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Season 05. Episode 09

## Podcast Title: The AA Cult?

Hi, this is Bruno J. and welcome to Episode 9 of season 5 of my podcast Busting Addiction and its Myths. This episode is dedicated to answering the question: Is AA a cult?

This podcast is sponsored by SafeHouse Rehab Thailand, the premiere drug and alcohol rehab dedicated to enhancing the art and science of recovery.

First, a plug for my sponsor who has given me the opportunity to help the families and loved ones of alcoholics and addicts better understand the nature of the disease and what they can and shouldn't do about it. We say in our podcast and blog that our primary goal is to help you make an informed decision at this critical stage of your life.

SafeHouse Rehab Thailand represents the *modern approach to recovery*, founded on Safety, which is why we absolutely outperform traditional rehabs when it comes to intake/detox, technology and aftercare.

To learn more about our modern, advanced approach to recovery, we invite you to visit [www.safehousererehab.com](http://www.safehousererehab.com) or send your questions and comments to [info@safehousererehab.com](mailto:info@safehousererehab.com)

If your loved one is an active or recovering addict or alcoholic, you are likely struggling with answers to your many questions as to how to help get your loved clean and sober.

You might have even heard that AA is just a cult and to stay away because they will enslave and then eat your children. Or that if you (the addict) "join" AA, then you will become isolated from your family, that the cult will extort all your family's money. Or that you will never be heard from again. And that there is a charismatic leader who commands total obedience. He will tell you whom you should marry. Secrecy rules.

Let's first blow up the idea of secrecy. There is an important distinction to be made between secrecy and privacy.

When we talk about closed AA meetings, these are meetings that are intended to protect the privacy of individuals, some of whom would prefer that their anonymity be protected. Sadly, there is stigma associated with alcoholism and addiction to this very day.

If you really want to know what goes on in a closed or private AA meeting, just go to one - they are listed in [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org) by city - and say: "Hi, I'm John and I have a drinking problem", and no one will ask for a membership card, because there isn't one. Nor do you need to know the secret handshake or code word, because there is none of that either. When it comes your turn to share, just say "I'll pass".

And that's it. Stay and listen. I guarantee you will learn some worthwhile things. You will likely learn about the 12 steps. At the end, the group might hug, or not, or say a prayer, or not. Most AA meetings last an hour to 90 minutes. And you can leave any time you want. They might close the door behind you for privacy, but it's never ever locked.

And most meetings are held where? In church (and temple) basements of every conceivable faith...so much for the idea of a godless cult.

There are "open" AA meetings where the public is invited to hear personal stories of recovery, and where AA members disclose their membership. It's up to the individual, in the service of carrying the message of recovery to families looking for insight on the disorder.

In AA, we have service people that go out into the community to bring the message of hope. As an example, AA has local committees for Corrections, Public Information, Cooperation with the Professional Community, and so on. These are all voluntary and can be a real challenge.

I was involved with a partner in bringing addiction education to the Milwaukee School District that has thousands of students. Pushing the agenda through the various layers of bureaucracy was a lesson in and of itself. It was left to the principals in the end and we did go into several high schools with a combined AA/Al Anon message.

Al Anon family groups operate like AA. Privacy first, then the rest is very much the same drill as AA. Al Anon, which I hold in the highest esteem, was founded to help family members of alcoholics who are also affected by addictive disease.

Al Anon is a safe refuge for family members who share their experience, strength and hope with each other so that they, too, can recover from the damage that alcoholism and drug addiction have

inflicted on the family. An unbidden, unwelcome, insidious invader. It is said that: "Even though you may suffer, you do not have to suffer alone".

Let's dispense with a few more myths about AA.

A cult has a charismatic leader who demands total obedience. AA is a 501(C) 3 not for profit corporation with a board of directors and a chairperson elected each year. The Chair is described essentially as someone who is the main communicator on the issues of the day as they relate to alcoholism. He or she have little power, except to persuade and lead by honest example.

A cult has you isolate from society. AA encourages its members to get out there and be of service to the community, and to help other alcoholics achieve and maintain their sobriety. Now that we are no longer a menace to it.

A cult has you turn over all your assets to their "cause". If you wanted to, you could go to a thousand AA meetings and not pay a dime. We pass the basket once during a meeting to help pay the rent to a church or a club, and the typical contribution is one or two dollars, even in the year 2020. This the best ROI for your money you could possibly imagine.

What about the principle of anonymity? The way it is typically understood (and stated) is that "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities".

We are also reminded that "We should always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films". That tradition was written over 50 years ago now, but the point about "personal anonymity" was to not have the baby thrown out with the bathwater if a celebrity first celebrated sobriety via AA and then relapsed.

In practice, we see many celebs flaunt this tradition today because they have to stay famous, right?

For many of us, we believe that we have no right to "out" anyone else, but that we can choose to disclose our own AA affiliation under the right circumstances. An example might be with a family friend who might be confiding in us about an addiction in their circle.

Let's shine some more light on this secret organisation, shall we?

AA is a fellowship, not an "organisation", which means that we are a bunch of former anarchists who have banded together to save ourselves and society from our hopeless condition of mind and body.

So, we are loosely organised, and anyone can join if they have a desire to stop drinking, and you are in. All we ask is that you observe some simple suggestions, like use the book Alcoholics Anonymous and the 12 steps as your guide to recovery and try to observe some simple traditions of unity and anonymity. Three or more makes an AA group.

Is AA a religious organisation or a religion? Do I have to believe in God, or in your version of God?

This is so simple, even I didn't get it, thinking there must be a secret of some sort involved. Even though the word God shows up, the idea of a higher power is the operative concept. The word God is typically followed by "as you understood him". An early breakthrough in AA took place when a friend of the co-founder Bill Wilson suggested, in response to Bill's resistance to the concept of a higher power: "Why don't you choose your own conception of God"?

Brilliant. We choose to believe as we wish. We can choose the group as our higher power, or Buddha.

Logical that there are powers greater than our "selves". How about the laws of physics? Did we invent ourselves, or did our parents have something to do with it?

AA will tell you that it is a spiritual program, period. We hold to the belief that a power greater than ourselves, however it is defined by us as individuals, has restored us to a sanity that we could never have achieved on our own.

It leans on the power of the group to effect the psychic change required to achieve and maintain sobriety. That is why it is called a "we" program. There are approximately 2 million AA members worldwide, speaking at least 70 languages.

So, have we busted the myth that AA is a cult?

Here is the evidence that smashes the myth to pieces. Unlike a cult, Alcoholics Anonymous, i.e., AA:

1. Is about privacy, not secrecy, in order to protect the identity of individuals who would prefer to remain anonymous. Because there is still the stigma associated with addictive disorder.
2. Encourages you to go out and make a difference in the world now that you are no longer a menace to society.
3. Does not ask for money; it is the best ROI one could imagine, as one could spend nothing, yet still attend every AA meeting free of charge - if one is so inclined.
4. Has no charismatic leader or guru. AA is a not-for-profit corporation led by a board of directors who elect a chairperson to speak for the fellowship on matters affecting alcoholics and alcoholism. More can be learned, and literature can be ordered at [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)
5. Members believe as they wish. The power of "we" is a mighty force that keeps us together. Carrying the message of hope will keep the fellowship alive and will alleviate needless suffering.