5 Live and Let Live

The old saying "Live and Let live" seems so commonplace, it is easy to overlook its value. Of course, one reason it has been said over and over for years is that it has proved beneficial in so many ways.

We AA's make some special uses of it to help us not drink. It particularly helps us cope with people who get on our nerves.

Reviewing once more a little of our drinking histories, many of us can see how very, very often our drinking problem appeared to be related somehow to other people. Experimenting with beer or wine in our teen-age years seemed natural, since so many others were doing it, and we wanted their approval. Then came weddings and bar mitzvahs and christenings and holidays and football games and cocktail parties and business lunches...and the list can go on and on. In all of these circumstances, we drank at least partly because everybody else was drinking and seemed to expect us to.

Those of us who began to drink alone, or to sneak a drink now and then, often did so to keep some other person or people from knowing how much, or how often, we drank. We rarely liked to hear anybody else talk about our drinking. If they did, we frequently told them "reasons" for our drinking, as if we wanted to ward off criticism or complaints.

Some of us found ourselves argumentative or even belligerent toward other people after drinking. Yet others of us felt we really got along better with people after a drink or two—whether it was a social evening, a tense sale or job interview, or even making love.

Our drinking caused many of us to choose our friends according to how much they drank. We even changed friends when we felt we had "outgrown" their drinking styles. We preferred "real drinkers" to people who just took one or two. And we tried to avoid teetotalers.

Many of us were guilty and angry about the way our family reacted to our drinking. Some of us lost jobs because a boss or a colleague at work objected to

our drinking. We wished people would mind their own business and leave us alone!

Often, we felt angry and fearful even toward people who had not criticized us. Our guilt made us extra sensitive to those around us, and we nursed grudges. Sometimes, we changed bars, changed jobs, or moved to new neighborhoods just to get away from certain persons.

So a great number of people besides ourselves were in one way or another involved in our drinking, to some degree.

When we first stopped drinking, it was a great relief to find that the people we met in AA—recovered alcoholics—seemed to be quite different. They reacted to us, not with criticism and suspicion, but with understanding and concern.

However, it is perfectly natural that we still encounter some people who get on our nerves, both within AA and outside it. We may find that our non-AA friends, co-workers, or family members still treat us as if we were drinking. (It may take them a little while to believe that we have *really* stopped. After all, they may have seen us stop many times in the past, only to start again.)

To begin to put the concept of "Live and Let Live" into practice, we must face this fact: There *are* people in A.A, and everywhere else, who sometimes say things we disagree with, or do things we don't like. Learning to live with differences is essential to our comfort. It is exactly in those cases that we have found it extremely helpful to say to ourselves, "Oh, well, 'Live and Let Live.'"

In fact, in A.A. much emphasis is placed on learning how to tolerate other people's behavior. However offensive or distasteful it may seem to us, it is certainly *not* worth drinking about. Our own recovery is too important.
Alcoholism can and does kill, we recall.

We have learned it pays to make a very special effort to try to understand other people, especially anyone who rubs us the wrong way. For our recovery, it is more important to understand than to be understood. This is not very difficult if we bear in mind that the other A.A. members, too, are trying to understand, just as we are.

For that matter, we'll meet some people in AA or elsewhere who won't be exactly crazy about us, either. So all of us try to respect the rights of others to act as they choose (or must). We can then expect them to give us the same courtesy. In A.A., they generally do.

Usually, people who like each other—in a neighborhood, a company, a club, or A.A.—gravitate toward each other. When we spend time with people we like, we are less annoyed by those we don't particularly care for.

As time goes on, we find we are not afraid simply to walk away from people who irritate us, instead of meekly letting them get under our skin, or instead of trying to straighten them out just so they will suit us better.

None of us can remember anyone's forcing us to drink alcohol. No one ever tied us down and poured booze down our gullets. Just as no one *physically* compelled us to drink, now we try to make sure no one will *mentally* "drive us to drink," either.

It is very easy to use other people's actions as an alibi for drinking. We used to be experts at it But in sobriety, we have learned a new technique: We never let ourselves get so resentful toward someone else that we allow that person to control our lives—especially to the extent of causing us to drink. We have found we have no desire to let any other person run, or ruin, our lives.

An ancient sage said that none of us should criticize another until we have walked a mile in the other person's boots. This wise advice can give us greater compassion for our fellow human beings. And putting it into practice makes us feel much better than being hung-over.

"Let live"—yes. But some of us find just as much value in the first part of the slogan: "Live"!

When we have worked out ways to enjoy *our own* living fully, then we are content to let other people live any way they want If our own lives are interesting and productive, we really have no impulse or desire to find fault with others or worry about the way they act.

Can you think right this minute of someone who really bothers you?

If you can, try something. Postpone thinking about him or her and whatever it is about the person that riles you. You can boil inside about it later if you want to. But for right now, why not put it off while you read the next paragraph?

Live! Be concerned with your own living. In our opinion, staying sober opens up the way to life and happiness. It is worth sacrificing many a grudge or argument... Okay, so you didn't manage to keep your mind completely off that other person. Let's see whether the suggestion coming next will help.