

## What does the Approved Literature say about Marriage?

(Written 1999 just prior General Delegates Assembly meeting in July 199 that [approved the Cleveland Clarification.](#))

The main argument for a liberal interpretation of the SA sobriety definition is that nowhere in SA approved literature are the terms "marriage" and "spouse" defined. Without explicit definitions of these terms, the claim is that members may decide for themselves what marriage and spouse mean in SA. This argument is extended to assert that same sex unions can thus be considered marriage. A detailed review of the literature, however, demonstrates just the opposite.

### Alcoholics Anonymous Literature

SA is built on the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. Indeed, AA literature is SA approved literature. A review of the main AA texts, "Alcoholics Anonymous" and the "Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions" reveals a literature replete with definitive statements about marriage.

Various passages in the Big Book and the Twelve and Twelve make it clear that marriage refers to a union of a man and a woman:

"Nearly every sound human being experiences , at some time in life, a compelling desire to find a mate of the opposite sex with whom the fullest possible union can be made - spiritual, mental, emotional and physical. This mighty urge is the root of great human accomplishments, a creative energy that deeply influences our lives. God fashioned us that way. So our question will be this: How, by ignorance, compulsion, and self-will , do we misuse this gift for our own destruction?" (12 and 12, page 117)

*"When alcoholism strikes, very unnatural situations may develop which work against marriage partnership and compatible union. If the man is affected, the wife must become the head of the house, often the breadwinner. As matters get worse, the husband becomes a sick and irresponsible child.... the wife is forced to become the mother of an erring boy..." (12 and 12, page 118)*

*"AA has many single alcoholics who wish to marry .....when boy meets girl.." (12 and 12, p119)*

By the repeated use of such terminology as "..the man .... the wife." and .."the husband ...the wife" the literature is making a definitive statement about the presence in "marriage partnership" of only one man, and only one woman. Nowhere in these publications is it stated or implied that marriage refers to anything else.

### Sexaholics Anonymous Literature

In SA literature the term spouse was used as an inclusive term to encompass male and female members, not partners outside a state registered marriage or of the same sex. If the understanding of the words spouse and marriage has changed with time, this is not reflected in the latest literature. "Recovery Continues", published in 1990, contains the article "What about Romance and Passion in Marriage after Sobriety" which clarifies the words "spouse" and "marriage" along traditional male/female lines.

*"your dilemma of being unable to have "healthy, normal" sexual relations with your spouse" (page 28)*

*"all this has a deep effect up the emotional , spiritual, and sexual relations between husband and wife" (page 29)*

*"this state of affairs between husband and wife..." (page 29)*

*"yes, SA husbands and wives do have problems with sex" (page 31)*

*". discover our mate, and grow together into the image and likeness of true manhood and womanhood, .." (page 34)*

By using the term "spouse" the article is being inclusive of male and female members. Then, on four occasions, the article makes specific and exclusive reference to marriage as being between husband and wife, or "together .. manhood and womanhood." The change from inclusive to exclusive language is quite stark. How is it possible to "discover our mate, and grow together into the image and likeness of true manhood and woman hood" without the presence of both a man and a woman?

Prior to publication as approved literature in 1990, editing suggestions were sought from the fellowship. At this time, the issue of whether marriage should include same-sex couples was a hot topic in SA. Some meetings openly promoted the idea that such arrangements should be considered marriage and thus sober in SA. The explicit reference to marriage as "husband and wife" is a significant change from the White Book where no such reference is made.

This article could easily have been made inclusive of same-sex arrangements by the simple use of the terms "partners" or "spouses" instead of "husband and wife". Similarly the mere omission of the phrase "into the image and likeness of true manhood and womanhood" would have opened the concept of marriage in SA to include same-sex couples. However, no such changes were made by the fellowship.

### **The Literature and the concept of "Marriage as you understand marriage".**

A member who endorses and promotes the liberal interpretation of the sobriety definition wrote

*"...leave it up to each person to decide what that (spouse and marriage) means just as we leave the decision on what God means to each person"*

Early drafts of the AA 12 Steps did not contain the words "as you understand God" and it was only following vigorous debate and the insistence of one section of the fellowship that those words were included when the AA Big Book was published in 1939.(see AA Comes of Age) All SA literature was submitted for review to the fellowship prior to publishing. Over the 20 year history of SA the words "marriage as you understand marriage" have never even been proposed for inclusion in the literature. Now we are told this concept must be assumed to be part of SA with none of the rigorous process that AA went through to formally make a similar idea part of that program.

Interestingly the member quoted above, when speaking on SA tapes, quotes Bill W clarifying why "defects of character" was used in Step 6 but "shortcomings" in Step 7. (Bill W clarifies that the two words are meant as synonyms: he learnt in school not to use the same word in two adjoining sentences) Bill W is given the right to clarify the meaning of words in AA literature but the SA founder, author of most SA literature, is denied the same right. Any clarifications or opinions he expresses are negated as "just one member's opinion". This is despite the fact that since SA was founded he has continuously and consistently clarified the intent, purpose and underlying principles of the terms marriage and spouse.

In the White Book the sobriety definition is described as a "firm and clear bottom line" (page 2). It also talks of sobriety as not being "a relative matter that we define for ourselves" (pages 1 & 191). The concept of "marriage as you understand marriage" is neither "firm" nor "clear". Rather it is a very "relative matter we define for ourselves" and one that can be defined and redefined at will. It would seem to refer to some sort of arrangement between any number of people with any combination of genders. (In the literature there is no explicit definition of marriage as only 2 people, only use of the term "the spouse" clearly indicating that marriage in SA is monogamous.) For the term marriage to be a "firm and clear bottom line" and not "a relative matter that we define for ourselves" it must have had a very specific meaning at the time the literature was written. The context of the times, the origins and history of SA, and our approved literature gives us much guidance as to what that meaning is.

## **Summary**

The terms marriage and spouse have been used in SA literature since 1981. The definition of these terms originated from the foundation of AA literature and the cultural context of the times. This meant "marriage" was a "firm and clear bottom line" referring to the state-registered union between a man and a woman. From the beginning of SA, the intent and meaning of the terms marriage and spouse have been clearly enunciated by the SA founder.

Those proposing a liberal interpretation of marriage and spouse insist however on a strictly legalistic reading of SA approved literature, looking only at the presence or absence of particular words, without reference to the cultural context of words or intent of the writer. Even by that measure, marriage in SA approved literature is clearly and exclusively male/female.

The use of the term " the spouse " in SA literature makes it clear that marriage in SA is monogamous. Similarly with the use of language such as "the man....the wife", "the husband....the wife" and "together ... manhood and womanhood" the SA/AA literature is explicit, exclusive and definitive in its description of marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman.

## **Conclusion**

For same-sex relationships to be considered marriage in SA would require a new piece of approved literature to re-interpret and supersede existing references to marriage. Until then, Marriage in SA remains, as it always has been, and as our approved literature clearly states, "the man..the wife", "the husband .. the wife", "boy meets girl", "husband and wife" where we "discover our mate, and grow together into the image and likeness of true manhood and womanhood"

**Written by Paul H of Canberra, Australia. and Simon T of Newcastle, Australia. June 12 1999**