

A Working Step 2 Guide

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Step 2 Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

The chapter “We Agnostics”, which begins on page 44, starts with a good review of Step 1:

“In the preceding chapters you have learned something of alcoholism. We hope we have made clear the distinction between the alcoholic and the non-alcoholic. If, when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely, or if when drinking, you have little control over the amount you take, you are probably alcoholic. If that be the case, you may be suffering from an illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer.” Let me repeat that last part: “If that be the case, you may be suffering from an illness which ONLY a spiritual experience will conquer.”

Now we know what we have to do in order to recover from alcoholism. We must undergo a life changing, spiritual transformation.

We realize this is not the answer many of you expected to find in Alcoholics Anonymous. But, please keep in mind that alcoholism IS a fatal, progressive illness. Prior to A.A., most alcoholics either died drunk or were locked up in jails or insane asylums.

In the middle of page 44, the authors once again tell us our options:

“To one who feels he is an atheist or agnostic such an experience seems impossible, but to continue as he is means disaster, especially if he is an alcoholic of the hopeless variety. To be doomed to an alcoholic death or to live on a spiritual basis are not always easy alternatives to face.”

So again, they are giving the only two alternatives you have if you are an alcoholic - either a lot of booze or a lot of God.

Not only is a spiritual experience possible, it is a guarantee, provided you keep an open mind and take the Steps as described in the “Big Book”.

It continues to tell us in the next paragraph on page 44, that no matter what our present beliefs are, there IS hope for us. The book continues:

“But it isn’t so difficult. About half our original fellowship were of exactly that type. At first some of us tried to avoid the issue, hoping against hope we were not true alcoholics. But after a while we had to face the fact that we MUST find a spiritual basis of life - OR ELSE. Perhaps it is going to be that way with you. But cheer up, something like half of us thought we were atheists or agnostics. Our experience shows that you need not be disconcerted (which means troubled).”

We find it amazing that the newcomer can start the A.A. program without any specific beliefs or, for that matter, without any beliefs whatsoever. All a person needs is the open-mindedness and the willingness to believe that WE BELIEVE this program works.

And let us assure you, WE DO believe. The Twelve Steps have changed our lives and the lives of millions of other alcoholics. This program WILL change your life too, IF you honestly want to recover from this deadly affliction AND are willing to go to any lengths.

Now that we have admitted we are alcoholics and that we can never safely drink alcohol, let’s look at what we have to do in order to recover. At the bottom of page 44, we learn:

“If a mere code of morals or a better philosophy of life were sufficient to overcome alcoholism, many of us would have recovered long ago. But we found that such codes and philosophies did not save us, no matter how hard we tried. We could wish to be moral, we could wish to be philosophically comforted, in fact, we could wish these things with all our might, but the needed power wasn’t there. Our human resources, as marshaled (or directed) by the will, were NOT sufficient; they failed utterly.”

So that last line is saying that our human resources (which is the ONLY thing that we have going for us), as directed by our self-will, has not worked in the past, is not enough, and will continue to fail us when it comes to combating our alcoholism.

The book continues:

“Lack of power, THAT was our dilemma. We HAD to find a power by which we could live, and it HAD to be a POWER GREATER THAN OURSELVES. Obviously. But where and how were we to find this Power?”

Well, that's EXACTLY what this book is about. Its MAIN OBJECT is to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself which WILL solve your problem. (Notice that it does NOT say that this Power is going to help US solve our problem, but that this POWER GREATER THAN OURSELVES will solve our problem. The book continues.) That means we have written a book which we believe to be spiritual as well as moral. And it means, of course, that we are going to talk about God."

Please turn to page 570 in the Third Edition Big Book, or to page 568 in the Fourth Edition. This is the Spiritual Experience Appendix in the back of the book. What is it going to take for us to find this Higher Power? The answer is mentioned in Appendix II. In paragraph 3 on page 570 in the Third Edition or 568 in the Fourth Edition, we find:

"Most emphatically we wish to say that any alcoholic capable of honestly facing his problems in the light of our experience CAN recover, provided (or if) he does not close his mind to all spiritual concepts. He can ONLY be defeated by an attitude of intolerance or belligerent denial."

"We find that NO ONE need have difficulty with the spirituality of the program. Willingness, honesty and open-mindedness are the ESSENTIALS of recovery. But these are INDISPENSABLE."

The "Big Book" authors tell us it is our arrogance and our shortsightedness that keeps us in the darkness and block us from the "sunlight of the Spirit," which is the ONLY thing that can help us.

Please turn back to page 46. The Big Book authors ask us to develop OUR OWN concept of God. In other words, they want us to find a God of OUR OWN understanding. In the second paragraph on page 46 it says the following:

"Much to our relief, we discovered we did not need to consider ANOTHER'S conception of God. OUR OWN conception, however inadequate, was sufficient to make the approach and to effect a contact with Him. As soon as we admitted the possible existence of a Creative Intelligence, a Spirit of the Universe underlying the totality of things, we began to be possessed of a new sense of power and direction, PROVIDED (or IF) we took other simple steps. We found that God does NOT make too hard terms with those who seek Him. To us, the Realm of Spirit is broad, roomy, ALL inclusive; NEVER exclusive or forbidding to those who EARNESTLY seek. It is open, we believe, to all..."

They inform us that we are going to take some actions which WILL lead us to our Creator, and this Higher Power WILL guide us in the Realm of the Spirit. Our personalities will change from self-centered to God-centered; our lives will change from the material to the Spiritual.

As we said earlier, A.A. is not a religious program. We're free to call this Power anything we wish, as long as WE are not it and it's a Power GREATER than ourselves. The "Big Book" authors use many different names for this Power including Creative Intelligence, Universal Mind, Spirit of the Universe, Creator, the Great Reality, and an unsuspected inner resource, among others. Quite a few times they call this Power, "God", but they use the word God merely for convenience rather than for any religious purpose. Please refer to this Power by any name you believe in or feel comfortable with.

Bill Wilson, our New York City co-founder, had a great deal of difficulty accepting this spiritual solution to alcoholism. In "Bill's Story" he describes how he "came to believe".

In late November 1934, Ebby T. visits Bill at his Brooklyn, New York home. It is during this visit that Bill first learns about a God of his own understanding. Let's pick up the story at the top of page 12.

As we mentioned earlier, Ebby is one of Bill's high school friends and a former drinking companion. Ebby has been sober in the Oxford Group for several months. He tells Bill his life has changed as the result of practicing the Oxford Group's Six Spiritual Activities that we discussed earlier. Please keep in mind that Bill always considered Ebby to be a worse drunk than he was, so the fact that Ebby was now not drinking carried a strong message.

Bill becomes quite distressed when Ebby starts talking about God. However, he DOES listen because he realizes Ebby's life has changed and Ebby is sober for the first time in many years. Page 12, paragraph 1:

"Despite the living example of my friend there remained in me vestiges (or traces) of my old prejudice. The word God still aroused a certain antipathy (which means a strong dislike). When the thought was expressed that there might be a God personal to me this feeling was intensified. I didn't like the idea. I could go for such conceptions as Creative Intelligence, Universal Mind or Spirit of Nature but I resisted the thought of a Czar of the Heavens, however loving His sway might be. I have since talked with scores of men who felt that same way."

Then, Ebby presents Bill with a revolutionary concept:

"My friend suggested what then seemed a novel (or new) idea. He said, 'Why don't you choose YOUR OWN conception of God?'"

"That statement hit me hard. It melted the icy intellectual mountain in whose shadow I had lived and shivered many years. I stood in the sunlight at last."

“It was only a matter of being WILLING to believe in a Power greater than myself. Nothing more was required of me to make my beginning. I saw that growth could start from that point. Upon a foundation of COMPLETE willingness I might build what I saw in my friend. Would I have it? Of course I would!”

This is how Bill started on his journey to a God of his understanding and lasting sobriety. It all began with Bill’s willingness to believe in a God of his own understanding.

Now, let’s look at how the “Big Book” authors describe God. In the middle of page 46, they ask us to set aside our contempt for spiritual principles and consider OUR OWN concept of God. If we do, we will begin to realize there just might be some validity to the A.A. spiritual solution for alcoholism. Starting with line three in the first paragraph of page 46, they write:

“...We found that as soon as we were able to lay aside prejudice and express even a willingness to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we commence to get results, even though it was impossible for any of us to fully define or comprehend that Power, which is God.”

Basically, the “Big Book” authors tell us it is impossible to define God. We have to stop trying to comprehend God with our mind and start accepting God with our heart. The book continues at the top of page 47:

“When, therefore, we speak to you of God, we mean YOUR OWN conception of God. This applies, too, to other spiritual expressions which you find in this book. Do not let any prejudice you may have against spiritual terms deter (or prevent) you from honestly asking yourself what they mean to you. At the start, this was all we needed to commence spiritual growth, to effect our first conscious relation with God as we understood Him. Afterward, we found ourselves accepting many things which then seemed entirely out of reach. That was growth, but if we wished to grow we had to begin somewhere. So, we used OUR OWN conception, however limited it was.”

On the next page, the “Big Book” authors state that most of us eventually become “teachable”. Sometimes we have to take our lives right to the brink of disaster and look death squarely in the eye before we are willing to acknowledge the presence of a Higher Power. But there is hope even for the most stubborn of us. Starting with the seventh line down from the top of page 48, it says:

“...Faced with alcoholic destruction, we soon become as open minded on spiritual matters as we had tried to be on other questions. In this respect alcohol was a great persuader. It finally beat us into a state of reasonableness. Sometimes this was a tedious process; we hope no one else will be prejudiced for as long as some of us were.”

In the third paragraph on page 52, the authors make a powerful case for the existence of God. Page 52, paragraph 3:

“When we saw others solve their problems by a simple reliance upon the Spirit of the Universe, we had to stop doubting the power of God. Our ideas did not work. But the God idea did.”

So, in order to recover from alcoholism, we have to find a Power greater than ourselves. But where are we going to find this Power? Please turn to page 55, and starting with the second paragraph, the authors provide us with the answer to that question. On page 55, paragraph 2, it says:

“Actually we were fooling ourselves, for deep down in EVERY man, woman, and child, is the fundamental idea of God. It may be obscured (or made unclear) by calamity, by pomp, by worship of other things, but in some form or other it is there. For faith in a Power greater than ourselves, and miraculous demonstrations of the power in human lives, are facts as old as man himself. We saw that faith in some kind of God was a part of our make-up, just as much as the feeling we have for a friend. Sometimes we had to search fearlessly, but He WAS there. He was as much a fact as we were. We found the Great Reality deep down within us. In the last analysis it is only there that He may be found. It was so with us. We can only clear the ground a bit. If our testimony helps sweep away prejudice, enables you to think honestly, encourages you to search diligently within yourself, then, if you wish, you can join us on the Broad Highway. With THIS attitude you CANNOT fail. The consciousness of your belief is SURE to come to you.”

These are dramatic, and for some of us, revolutionary concepts. Let us summarize them for you. First, the authors of the “Big Book” tell us they have found a way to free us from the bondage of alcoholism. Next, they describe the solution as a Power greater than ourselves. Finally, they tell us where to find this Power - right inside each and every one of us.

Now we know WHERE to find this Power. Most of the rest of the “Big Book” is devoted to the question of HOW to find this Power.

Once again we need to make a decision. We have to decide whether or not we believe in a Higher Power - a Spirit of the Universe - a God of OUR understanding.

Just like Step One, the Big Book on page 47 provides a question associated with taking Step Two. In the middle of 47, the Big Book authors write:

“We need to ask ourselves but one short question. ‘Do I NOW believe, or am I even WILLING to believe, that there IS a Power greater than myself?’ As soon as a man can say that he does believe, or is willing to believe, we emphatically (or strongly) assure him

that he is on his way. It has been repeatedly proven among us that upon this simple cornerstone a wonderfully effective spiritual structure can be built.”

Now, it’s time to choose. Are we willing to admit that there is a Higher Power? If we are, we’re ready to take Step Two.

If you are hesitant to commit right now, that’s fine. It just means you’re not ready to proceed with the rest of the program. Please take time during the next week to discuss the concept of a “God of YOUR understanding” with your “sponsor” or spiritual advisor. If after that you are then ready to proceed, have that person take you through the Second Step and ask you to answer the Second Step question found in the middle of page 47, where we find the directions.

Let’s see who is ready to proceed.

This is the Second Step question for those doing it for the first time:

“Do you NOW believe, or are you even WILLING to believe, that there IS a Power greater than yourself?”

Please answer yes or no.

For those of you who have done a Second Step in the past, there is a deeper Step Two question to answer:

Do you now believe, or are you even willing to believe, there there is a Power greater than yourself that can take you beyond where you are now in EVERY area of your life. Past here, past the experience you've already had. Do you believe that there are realms of peace, love, freedom, happiness, understanding, areas of consciousness, wisdom, & power that you can't even imagine?

Please answer yes or no.

Those of you who have answered “yes” to the Step 2 question have completed the Second Step.

For some helpful thoughts on Step 2 please go back to the Step 2 & 3 files and read “Step 2 Thoughts.”

If we need to come to believe that a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity, what does sanity look like in many areas of our life? For help with that please go back to the Step 2 & 3 files and do the “Step 2 Sanity Exercise.”

For an important question about the chapter where almost all of Step 2 is found please go back to the Step 2 & 3 files and read “We Agnostics 2 People Groups.”