

VIRTUAL MEETINGS

This writing is 100% MY OPINION and not that of any AA Group, Virtual Group, or AA as a whole.

The question posed to me was, what is the difference between a “Virtual” A.A. Group and just a “Virtual” meeting? In my opinion, it is the same as an A.A. Group versus “just” a meeting. If the “Virtual” meeting is following the Traditions, follows the Preamble, has Service opportunities, passes the basket, rotates officers, and has business meetings, it’s an AA “Virtual” GROUP; if not, it’s “just” a meeting. My fear is what’s going to happen when we can meet face to face again—will we come back together for our Common Welfare?

From portions of the AA Pamphlet P-16 The A.A. Group... Where it all begins: How a group functions How to get started

It reads in part:

Alcoholics Anonymous® is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. • The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. • A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. • Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

The Group... Where A.A.’s Service Structure Begins What Is an A.A. Group? As the long form of Tradition Three clearly states, “Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.” Further clarification of an A.A. group may be found in the Twelve Concepts for World Service, Concept Twelve, Warranty Six: • no penalties to be inflicted for nonconformity to A.A. principles; • no fees or

dues to be levied — voluntary contributions only; • no member to be expelled from A.A. — membership always to be the choice of the individual; • each A.A. group to conduct its internal affairs as it wishes — it being merely requested to abstain from acts that might injure A.A. as a whole; and finally • that any group of alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group provided that, as a group, they have no other purpose or affiliation. Some A.A.s come together as specialized A.A. groups — for men, women, young people, doctors, gays and others. If the members are all alcoholics, and if they open the door to all alcoholics who seek help, regardless of profession, gender or other distinction, and meet all the other aspects defining an A.A. group, they may call themselves an A.A. group.

Is There a Difference Between a Meeting and a Group? Most A.A. members meet in A.A. groups as defined by the long form of our Third Tradition (see page 44). However, some A.A. members hold A.A. meetings that differ from the common understanding of a group. These members simply gather at a set time and place for a meeting, perhaps for convenience or other special situations. The main difference between meetings and groups is that A.A. groups generally continue to exist outside the prescribed meeting hours, ready to provide Twelfth Step help when needed. A.A. groups are encouraged to get listed with G.S.O., as well as with their local offices: area, district, intergroup or central office. A.A. meetings can be listed in local meeting lists.

THE THIRD TRADITION (The Long Form) Our A.A. experience has taught us that:

3. Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.

Enough of the Literature...

I believe MY Higher Power waited for the year 2020 to create a pandemic. I’ve been in AA since before the invention of the personal cell phone and the home answering machine. If the pandemic had



happened back then, would I have been able to stay sober? Would others have had a hard time staying sober? MY Higher Power knew that options like Go to Meeting, Skype, ZOOM, and so on were available to us this year, even if most of us in AA did not, including me. I’m the king of Contempt Prior to Investigation; I would not have been caught at an online or over the phone AA meeting prior to March 15, 2020. Though I never tried one or knew of anyone who did attend, I was sure that it was not as good as a “REAL” AA meeting, where we meet/met face to face.

How many of us would have considered attending an online AA meeting six months ago? Or even last month. I found this on the internet:

“The first AA meetings online used Bulletin Boards and were around 1986. Email groups started forming in the early nineties and the development of the worldwide internet rapidly fueled the growth and variety of groups. The first online AA group, Lamp-lighters, was formed in 1990, and has met by email continuously since then. Now there are hundreds of AA groups with thousands of members, connected together through this Online Intergroup. Using various mechanisms — video conferencing, phone conferencing, message boards, email listservs, and chatrooms — the AA community is constantly connecting and finding new, creative ways to communicate the experience, strength and hope of recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous.”

I believe that AA “Virtual Groups” are a Group if they have formats, scheduled regular meetings, are open to all AA members, and are stepping up to provide SERVICE to others. BUT, I PERSONALLY THINK that people may become TOO LAZY to go back to meetings once the world is safe again. Why get dressed when I can stay in my PJ’s, why drive 20

(Continued)

minutes (usually it's 5 minutes) to a meeting when I can watch Magnum PI (is it still on TV?) right up to the time the meeting starts. What happens to, come early and stay late, when the Chairperson unlocks the "Virtual" meeting at 30 seconds before the scheduled time? Will we be at the door to help the newcomer? Will the newcomer have the same chance I had when I came through the door "Shaking and Baking" and could not hold a 1/2 full cup of coffee? I was guided to a seat, given a coffee (1/3 filled), a handshake, a schedule, and asked to "come back tomorrow night." Will this happen in a "Virtual Meeting"?

From the AA General Service website, in part: "...By attending digital meetings, group members can focus on A.A.'s primary purpose: to carry its message of recovery to the alcoholic who still suffers"... "A.A. in the digital age has certainly taken on a new meaning in these challenging times, reminding its members and those searching for help that A.A. is not just a "place," but exists in the hearts, minds and help offered."

The General Services Office is OK with "Virtual" meetings and I should be too (right)?

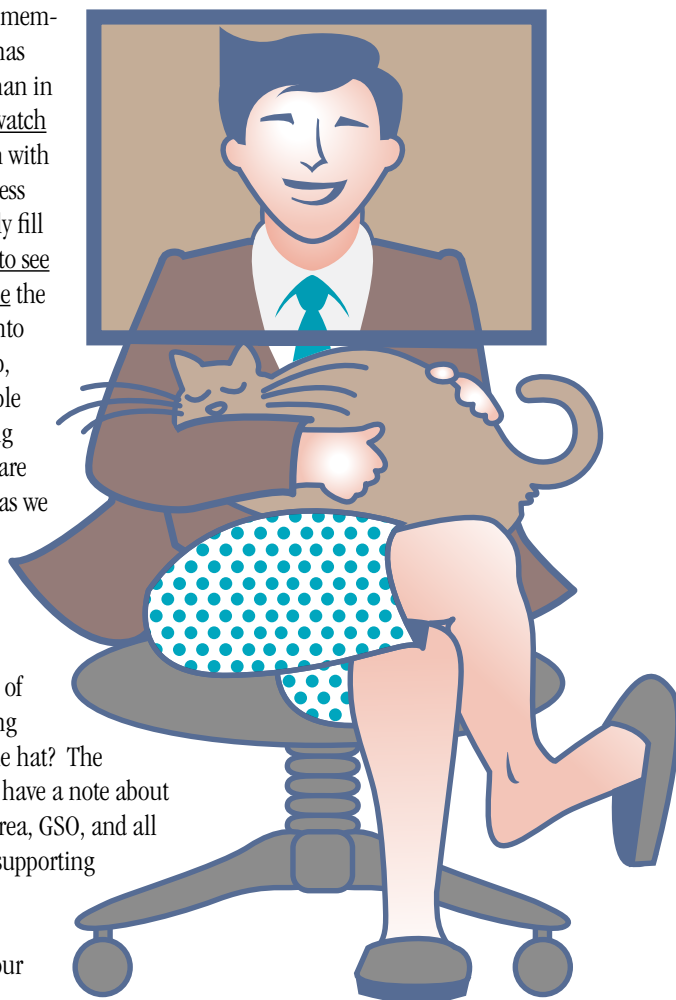
From AA's Twelve and Twelve: (underlines are my addition) "Practically every A.A. member declares that no satisfaction has been deeper and no joy greater than in a Twelfth Step job well done. To watch the eyes of men and women open with wonder as they move from darkness into light, to see their lives quickly fill with new purpose and meaning, to see whole families reassembled, to see the alcoholic outcast received back into his community in full citizenship, and above all to watch these people awoken to the presence of a loving God in their lives—these things are the substance of what we receive as we carry A.A.'s message to the next alcoholic." Will I (we) be able to "SEE" this in a "Virtual" meeting?

Now let's talk about the "Passing of the Hat"--are those of us attending this "Virtual" meeting passing the hat? The meetings I attend "Virtually," all have a note about support needed for our District, Area, GSO, and all of the other entities. Are we still supporting them? Are YOU? It is VERY easy to ignore the mention of, or the screen indicating where to send our

contributions, the use of an old fashion paper check or the QR codes used for PayPal, Zelle, or other type of modern technology we make payments with, that some Groups use. This allows one to scan the QR code right then and there (during the "Virtual" meeting) in order to make a donation to the local Group sponsoring the "Virtual" meeting. Have I asked who is paying the fee for the use of the online service so that we can have a "Virtual" meeting? (Someone is.) The AA entities still have bills to pay just like those of us at home. Are WE supporting AA? I know I am. If you are unemployed, underemployed, or have other financial issues, please ignore this, unless you are still showing up at meetings with a pack of cigarettes or a store bought coffee.

I think I may have strayed off topic a little. Is a VIRTUAL meeting as good as a "REAL" in person AA meeting? I think not, for ME. Will I attend them in the future? Probably, it's nice not to have to fully dress to go to a meeting. Are we sticking our heads out of the storm cellar and telling the world everything is all right, even though it's not? I hope to see you in the seat next to me at a "NON Virtual" meeting in the VERY near future.

— John H.



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WORTH REPEATING

The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays.

There is a difference between holding your own and taking over.

All pain comes from separation.

The intellectual process is always going to undermine this program.

The self-inflicted weight of the world was removed.

Believe those who are seeking the truth.

Doubt those who find it.

Too blessed to be stressed.

We speak in bumper stickers.

My fingerprints were all over my life. That was the problem.

God please take me off my hands.

Intimacy: Into me see.