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## **Speaking Notes: Addiction and Spirituality: What's Jung Got to Do With It?**

### **Opening:**

Addiction & Spirituality—two themes that touch all of our lives. Addiction touches each of us—through family, friends or community. Spirituality matters as we make sense of our lives, our aging, our addictions. But Carl Jung? Yes, he is part of the story, and it turns out that a central piece of the story began right here in Albany N.Y.

Here in Albany we know the Thacher Family: three Mayors, important businesses, And a beautiful park. This was an important political family. And in an important political family everyone is scrutinized. No one should embarrass the family or bring trouble to the family name. But in Albany's Thacher family there was trouble. And trouble's name was Edwin—nickname Ebby.

Ebby was “that” kid. Born in 1896 He was always in trouble, at home, with neighbors and at school—the only member of his family expelled from the Albany Academy—and as he got to be a teen that trouble was fueled by alcohol. When important political seasons came around the Thacher family had to make sure that Ebby was out of town—so he was sent to Manchester, Vermont where the family had a summer place.

Ebby had friends there. It was a community of summer homes for prominent wealthy families. Two of Ebby's best friends there were Rowland Hazzard who came from Rhode Island's most prominent family. Their wealth from the textile industry, and a local “townie” kid William Wilson—or Bill from nearby

East Dorset, Vermont. Friends since childhood: Rowland, Ebby and Bill. All three trouble makers and all bad drinkers.

Always in trouble like his friend Ebby, Rowland was in trouble with his family too. As a kid and a teen his family could always bail him out. But after college when he was expected to join the family business, (kind of like Ebby) and it just didn't work. He was drunk every day.

So, and because this was a very wealthy family, they sent Rowland to every doctor and sanitarium in the United States --but to no avail. After each treatment he'd be dry for a few weeks or a few months but then he'd be "off the wagon" and back in trouble. And his Albany friend Ebby was no help always luring Rowland back for more booze and more escapades.

Finally, as a last attempt before committing him permanently to an institution, the Hazard family sent Rowland to Switzerland for treatment with the renowned doctor, Carl Jung.

Rowland spent months with Jung where he received extensive psychoanalysis. His physical health improved, and it seemed like his mind had also. Dr. Jung declared Rowland cured and he began his trip home. But he got no further than London before he drank again and remained drunk for weeks.

Broken and ashamed, Rowland returned to Geneva to Jung who declared him "a hopeless alcoholic." Deflated and depressed, Rowland pushed Jung asking, "Is there nothing I can do?" and, Jung famously said, "I have only ever seen a rare few of your type who were cured because they had a **spiritual awakening**".

Rowland said to Jung, "But I have that; I go to church, I'm an elder."

Jung then explained that he was not talking about following a religion but that the rare cure required a "a spiritual disruption at depth."

It was that interaction that enabled and touched the earliest part of AA— or more accurately, pre-AA. Rowland left Geneva again seeking out a spiritual experience and he found it in The Oxford Group in Europe. The Oxford Group was an Evangelical Christian Group. Rowland joined up and had his spiritual awakening. He made a commitment to the group and to helping others.

He returned to his family home in Vermont on fire with his new beliefs and he began to proselytize, carrying this message of Christianity AND freedom from alcoholism to his old friend, Ebby Thacher. Rowland found Ebby in jail and --note the privilege here—made a deal with the judge to supervise Ebby for two months, promising the judge that if he couldn't get Ebby sobered up, they could throw away the key.

Thacher took Ebby through the six steps of The Oxford Group, and with Ebby's awakening, he too began to proselytize. So, who could he help? What bigger drunk did he know than his good friend, Bill Wilson. And Ebby carried the message to Bill on one cold night at a kitchen table in Brooklyn. And the rest is AA History.

We know that those six Oxford Group steps became 12 steps, the program became AA and today there are millions of people who claim their lives were saved by that program and by all the “grandchildren”: Alanon, NA, OA, DA, NarAnon, there pretty much is a 12 step program for everyone. ☺)There is even a 12 step program for people who talk too much: It's called On and On An On ☺)))

But here is the crucial takeaway: What Jung said was that the center of making such a deep change was that one needed to have: Spiritual disruption at depth. That “spiritual disruption” –we say “spiritual awakening” –literally shakes/disrupts the psyche so that integration or individuation can occur.

So, it's not about the drinking. How can that be?

Jung believed that when we shut down our spiritual instincts we develop neuroses, and anxiety. And then we try to fix that.

So, the 12 steps are NOT designed to stop drinking. Think about that. They are not the cure for alcoholism, but they create and support a spiritual awakening. Out of that awakening we may stop using addictive substances and behaviors. This is also why the 12 steps can and do work for food, and gambling, and other addictions. It's the process and not the substance.

James Hollis—Jungian psychoanalyst and an expert on aging—writes that “We live in a culture that breeds addictions because we allow our deepest self to be severed from the mythic ground.” (think Joseph Campbell here) His point is that when we are dislocated from our deepest self we experience anxiety—and anxiety is a continuum that runs from annoying discomfort to a serious disorder.

So, let's pay a debt to the past: Here is what Carl Jung gave to us in AA:  
Surrender: breaking down that protective ego.

Projection (One finger pointed, three point back at you)

There are many important concepts from Jung we learn in recovery:

But here is my favorite Jung quote:

“Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.” **Repeat that.**

An Example: A woman keeps dating men who are like her father. So she decides to quit dating to focus on her work. She gets a new job and guess who her new boss behaves like?

Years later—after AA had been around for a long time, Bill Wilson corresponded with Jung, asking him about that early patient—Rowland Hazard

and Jung replied: “His craving for alcohol was the equivalent of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language as the union with God.”

It’s important to note here that for many people AA and the 12 steps may be the best known route to recovery—but they are NOT the only way. There are other treatments and approaches that are also effective.

So, you might be thinking, “Oh, that is so great for those people with alcohol or drug addictions—Good for them.” But, not so quick. Here is the good news and the bad news: We are All addicts. (pause) But Maybe you say, “I don’t even drink and I never use drugs, I don’t even like Advil.”

Well, Anne Wilson Schaef –scholar and author-- writes about what she calls the “process addictions” TV, Internet, social media, shopping, nature shows (yes those super soothing nature shows, and smoking, and eating certain foods in certain ways.

And addictions –also a continuum from watching TV to fatal opioid addiction—are anxiety management techniques used to lower our level of psychic distress “whether we are conscious of that distress or not.” Hollis says, “in no one’s life are these anxiety-reduction patterns absent.” Yeah, that’s the good news and the bad news: we all have anxiety and we are all addicts. 😊

What Schaef and Hollis both say is that if we could find some relief from our anxieties we wouldn’t use them? And if they didn’t work or stopped working wouldn’t we move on to something else that gave us some relief –a different substance or different behavior –dangerous or benign.

So, again you might say, “Sure I have that bowl of ice cream every night”, or “I do that Sudoku every single morning”, but is that really an addiction? Is it really an anxiety relieving mechanism?

How do you know if you are addicted to it?

There is only one way to find out: Stop doing it for 21 days! How do you feel even thinking about that? Is that a tablespoon of anxiety?

Hence, we all need some spirituality or spiritual practices.

So we go back to that early history of AA—we know that AA actually grew out of The Oxford Group. The Oxford Group didn’t plan to cure alcoholism, but they noticed that “drunks” (the word of the time) who were converted by the Oxford Groups stopped drinking and stayed stopped. And now that we know what Jung meant by “spiritual disruption at depth” we can see why that might have happened.

But also this: In the first several years of AA there was no literature, no publications. We know that today AA members read what is called “The Big Book”—kind of a manual and a collection of success stories and a bunch of other books—but the early AA members didn’t have any of that. So, what did they read?

They read the Bible (not a huge surprise) but they also read “The Varieties of Religious Experience” by William James—they didn’t skim it they studied it. And they read several books by Carl Jung—so it’s really no surprise that we recognize Jungian concepts in the later books written by Bill Wilson and AA members.

This also tells us something about our declining literacy levels 😊) How many folks do you know who regularly read texts like William James and Jung? 😊

But something else to think about these many years later: It may be that the Twelve Step Program is actually a Wisdom Tradition—has become a wisdom tradition. In theory a wisdom tradition is a set of practices, ideas and a community of people that provides a framework for the development of one's inner self, creation of a spiritual life and the realization of enlightenment—which has stood the test of time. The Twelve step program meets those tests. And it has a lineage, a community of practice, transmission and moves toward humility and service.

Episcopal priest and author, Rev. Keith Miller, called twelve step recovery “The greatest spiritual movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”

### **Here's another way to look at AA and the Twelve Steps: The Three Graves**

Progress on the spiritual journey of recovery can be measured by looking at three graves that mark the resting places of individuals who are important to the history of Alcoholics Anonymous.

In the first five years of recovery the focus is on staying sober. In these years an AA member learns how to stop drinking. The focus is on the self, on “me” and “my recovery”. It is a time when we learn that “it's a selfish program”, and that “My sobriety is the most important thing in my life.” Many members, especially in the Northeast have an opportunity sometime in those first five years to visit Dorset, Vermont and to see the Wilson House—Bill Wilson's home and to visit his nearby grave. It is a kind of pilgrimage for many AA's to see Bill's grave and to say thanks.

In the small East Dorset cemetery Bill's grave is easy to spot: it is covered with flowers, teddy bears, notes, AA chips and other tokens of gratitude and appreciation.

It is fitting that in these years that a new AA member is focused on themselves. But as the spiritual journey of recovery continues a recovering person continues to grow and moves on from not drinking to learning skills in human relations. These are the years when an AA learns how to be in a relationship, how to get along at work, how to make and be a friend, how to own their part in a relationship.

In these years people remarry or they may repair or improve relationships with their children and make amends which bring family relationships back. In these years one can return to East Dorset and visit another important grave. This grave belongs to Lois Wilson, Bill's wife who was the founder of Al-anon the 12-step program for family members and friends of Alcoholics. AA members who travel beyond not drinking realize in *these* years that they have to learn how to "live and let live" and how to "detach with love." This is often harder than not taking a drink.

Lois's grave reminds us that this is another level on the spiraling journey of recovery. In years 5 to ten it's NOT about me, now it's about other people. The



“Lois years” are the time for amends—not just apologies, and for learning to be a human being in relationships and in the world.

If one chooses to continue on the recovery path there is another significant crossroads that comes after 15 or 20 years. While spiritual work has been going on all along, this next stage is about something deeper. It’s about surrender. And surrender— is a part of every faith tradition as far back as the story of Krishna and Arjuna.

A symbol for these years is yet another grave, and this grave is not in Vermont but rather here in Albany. Ebby Thatcher is buried in the Albany Rural Cemetery and his grave marks this part of the journey.

Ebby Thatcher was the man who carried the message of recovery to Bill Wilson’s Brooklyn kitchen table. While AA history credits Bill and Dr. Bob with the first moment of one drunk helping another that is not wholly true. In fact when Ebby helped Bill to stop drinking that was the occasion of one drunk helping another to recovery.

So, why isn’t Ebby credited as a founder of AA? Simply, because Ebby did not remain consistently sober. Ebby moved in and out of sobriety—though always in recovery --for the next 30 years. His imperfection was too glaring to be held up as a model in the new organization.

However, when we visit Ebby's grave here in Albany we find not teddy bears or flowers, but weeds and a few AA chips buried in the dirt. The first time I went to Ebby's grave it wasn't easy to find, and I had to dig a little and push away the weeds and there were some chips. Significantly those chips were marked 20 and 30 and 35 years. I believe it is because people with that amount of time on this journey appreciate the imperfection that is required to live a long time on any spiritual path.

While Bill Wilson's years are about "me", and the Lois years are about other people, the "Ebby years" are about a Higher Power or something in this universe that is Bigger than us. Our Bigger could be Beauty, Science, Nature etc.

Ebby Thacher was a broken, imperfect man who was well used by his Higher Power.

But without Ebby there would be no AA, and no spiritual path to recovery for others to follow. So at this later stage of recovery we have to ask ourselves if we are willing to be used by God for Good.

**SLOW**--Here again we find Carl Jung who said, "We don't solve our problems, we grow bigger than our problems." And spirituality is the fuel and ground of that change.

