

THE STEPS OF A.A. - AN INTERPRETATION  
Written by Clarence H. Snyder, January 1972

Alcoholics Anonymous is not a "booze cure" or a psychological means of controlling one's excessive or obsessive drinking. A.A. is a program, a life-changing program, and, in a great part, we owe our inception as a fellowship to our origin in the Oxford Group movement during the mid 1930's.

The Oxford Group was designed as a Life Changing program- and we in A.A. have for our own uses and affiliation, modified their program, chiefly by designing our twelve step program in a manner that the alcoholic who feels he needs and wants a change from what they are experiencing, can comfortably accept and apply the program and thereby change their life.

To do so, requires certain attitudes, willingness, and acts on our parts.

We have simplified the program, in the feeling that any alcoholic with an alcohol problem can live a life free of the obsession to drink. Our program of the twelve steps is really accepted in four distinct phases, as follows:

- 1) Need (admission)
- 2) Surrender (submission)
- 3) Restitution
- 4) Construction and Maintenance

Phase #1 - Is covered in Step 1- "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable" - this step points out phase 1- or our own need - there is a need for a change!

Phase #2 - Includes the 2nd through the 7th steps which constitutes the phase of submission.

Step#2 - "We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." Since we could not manage our own lives, of ourselves, we found ourselves to be powerless over alcohol; we were encouraged by the power of example of someone or some others to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. In this step, we have the "proof of the pudding" before we are asked to eat it!! Others tell us of their experiences and share their deepest feelings with us and those members are alcoholics such as we are, and there they stand, sober, clean-eyed, useful, confident and with a certain radiance we envy and really want for ourselves. So, we *WANT* to believe it! Of course, some persons could conceivably be a bit more startled at first by the reference to "being restored to sanity," but most of us finally conclude that in hearing of some of the experiences our new friends had during their drinking careers were anything but the actions of a rational person, and when we reflect upon our own actions and deeds prior to our own introduction to A.A., it is not difficult to recognize that we too, were pretty well out in left field also! In fact, most of us are happy in the feeling that we were not really responsible for many of our past unpleasant and embarrassing situations and frankly, this step does much to relieve our feelings of guilt and self-condemnation.

Step #3 - "We made a decision to turn our *will and our lives* over to the care of God..."

Now here is the step which separates the men from the boys (or the women from the girls) - this is the step which tells the story as to whether we are going to be *in* A.A., or *around* A.A. Yes, we can attend meetings, visit the clubs, attend the social functions, but, unless we really take step #3, we are continuing to make up our own program. Since our entire program is based upon dependence upon God and our lives are to be directed by Him! So, here we are, making a *decision* which in itself is quite an accomplishment for the alcoholic, since they are one of the most indecisive creatures in society, due to their incapacity to manage their own life due to their obsession- But- to make a decision to turn our life and our will over to the care of God- this creature in the far blue yonder, whom we have little acquaintance with and probably much fear of, this is really asking very, very much of an alcoholic! Rest assured, that if they are not ready, if they have not reached their "bottom" or extremity, and if they are not really "hurting more than they ever have," they are not about to take step #3. So - they go pretty much on their own as usual, except that they do have the advantage of better company than they had been associating with and this in time, could really foul up any type of drinking life they may have in the future! Another important feature enters here, in that they *know* now that there is a way out of their dilemma and this is bound to "work" on them as time goes on, if they have any pride at all in themselves! At this point - their biggest problem is to overcome *FEAR* and "Let go and let God."

Step #4 - "Made a searching and fearless *Moral* inventory of ourselves."

This is a step which should be taken with the assistance of a sponsor, or counselor who is well experienced in this changed life - due to the capacity of the alcoholic to find justification for about anything - a sponsor can bring up through sharing - many various moral weaknesses which need attention in their life and can smooth the way for the alcoholic to examine them in a frank fashion. The next step suggests that someone is helping with step #4 - since it reads as follows:

Step #5 - "Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to *another human being*, the exact *NATURE* of our wrongs."

We put ourselves on record and leave no options or reservations! Note that it states, *NATURE* of our wrongs- not the wrongs themselves! We are not required to narrate details of our many indiscretions. Many of them we don't even remember, nor are conscious of. This is not a laundry for dirty linen; this is recognition of character defects, which need elimination or adjustments!

Step #6 - "Were *entirely* ready to have God remove *ALL* these defects of character."

This step allows for no reservations. The alcoholic, being an extremist must go the whole route. We are not a bit ready, or about to be ready, but *entirely* ready to have God, not us, remove *ALL* these defects of character, (the interesting ones as well as the more damnable ones!).

Step #7 - "Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."

We tried to make no deal, as we did in the past when situations would overwhelm us. It was common to say- "Dear God, get me out of this mess and I will be a good boy (or girl), I will not do thus and such, etc., etc., etc.," NONE OF THAT! We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings. The Good Book assures us that anything we ask believing, we shall receive!

Step #8 - Begins our phase #3- that of restitution. So now we have admission in Step #1, Submission, Steps #2 through #7. Now for the Restitution in Steps #8 and #9.

Step #8 - "Made a list of *all persons* we had harmed and *became willing* to make *amends to them all*. Steps 8 and 9 should also be taken with the assistance of a knowledgeable sponsor or a counselor, since in our present state of impatience with almost complete lack of judgment; we could conceivably cause much harm in executing this phase of the program.

Most of us probably have persons on that list whom we just do not want to have any contact with. The step states plainly - *ALL* persons we had harmed! Obviously some of these persons are not available, having passed on, or disappeared etc., so we must ask God to handle those details. But step #9 states - "Made direct amends *Whenever Possible* except when to do so would injure them or others." We cannot and should not try to clear our slate or conscience at the expense of any others. This phase is very important and it eliminates the possibility of carrying over some details into our new life that could consciously come back to haunt or harm us in our new life. We are going into a new life, and we should "Let the dead bury the dead."

Now that we have taken 9 steps!!! We have concluded 3 phases of our program. These 9 steps we have accomplished - so - FORGET THEM!!! They have required action and you have taken the action, so there is no need of repeating it! There are only two occasions when one must refer back to the first nine steps, #1- is in the event that the person "resigns and resumes," obviously they must start all over again! The other occasion when we may refer to the first nine steps is when we are trying to explain them to a new member and helping them with them.

So, now we have our last phase, that of *Construction* - Steps 10-11- and 12. With these steps, we construct our life. These are our living steps. We no longer must be concerned with 12 steps- ONLY 3 STEPS!! How simple, how wonderful!!

Step #10 - "Continued to take *personal* inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it."

This step has absolutely no connection with step #4. Note, in step #4, it calls for a searching and fearless *Moral* inventory. This step calls for a *personal* inventory. This step is our daily check on ourselves. This is our check on the small and large and otherwise details of my life *TODAY*. My simple way of handling step 10 may help someone, since I find that it is most adequate for me, and I prefer to keep things simple and uncomplicated.

At night, after I am in bed, my day is over; I find this is one of my most important prayer times. I think about my day, what have I done, whom I have been with, what has transpired. Sometimes I find that I am not proud of something I have done today, and I owe someone an apology, I do not permit these things to go unattended. I have found that it is not the so-called "big" things which seriously affect the alcoholic in their new life, but the "little" things. They can go on and on and add up and become a real burden and eventually have drastic effects upon our new life. This is the reason for step 10, keep things "cleaned up," keep the walk swept! Maintain a good healthy attitude.

Step #11 - "Sought through Prayer and Meditation, to improve our conscious contact with God, praying *only* for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out."

This is a great step, first, because it brings us into a prayer life. Back in step #3, we made a decision to turn our life and will over to the care of God. In step #11, we receive our orders!! Let us break this step down and discover how it is both simple and profound. We are seeking something, seeking to improve our conscious contact with God. What does that mean? To me it means He is not in the far blue yonder, beyond reach, but right here, close where I can talk to Him and listen to Him (the Bible states that He is closer than hands and feet, and that is most close!). So, I am seeking to make this contact through Prayer and Meditation. What does this mean? To me, Prayer is talking to God, and Meditation is listening to Him! The good Lord endowed us with one mouth and two ears, which should suggest something to us!! We are enjoined- "Be Still" - and that is how we should be while listening! The answers surely will come if we but listen. Now, the step tells us what to pray for.

"Only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out." Since we submitted ourselves and turned our will and life over to the care of God in phase #2- now we ask for His orders and strength to carry them out. We are promised that He will never expect anything from us that He won't give us the power to execute.

Now then, do you see any place in the step thus far to suggest we pray for sobriety? Of course not, and it is absolutely unnecessary - you *HAVE* sobriety. Thank Him for it - but it is pointless to pray for what you already have. The 11th step states very plainly *how to pray* and *what to pray for*!!

Step #12 - We have experienced 11 steps and something has happened to us. In fact, something happened at the end of step 9! Step 12 states very plainly - "Having had a Spiritual Experience as *the* result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other Alcoholics and to practice these principles in *ALL* of our affairs."

What is a Spiritual Experience? That is the changed life we have been referring to. That is the change that comes to a person who has turned their will over to the care of God and continues to try and improve themselves, mentally, morally and spiritually. It states that we try to carry this message (not the alcoholic) to alcoholics. We practice these principles of love and service in all our affairs. Not just in A.A. meetings and associations, at home, at business, everywhere! What a blessing this fellowship is. What a great opportunity to love and be loved. Why cheat yourself? We have the prescription, the means of getting well, staying well, growing and best of all, *SERVING*. Come on in, the water's fine!! Friends are wonderful, the fellowship is distinct and GOD IS GREAT!!

[This was transcribed from Clarence's handwritten copy.]