

The Four Absolutes - Excerpt

taken from Dr. Bob's Last Major Talk, Detroit, December 1948

"The four absolutes, as we called them, were the only yardsticks we had in the early days, before the Steps. I think the absolutes still hold good and can be extremely helpful. I have found at times that a question arises, and I want to do the right thing, but the answer is not obvious. Almost always, if I measure my decision carefully by the yardsticks of absolute honesty, absolute unselfishness, absolute purity, and absolute love, and it checks up pretty well with those four, then my answer can't be very far out of the way. If, however, I do that and I'm still not too satisfied with the answer, I usually consult with some friend whose judgment, in this particular case, would be very much better than mine. But usually, the absolutes can help you to reach your own personal decision without bothering your friends.

"Suppose we have trouble taking the First Step; we can't get quite honest enough to admit that John Barleycorn really has bested us. The lack of absolute purity is involved here - purity of ideas, purity of motives. Absolute unselfishness includes the kind of service I have been taking about - not the dime or two bits to the bum, but actually giving of yourself.

"As you well know, absolute love incorporates all else. It's very difficult to have absolute love. I don't think any of us will ever get it, but that doesn't mean we can't try to get it. It was extremely difficult for me to love my fellowman. I didn't dislike him, but I didn't love him, either. Unless there was some special reason for caring, I was just indifferent to him. I would be willing to give him a little bit-it didn't require much effort. I never would injure him at all. But love him? For a long time, I just couldn't do it.

"I think I overcame this problem to some extent when I was forced to do it, because I had to either love this fellow or attempt to be helpful to him, or I would probably get drunk again. Well, you could say that was just a manifestation of selfishness, and you'd be quite correct. I was selfish to the extent of not wanting Bob hurt; so, to keep from getting Bob hurt, I would go through the motions of trying to be helpful to the other fellow. Debate it any way you want to, but the fact remains that the average individual can never acquire absolute love. I suspect there are a few people who do; I think maybe I know some who come pretty close to it. But I could count them on the fingers of one hand. I don't say that in any disparaging manner; I have some wonderful friends. But I'm talking about the final aspects of absolute love, particularly as it applies to A.A."