

OVERVIEW OF THE STEPS

STEP ONE

The very first thing we have to do to solve a problem is find out what that problem is. In order to find a real, lasting solution, we have to understand the problem thoroughly and know exactly what it is. Until we have this information we can't solve our problem. Usually when we have a problem we can go to a professional - a doctor, a dentist, a car mechanic - and that person can find out what our problem is and tell us. But alcoholism is a disease in which we have to make our own diagnosis. This is very hard to do because alcoholism is a disease that tells us, "We haven't got it; we're fine."

What exactly is our problem? The Big Book tells us in Step 1 of the 12 Steps: The problem is that we're powerless over alcohol and our lives have become unmanageable. Understanding and accepting this will be the 1st Step in recovery.

It all boils down to 1 word: powerless. Once we really see this and accept it, then we can understand that there's a solution. Until we fully understand this, however, we're still lost.

We can't find a solution to our alcoholic problem or any problem until we fully and clearly understand what the problem is. As alcoholics, our problem is not weak will, not moral character, and not sin. Our problem is that we have an actual 2 fold disease: a physical allergy that ensures that we'll eventually lose control when we drink and an obsession of the mind that makes us want to keep drinking. We cannot do anything about the physical allergy. That will stay with us the rest of our lives. Therefore, our recovery has to come through our mind. Nevertheless, left solely to our own resources, we are powerless over alcohol, and because we are powerless over alcohol, our lives have become unmanageable. This statement of the problem is Step 1 of the 12 Steps.

STEP TWO

Once we do know that the problem is powerlessness, the solution has to be power. It's that simple. Power is the cure for powerlessness - and the prescription - power.

Since we can't do anything about the physical part of our illness of alcoholism, our solution must be to find a power that can work in a non-physical way, in our mind. Step 2 of the 12 Steps says that we came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. This is the foundation of the whole Alcoholics Anonymous program.

Now, if we're powerless and the solution to our problem is power, then what we need to do is find that Power. Steps 3 through 12 enable us to find a Higher Power, a Power greater than ourselves. This is the main purpose of the Big Book to enable us to find a Power greater than ourselves that will solve our problem.

Step 1 is the foundation of our recovery on which the cornerstone is laid; Step 2. In Step 1 we become willing to change while Step 2 involves believing that a change is possible.

Belief is the cause of our actions; faith is their result.

STEP THREE

Now that we admitted we are powerless over alcohol and have come to believe that a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity we're ready for Step 3 which is to make a decision to turn our will and our life over to the care of that Higher Power. Look at Step 3 beginning with the word decision. This is 1 of the key words in all of the 12 Steps and all of the Big Book because it represents the link between understanding and action. To find a solution to any problem, we 1st have to understand what the problem is--but understanding alone isn't enough. We have to decide to act. It's impossible to take any kind of action without 1st somehow, in so many words, saying to ourselves, "This is what I'm going to do." A decision without an action that follows it is essentially worthless.

Step 3 involves making a key decision--turning our will and life over to our Higher Power. Steps 4 through 9 are the actions necessary to carry this decision out. We are supposed to turn our will and our life over to our Higher Power. But what exactly is our will? It's nothing more than our mind and our thinking. Our will is this thing up in our heads that tell us what to do. Our life is our actions--the sum total of all the actions we're taken throughout our lifetimes. It is all the actions that have made us who we are and have put us where we are at this moment.

Turning our will and life over to the care of a Higher Power isn't quick or easy because self-will rarely give up without a fight. We can't just do it in a moment. It takes a decision and a lot of action and work to turn our lives around.

As human beings, every one of us have self-will. The point of Step 3 is not to eliminate this will. Instead, the task is for each of us to let our Higher Power be the director of our will. If a Higher Power directs our will, then that Power will direct our actions. And if that Power directs our actions, then it directs our life and we can at last live with some peace of mind and serenity. Selfishness and self-centeredness are the causes of our troubles. Our troubles are basically of our own making. We cannot, however, solve them on our own. Our problem is that we let our self-will control what we do; the solution is to give the control of our will to our Higher Power. It is essential to our recovery that we be free from selfishness. If we cannot, our selfishness will kill us. Only our Higher Power can free us from that selfishness.

STEP FOUR

Step 3 - deciding to turn our will and life over to a Higher Power - is a vital and crucial part of our recovery. If we could turn our will over in Step 3 we wouldn't need any more Steps. But Step 3 says, "We made a decision." But this decision will have little or no effect unless we follow it up with action. Once we decide we want our Higher Power to take over our will and life it makes sense to clear out of ourselves the things that block us off from our Higher Power so that the Power can work more freely in us. As long as things that are blocking us off from this Power are in our mind, our Higher Power cannot enter our mind and direct our thinking. We need to take Step 4 at once--right after taking Step 3 because Step 3 usually moves enough self-will out of the way so that we've able to strike while the irons hot. If we don't it's easy for self-will to talk us out of it and block us from going on with our 12 Step Program. If we

don't take Step 4 we will still be filled with fear, guilt, remorse and shame and every day we stay this way is one day closer to the day we might take a drink to feel better even though we have worked our way through Steps 1, 2 and 3 and attended plenty of meetings. In Step 4 we look at our resentments (wrong judgments), our fears (wrong believing), and our wrong actions (harms done to others).

STEP FIVE

In Step 4 we look for resentments, fear, guilt, remorse and shame. In Step 5 we then discuss the exact nature of our wrongs, defects of character, shortcomings. These words all describe the same thing, that is the cause of resentments, fear, guilt, remorse and shame. Here, at last, we begin to have a spiritual experience and know that our obsession with drinking no longer has to control our lives. In Step 5 we examine the information we found in Step 4 and make sure it is true by evaluating what we wrote down. We don't have a good record for seeing the truth, only our perception of it so we don't rely on ourselves. So Step 5 is getting an outside view point, a different look at things, from God, ourselves and an outsider. It's getting a 2nd opinion. Steps 4 and 5 are actually parts of the same process: Step 4 is putting it down on paper and the other, Step 5 is improving it. Step 5 is not a confession. It is not a general discussion. It is a very specific discussion of the exact nature of our wrongs. It doesn't say we admit our wrongs because that is not the focus of this Step. Again, it is specifically stated as the exact nature of our wrongs. The exact nature is the origin of our resentments, fears, guilt, shame and remorse. To do this we ask ourselves these questions: Were we dishonest, selfish, self-seeking, inconsiderate or fearful?

STEPS SIX AND SEVEN INTRODUCTION

The previous Steps give us the ability to take Step 6 and 7 where change really begins. In Step 1 we saw the problem, in Step 2 we saw the solution, in Step 3 we make a decision and in Step 5 we re-examined those things blocking us from our Higher Power. The basis of our change is based on the principle of whatever we practice we become good at. To change we must practice the opposite of what we are trying to change.

STEP SIX

Once we recognize and discuss the things that block us off from our Higher Power, strange as it sounds, sometimes we'd rather sit in today's pain and suffer than take a chance of doing something different. We are used to the pain and know what it's like and we're learned to deal with it in our own ways--but we don't know what the future will be like without the pain. So, in many cases, we'd rather suffer with what's familiar than take a chance of changing. Also, many of us don't want our defects of character/shortcomings/wrongs removed because they are fun and exciting. They cause us trouble and they lead to restlessness and discontent instead of peace and serenity--but because they're fun and exciting, we're unwilling to have those things that have been blocking us from our Higher Power removed so they can be replaced with character strength: love, honesty, courage, unselfishness, the will of a Higher Power, peace and serenity.

STEP SEVEN

Our Higher Power will not remove our character defects until we ask, Step 7. Our Higher Power can do things we can't--but won't do things for us that we can do for ourselves. We can't remove our own defects of character; all we can do is ask our Higher Power to take them away. But what we can do is practice living in a way that's different from the way we lived when we were ruled by our shortcomings. We can try to live according to some principles--the principles of unselfishness, honesty, courage and considerateness. Once we've asked our Higher Power to remove our selfishness, then with that Power's help we can practice unselfishness instead, slowly, our old mental habits can die and can be replaced by new ones which will take time and work on our part. Once we asked our Higher Power to take away our dishonesty, then with that Power's help and our sincere effort we can be honest. This might be difficult at first, but as our Higher Power slowly takes away our dishonesty and we practice being honest, our old habit dies and is replaced with dishonesty's opposite. Once we've asked our Higher Power to remove our fear, then with the help of our Higher Power, we can start to do those things we're always been afraid to do. After a while, we're find courage beginning to replace our fear. Once we've asked this Power to take away our inconsiderateness, then with our Higher Power's help and our own efforts, we can start being considerate of others. Slowly, over time, through repeated practice, the old habit of inconsiderateness dies and the new habit of considerateness replaces it and becomes natural. As we practice unselfishness, honesty, courage and considerateness, something amazing will start to happen. The old us will disappear and die and a new personality will take its place. And we're find that this personality and the new way of life that goes with it are far, far better than the personality and way of life we used to have. Following the principles is a much less stressful 1 too. For 1 thing, these principles don't cause shame and quilt or remorse. For another, we feel a lot better about ourselves--and we don't have to worry about getting caught doing things that land us in trouble. We will also get along a lot better with people.

Step 7 isn't something we just do once and get it over with. We have to practice it regularly, on a daily basis. At 1st this may mean making ourselves do what we don't want to do. But as we establish this new pattern of thinking, acting and living, we resist less and less and eventually we want to do all those we're doing. Then we don't have to make ourselves to do anything anymore.

We just do what we know is right, and when we're not sure what's right, we ask our Higher Power for guidance.

STEPS EIGHT AND NINE INTRODUCTION

Steps 1 through 9 have provided us with a way to find harmony and live in it. Steps 1 through 3 put us in the right relationship with our Higher Power, a relationship where now our Higher Power, not us, is to be our director. Steps 4 through 7 put us in the right relationship with ourselves. In Steps 4 through 7, we could see what blocked us from our Higher Power, and we're doing something to eliminate character defects/shortcomings from our personality.

Now we're ready for Steps 8 and 9, both of which give us an opportunity to live in harmony with our fellow human beings. They give us a chance to set things right with other people and to get rid of fear, guilt, remorse and shame that we have felt in the past. The thing about setting things right with other people is that we're got to start from the inside ourselves because we can never get the outside stuff straight until we first changed what is going on inside us. This is what the 12 Steps are all about - changing what's going on inside of us - and with Steps 8 and 9 we can start to get rid of our fear, guilt, remorse and shame which are all associated with the people we listed in our personal inventories--the people we hurt, threatened or caused trouble for. Working Steps 8 and 9 gives us a chance to do something about all that hurt and trouble we caused.

The fulfillment of the 12 Promises on ps. 83 and 84 of our Big Book is the direct result of getting right with our Higher Power in Steps 1 through 3, getting right with ourselves in Steps 4 through 7 and getting right with our fellow humans in Steps 8 and 9. Steps 1 through 9 are a design for living that really works.

STEP EIGHT

In Step 8 we make a list of all the people we're harmed and we become willing to make amends to them all. In Step 9 we actually make direct amends to these people wherever possible except when doing so would hurt them or others. By now we've set things right with a Power greater than ourselves. If we set things right with our fellow human beings, we're going to start feeling pretty good. And we're going to discover a way to live in which we can be sober, peaceful, happy and free. Willingness is the key to Step 8. If we're not completely willing to make amends or we lack courage: We pray to our Higher Power asking for willingness and courage and continue to pray until the willingness and the courage comes. That is all there is to Step 8 - willingness and courage.

STEP NINE

Step 9 is the act of actually making amends. The purpose of making amends is to further help us get rid of the fear, guilt, remorse and shame that have become associated with the people we've hurt over the years. Once we've made our amends we're going to feel a lot better about ourselves, about other people and about our whole life. But that's not the reason why we make amends. We do it because it's the right thing to do. Even more, we do it because we have to, because it's a vital part of our Recovery Program. In fact, the question is, Can we find peace of mind and happiness and stay sober if we don't make amends? You make amends to yourself by making amends to others which relieves us of fear, guilt, remorse and shame associated with our past.

STEPS TEN, ELEVEN AND TWELVE INTRODUCTION

Everything in our universe is either growing or dying. Everything is either going forward or going backward. Nothing ever stays the same. By working Steps 1 through 9 we've succeeded in transforming our lives. But if we try to stay where we are without growing anymore, we're start dying - not physically, but emotionally and spiritually. Eventually, we slip back and start having difficulty with people again. That will cause trouble in our minds and resentments and fears will start showing up once more. These resentments and fears will begin to block us off from our Higher Power and eventually we start telling ourselves that we can safely drink again which will surely bring us physical death. So we need to find a way to keep ourselves growing. The last of the 12 Steps are designed to help us continue our spiritual growth.

Once we completed Steps 1 through 9 we have already recovered in the 1st 3 dimensions of life - spiritual, mental and physical. We can now begin to live in the 4th dimension of life as if we continue to practice our 12 Steps. This is indescribably wonderful. We have to feel it and experience it to know what it is. It can't be described. Working Steps 10 through 12 enables us to live in this 4th dimension of existence. Steps 10, 11 and 12 keep us growing spiritually and emotionally which in turn keeps us from slipping backwards because we keep moving forward, growing for the rest of our lives.

STEP TEN

The key to Step 10 is the word continued. In Step 10 we continue to take personal inventory, (looking for selfishness, self-seeking, dishonesty, inconsiderateness and fearfulness) and whenever we are wrong we promptly admit it. We also continue to grow in effectiveness, understanding and spirit. We work Step 10 for the rest of our lives. Working Step 10 means continuously working Steps 4 through 9 on a daily basis. Step 10 means continuing to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment and fear (Step 4). When these crop up, we ask God to remove them (Steps 6 and 7), discuss them with someone immediately (Step 5), and make amends quickly if we have harmed someone (Steps 8 and 9). And we must ask our Higher Power daily how we can best serve His will instead of our own. This is the proper use of the will. All of this adds up to something a great deal more than just admitting when we're wrong and then making amends. It means growing into a 4th dimension of living, the dimension of the Spirit and the return of sanity. Because by working Steps 1 through 10, our sanity will have returned. We will no longer be interested in drinking alcohol. As we continue to work Step 10 in our life, we're see our character defects/shortcomings become smaller and smaller. Our relationship with God as we understand God will become better and better. So will our relationship with our fellow human beings and with ourselves. Step 10 is not something we do before we go to bed at night. It is something we should do all through the day. It is very easy - as soon as we feel something out of line, some discomfort - we pause, analyze it, find out what it was and get rid of it. If we don't, it's going to build up and ruin our day.

STEP ELEVEN

As a result of the actions of Steps 4 through 10, we removed the things that were blocking us from God. Now we can carry out the decision we made in Step 3 of turning our will and our life over to the care of God as we understand Him. Through prayer and meditation, we can receive God's will for us and the power to carry it out. If we can do that, we will have carried out the decision that we made in Step 3.

If we rest on our laurels we're headed for trouble. We have got to use our willpower to serve and follow our Higher Power. Otherwise, we will slip backward. Now that we have our will and our sanity back, we can't stop at Step 10. Our Higher Power dwells in every one of us and has all knowledge and all power. For this reason each of us has within ourselves all the knowledge and power that we're ever need to take care of any situation. And we have a way to tap into this knowledge and power of God which enables us to deal with any set of circumstances that might arise. There are 2 ways to tap into this knowledge and power: through prayer and through meditation. This is what Step 11 is all about. It tells us to seek through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand God, praying only for the knowledge of His will and the power to carry out that will. This will take lots of practice on our part - unending practice - until we die: which will be sober.

We should pray and mediate at 4 distinct times: (1) at night, it is a nightly review, (2) in the morning, we should ask God to direct our lives that day, (3) when facing indecision, ask God for inspiration, an intuitive thought or a decision and (4) when agitated or doubtful, ask for the right thought or action.

STEP TWELVE

Now that we made it through the 1st 11 Steps, we have the biggest and best promise fulfilled that the Big Book mentions: we have had a spiritual awakening. Step 12 begins with these words: "Having had a spiritual awakening..." This is stated not as a hope or a wish, but as a fact. Step 12 begins by promising us that if we apply the previous 11 Steps in our life we will have a spiritual awakening. Not might have or should have or will probably have - will have.

What is a spiritual awakening? It's a personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism. After we have a spiritual awakening we're be able to live and get along with our fellow human beings. We're be able to deal with them openly and honestly as equals, without resentment, fear, guilt or remorse. We'll be able to live our lives with serenity and peace of mind, instead of restlessness, irritation or discontent. We'll be able to live and stay sober. Once we have had this spiritual awakening we are told in Step 12: "...we tried to carry this message to alcoholics,..." The message that we are to bring to the alcoholic who suffers is: That we've had a spiritual awakening as the result of the 12 Steps. This is the only real message that we have to offer to anybody.

SUMMARIZATION

To stay sober and have peace of mind and serenity we are told to: Abandon ourselves to God as we understand Him. We did that in Steps 1, 2 and 3. Admit our faults to God and to our fellow men and women. We did that in Steps 4, 5, 6 and 7. Clear away the wreckage of our past. We did that in Steps 8 and 9. Give freely of what we find. We do that in Steps 10, 11 and 12.

We in A.A. share a common problem: alcoholism and a common solution: a vital spiritual experience that results from working the 12 Steps.

To solve our problem for powerlessness, we need to find a Power greater than ourselves. Steps 2 to 12 describe this solution and show us exactly how to find such a Power.

Psychic change, personality change, spiritual experience, spiritual awakening all mean the same thing: change.

Author unknown

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