

What We Were Like

Emmet Fox and Alcoholics Anonymous

One of the very early recovering alcoholics who worked with co-founder Bill W. was a man named Al, whose mother was secretary to Emmet Fox, a popular lecturer on New Thought philosophy. When the early groups were meeting in New York, members would frequently adjourn after a meeting and go to Steinway Hall to listen to Fox's lecture. To this day there are AA groups that distribute Fox's pamphlets along with Conference-approved AA literature.

An account set forth in "Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers" tells of the influence of Emmet Fox and his classic work, "Sermon on the Mount." An AA old-timer recollected: "The first thing he (Dr. Bob) did was to get Emmet Fox's 'Sermon on the Mount'. Once when I was working on a woman in Cleveland, I called and asked him what to do for someone who is going into DT's. He told me to give her the medication and he said, 'When she comes out of it and she decides she wants to be a different woman, get her Drummond's 'The Greatest Thing in the World.' Tell her to read it through every day for thirty days and she'll be a different woman.' Those were the three main books at the time; that and 'The Upper Room' and 'The Sermon on the Mount.'"

Perhaps the fundamental contribution of Emmet Fox to Alcoholics Anonymous was the simplicity and power of "The Sermon on the Mount." This book sets forth the basic principles of the New Thought philosophy that "God is the only power, and that evil is insubstantial; that we form our own destiny by our thoughts and our beliefs; that conditions do not matter when we pray; that time and space and matter are human illusions; that there is a solution to every problem; that man is the child of God, and God is perfect good."

Central to New Thought philosophy was the perspective which saw that love and personal forgiveness were the keys to fundamental transformation: "Love is by far the most important thing of all. It is the Golden Gate of Paradise. Pray for the understanding of love, and meditate upon it daily. It casts out fear. It is the fulfilling of the Law. It covers a multitude of sins. Love is absolutely invincible.""

Fox went on to say that forgiveness was an integral part of the Pathway of Love, "which is open to everyone in all circumstances, and upon which you may step at any moment - at this moment if you like - requires no formal introduction, has no conditions whatever. It calls for no expensive laboratory in which to work, because your own daily life, and your ordinary daily surroundings are your laboratory. It needs no reference library, no professional training, no external apparatus of any kind. All it does need is that you should begin steadfastly to expel from your mentality every thought of personal condemnation (you must condemn a wrong action, but not the actor), of resentment for old injuries, and of everything which is contrary to the law of Love. You must not allow yourself to hate either person, or group, or nation, or anything whatever.

"You must build-up by faithful daily exercise the true Love-consciousness, and then all the rest of spiritual development will follow upon that. Love will heal you. Love will illumine you."

One of the cornerstones of Fox's philosophy was to live but one day at a time, to be responsible for one's own thoughts and to clear up resentments, just as AA was to teach that "resentments are our number one cause of slips." For Fox, one of the most important rules for growth was to live in the present: "Live in today, and do not allow yourself to live in the past under any pretense. Living the past means thinking about the past, rehearsing past events, especially if you do this with feeling...train

yourself to be a man or woman who lives one day at a time. You'll be surprised how rapidly conditions will change for the better when you approach this ideal."

Emmet Fox emphasized the idea that thoughts are real things, and that one cannot have one kind of mind and another kind of life. According to Fox, if we want to change our lives, then we must change our thoughts first. Many of his simply stated profundities have contributed to an AA philosophy that has transformed the lives of literally two million recovering alcoholics.

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