



Happy Anniversary

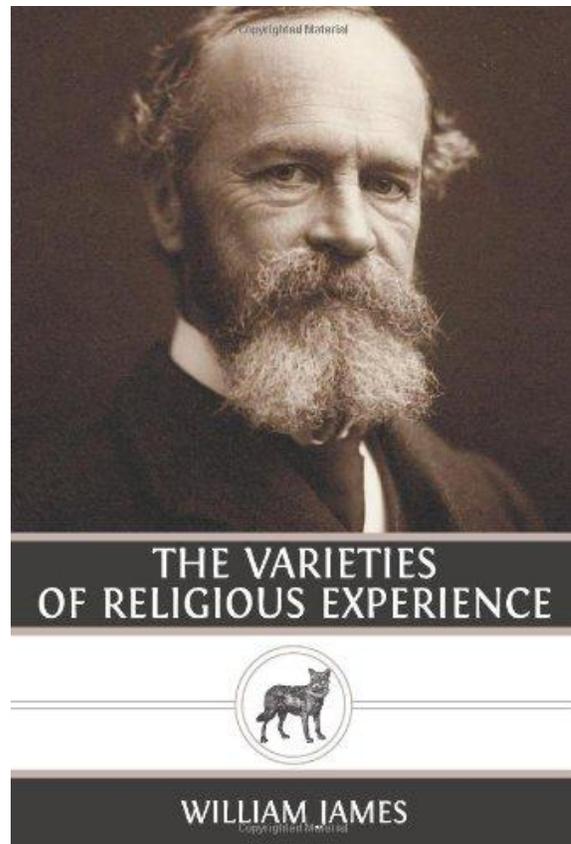
Beyond Belief is a Year Old this week and today we celebrate the positive evolution of our recovery community.

Happy Anniversary everyone!

This week is the anniversary of the first printing of *Beyond Belief: Agnostic Musings for 12 Step Life*. There are 1206 people who own a paperback or eBook copy of *Beyond Belief*. I don't personally know 1,200 people so someone's talking it up and that someone is you. In fact some of you have become remarkable champions of the first daily reflection book for nonbelievers, freethinkers and everyone.

This, I want to propose, is way more significant than simply beating the odds of a first-time print-on-demand project, over 90% of which never move 200 units. I think it signifies a paradigm shift. Sorry if you have heard that tired phrase in way too many boardrooms and trade-shows. Let me explain how this modest result is such an accomplishment and why you—not us—are responsible for it all. The first year buyers and readers are what market commentators call the early adaptors or visionaries. Let's look at how, together, we have already shifted the recovery movement in a new direction—a better direction.

We know Bill Wilson and the other founders were fans of the writings of William James. Pre-Big Book AA leaned on James's *The Varieties of Spiritual Experiences*. When Wilson was penning an article for the *The Grapevine* (July 1946) called, "The Individual In Relation to A.A. as a Group," Bill W writes those infamous words that we have since celebrated: "So long as there is the slightest interest in sobriety, the most unmoral, the most anti-social, the most critical alcoholic may gather about him a few kindred spirits and announce to us that a new Alcoholics Anonymous Group has been formed. Anti-God, anti-medicine, anti-our Recovery



Program, even anti-each other—these rampant individuals are still an AA Group if they think so!”

Of course, unbelievers and nonconformists in recovery are moved by this unabashed assurance that unorthodoxy is as AA as “one day at a time” or “don’t drink and go to meetings.” But just as significant as the individualism that Wilson was celebrating was (as reflected in the title, “The Individual In Relation to A.A. as a Group”) the cue to the society to encourage and champion these odd-balls.

Wilson, along with the more savvy old-timers, counted on their fledgling society to muster the courage to change; any society that was going to survive, would need to adapt as foreshadowed in early writing—“We know but a little,” “More will be revealed,” “Never fear needed change.”¹

And what does change for the better look like? Well, it is un-pretty, cloaked in unpopularity and clamoring with controversy. Born of discontent, the survival of this anti-social, anti-whatever faction depends on being embraced by a flexible, trusting and tolerant society. Could AA do that? Does that sound crazy or impossible? It may well be that the genesis of Wilson’s scheme came from his readings of Williams James.

In a lecture called, “Great Men, Great Thoughts, and the Environment” delivered before the Harvard Natural History Society (published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, October, 1880) William James says this: “Thus social evolution is a resultant of the interaction of two wholly distinct factors, - the individual, deriving his peculiar gifts from the play of physiological and infra-social forces, but bearing all the power of initiative and originations in his hands; and, second, the social environment, with its power of adopting or rejecting both him and his gifts.” What resonates with where we stand today in 12 & 12 recovery is how James drives this idea home, “Both factors are essential to change. **The community stagnates without the impulse of the individual. The impulse dies away without the sympathy of the community.**”

James says that our society will stagnate without *the impulse of the individual*. While it starts with one person saying, “This isn’t good enough, we can do better,” without the *sympathy of the community* it would all be for not.

Let’s say a single member feels malnourished by the lack of secular support literature in Twelve Step rooms. He writes a book into an untested market after pitching the idea and being rejected by both Hazelden and HCI Books. So what; so far we have nothing but one restless malcontent. To breathe evolution into the chaos, the impulse of the individual (or the whole writing/editing team) had to freefall into the sympathetic arms and hearts of a recovery community.

What we celebrate on the anniversary of the first printing of *Beyond Belief: Agnostic Musings for 12 Step Life* is not the *impulse of an individual*, but *the sympathy of our community*. One person does not a 12 Step meeting make and a new book being read by a couple dozen recovering members does not constitute the evolution of a society that James pointed towards. But a thousand people just might be the start of evolution. I think this is very, very exciting and very, very hopeful.

We hear and read a lot of discontent about society—our recovery society—dogmatically bogging down into the reification of our principles and infighting among clashing personalities. Okay, true enough, you read a lot of this type of bitching from this very site and these clashing personalities. But while we seemingly bitch and finger-point, maybe we are becoming or evolving into what Ghandi called the change we “want to see in the world.”

You see, we are the Fellowship; it isn’t a rented office in Manhattan or a General Service Conference each April. Our society’s heart beats in every group through the words and deeds of every member.

| Paperbacks | Sales |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| Direct from Rebellion Dogs Publishing | 324 |
| Bookstores | 188 |
| Amazon | 405 |
| Conferences/Conventions | 52 |
| eBooks | |
| Direct from Rebellion Dogs Publishing | 18 |
| Amazon (Kindle) | 164 |
| Kobo, Sony, iTunes, B&N | 33 |
| Libraries | 22 |
| Total | 1,206 |

Beyond Belief: Agnostic Musings for 12 Step Life is one year old now.

This is a time to share our joy and express our gratitude to all supporters. After one year in the market, 1,206 people own a copy of *Beyond Belief*. It isn’t the end of day-jobs for anyone at Rebellion Dogs but it is something to be thankful for. Coming from me (Joe C), I don’t actually know over a thousand people so I have all of you to thank for talking up this book, your encouragement and the many who are the champions of this book.

For you curious cats, here is how it broke down: Paperbacks were preferred five to one, although several people want and have the book in both formats. Over two dozen booksellers, libraries and treatment centers have seen fit to bring this book to the attention of their visitors/clients.

In any sales cycle there are the innovators who take the leap of faith before others have heard about the new offering, followed by the early adapters, the early majority, late majority and finally the laggards who buy something once it’s in Walmart. We are now at the early adapter stage.



In technology, enthusiasts are in first because nerds love new technology for technologies sake. The love is not conditional on what the ultimate impact of the new technology is. The second phase is the visionaries; they are ahead of the crowd and buy in at top dollar to be there first. They see progress, momentum and potential and pay a premium to say, “I was there at the start.” The pragmatists join in when the price is more reasonable, the conservative are there once “everyone is doing it” and finally the skeptics give up and give it a try.

Everyone who owns a book now is an innovator, buying into an un-tested product, aimed at an unmet need. It is you that I want to thank and celebrate in this blog post.

Lessons from the music business

Derek Sivers uses the term first follower(s) to describe the significance of innovators and early adapters. First followers turn a lone nut into a leader. In the way James recognized the needed combination of an individual impulse and community sympathy, Sivers recognizes that the leader(s) is over-glorified because it is really the first follower(s) who showed courage and start a movement. Wayne’s World wouldn’t be a world without Garth. Bill Wilson wasn’t a fellowship; Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith, together, were the start of the AA fellowship.

Derek Sivers knows of what he speaks. He was a competent musician and composer but we don't know him for these gifts. His claim to fame is founding CD Baby. Derek started helping to market other artists' music and this became a multi-million dollar company. CD Baby was one of the early non-pornography internet sales success stories that Amazon, eBay, and many others have emulated.



http://www.ted.com/talks/derek_sivers_how_to_start_a_movement.html

Our early adapting booksellers are the same heroes that Derek Sivers champions in a TED Talk and three minute video.

The first retail stores that stocked *Beyond Belief* are some of what Sivers calls “first followers.” The most encouraging news I hear is that where *Beyond Belief* is on bookshelves, about half of the sales were from people who came into the store to buy something else. The book has a “Hey, what a good idea!” effect. Some of these stores are addiction/recovery specialty stores and others are more general booksellers that happen to have a well-stocked Self-Help section.

The big picture of the daily reflection market

While I don't know what the potential market for an agnostic daily reflection book really is or will be, we are off to a good start. Sure, if I wanted a best-seller I would have written another book for the rest of the marketplace that embraces and never tires of theistic daily devotionals. The total marketplace for these books is in the area of 750,000 unit sales per year. People who read Conference annual reports tell me AA sells over 150,000 *Daily Reflections* paperbacks each year. On Amazon, several books of this type outsell AA's offering. Hazelden's *Each Day a New Beginning* (for Women) and the 1954 *Twenty-four Hours A Day* outsell *Daily Reflections*. Outselling all of the daily reflection books, for codependents, is Melody Beattie's *Language of Letting Go*. That book was written in 1990 and is still in the top 35,000 of the over one million books sold on Amazon.com, today.

There are daily devotionals for men, young people, newcomers, Al-Anon members and recovering drug addicts. All of them assume a creator-God worldview. I think all the ones I mentioned, outsold *Beyond Belief* in the last 12 months. That's Okay; sure I have a

competitive streak. I'd like to kick-ass, but that's up to the public, not me. If someone told me that, "1,200 and only 1,200 want and need this book; it will cost you more than you will make—will you write a daily reflection book that includes people who don't believe in God?" I would have said yes.

If 5% of the 750,000 people who buy daily devotionals would prefer an agnostic version, that can translate to 35,000 *Beyond Belief* owners a year. We can do that.

The Varieties of Beyond Belief Experiences

According to Paul Simon there are 50 ways to leave your lover. How many ways are there to use *Beyond Belief*? Some read it alone, some with a friend and some in a 12 Step group. Some people read a page each day. Some flip through and read pages at random. Some go to the index and look up musings on specific topics like relapse, Step Six, open-mindedness or work-life. In this way some group chairs pick a topical musing to read as a kick off to group discussion the way *Living Clean*, *As Bill Sees It* or *Twenty-four Hours A Day* are used. How many of you noticed that the 10th of each month is the Tradition that corresponds with that month? March 10th is Tradition Three, for instance. Okay, so that's me being nerdy. Ernie Kurt talked about reading with a pad and a pen to one side. Is anyone mucking their *Beyond Belief*? That would be kinda' cultish. Others would like another index at the back so quote sources. That way, if you wanted to look up what dates Bill W or Janis Joplin or Carl Jung are quoted, you could. Maybe in a future version we can make room for that.

We Are All "the change we want to see in the world"

Today's celebration isn't about one book. This last year other agnostic/atheist books have been released into the addiction/recovery community and older ones are getting a second life. Roger C who authored *The Little Book* also edits AAagnostica.org which is a hub of evolution. Look at all the Yahoo, Facebook and Google sites devoted to agnostic 12 Step community. Slightly older books, *The 12 Step Buddhist*, *The Skeptics Guide to the 12 Steps* and *Waiting: A Nonbelievers Higher Power*, are all catalysts of our evolution. Rebellion Dogs Publishing has changed our own bookstore page to celebrate many great books that represent our changing community. No music fan owns just one record. No book-based society thrives on just one book—no matter what the thumpers might tell you. We aim to champion great books the way you have helped us spread the word about *Beyond Belief*. Play it forward, they say.

Everyone of you who has started or helped to start a group—you are visionaries, too. Two thirds of the agnostic AA groups listed on the NYC agnostic AA worldwide group directory didn't exist before the year 2000. The change we demand and anguish over not being a reality is already happening.

So often we cry out about either the antiquated *Big Book* or the change-resistance of so many members but we miss the view of the forest because of the tree we are focused on.

Who is the fellowship if it is not us? What is going on is cause for celebration. Sure, be a watchdog, identify wrongs and defend scapegoats. But let us not be so preoccupied with fault-finding that we miss the glorious truth that what we want has already started. Sure, it's the one year key-tag, cake or medallion for *Beyond Belief* and everyone in recovery and every tool in the recovery tool-kit is a sign of hope. It takes a community to raise a child, help an addict recovery or move towards the society we want our children to feel included and welcome in.

It's happening.

ⁱ "Let us never fear needed change. Certainly we have to discriminate between changes for the worse and changes for the better. But once a need becomes clearly apparent in an individual, in a group, or in AA as a whole, it has long since been found out that we cannot stand still and look the other way. The essence of all growth is a willingness to change for the better and then an unremitting willingness to shoulder whatever responsibility this entails." Bill W. A.A. Grapevine "July 1965