage
- Childhood
- Family
- Intimacy
- Communication
- Finances
- Control

Security
- Freedom
- Self-esteem
- Dignity
- SELF
- Choice
- Dreams
- Ambitions

Trust
- Shame
- Health
- Job
- Abandonment
- Healthy sexuality
- Order
- HOPE
Emotional pain that is not transformed will be transmitted.

All emotional pain is grief.

Stephen Levine
Religion

from the Latin *religare* (to bind fast; moor), from Late Latin *ligare* (to bind; to tie; bind, tie, fasten) + Latin prefix *re-* (again)

**SPIRITUALITY**

*spiritual* - of or concerning the spirit (esp. in religious aspects) from O.Fr. *spirituel*, from Latin *spiritus, spiritualis*—breath, breathing, of the spirit
Emotional pain that is not transformed will be transmitted.
Authentic spirituality evokes awe, wonder, and a sense of mystery.
We found the Great Reality deep down within us.

12 Steps
The spiritual path leads down before it leads up.

descent
What we believe matters far less than what we DO.
paradox

a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement...

from the Greek parádoxon-

unbelievable;
literally, beyond belief
Spirituality is paradoxical
either/or
black/white
win/lose

Moving from Dualistic Thinking...
not Thesis
Antithesis
but Synthesis
both/and

...to Non-Dual Thinking
Step 2.

hope

restoration
RESTORATION

- a process we undergo

...undergone a profound alteration in (our) reaction to life.

Appendix II, p.569
What if ‘GOD’ is a process or experience we undergo?

...undergone a profound alteration in (our) reaction to life.

Appendix II, p.569
Restoration to Freedom = ‘SPIRITUAL’ EXPERIENCE
Elements of an authentic, sensible spirituality...

transformation
mystery
practice
freedom
restoration
paradox
descent
OUR OWN LIFE IS THE INSTRUMENT WITH WHICH WE EXPERIMENT WITH TRUTH.

THICH NHAT HANH
What language shall we use to tell this story?
Keep The Conversation Going…

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www.sensiblespirituality.org

CD Retreat Albums: www.inlight.com

Retreat Schedule: sensiblespirituality.org/retreats