

INTRODUCTION

Study and Practice

How can we alcoholics in recovery live *happy, joyous, and free?* (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 133: paragraph 0)

Alcoholics Anonymous is the life changing program formed by two desperate alcoholics in 1935. In the Big Book, as the text *Alcoholics Anonymous* is known, we read the written words of the first 100 men and women of AA as they were put in the way of a spiritual awakening. Where did their words come from? What were their practices of the day by day disciplines that became the principles of the 12 Steps? How did they do it?

The Steps are suggested guides for recovery. There is no rule that says anyone has to do them, and there is no regulation about how they should be done. This Steps by the Big Book workbook is for those who *are willing to grow along spiritual lines* (60: 1) by studying the first 103 pages of the Big Book while actually doing the Steps. Our goal is to study the Steps as a friendly, focused group, and work them as the authors of the Big Book described. We wish to make the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous part of our lives by collaborating with a power greater than ourselves – an inner knowing, our own best and highest nature. To this end we ask ourselves two primary questions:

-(Study) What do the Big Book authors say about the Steps?

-(Practice) What does the Big Book say to each one of us about our own actual practice of the principles of the Steps in our daily lives?

Some of us in the recovering community in the Brattleboro, Vermont, area found that we did better studying the Big Book as a group rather than on our own. It is our belief that the only wrong way to work the Steps is alone. Together we can do it! The work of this group study supports the pass-it-on process of one alcoholic talking with another. This workbook is for those in recovery who want to go through the Steps again; or freshen up on their Steps prior to working with a sponsee; or for sponsors and sponsees who want to progress through the Steps together. The only requirements are to show up, study the Big Book, and do each Step. This guide comes from these experiences. This is only an introduction to the spiritual riches of the Big Book's directions to the 12 Steps. We hope this manual is useful throughout recovery, whether one is working the Steps for

the first time, or has followed the Steps for many years. Perhaps your group may craft its own manual, the better to reflect the warmth and strength of the *safe harbor* found in the 12 Steps.[12&12, 35:2] If appropriate, simply say your own addiction in place of alcohol.

Your Group

Please be aware that everything in this workbook comes from our experience, strength, and hope. Every process and suggestion in this workbook is optional.

Our Steps by the Big Book group sessions are not official AA meetings because we limit enrollment to a specific number of participants.

- Your group can be of any size or composition. An even number of participants, perhaps from 2 to 16, allows members of the group to work in pairs as “buddies.” A group may be simply one sponsor and one sponsee.
- Agree on a purpose, plan and session format of the Steps by the Big Book group, and that in general the group will stick to the schedule.
- Agree that each member attends every session if possible, commits to read the text and respond to the session questions, and in fact DOES each Step as it is encountered. (Fifth Steps are not shared at the sessions.)
- Agree that each member of the group contacts one or more members (buddies) and/or a sponsor regularly between sessions.
- Agree that group members can expect to spend at least as much time on reading, writing and contact with buddies between sessions as in group time.
- Agree on a date by which participants may leave or new members may join the group after it begins.
- Agree that group members will not drink or use during the course.

Group Norms

While there are no rules in AA, there are written Traditions and unwritten norms (i.e. identifying oneself as an alcoholic in meetings). In order to ensure that your group runs smoothly, we suggest considering these questions:

- Will start and end times for the sessions be honored?
- Will one group member chair the entire process, or will group members take turns chairing the sessions?
- Will absolute confidentiality and anonymity about the group be practiced?
- Will readings be read at the sessions, or should the readings be completed in advance?
- Is each group member expected to speak and share personal writings at group sessions? (It is suggested that members do their Fifth Step outside of the sessions with a sponsor or buddy.)

- Will group members consider not speaking a second time until all have had a chance to share first?
- Will someone serve as a friendly timekeeper?

Working with a Sponsor or Buddy

Our group experience has shown that it is useful for group participants to work closely with one or more members of the group (“buddies”), in a manner that compliments working with a sponsor.

The support and stimulus of working the Steps with a buddy, a sponsor, or both, leads to personal growth and change. We read the Big Book chapters or selections together. Together, we work on our reflections and writings about the focus questions and inventories. Together we get and give support for this process of working the Steps, and for sharing our discoveries, doubts and experiences in the group.

Guide to This Guide

Our reference for this study of the 12 Steps is the first 103 pages of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, fourth edition, *the basic text* (xi: 2) for the program and fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. The Big Book (BB) notations are to page and paragraph, as in (64: 0, 1), i.e. (64) page 64; (: 0) the partial paragraph at the top of the page; (1) the first full paragraph on that page; etc. Quotes from the Big Book are in *italics*. (SbBB) refers to this Steps by the Big Book workbook.

Please ignore anything in the group sessions or this workbook that you feel contradicts what you find in the Big Book.

As a study group we will cover:

Preface and Forewords	
“Doctor’s Opinion”	Step 1.
Chapter 1. Bill’s Story	Step 1
Chapter 2. There Is a Solution	Steps 1 and 2
Chapter 3. More About Alcoholism	Steps 1 and 2
Chapter 4. We Agnostics	Step 2
Chapter 5. How It Works	Steps 3 and 4
Chapter 6. Into Action	Steps 5 through 11
Chapter 7. Working With Others	Step 12

To prepare for the Steps by the Big Book group sessions, we read the Big Book paragraph by paragraph. We pause at commas and stop at periods. We turn the declarative statements of the Big Book into questions for ourselves. We constantly ask, "What does this mean for me in my life?" We then explore these questions with others.

In essence, this manual is a cut-and-paste scrapbook of pithy suggestions – concise and helpful insights that can have an immediate effect on how we study and work the Steps. The session material is drawn from the Big Book, and AA literature, such as *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (12&12)*, with focus questions and comments borrowed verbatim without attribution from meetings, others in recovery, and from a number of published and recorded recovery sources. Any errors that appear in this guide belong to those of us who compiled it.

This workbook is divided into three parts: Part I covers Steps 1, 2 and 3; Part II examines Step 4; Part III looks into Steps 5 through 12. Each of the parts begins with focused meditations/prayers and notes on the Steps in question. Next are the specific sessions on each Step with reflective questions about the Big Book reading. Optional material and sample definitions are in brackets [...]. Finally, there are worksheets that are intended to help you focus your writing on each Step. On pages 7 - 9 you will find the basic workbook session outline and an optional suggested group session format.

How a Session May Go

Typically we read the session material on our own and write our responses.

This is a team effort. We meet as a committed group of equals once or twice a week, or as the group sees fit. We open with a time of quiet relaxation, followed by a very brief check-in as to how each member is doing with studying and working the Steps. We read condensed selections from the Big Book on a particular Step, and then for 10 to 15 minutes one group member speaks of her or his personal experience doing this Step by the Big Book process. Every member then shares their writings or reflections on that session's Step work. Discussion is encouraged, as long as we speak out of our own experience. Some groups choose to expand or contract the session material, such as skipping over several sessions in Step 4. We may close with reciting the Step and a meditation or prayer.

An OUTLINE of a typical Study Session

I ON YOUR OWN: STUDY – What did the Big Book authors say?

- **READ** - Individually, and with your sponsor or other group members, study the suggested readings for the Step you are working on.
- **WRITE** - We suggest one or two 15-20 minute writing sessions per day.
 - Write of your own experience working the Step under consideration. Respond to the issues the readings raise for you.
 - Reflect on the focus points in each session and think about writing on three or four, or all of them, as you see fit.
 - Try reading aloud the bulleted focus and reflection comments to help make them stick. Cross them off as you respond to them.
 - Consider completing the worksheets intended to build on what the Big Book says about the practice of each Step.
- **TALK** - Meet with one or more other members of the group or with your sponsor or both to discuss the readings and your written reflections on them.
- **PRACTICE DAILY RELAXATION WITH MEDITATION / PRAYER** - Strive to develop a daily practice of quiet centering before reading and writing. Use whatever meditations or prayers are meaningful to you. (See BB p.13: 4 and Step 11, BB pp. 85-88) [Optional: also see this SbBB workbook p. 14]

II WITH THE GROUP: PRACTICE – What does the Big Book say to me about my own practice of this Step?

- We each reflect together in depth about our own life practices of how we actually live and do the Step in question as illuminated by the Big Book.
- We each share what we have written.

III DAILY PRACTICE OF 12 STEP PRINCIPLES

- We each consider our own personal daily practice of the principles of the relevant Step.
- *The spiritual life is not a theory. We have to live it. (83: 2)*

IV TAKE THE STEP

Since the way people take the Steps in AA is highly personal, we leave it to individual members to decide when they have taken each Step. The Big Book has us consider, *Is our [Step] work solid so far? Can we answer to our satisfaction?* (75: 3-76: 1) One measure is our own peace of mind. Some groups observe completing each Step by joining hands and reciting the Step, along with selected meditations or prayers.

How might a Study and Group Practice session go?

A group member responds:

Generally speaking, we are people in recovery who come together to work on the Steps because we want to. We are willing to commit to five months or so of weekly sessions. And most stay when we hear about the details of this particular group approach to working the Steps by the Big Book. The workbook can be a little dry and it may seem like drudgery, but it helps to read it out loud like a bedtime story.

We get the importance of closely reading the Big Book outside of the group sessions with a buddy and maybe other group members, and/or a sponsor. We take what that book has to say personally. It becomes our book. We spend time each day in quiet reflection, and write frankly about what the Big Book and the workbook bring up for us. Those who are not writers talk it out with their buddy and/or sponsor.

The weekly group sessions are friendly and we try to begin on time, sitting in a circle.

~Someone familiar with the process may chair the early sessions. Later we can each take turns chairing for three sessions or so in a row, and we might all agree to change the format as needed. We review the Step we are covering and what will happen that particular session. We may open with the Third Step prayer. The silent quiet time is refreshing and helps us to "be there."

~We check-in one after the other, keeping it short. We often read aloud the Steps by the Big Book workbook notes and session selections for that Step.

~Either the chairperson or someone they choose starts off by reviewing some favorite short selections from the Big Book, reading a sentence or paragraph or a few pages. Then they read part of what they have written in response and speak about their personal work on that Step according to the Big Book.

~Others carry on by reading aloud their own writing, or say their reflections. The discussions get lively, yet focus on each person's own working of that Step with the support of all. As the Big Book says, *Cooperate; never criticize. To be helpful is our only aim.* (89: 3)

~If we haven't "finished" a particular Step, we may choose to spend another week on it, or we may agree "good enough" and we stand and grasp hands and recite the Step and often say a prayer from the reading. Together we have "taken" that Step.

~Then we look ahead to the next session, and encourage each other to meet with our buddies, to do the Big Book reading and to do the writing. We may close with the Seventh Step prayer, and we might go out for coffee and head on home.

Optional example of FORMAT outline for a typical Group Practice session.

This is for a 1½ hour session once a week. You may adjust the length of the session to 2 or more hours, add breaks, etc.

- **1st Open on time with focus meditation or prayer such as the Third Step prayer and from 1 to 5 minutes or more of centering silence.**
- **2nd Initial 2 min.: Review agenda for this session.**
- **3rd The SESSION – Approximate group study and practice times:**
 - ~10 min.: 30 second check-ins around the group.**
 - ~15 min.: Review brief selections from the reading.**
 - ~15 min.: Session chairperson or designated group member may share their writing and experience with this reading and this Step according to the Big Book.**
 - ~40 min. Discussion (40 min. per 1½ hour session. 70 min. per 2 hour session, etc.): Group members may share their writing and talk about questions and worksheets on actually working the Step in question by the Big Book.**
- **4th Final 3 min. Review next session's agenda. Encourage reading and writing between sessions. Urge meeting with one's buddy and/or sponsor.**
- **5th Close on time with meditation or prayer such as the Seventh Step prayer**

IF I am abstinent
& desire recovery...

...& I am willing to
grow along
spiritual lines...

...then I may commit with
others to a friendly, focused
**Steps by the Big Book
study group**

**"Easy does it,
But Do It!"**

MY JOB (as best I can,*
for ~2 - 3 hours a week)
STUDY ON MY OWN
Daily* **relax and quiet time**
Daily* **read** Big Book selections
& Step by Big Book questions

Daily* **WRITE**
on Big Book phrases
& Step by Big Book queries
"What these mean in MY life."

Weekly **talk** with Buddy/Sponsor
Weekly **ATTEND**
Steps by Big Book group sessions

Buddy's/Sponsor's JOB
Same as My Job

STUDY WITH BUDDY
Weekly **TALK** with
buddy/sponsee

Weekly **ATTEND** group session
"Together we can do it!"

OUR JOB "Relax! Our reasonable best is good enough."
All **ATTEND** every **Steps by the Big Book session***
GROUP PRACTICE SESSION
Begin on time / Review the session agenda
Quiet time - meditation-prayer / **Check-in** around circle

Chairperson or other: **Read** part of Big Book selection
Share Writing on Big Book & Steps by Big Book workbook

Others **share Writing and Reflections** in turn
Take Step together

Review next session / closing meditation-prayer / **End on time**