

NOTES ON STEPS 1 – 2 – 3

It meant destruction of self-centeredness. (14: 1)

STEP 1

No words can tell of the loneliness and despair I found in that bitter morass of self-pity. ... I had met my match. I had been overwhelmed. Alcohol was my master. (Bill's Story, 8: 1)

Like Bill, we are alcoholics, and we have hit bottom. The problem is our mental obsession that leads us to take a drink, and our resulting physical compulsion to drink to excess. Our lives are unmanageable; we must surrender. Working Step 1 begins when we become abstinent. We have to stop our particular addictive alcoholic behaviors so that our continued acting out does not hinder our surrender. Our experience is that we do not become whole without a solution beyond ourselves.

This is a disease of isolation and loneliness. We are prisoners of our self-sufficiency, isolated inside. We admit we need to grow and that we are not free. We are *people who appear to be sure of themselves but are actually eaten alive with fear inside.* (193: 2) If anxiety is the existential basis of our addiction, then we must alter our fear, remorse, shame and guilt in order to find happiness so that we do not have to go back to drinking. [Shame: feeling disgrace for who we are in our essence.] [Guilt: feeling disgrace for how we have behaved.] As recovering alcoholics, we have to do something about being *restless, irritable and discontented* (xxviii: 4) or we will drink again.

The point is to experience a *personality change sufficient to bring about recovery.* (567: 1) Human nature, the 'self' and 'instincts' are not the problem. The problem is how we habitually react to people, places, and things in our instinctual and self-absorbed ways, such that we risk drinking or having an emotional dry bender. How may we come to have a *profound alteration in [our] reaction to life?* (567: 4) How may we be free?

Recovery is an individual alcoholic's experience of the transformative power that comes from actually working the Steps, the program of action of the fellowship of

Alcoholics Anonymous. Out of our discontent with the way we are, we study and practice the 12 Steps as a daily discipline in order to achieve and maintain spiritual balance.

Rather than argue with the various hypotheses of AA, we experiment by doing the Steps as written and see what the results are. A sponsor is our essential guide through the 12 Steps. It is not about us or our opinions; it is about our action of working and living the Steps on a daily basis. The spiritual power, which comes from the practice of the 12 Steps within the AA fellowship, can move us to be sober and live with serenity and peace of mind.

STEP 2

Why don't you choose your own conception of God? ... 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. (Bill's Story, 12: 2, 12: 4)

If our problem is that we have a body which will die if we drink, and we have a mind which compels us to take that drink, then we are powerless indeed. We are without power. Yet the fact that we and others like us are not drinking or using, one day at a time, is proof of the action in our own lives of a solution – a power greater than any one of us. Step 2 reminds us we are crazy to think that we need to be in control or that we can do it alone. We no longer need to live solo with the pain and insanity that have been our nature. Insanity is when we lack perspective and things are out of proportion, and when we repeat the same mistakes over and over expecting different results. In AA we find hope that we can be restored to sanity, we can become whole. The hope of Step 2 follows the desperation of Step 1 as the dawn follows the dark.

AA is a spiritual, not a religious, program. Spirituality is what happens to us when we work the Steps within the AA fellowship community. Step 2 does not say: We came to believe IN a power that WOULD restore us. Step 2 describes the solution as we *came to believe THAT a power greater than ourselves COULD restore us to sanity.* (59: 2) The emphasis is not on who or what this power is, but on what this power can do for us. We begin to turn inward to find a higher power that works and feels safe. A group itself qualifies as a power greater than us, so do the spiritual principles contained in the practice of the 12 Steps. So does the understanding any one of us has of a higher power.

STEP 3

I humbly offered myself to God, as I then understood Him, to do with me as He would. I placed myself unreservedly under His care and direction. I admitted for the first time that of myself I was nothing; that without Him I was lost. (Bill's Story, 13: 2)

Heard in a meeting: "The problem is **Me!** The solution is **Beyond Me!** And the program of action is **Let It!**"

"Is the stone heavy? Put it down and rest."

The central affirmative action in Step 3 is a decision. We become willing to take action to do something different. We stop exhausting ourselves as if we were in charge of making things happen in this world. We loosen our grip on our fearful sense of self. We were never meant to do it alone.

We are asked to turn our will and lives over to the care of what we do not understand. Yet we may define our *own conception* of this power, as we may for our own understandings of *other spiritual expressions* and *spiritual terms*. (47: 1) By working Step 3 we are allowing *an unsuspected inner resource* (567-568) to care for us, not control us or conduct our lives for us. We are not giving anything away; we are not struggling to become something we are not. We are learning to cooperate with what we always were. We are complete and whole as we are; the stuff we mixed in was to survive.

We may discover that we are very sure what God is not for us, but not what God is, and that is fine. Working Step 3 will help us discover what works best for us. We are aligning ourselves with *a Spirit of the Universe* (46: 2) – one with our own best and highest nature. Spirituality is our tool based on personal experience, which gets better the more we experiment with it and use it. Step 3 reflects a spiritual progression through practice from hope to faith to trust. We begin to experience the distinction between *self-sufficiency* and "*God-sufficiency*." (52: 4-53: 0) The decision to turn our will and lives over to the care of a higher power of our own understanding is one we may make each day, one day at a time.

The authors of the Big Book call Step 3 the *keystone* (62: 3) to the *wonderfully effective spiritual structure* (47: 2) of a spiritual awakening that is being built by the discipline of the practice of the 12 Steps within the fellowship. How do we work Step 3? We do it by working Steps 4 – 12.