

Through geographical coincidence (a Higher Power's way of remaining anonymous?), a mutual friend and researcher introduced me to Audrey Kishline, founder of Moderation Management. At the time, Audrey was preparing to publish the first MM handbook, and our friend was concerned over an anti-AA tone that her publisher of the time was encouraging. In the course of several conversations, I came to realize that Audrey's (and others') arguments were not with A.A., whose early history they were in many ways replicating. In the hope of preventing such confusion, Audrey asked that I write a Foreword to the second edition of the MM handbook, which was published in 1996.

AN INTRODUCTION TO MODERATION MANAGEMENT

M.M. is neither pro-alcohol nor anti-A.A. Because some media, lusting for controversy, have presented Moderation Management as somehow opposed or an alternative to Alcoholics Anonymous, this is an important first truth. As two different programs for two different problems, M.M. and A.A. complement each other. Both its lay, non-professional nature and its insights, pragmatism, and compassion reveal Moderation Management to be closer to the original impetus behind Alcoholics Anonymous than are many professionalized programs that present themselves as “A.A.”- or “Twelve-Step”- inspired.

But don't rely on my word, or even on the evidence offered below. Let's begin with a story. Some months ago, Audrey Kishline and I were two of fourteen presenters at a Symposium on Alcohol and Drug Abuse Studies at East Carolina University. Having taught at the North Carolina Summer School for Alcohol Studies for some years, I knew several of the attendees who were A.A. members and who, more importantly, had the kind of sobriety that anyone who knew them, alcoholic or not, might well admire.

Before the program began, some of these individuals expressed concern about “this new-fangled M and M,” but they reminded each other that they should listen to all the presenters with “willingness, honesty and open-mindedness.” At the first break after Audrey's

presentation, my A.A. friends crowded around her, thanking her for M.M., one of them suggesting that “now that a lot of treatment is going down the drain, this may become, for some who need it, a new anteroom to A.A.” All agreed that they had heard from Ms. Kishline nothing that contradicted anything they knew about A.A. – that in fact they had heard a few things about A.A. that had seemed lost in many of the environments created by professional treatment.

Of course, even A.A. oldtimers are not God. Let me, then, offer a few comments about M.M.’s insights, pragmatism, and compassion. These three realities are so intertwined as to be in practice inseparable, but let’s treat them separately to make a brief point about each.

Insights: Although less explicitly “spiritual” than Alcoholics Anonymous, Moderation Management’s emphasis on *balance* captures classic spiritual insight as well as a key vision of A.A. co-founder Bill Wilson, set forth, for example, in his A.A. *Grapevine* essay, “Humility for Today.” Nor is the vocabulary of “habit” the exclusive possession of behavioral psychologists, as anyone knowledgeable in the classic spiritual writers readily recognizes.

Pragmatic: Despite a brief – and unfortunate – detour down the “disease” path/trap (which I understand is to be omitted in later editions of this book), Moderation Management is a practical, experiential program. Like the authors of the A.A. Big Book, the earliest M.M. members say, “Here are the steps we took: here is the structure we use.” No grand theory, no exploring of causes, no choosing of sides – just straightforward statements of simple practices that worked for them. And for those for whom those practices do not work, this book describes how M.M. helps these recognize their need for abstinence and guides them to programs that make it possible. M.M. is not “anti-abstinence” or anti-anything: it provides a helpful option for those alcohol abusers who, in current medical terms, are not alcohol dependent. For those perhaps slipping across that line, Moderation Management makes easier and more likely a sooner discovery of their need for an abstinence program.

That practicality is of course related to M.M.’s *compassion*. Again following the example of Alcoholics Anonymous, Moderation Management is interested not in debate or argument but in helping those whose life and humanity are disrupted by their drinking of alcohol. Even though M.M. focuses on those who are not “chronic drinkers” or

“alcohol dependent” or “alcoholics” in three of the vocabularies currently in use, its program also helps those who would fit in those categories, who need to choose abstinence, but who are not yet ready to do so. M.M. has no other agenda than helping *all* those whose drinking of alcohol causes them trouble – a point emphasized by its reliance on mutual help and especially its non-profit reality.

For again like Alcoholics Anonymous, Moderation Management suggests not the “self-help” of lift-your-own-bootstraps peptalks but *mutual* help: M.M. offers *meetings* and seeks to form *groups*. Whether Moderation Management will evolve a concept similar to “fellowship,” whether those who come to M.M. and achieve moderation will continue in attendance for others’ sakes as well as their own – these are yet unclear. They are among the questions that make the opportunity to follow the story of Moderation Management so exciting.

The non-professional and non-profit aspects of Moderation Management, which set it off from so many supposedly “similar” or “competing” programs, attest to the primacy of genuine compassion and concern. The importance of this is not a new insight. In the A.A. book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, discussing Tradition Eight [“Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional”], A.A. co-founder Bill W. wrote some words generally overlooked in our over-professionalized age:

. . . Almost no recovery from alcoholism has ever been brought about by the world’s best professionals, whether medical or religious. We do not decry professionalism in other fields, but we accept the sober fact that it does not work for us. . . .

Alcoholics simply will not listen to a paid Twelfth Stepper. . . . The money motive compromises him and everything he says and does for his prospect.

The same seems true of “alcohol abusers” and “problem drinkers” – likely one reason behind their affection for M.M.

Nothing in the Moderation Management program suggests that alcoholics can safely drink alcohol. The opposite is in fact several times

stated. But there is a long-standing distinction to be honored, one too often obscured by some over-zealous treaters. The medical distinction of “alcohol abuse” from “alcohol dependence” – visible in M.M. distinguishing between “problem drinkers” and “chronic drinkers” – in fact reflects the A.A. Big Book’s differentiation of “the real alcoholic” not only from “moderate drinkers” but from “a certain type of hard drinker.” Of this latter *Alcoholics Anonymous* says:

He may have the habit badly enough to gradually impair him physically and mentally. . . . [But] If a sufficiently strong reason -- ill health, falling in love, change of environment, or the warning of a doctor -- becomes operative, this man can also stop or moderate, although he may find it difficult and troublesome and may even need medical attention. (pp. 20-21, 3rd edition; 1st edition, p. 31.)

Not only members of Alcoholics Anonymous, but *all* genuinely concerned about alcoholics can only welcome anything that aids and makes less “difficult and troublesome” the move to “stop or moderate.”

There will be and can be only one Alcoholics Anonymous. But Moderation Management’s willingness and even eagerness to learn from A.A.’s history suggest that M.M. also may meet a very real albeit a very different need in a society still confused about its use and abuse of beverage alcohol.