

August 20, 2020

On Anarchy and Addiction Recovery

By Jennifer Rose, Anarchist/Addict



As an anarchist prisoner with a history of alcohol and drug addiction which started back in my youth, I first became familiar with 12-step addiction recovery programs, like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (N.A.), when I first began attending meetings off and on from the ages between 16 and 20. I was always struck by the basic principles and group structure of the AA/NA programs, which were based on non-coercion/non-hierarchy, anonymity, small self-organized local groups where anyone was welcome to come or go, to share or not.

One may be surprised at the similarity to anarchist organizing principles in the AA/NA 12-step recovery programs. Such as mutual aid, voluntary cooperation, and autonomous space. Although one obvious conflict of interest is the regular mention of "God as we understood him" in the AA/NA literature, seemingly both monothestic/religious and sexist at the

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same time!

Yes, the original founders of A.A. in 1935, Bill W. and Dr. Bob, were both professed Christians and deeply involved in the Oxford Group movement, which sought to live by the "Four Absolutes" — absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love. From these, the early A.A. group also had six precepts relayed by Ebby T., who was Bill's sponsor, which were:

- We admitted we were licked.
- We got honest with ourselves.
- We talked it over with another person.
- We made amends to those we had harmed.
- We tried to carry the message to others with no thought of reward.
- We prayed to whatever God we thought there was.

From these, the Twelve Steps emerged. ①

These early founders and participants often studied and discussed parts of The Bible that supported their recovery program. Dr. Bob called every newcomer to the first A.A. group to "say a prayer to God admitting you were powerless over alcohol and your life was unmanageable." Nearly 93 percent of those surveyed in the Akron group never relapsed. ①

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In order to remove any barriers to inclusion based on religious views, AA did not use explicitly Christian language in their literature. They referred to God mostly as "God as we understood Him" or as a "Power greater than ourselves." ①

This has allowed for people of every faith, political belief, or religious background to join AA/NA 12 step programs, even many atheists, agnostic, or non-religious people have been able to use the group or program, the greater good or society, or the Universe or Mother Nature as the necessary spiritual element/substitute for "God" or "Power".

I've been familiar with AA/NA since my teenage years, when I partied non-stop and ran "wild in the streets" as the Circle Jerks song goes. I've always been "out of control" when it came to drinking, smoking, doing hits of acid/LSD, and eventually smoking cocaine, slamming crystal meth and heroin. I've done it all! I've also found this addiction a problem which led to my initial criminal convictions of robbery, and to getting in fights.

While i don't believe in prohibition laws, or the "drug war", which has led to the mass incarceration of so many people, esp. the young, or Black and Brown people, who are unnecessarily criminalized simply for having this disease of addiction. i do believe that we need to address this problem of addiction, and "the system" is not going to do this! So, we need to resort to D.I.Y. (do-it-yourself) self-help groups, such as AA/NA 12-step recovery programs, which is compatible in my opinion even with those like me who are anarchists.

On July 28, 2020, i was denied parole for 5 years by the Board of Parole Hearings (BPH), part of the reason being my alcohol and drug addiction history as a "causative factor" in criminality. They recommended i do self-help, and stay clean.

Inmates in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) are overdosing on street drugs at a high rate. CDCR offers numerous options to treat substance use disorders. These options include the following:

- Medication Assisted Treatment,

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- Psychosocial Interventions.
- Nursing Led Groups.
- Peer Education Programs.

Voluntary treatment begins following a series of screenings and prepares the incarcerated person for the best chance of success when released. (2)

i was referred to the newly implemented Integrated Substance Use Disorder Treatment (ISUDT) by one of my healthcare providers.

"Addiction is a treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual's life experiences."

— American Society of Addiction Medicine.

It is estimated that approximately 70 percent of incarcerated people in CDCR prisons have a substance use disorder.

The rate of overdose-related deaths has been higher in California than other U.S.

prison systems, reaching a record of 30 per 100,000 patients in 2012. (3)

i began the treatment a few months ago with medication assisted treatment (MAT), a prescription of Suboxone, which

helps restore dopamine levels, which reduces the risk of relapse and cravings. However, the ISUDT is based on the Whole Person Care (WPC) model, which combines medical, mental health and social services to improve outcomes. Cognitive Behavioral Interventions (CBI) in the form of one-on-one, or in groups, talk therapy, such as in classes similar to those for anger management and criminal thinking, is a mandatory part of MAT which is not being provided due to the cancellation of self-help/rehabilitation programs at this and most other prisons during the COVID-19 pandemic emergency protocols.

So, at present, all I have is my being a self-motivated anarchist/antifa prisoner, reading my NA Basic Text book (I've worked steps 1-3 on my own, but need a sponsor to make further progress!), and pursuing all available college and self-help correspondence courses. Additionally, I'm seeking compatible spiritual practices as an anarchist (e.g. Yoga, Nature, Taoism, Native), I also recently joined the Unitarian Universalist prison ministry, which also offers correspondence courses, an addictions ministry, and

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penpals conducive to my addiction recovery program. Unitarian Universalist Association includes people of ALL faiths, and even atheists/agnostics; and ministers who are themselves in recovery from addictions who try to help others. (4)

In conclusion, anarchist practice and principles is not incompatible with addiction recovery programs. NA is in 132 countries and we speak 77 languages. The Basic Text itself is translated into 24 languages. Addiction is a disease that does not discriminate, and neither does the program of NA. No matter what conflicts are unfolding in the world at large... our common welfare should come first... any addict can stop using drugs... and find a new way to live. (5) Just for today, you never have to use again! (5) I welcome anyone interested in quitting drugs and alcohol to join me! And if there's someone out there who may feel qualified to become a sponsor (preferably a woman or trans person), I need your help! Please, write to me directly! Stay clean & stay safe! (A)



Reference Notes

1. "An Early History of Life Recovery"; by Steve A. and Dave S.; The Life Recovery Bible.
2. "Preventing Overdoses and Getting Care for Addiction" (brochure). California Correctional Health Care Services (CCHCS).
3. "Struggling with Addiction" (CCHCS).
4. "Addiction and Your Faith Community" (brochure). Unitarian Universalist Association
5. "Preface to the Sixth Edition". Narcotics Anonymous (Basic Text).



For addicts seeking recovery, medication assisted treatment (MAT), is not recommended by the NA recovery program. Substitute drugs are discouraged, and abstinence is the only method of maintaining sobriety or staying clean, by the NA program, and literature. For those who may have a problem with the spiritual aspect of AA/NA, I would recommend consulting a Unitarian Universalist minister or reading/studying some UU literature to seek out whatever concept or idea that works best for you. This is key to your success.

in the NA program, as one cannot work the 12-steps without some type of understanding of a "Power greater than ourselves", whether you are atheist or agnostic, there must be a sense of "higher power", even if its just a "concept" or "principles", or the power of Nature/Life.

i'm still in the process of working this out myself, so don't feel like you're alone or it's not possible.



Resources for Recovery

Narcotics Anonymous
 World Service Office
 PO BOX 9999
 Van Nuys, CA 91409, USA
 (818) 773-9999
www.na.org

Unitarian Universalist Association - Addictions Ministry
 24 Farnsworth St.
 Boston, MA 02210-1409
www.uua.org

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www.uuaddictionsministry.org

Alcoholics Anonymous
www.aa.org

Rational Recovery
www.rational.org