

Big Book Close Study Questions 1-20

(November 2017, VSB Website Resources Sub-Committee: The readings are from the AA 'Big Book', 3rd edition and/or the 'Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions'. "D & R" mean discuss and reflect. Quotes from AA material have been updated to reflect alcohol, as written. OA only has permission to change the wording to "compulsive overeater" in OA Steps and OA Traditions. In one's private reading and writing, one can substitute the words "food" and "compulsive overeater" for "alcohol" and "alcoholism.")

Overeaters Anonymous / H.O.W. Honesty **O**pen-mindedness **W**illingness

Please take from these questions what you like and leave the rest.

1. Read the Preface on pages xi and xii.
 - A. Why do you think there exists a sentiment against any radical changes being made in the Big Book?
 - B. What is the main purpose of all the changes made in the Big Book?
 - C. What is the chief importance of the forty—four personal stories?

2. Read the “Foreword to First Edition” on pages xiii and xiv
 - A. What is the main purpose of the Big Book?
 - B. In the beginning, why did the original members wish to remain anonymous?
 - C. Did the original members see their AA work as their full-time jobs?
 - D. What did the writers mean when they said, “We are not an organization in the conventional sense of the word.” (Bottom of page xiii and top of page xiv)

3. Read the foreword to Second Edition” on pages xv to xxi.
 - A. These pages describe the phenomenal growth that occurred in the AA program during the years between 1939 end 1955. Why do you think this growth was so outstanding?
 - B. In this Foreword, it states that the stockbroker “... suddenly realized that in order to save himself, he must carry his message to another alcoholic.” (pg. xvi) What are your thoughts and feelings on this idea?

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- C. Dr. Silkworth explained to the stockbroker the “grave nature of alcoholism.” (pg. xvi) Does compulsive overeating share this grave nature? If so, what exactly is the grave nature of compulsive overeating?
 - D. AA’s “fearsome and exciting adolescent period” is described in the paragraph beginning at the bottom of page xviii. The concluding sentence states, “We had to unify our Fellowship or pass off the scene.” (pg. xix) What are your thoughts and feelings on this idea?
 - E. This Foreword concludes with the words, “...join us on the highroad to a new freedom.” (pg. xxi) What does this invitation mean to you?
4. Read the “Foreword to the Third Edition” on page xxii.
- A. In 1978, women made up about one-third of AA’s membership — a dramatic rise over the early days. In OA, men are in the minority. Why is this? Should action be taken to attract more men to this program? If so, what can be done?
 - B. This reading emphasizes how universal the basic principles of Program are. They appeal to young, old, and members of many, many nationalities. What is this special appeal?
 - C. The final sentence on page xxii states, “Each day, somewhere in the world, recovery begins when one alcoholic talks with another alcoholic, sharing experience, strength, and hope.” (pg. xxii) What are your thoughts and feelings on this idea?
5. Read the beginning of “The Doctor’s Opinion” on page xxiii until the second line of page xxv (“... what we have to offer.”)
- A. Why was it important to introduce Dr. Silkworth as “A well-known doctor, chief physician at a nationally prominent hospital specializing in alcoholism and drug addiction....” (pg. xxiii)?
 - B. Dr. Silkworth wrote that in late 1934 he attended to patient who was of the type doctors considered hopeless. Nevertheless, in the course of his third treatment, this patient acquired certain ideas concerning a possible means of recovery. Although these ideas are not spelled out here, what do you think they consist of?
 - C. On page xxiv it says that “the body of the alcoholic is quite as abnormal as his

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mind.” What does this mean? How does this quote relate to you?

D. In this section, the concept of an allergy to alcohol is introduced. How does this concept relate to food and you?

6. Read from the third line of page xxv (“The doctor writes:...”) to the end of the ninth line of page xxvii (“of his recovery.”).

A. On page xxv, Dr. Silkworth writes, “With our ultra— modern standards, our scientific approach-to everything. We are perhaps not well equipped to apply the powers of good that lie outside our synthetic knowledge.” (pg. xxv) What does this sentence mean to you? How does it relate to your own recovery?

B. In the first paragraph on page xxvi, the doctor describes the relationship between allergy and the phenomenon of craving. Do you find that certain foods —or quantities — touch off the phenomenon of craving in you? What do you suppose Dr. Silkworth would tell you regarding the avoidance of this phenomenon?

C. On the fourteenth line of page xxvi appears the sentence, “Frothy emotional appeal seldom suffices.” What does this mean? Why isn’t “frothy emotional appeal” enough? Reread the remainder of this paragraph. What does the doctor feel is required for a true recovery?

D. On lines three through nine on page xxvii, the doctor writes about stages of a spree (binge). Is this description accurate? Compare this description with your most memorable binge. The doctor feels that “an entire psychic change” (pg. xxvii) is required for recovery. What are your thoughts and feelings on this idea?

7. Read from the tenth line of page xxvii (“On the other hand—...” to the end of “The Doctor’s Opinion” on page xxx.

A. On page xxvii, Dr. William Duncan Silkworth proclaims “...that something more than human power is needed to produce the essential psychic change.” (pg. xxvii) What is the “something more”? Is a psychic change truly essential to recovery? What is your definition of a psychic change?

B. Dr. Silkworth does not agree with those who feel that-alcoholism is a matter of

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mental control. He feels that drinking to overcome a craving goes beyond an alcoholic's ability to control. Can you stop overeating using your will power or mental control? Have you ever tried to overcome powerful food cravings without help? How do you handle cravings today?

8. Read from page 1 ("Bill's Story") to the end of the twelfth line on page 3 ("...for that year.")
- A. After Bill sailed for Europe during the war, he said that he "... was very lonely and again turned to alcohol." (pg. 1) What do you think of his reaction to loneliness? Have you ever turned to food to ease your loneliness? If you have, what were the results?
 - B. On page 1, Bill quotes a little poem he discovered on a tombstone outside of Winchester Cathedral in England. He felt that it contained an "Ominous warning— one that he failed to heed." (pg. 1) What was this ominous warning? Have ominous warnings regarding your health, life span, job or anything else ever helped you gain or maintain abstinence? Whether you answered yes or no; elaborate on your response.
 - C. On the third line of page 2, Bill states, "I'd prove to the world I was important." What are your thoughts and feelings on this statement?
 - D. Beginning at the end of line seven of page 2, Bill writes, "Potential alcoholic that I was, I nearly failed my law course. At one of the finals I was too drunk to think or write." Did you ever continue eating compulsively despite serious consequences? Whether you answered yes or no; elaborate on your response.
 - E. In the second paragraph of page 2, Bill proclaims, "The inviting maelstrom of Wall Street had me in its grip." Webster's New World Dictionary defines "maelstrom" as "1. any large or violent whirlpool 2. a violently confused 'or agitated state of mind, emotion, affairs, etc.'" It has been said that compulsive people are captivated by and attracted to exciting and dangerous people, experiences emotions, substances, etc. What are your thoughts and feelings on this idea?
9. Read from the thirteenth line of page 3 ("For the next few years ..." to the end of the second line of page 5.

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- A. On the seventeenth line of page 3, Bill proclaims, "Drink was taking an important and exhilarating part in my life. " Did food ever become "important and exhilarating" to you? If so, describe what happened.
- B. On the twelfth line from the bottom of page 3, Bill begins to explain the progression of his drinking: "My drinking assumed more serious proportions, continuing all day and almost every night." Is the disease of compulsive overeating progressive? If it is, describe the progression of your disease. If this disease is not brought into remission, where does it inevitably lead?
- C. In describing the great collapse of the American economy in October of 1929, Bill describes how he and many others lost all their money. He writes about the many jumping from buildings to their deaths. Yet, he writes on the fifteenth line from the bottom of page 4, "As I drank, the old fierce determination to win came back." Was his attitude realistic in his condition? Did you ever take unrealistic action based on false courage provided by the intoxicating effect of compulsive over— eating? Elaborate on your answer.
10. Read from the third line of page 5 ("Liquor ceased to be...") to the thirteenth line from the bottom of page 6 ("...oblivion.)
- A. On page 5, Bill realizes that "Liquor ceased to be a luxury; it became a necessity." How does this quotation relate to compulsive overeating and you?
- B. Bill missed an opportunity to make a great deal of money in 1932 because he was on a drinking spree. As a result, he swore off liquor forever. Even his wife saw that he meant business. Yet, he writes (beginning on the seventh line from the bottom of page 5), "Shortly afterward I came home drunk. There had been no fight. Where had been my high resolve? I simply didn't know. It hadn't even come into my mind." How does this quotation relate to your history of compulsive overeating?
- C. Beginning on the eighth line of page 6, Bill describes what was happening to him after he would pick up the first drink again: "The remorse, horror and hopelessness of the next morning are unforgettable. The courage to do battle was not there. My brain raced uncontrollably and there was a terrible sense of impending calamity." Does this description seem familiar to you? If it does, relate it to your experience as a compulsive overeater.

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11. Read from the twelfth line from the bottom of page 6 (“The mind and the body...”) to the end of the twelfth line of page 8 (“... was my master.”).
- A. On the seventh line from the bottom of page 6, Bill describes how he was cursing himself for being a weakling. Did you ever curse yourself for your weakness when it came to overeating compulsively? Elaborate on your answer.
 - B. The last four lines on page 6 are devoted to a ‘description’ of a low point in Bill’s alcoholism. He shares with us, “Then came the night when the physical and mental torture was so hellish I feared I might burst through my window, sash and all.” How does this description relate to the desperation of your rock bottom?
 - C. On the fifteenth line of page 7, Bill shares a discovery about alcoholics, “... the will is amazingly weakened when it comes to combating liquor, though it often remains strong in other respects.” Is this description accurate for compulsive overeaters? How does it relate to you?
 - D. Beginning on the tenth line of page 8, Bill describes his utter desperation, “I had met my match. I had been overwhelmed. Alcohol was my master.” How does this quote relate to compulsive overeating and you?
12. Read from the thirteenth line of page 8 (“Trembling, I stepped...”) to the end of the second line of page 10 (“... I was hopeless.”).
- A. On page 8, Bill talks about the “...insidious insanity of that first drink...” (lines fourteen and fifteen). What is meant by the term insidious insanity? Describe the insidious insanity of your first bite.
 - B. Beginning on the fourteenth line from the bottom of page 8, Bill describes his “fourth dimension of existence.” What is this new dimension? How does it relate to you and your recovery?
 - C. Bill’s friend was apparently sober and well when he visited. At that moment, Bill wanted to learn the details of the recovery. On the first and second lines of page 10, he states, “Certainly I was interested. I had to be, for I was hopeless.” What was the basis for his friend’s recovery? Bill was interested because he was desperate, how can the desperation of compulsive overeating actually help you lead a fabulous life?

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13. Read from the beginning of the third line of page 10 (“He talked...”) to the end of the next to last line on page 11 (“... great tidings.”)
- A. On the sixteenth line from the bottom of page 10, Bill explains that atheists have “... blind faith in the strange proposition that this universe originated in a cipher and aimlessly rushes nowhere.” Explain this concept in your words. Is the proposition presented in the quote strange to you? Elaborate on your answer.
 - B. On the tenth line from the bottom of page 10, Bill asks a very provocative question: “How could there be so much of precise and immutable law, and no intelligence?” What do you think Bill was trying to tell us with this question? What is your answer to his question?
 - C. What is the point of the third paragraph on page 11? How does the idea presented here apply to your recovery?
 - D. On the fifth line from the bottom of page 11, Bill says that his “... ideas about miracles were drastically revised...” What do you think he meant by that statement? What is your definition of a miracle?
14. Read from the last line of page 12 (“...the sense...”) to the end of the thirteenth line of page 13 (...drink since.”).
- A. On the fourth and fifth lines of page 12, Bill states, “The word God still aroused a certain antipathy.” What is the meaning of this quote? How do you relate to this quote?
 - B. On the eighth and ninth lines from the bottom of page 12, Bill proclaims that “... God is concerned with us humans when we want Him enough.” Is this a fact? Elaborate on your answer, using your experience if it is appropriate.
 - C. In the paragraph beginning on the fifth line from the bottom of page 12, Bill recalls his experience at Winchester Cathedral when, for a moment, he “... needed and wanted God.” He felt at that time that God had come to him. Yet, Bill adds, “But soon the sense of His presence had been blotted out by worldly clamors, mostly those within myself.” (pgs. 12, 13) Do worldly clamors ever interfere with your contact with God? If so, what are your major worldly clamors? What can you do to reestablish your contact with God?

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- D. In the paragraph beginning on the sixth line of page 13, Bill tells what he did to begin his permanent sobriety. Reread this paragraph and, in your own words, explain what he did. How does Bill's action described in this paragraph relate to your recovery?
15. Read from the fourteenth line of page 13 ("My schoolmate...") to the end of the fifth line of page 15 (...just like that.)
- A. Reread the first paragraph of today's reflection. What actions did Bill take? Which of the Twelve Steps were born here? How do these actions relate to your compulsive overeating and to your recovery?
- B. Reread the next paragraph ("I was to test ...") What happened to Bill's common sense? How did Bill's thinking and entire way of life change? How do actions laid out in this paragraph relate to your day-to-day recovery?
- C. On the fourth line of page 14, Bill writes about the "...destruction of self-centeredness." What does he mean? Why is this such a crucial aspect of recovery from compulsive overeating?
- D. On the sixth line from the bottom of page 14, Bill relates, "... the absolute necessity of demonstrating these principles in all my affairs." What does he mean? Do you agree or disagree with him? Elaborate on your answer.
16. Read from the sixth line of page 15 ("My wife and I ...") to the end of page 16 ("... good will to men.")
- A. Bill tells us that during his first year and a half of sobriety, he was "...not too well at that time, and was plagued by waves of self-pity and resentment." (pg. 15) However, when everything else failed, one specific activity would keep him from returning to drinking. What was that activity? Have you ever tried it? If you have, what were the results?
- B. Acknowledging all of the pain and misery surrounding the disease of alcoholism, Bill writes, "There is, however, a vast amount of fun about it all." (pg. 16) Can you find fun in your recovery? If so, what is the fun? Can you create fun to help lighten the seriousness so many compulsive overeaters feel? Elaborate on your

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answer. By the way, the author of these questions hopes that you're having fun answering them.

- C. On the seventh line from the end of page 16, Bill proclaims, "Faith has to work twenty—four hours a day in and through us, or we perish. "Do you agree with this concept? Elaborate on your answer. How does this concept relate to you and your recovery?"
- D. In the closing paragraph of this chapter, Bill reassures us: "Most of us need look no further for Utopia. We have it with us right-here and now." What is meant by Utopia? Have you ever spent time, money and/or energy looking for Utopia? If you did, what were the results? Is Bill correct when he says that we have Utopia with us "right here and now" (pg. 16)? Elaborate on your answer.
- E. Bill's final sentence in his story tells us how a simple chat in a kitchen one day continues to multiply itself and continues to increase "peace on earth and good will to men." (pg. 16) What is Bill telling us here? How does this message relate to you and your recovery?

17. Read from the beginning of Chapter 2 on page 17 to the end of the nineteenth line of page 19 ("...freely given us?").

- A. The title of this chapter is extremely significant. What is the message and importance of the chapter's title? Why do you suppose the authors chose to include this chapter early in the Big Book and directly following "Bill's Story?"
- B. Beginning on the ninth line of page 17, the authors state that "... there exists among us a fellowship, a friendliness, and an understanding which is indescribably wonderful." Have you found the indescribably wonderful fellowship, friendliness and understanding in your own OA experience? Elaborate on your answer.
- C. Reread the first paragraph on page 18. The authors explain a very major distinction between most illnesses and alcoholism. What is this difference? Does the distinction also hold true for the disease of compulsive overeating? Elaborate on your answer.
- D. The last three lines of page 18 and the top line of page 19 outline the conditions that the authors found most effective in approaching other alcoholics. What are these conditions? Why do you suppose they are so effective?

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18. Read from the fourteenth line from the bottom of page 19 (“We have concluded...”) to the end of the fifteenth line of page 22 (“... should identify him roughly.”).
- A. On the first three lines of page 20, the authors tell us that “Our very lives, as ex-problem drinkers, depend upon our constant thoughts of others and how we may help meet their needs.” What are your thoughts and feelings on this concept? How does it relate to you and your recovery?
 - B. Reread the paragraph beginning on the fifteenth line of page 20 (“How many times ...”) How does this paragraph relate to your history of compulsive overeating?
 - C. Beginning on the eleventh line of page 21, the authors state that, at some stage of genuine alcoholic’s drinking career, “... he begins to lose all control of his liquor consumption, once he starts to drink.” How does this quote relate to your compulsive overeating?
 - D. In describing alcoholic behavior, the authors state, on the tenth line from the bottom of page 21, “He is often perfectly sensible and well-balanced concerning everything except liquor, but in that respect, he is incredibly dishonest and selfish.” How does this quote relate to your compulsive overeating?
19. Read from the sixteenth line of page 22 (“Why does he ...”) to the end of the third line of page 25 (“... but cannot.”).
- A. On the last three lines of page 22 and the first word on page 23, the authors state, “We are equally positive that once he (the alcoholic) takes any alcohol whatever into his system, something happens, both in the bodily and mental sense, which makes it virtually impossible for him to stop.” How does this quote relate to your compulsive overeating?
 - B. Beginning on the fifth line of page 23, the authors state that “... the main problem of the alcoholic centers in his mind, rather than in his body.” Do you agree with this quote? Elaborate on your answer.
 - C. Beginning at the top of page 24, the authors present a very critical point in the progression of the compulsive disorder: “At a certain point in the drinking of every alcoholic, he passes into a state where the most powerful desire to stop

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drinking is of absolutely no avail.” How does this quote relate to your compulsive overeating?

- D. Beginning on the ninth line of page 24 the authors state, “We are unable, at certain times, to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or month ago, we are without defense against the first drink.” Write out the circumstances, suffering and humiliation of your last or most recent big eating binge. Then write on the concept introduced in the last sentence of the quote, but relate it to the first bite.

20. Read from the fourth line of page 25 (“There is a solution.”) to the end of Chapter 2 (page 29).

- A. Beginning on the eleventh line of page 25, the authors tell us that “... there was nothing left for us but to pick up the simple kit of spiritual tools laid at our feet.” What does this quote mean to you? Have you picked up this simple kit? Elaborate on your answer.
- B. Beginning on the thirteenth line from the bottom of page 25, the authors proclaim, “The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our Creator has’ entered into our hearts and lives in a way which is indeed miraculous. He has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do by ourselves.” Do you share the absolute certainty that the authors possess? Elaborate on your answer.
- C. On the fifteenth line of page 27, the authors mention “vital spiritual experiences.” What is the meaning of this phrase? How does this phrase relate to your life?