

PART III NOTES ON STEPS 5 - 12

Steps 5 – 8: *We are building an arch through which we shall walk...free...at last. Is our work solid so far?* (75: 3)

STEP 5

“My schoolmate visited me and I fully acquainted him with my problems and deficiencies.” (Bill’s Story, 13: 3)

We lied to others and to ourselves for years about who we were and what we did. Now, we turn and speak straight, in true perspective, to another person. We discuss our strengths and limitations without judgment or blame. We let it all out; we get real. We share the thoughts, actions, and motives in our lives that have worked and have not worked to make us happy, joyous, and free.

We show love and respect for ourselves when we ask others to hear our Fifth Step. As we share our inventory, we become clearer about the exact nature of our old worn out defenses, our wrongs, our defects and shortcomings. Now, we focus on what is behind the patterns of our alcoholism, and the reasons why we acted out in the ways we did. Step 5 calls for courage and a sense of trust in the process of recovery. With courage, we tell the truth about who we are – then, with trust, we listen to the response. Our lonely existence of shame is replaced by humility and self acceptance.

We ourselves are the ones to decide if we have now worked the first five Steps satisfactorily. (76: 0) The measure is our own peace of mind.

STEP 6

“I...became willing” (Bill’s Story, 13: 3)

Heard in a meeting: “Step 6 is about NOT doing what you want to do. What are you willing to give up? Are you ready for change?”

We become willing to give up our bondage of self-absorption.

We are of the conviction that we are powerless over our addiction to alcohol, and that our lives are unmanageable. When we try to manage life, life becomes unmanageable. Our compulsive physical cravings, our emotional obsessions, and our

spiritual void lead us to be restless, irritable, and discontented. These all motivate us to react to life events with selfishness, dishonesty, self-seeking, and fear.

We are worn out.

We are dishonest when we do not see the reality of what is unfolding before us in true perspective and proportion. We are selfish and self-seeking in that our own self-centered desire, disinterest, or disgust are the criteria by which we judge and react to life. [12 & 12, 92: 3 – 93: 0] We are fearful as we anticipate the sense of loss that will happen if we do not get what we desire, or lose what we have, or we are found out for who we are and what we have done. [12 & 12, 76: 2]

We are exhausted.

And we drink. Or we act and think as though we have been drinking, on an emotional dry bender. Now we are exhausted with our way, we are worn out by our habitual choices; we are sick and tired of the consequences of doing things our way. Our way *did not work*. (52: 3) In Step 6, when these things become objectionable to us, we are ready to give them up. This is a gift of desperation. When we could not spot or note our thought-habits and behaviors, we could not get rid of them. Today, when we can see and name them, we can renounce them, turn them over and change.

STEP 7

...to have my new found Friend take them away, root and branch. (Bill's Story, 13: 3)

Heard in a meeting: "Step 7 is about DOING what you do not want to do. What are you going to do instead? Will you ask for help to make these changes?"

We may think of a shortcoming as falling short of our potential. In Step 7 we are going to practice new things in our lives, and a *personality change sufficient to bring about recovery*, a conversion, begins to take place. (567: 1) We are asking for help and strength from the power that we discover within us, through the discipline of the practice of working this program as understood by Alcoholics Anonymous. While we cannot - nor should not - deny our instincts, we are asking the higher power of our understanding to remove that habitual and insatiable demand for the satisfaction of our instincts beyond our true needs.

The effort, or the act of working this Step, is in the asking. We are asking for help to have wisdom and clarity, to be made strong. How we go about asking – through prayer, through meditation or other spiritual practices, or by thinking it over – is up to us. We are not going to ask just once, we will ask again and again throughout our lifetimes until in a moment of grace we find strength to go on without drinking or using. We need spiritual strength to go forth into the world and take those actions that are consistent with, and even demanded by, the understanding we have from our quiet time alone with our higher power. We take refuge in and cooperate with this ‘inner knowing’ in the process of letting go, of opening ourselves to change. We have come to see that we are a part of, rather than apart from, this universal family. This true perspective of humility gives us peace of mind. [12 & 12, 48: 0; 58: 1; 72: 2]

STEP 8

We made a list of people I had hurt or toward whom I felt resentment. (Bill’s Story, 13: 3)

Steps 8 and 9 are powerful tools to address guilt and shame.

Step 8 is the beginning of a process of healing relationships. We do not just look at ourselves; we must actually look at our roles in relation to others. This takes hard work and effort. We know who we have really harmed. These disturbances live on inside of us until we find a way to honor our feelings. Step 8 is a way out of remorse and regret. We do not let a long list distract us from the most difficult and painful relationships and the true amends we have to make.

With our sponsor, we discuss each person on our list and the potential amends we might make. We will not have to avoid anyone. We will not have to be afraid of being found out for some neglected responsibility. Instead of *being servile or scraping*, of feeling shame and guilt or of feeling forever less than, now *as God’s people we stand on our feet; we don’t crawl before anyone.* (83: 3) With a sense of inclusion comes a sense of acceptance. We grow in the program to be true companions with others and ourselves.

Steps 9 – 12: Heard in a meeting: “We practice Steps 9, 10, 11 and 12 on a daily basis.”

STEP 9

I expressed my entire willingness to approach these individuals, admitting my wrong. Never was I to be critical of them. I was to right all such matters to the utmost of my ability. (Bill’s Story, 13:3)

Heard in a meeting: “To make an amend = make an apology + change behavior.”

The goal is to directly make amends to those we have harmed, not excusing our behavior, blaming others, proving something, or arguing about those events.

[Optional: Step 9 in the 12 & 12 gives us clear cut directions for making amends:

- *First we will wish to be reasonably certain we are on the A.A. beam.*
 - *Then we are ready to go to these people*
 - *to tell them what A.A. is,*
 - *and what we are trying to do.*
 - *Against this backdrop we can*
 - *freely admit the damage we have done*
 - *and make our apologies.*
 - *We can pay, or promise to pay*
 - *whatever obligations, financial or otherwise, we owe.*
- 12 & 12, 84: 1]*

The Big Book authors relate how another of AA’s founders, Dr. Bob, made his amends. This was on June 10, 1935, which is considered the anniversary date of Alcoholics Anonymous:

One morning he took the bull by the horns and set out to tell those he feared what his trouble had been. He found himself surprisingly well received, and learned that many knew of his drinking. Stepping into his car, he made the rounds of people he had hurt. He trembled as he went about, for this might mean ruin, particularly to a person in his line of business. At midnight he came home exhausted, but very happy. He has not had a drink since. (A Vision for You, 156: 1, 2)

Step 9 gives us a way to make restitution and to set right the damage we have caused in the past. We can admit the wrong and not feel we are groveling or obliged to hide in shame. Making amends is a commitment to a continuous process of change. We will spend the rest of our lives practicing the spiritual principles that will bring real change in the way we are partners with people.

STEP 10

I was to test my thinking by the new God-consciousness within. (Bill's Story, 13: 4)

Heard in a meeting: "If we are not growing in recovery we are moving backward toward active addiction."

The addictive diseases are characterized by denial, self deception, isolation and loneliness. In Steps 4 – 9 we act to identify and change what in us blocks us from a power greater than ourselves. In Step 10, we practice Steps 4 - 9 in real time on a daily basis. This turns the slogan "one day at a time" into a philosophy of life.

Step 10 invites the practice of continuous awareness of our intentions, motives, and behaviors, and guards against persistent defects or new problems. We consider our conduct and thought patterns in order to initiate change. When we are attentive, we may inventory ourselves at any time of the day. Also we may retreat to places of quiet and work the Steps in a more formal way annually or semiannually.

We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. (Into Action, 85: 1)

STEP 11

I was to sit quietly when in doubt asking only for direction and strength to meet my problems as He would have me. (Bill's Story, 13: 4)

In Step 11, our work is to seek to improve the conscious contact we have always had with *an unsuspected inner resource*, (567: 4-568: 0) which is our higher power. As we work through the Steps, we discover more of the nature of this Spirit. Yet it is often easier to identify what is not God's will for us than what is. It is understood that it is not God's will for us to drink and lapse into active alcoholism.

Eventually, all things merge into one. And through it all is our common experience of healing from alcoholism as this power that is greater than ourselves is made manifest in our lives. Our practice changes as we change. We each grow into an evolving exercise of personal meditation and prayer as we progress on our own spiritual path. May we be cautious that our own private devotions do not take us away from the fellowship.

STEP 12

Spiritual awakening: *It meant the destruction of self-centeredness. ... There was a sense of victory, followed by such a peace and serenity as I had never known.* (Bill's Story, 14: 1, 2)

The result of these steps: *Belief in the power of God, plus enough willingness, honesty, and humility to establish and maintain the new order of things were the essential requirements.* (13: 5-14: 0)

Carry the message: *Particularly was it imperative to work with others as he had worked with me. Faith without works was dead.* (14: 6)

Practice these principles: *My friend emphasized the absolute necessity of demonstrating these principles in all my affairs.* (14: 6)

A spiritual awakening is real because our lives are changed as a result. We can see and feel it. Many of us feel more alive, loving, open, and better able to join fully in life. We come to know the natural joy of things experienced just as they are. That power, whether it is our own best and highest nature or a force beyond ourselves, becomes ours to tap into whenever we are open to it. It guides our actions and provides inspiration for our continued growth. This comes about gradually and slowly as we work the Steps. We grow more and more uncomfortable acting out on our character defects, and begin to feel more at ease practicing spiritual principles.

The founding moment of AA was Bill W. sharing his story with Dr. Bob. We can only keep what we have by giving it away, because we reinforce our recovery by sharing it with others. The message of a spiritual awakening perhaps is that we are not alone, we can stay sober, we can recover, and there is hope. We simply present the message of our own story as positively as we can, and remain available to help when we are asked.

We see which Step we are meant to practice in each event of life. We are more aware of our old unworkable thought-habits that leap to mind when we react to life events and that dictate our actions. Now we may pause, ask for help, and then respond in a workable way that contributes to the serenity and peace of mind of all concerned. The positive principles of honesty, selflessness, courage, and compassion arise naturally as we enjoy that *profound alteration in [our] reaction to life* that the Big Book authors speak of. (567: 4) The spiritual benefits of our new worthy behaviors are real and will materialize if we work for them. We deeply wish for others as well as for ourselves that we all may be happy, joyous and free. Gratitude becomes the underlying force in all that we do. We let our lives speak. .