

SESSION 1

Preface and Forewords

A wonderfully effective spiritual structure can be built. (47: 2)

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

- **READ** Read the Table of Contents, Preface, and the Forewords to the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Editions of the Big Book. Many will read the Foreword to *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (12&12)* as well.
- **WRITE** Consider the focus questions relating to the readings, and write reflective answers to them, as you see fit. Cross off the bulleted comments as you take them in. Include your own questions and observations, and explore your doubts as well as your certainties in detail and in depth.
- **TALK** Talk with your sponsor and/or buddy about the process you are about to undertake.

II WITH THE GROUP: PRACTICE – What does the Big Book say to me about my practice of the 12 Steps.

- Discuss the purpose, plan and session format of this Steps by the Big Book group course. Consider that each member is expected to not only talk about but to do each of the Steps and, if possible, to attend every session with the team.
- This is a commitment, a team effort. Together we can do it!
- Discuss how the Big Book readings influence your own recovery process.

Points of Focus and Reflection

1.) **Contents** -A repeating *mighty purpose and rhythm* (10: 3) of the Steps and of the Big Book can be seen even on the Contents page (Consider page v).

- ‘The Problem’ is set out in Doctor’s Opinion and Chapter 1. [See 17: 1; 19: 3]
- ‘The Solution’ is introduced in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. [See also 17: 3; 25: 1]
- ‘The Program of Action’ is described in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. [See also 9:6; 42: 2]

2.) **1955 Foreword to Second Edition** (Consider pp. xv: 3-xvii: 2; xix: 1; xxi: 0)

- What do the Big Book authors mean when they say that, *This is but a beginning, only the augury of a much larger future ahead?* (xv: 2)
- How am I part of that future? What do I know about the story of AA?
- What were the tenets of the Oxford Groups? (xvi: 0) [See also 263: 0]
- What is the *message* of AA? (xvii: 3; xviii: 0; xxi: 0) [See also xvi: 2; 17: 3; 45: 2; 60: 0; 77: 0; 89 :1]
- What are *the principles by which the individual alcoholic could live?* (xix: 1)
- What are the *principles by which AA groups and AA as a whole could survive and function?* (xix: 1)
- What is the alternative to *the high road?* (xxi: 0)

SESSION 2

STEP 1 The Doctor's Opinion

Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.

...Physical craving for liquor. (xxvii: 1 - xxviii: 0)

They cannot...differentiate the true from the false. (xxviii: 4)

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

- **READ** Read The Doctor's Opinion. Many will read Step 1 in the *12&12*.
- **WRITE** As part of your Step 1 written inventory begin to write about:
 - Your own definition of each word in this Step, and every Step. Then look up each word individually in the dictionary.
 - Write what each part means to you: We **admit** that we are **powerless** over our **alcoholism-addiction** and that our lives have been and are **unmanageable**.
 - “How am I powerless over alcohol? Even if I have been sober for a significant length of time, how am I powerless?”
 - “How is my life unmanageable today?”
- **TALK** Talk with your sponsor and other members of the group about the readings and your reflections on them.
- **PRACTICE DAILY MEDITATION / PRAYER** The Big Book and *12&12* offer many suggestions for meditation and prayer. You may follow these suggestions, or choose a practice that is in line with your own belief system. The goal is to set aside some quiet reflection time, perhaps 15-20 minutes twice a day.

II WITH THE GROUP: PRACTICE – What does the Big Book say to me about my practice of Step 1?

As you go about your daily activities, think about the people, places, and things that are unmanageable, or over which you are powerless. Complete this sentence as often as necessary for any one day: “I cannot control / have no power over_____.”

Also list what you can control and what you do have power over. Share your lists with the group. Avoid 'yes' and 'no' rote answers. Instead, respond fully in detail and in depth.

Points of Focus and Reflection (Consider pp. xxvi: 3-xxix: 3) Try them out loud.

The Problem as understood by Dr. Silkworth in the Doctor's Opinion.

- 1.) The mental obsession (xxviii: 4)
- 2.) The physical compulsion [physical *craving* or *allergy* (xxx: 5)]
- 3.) The using to excess [abuse: *spreed* (xxix: 0)], and the need to control our drinking.
- 4.) The need for a psychic change.

1.) **Mental Obsession**

- How am I affected by Dr. Silkworth's definition of alcoholism as a medical problem? [Disease: (L- To lack ease.) Involuntary disability. See 64: 3]
- Did I drink *essentially because [I] like the effect produced by alcohol?* (xxviii: 4)
- Have I been *restless, irritable, and discontented* (xxviii: 4)
- Have I sought *the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks?* (xxix: 0)
- Describe in detail how I succumbed *to the desire again?* (xxix: 0)
- In what ways did I reach the point where I could not differentiate *the true from the false?* (xxviii: 4)
- When did I first experience an abnormal mental obsession with alcohol? Describe.

2.) **Physical Compulsion**

- How did I develop the *physical...phenomenon of craving [allergy]?* (xxvii: 7 - xxviii: 0,1; xxix: 0; xxix: 4; xxx: 1, 5)
- How do I describe my pathological physical reaction to alcohol?
- In what ways has my alcoholic body become as sick as my alcoholic mind? (xxvi: 3)
- What is my understanding of the concept of alcoholism as the *manifestation of an allergy?* (xxviii: 1) [Allergy: An abnormal reaction.]
- How do I feel about the idea of hospitalization? (xxviii: 0)
- When did I first experience a physical compulsion or craving for alcohol? Describe.

3.) **Drinking to Excess:**

- In what ways did I *pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again?* (xxix: 0)
- In what ways did I repeat this *over and over?* (xxix: 0)
- What are my reflections on the ideas that alcoholism *has never been...permanently eradicated;* and that *the only relief...is entire abstinence?* (xxx: 5)
- When did I first experience the loss of control of my drinking? Describe.

4.) **Psychic Change**

- What is my understanding of a *psychic change?* (xxix: 1, 3)
- What is meant by being *required to follow a few simple rules?* (xxix: 1)
- Am I aware that, if I have been abstinent from alcohol a while, Step 1 is about my powerlessness over some other behavior that reflects the unmanageability of my life?
- Am I aware that I need to find a way to stop that behavior so that my surrender is not blocked by continued acting out?
- What is of significance to me in this chapter? What do I not agree with?

SESSION 3

STEP 1 Bill's Story

Step 1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.

Upon a foundation of complete willingness.... (12: 4)

Step 1 written inventory

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

- **READ** Chapter 1 Bill's Story, pp.1 – 16. Read in the Big Book how in 1934 one of AA's founders, Bill W., learned of the problem, the solution, and the program of action to recover from alcoholism.
 - 1.) The Problem: From Dr. Silkworth, Bill learned of the medical problem of alcoholism as both a mental and a physical illness. (7:1; xxv-xxxii)
 - 2.) The Solution: From Dr. Carl Jung, (through Roland H. and Ebby T.) Bill learned of the spiritual solution to the problem as a *necessary vital spiritual experience*. (27: 5; see also 9: 6; 567-8)
 - 3.) The Program of Action: From the Oxford Group (through Ebby T.), Bill learned of the discipline of practicing a step by step program of action that opens one to the necessary *vital spiritual experiences*. (27: 4) [See also He Sold Himself Short, 263: 0]
- **WRITE** Write down how the matters set forth in Bill's Story reflect your own life.
 - Cross off the bulleted focus and reflection comments as you consider them.
 - Continue writing your Step1 inventory about your powerlessness over alcohol and how your life is unmanageable.
- **TALK** Speak with your sponsor and other group members about the study group and the Step 1 readings.
- **PRACTICE DAILY MEDITATION / PRAYER**

II WITH THE GROUP: PRACTICE – What does the Big Book say to me about my practice of Step 1?

- Review selections from Bill's Story together.
- Consider sharing your own writings and personal Step 1 stories with the group.
- Rather than 'yes' and 'no' responses, consider answering in detail and with examples.

Points of Focus and Reflection (Consider 2: 2; 3: 2; 5: 4-6: 1; 8: 1-9: 6; 12: 2-14: 6)

1.) The Problem (17: 1)

- What did Bill mean by, *I commenced to forge the weapon...that one day would turn...like a boomerang and...cut me to ribbons?* (2: 2)
- Was there a time for me when *liquor ceased to be a luxury; it became a necessity?* (5: 1)
- Did I think *I could control the situation?* (5: 1)
- Did I ever wonder, *Was I crazy?* (5: 5)
- How does an *appalling lack of perspective* relate to sanity, honesty, or humility? (5: 5) What do sanity, honesty, and humility mean to me?
- In what specific ways did I feel *the remorse, horror and hopelessness of the next morning?* (6: 1)
- Did I ask, *Should I kill myself?* (6: 1)
- In what ways did I seek *oblivion?* (6: 1)
- In what ways have I felt fear? (6: 2, 7: 0)
- What are my reflections on Dr. Silkworth's proposition that we have been *seriously ill, bodily and mentally?* (7: 1)
- Did I see that *I could not take so much as one drink?* (5: 4)
- Did such *self-knowledge* (7: 2) of the problem of *the insanity of that first drink* (8: 2) alone keep me sober?
- Bill describes taking Step 1 by admitting, *Alcohol was my master.* (8: 1)
- In what ways has alcohol been my master? (8: 1)

2.) The Solution (17: 3)

- What is my understanding of the *simple religious idea?* (9: 6)
- What was my reaction to religion, the church, and God? (10: 1)
- How do I react to the suggestion, *Why don't you choose your own conception of God?* (12: 2; 46: 2)
- Bill takes Step 2 when he understands that, *nothing more was required...to make my beginning than being willing to believe.* (12: 4)
- Note that Bill was instructed *to sit quietly and to test [his] thinking by the new God-consciousness within.* (13: 4)

3.) The Program of Action (9: 6)

- What is my understanding of the *practical program of action?* (9: 6)
- How did this derive from the non-alcoholic *Oxford Groups of that day?* (xvi: 0; and see 263: 0)
- What are *the essential requirements*, as I understand them? (13: 5 - 14: 0)
- How do I understand, *It meant destruction of self-centeredness?* (14: 1)
- What were the *revolutionary and drastic proposals?* (14: 2)
- Note that Bill essentially takes Step 3 through Step 12 at this time while still in the hospital. [Step 1 (8: 1); Step 2 (12: 4); Steps 3-11 (13: 2-4); Step 12 (1st part 13: 5; 2nd part 14: 5, 6)]

STEP 1 WRITTEN INVENTORY

Step 1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.

Consider these questions, which are borrowed from meetings and recovery literature. Add your own as you see fit. Copy and expand this template in your own notebook. Consider responding in detail with specific examples, rather than rote yes's or no's.

I POWERLESSNESS Physical compulsion :

What were all of the types and amounts of alcohol and drugs I used, from my first time to the present? What did it cost me or others (purchases, income, fines)? Emotional cost?

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When have I experienced the abnormal physical reaction to alcohol? [‘One drink leads to another.’ Suggestion: Describe the last drink or a similar episode in detail.]

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When did I recognize that I lost control of my drinking? [I drink to excess. I cannot stop when I want to. Heard in a meeting: “When I drink I break out in a binge.”]

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In what ways have I attempted, and have failed, to control my drinking? Did I use alcohol, or did alcohol use me?

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What were the things I did while acting out on my disease that I would never do when focusing on recovery? (ie: destructive behavior, loss of memory and blackouts, being abusive physically or verbally, insane and suicidal behaviors, etc.)

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What would my life be like if I admitted being powerless over alcohol and other dysfunctional behaviors?

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What other aspects of my life am I powerless over?

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In what ways has my disease been active recently? How do I behave compulsively?

STEP 1 WRITTEN INVENTORY

II UNMANAGEABILITY Mental obsession (self-centeredness):

When and how has my mind told me that one drink will not hurt?

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How did jails or institutions take over the management of my life at different times?

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How am I addicted to changing my mood? What was I trying to change? In what ways am I addicted to looking outside of myself for exterior things to change the way I feel?

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-

Are there situations that I fear will be so painful that I will drink again?

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-How has my addictive thinking and behavior manifested in my life today? Be specific.

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What is it like when I am obsessed with someone or something?

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-

Do I maintain a crisis mentality, reacting to every challenge as a personal insult? How has this affected my life?

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-

Do I insist on having my own way? Do I consider the needs of others? How has this behavior/attitude affected my relationships?

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What in my life can I truly manage?

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-

What managed my life when using, and what manages my life in recovery?

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SESSION 4

STEP 1 & 2 There is a Solution

Step 1 We admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable.

Step 2 Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Fellowship... ...the powerful cement which binds us. (17: 2)

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

- **READ** Read Chapter 2, There is a Solution and Appendix II, Spiritual Experience in the Big Book.
- **WRITE** Continue to write about how you are powerless over alcohol, and why your life is unmanageable (then and now). Respond to at least three or four of the optional focus questions, and to ones of your own.
- **TALK** Talk with your sponsor and other group members about powerlessness.
- **PRACTICE DAILY MEDITATION / PRAYER**

II WITH THE GROUP: PRACTICE – What does the Big Book say to me about my practice of Step 1 and Step 2?

- Letting go of the illusion that we can control our addictive behavior on our own is the first step on the way to recovery.
- Only when we realize we cannot control our using do we find a way to change, a way out.
- Consider sharing your written reflections on Steps 1 & 2 with the other members of the group. Pick a topic that interests all or several members of the group and engage in a round robin discussion.

Points of Focus and Reflection (Consider 17: 2-18: 4; 20: 1-23: 1; 25: 1-3; 27: 2-28: 3)

1.) The Power of the Fellowship

- How do I understand the *fellowship* as *the powerful cement which binds us?* (17: 2)
- How have I experienced the *common solution*, the *way out?* (17: 3)
- Did my *alcoholic illness engulf all whose lives touch the sufferer's?* (18: 1)
- How is it that I can *win the entire confidence of another alcoholic?* (18: 4)

2.) The Real Alcoholic

- In what ways do I have a *hopeless condition of mind and body*? (20: 1)
- What is my reaction to the idea that a *real alcoholic* is one who loses *all control of his liquor consumption once he begins to drink*? (21: 1)
- Am I a *real alcoholic*? (21: 1) If not, why not?
- Did I have control over alcohol?
- What *absurd, incredible and tragic things* did I do while drinking? (21: 2)
- In what respects have I been *dishonest and selfish*? (21: 2)
- Have I been a *real Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*? (21: 2) Describe.
- When have I searched *madly for the bottle*? (22: 0)
- Have I used a *combination of ...sedative and liquor...?* (22: 0)
- Can I answer *the riddle* of why I took *that one drink*, that *first drink*, over and over? (22: 3; 22: 2; 23: 1)
- How do I respond to the premise that *the main problem of the alcoholic centers in his mind, rather than his body*? (23: 1)
- In what ways do I share *the malady of the lie*, the mental *obsession that somehow, someday* [I can] *beat the game* and take one drink? (23: 2; 22: 2) [See also 326: 2]
- In what specific ways have I *lost the power of choice in drink*? (24: 1)

3.) The Spiritual Experience

- In what ways is my being sober today evidence of having *tapped an unsuspected inner resource* which I may *identify with* [my own] *conception of a Power greater than* [myself]? (567: 4-568: 0)
- In what ways had I *come to believe in the hopelessness and futility of life* as I had been living it? (25: 1) Describe in detail.
- Have I felt I had *but two alternatives*:?
 - *One was to go on to the bitter end, blotting out the consciousness of our intolerable situation...*
 - *...and the other, to accept spiritual help*? (25: 3)
- How does one go about accepting spiritual help? Might one's spiritual life then include *our constant thought of others and how we may help meet their needs*? (20: 0) Can I accept that the concept of "others" includes me?
- Am I ready for the *self-searching*, the *leveling of* [my] *pride* and the *confession of shortcomings* that *the process requires*? (25: 1) (See also 42:1, 2; 64: 1; 122: 1)
- What was the *certain simple attitude* (27:0) that allowed the *utterly hopeless...drunk* (26: 1, 3) to become a *free man*? ((26: 4; 28: 1) [See 28: 3 *willing and honest enough to try.*]
- How do Dr. Carl Jung's reflections on *vital spiritual experiences* as the solution to our problem apply to my recovery? (27: 4, 5)
- How might William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* be of use to me? (28: 3)
- Have I experienced the presence of a higher power? Be specific.

SESSION 5

STEP 1 & 2 More About Alcoholism

Step 1. We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.

Step 2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

We were alcoholics (30: 2; see also 60: 2)

Take Step 1

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

- **READ** Read of relapse in Chapter 3, *More About Alcoholism*.
- **WRITE** Write the story of your last drink in detail or tell aspects of your story through several drinking episodes. .
 - You may focus on these or other points in your written reflections:
-The Starting Problem: Our mental obsession. ('The Lie') There came the time that we were stone cold sober and we picked up even though we had years of experience about where it would lead us. *The subtle insanity which precedes the first drink.* (40: 2)
-The Stopping Problem: Our physical compulsion (craving, "allergy"). That once we put the drink into our system there was never enough, we could not stop.
-How we drank to excess: Why? Because we are alcoholic. (30: 2) [See also 342: 1]
- **TALK** Talk with your sponsor or with other members of your group.
- **PRACTICE DAILY MEDITATION / PRAYER**

II WITH THE GROUP: PRACTICE – What does the Big Book say to me about my practice of Step 1 and Step 2?

Talk with other group members about relapse. Did any of the stories in this chapter move you more than others did? Have you ever faced a situation where only your higher power stood between you and a drink? (43: 3) Have you ever relapsed? Describe in depth.

Points of Focus and Reflection (Consider 32: 2-34: 2; 35: 1-38: 2; 39: 2-43: 3)

1.) The Man of Thirty

- Do I have a *reservation of any kind*, [or] *any lurking notions that someday [I] will be immune to alcohol?* (33: 1)
- Was I *astonished at [my] inability to stop?* (33: 3)
- Had I *lost the power to choose?*(34: 2)
- Like the man of thirty, did I have an *utter inability to leave it alone?* (34: 2)

2.) Jim

- What *mental states* are the *crux of the* [drinking] *problem*? (35: 0)
- Can I identify with Jim who *found himself drunk* even after accepting what others *knew of alcoholism* [Step 1], and the *answer* [they] *had found* [Step 2]?
- Have I been *crazy and insane*?(see 5: 5; 37: 1; 38: 1, 2)
- Was I able to *stop drinking on the basis of self-knowledge*? (39: 1)

3.) The Jaywalker

- Are my thought-habits and behaviors *absurd and incomprehensible*? (37: 4)
- How have I *been strangely insane*? (38: 2)

4.) Fred

- Can I identify with Fred, who *would not believe himself an alcoholic* [Step 1], *much less accept a spiritual remedy for his problem* [Step 2]? (39: 2)
- Was I told *that if I had an alcoholic mind, the time and place would come – I would drink again*? (41: 2-42: 0)
- What are the *spiritual answer and the program of action*? (42: 2)
- What are my thoughts about the idea that *the alcoholic at certain times has no effective mental defense against the first drink*? (43: 3)

III DAILY PRACTICE OF STEP 1 PRINCIPLES:

- Do I know that admitting powerlessness does not mean admitting worthlessness?
- How may I accept my new freedom in no longer having to lie about my drinking?
- How may I stay in touch with the reality of my disease, no matter how long I have been free from drinking?
- In what ways today have I begun to be honest in recovery?
- Can I tell my sponsor or someone else when I have been thinking about drinking or acting out on my disease in some other way?
- How am I practicing open-mindedness, humility, and willingness today?

IV TAKE STEP 1 Take Step 1 in the second paragraph of page 30.

...We had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics. This is the first step in recovery. (30: 2)

This is how the Big Book authors described taking Step 1. If we concede, then according to the Big Book and under the conditions of this day, we take Step 1. As with all of the Steps, we each take Step 1 when we each say so.

Some write a statement such as this:

“I admit I am powerless over _____. My life is unmanageable.”
_____ (signature) _____ (date)

The group may or may not choose to observe the completion of this Step by holding hands and reciting the Step.