

Step Three

We can think of the program as a racecourse with a set of fences to jump. Many see steps Four and Five as the Bechers (Beaches) Brook of the program. This is a famous jump on the Grand National course at Aintree. The surprise of Bechers Brook is that the ground drops away on the far side of the jump, so having made what appears to be an impossible leap it then becomes a frightening plummet to earth on the far side.

On a racecourse, the hurdles range from easy through to difficult. We have possibly anticipated that the fourth step will be one of the difficult ones. With our eyes raised, we rush forwards, failing to recognise the full implications of the third step. Step three is just as big a hurdle, the first two steps ask us to look honestly at our lives and recognise that we have been suffering from the illness of alcoholism. If we do this after hitting our rock bottom, we are usually willing to accept the truth. In step three, we start to take our first action towards correcting our behaviour.

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

It seems an impossible demand, asking us to surrender control of our life, especially if we don't accept the concept of a Higher Power working for us. The good news is that the prospect of this has appalled thousands of us, but we have managed to achieve it. If we break this step down in reverse order, we can accept each phrase before actually looking at it in entirety.

...God as we understood him

Many people have a working faith, but they have never expected that their God would take an active interest in their daily lives. They feel challenged by the idea that a Higher Power could or would intervene for them. Such people usually find it easy to look at the evidence in their lives and to move towards accepting that their Higher Power is working for them.

People who once had a faith, but feel deserted by God are possibly in the hardest category. They believe they have proved that God doesn't exist and usually feel that it is impossible to give God "another chance", but by adopting one of the following suggestions, they can move forwards.

A common statement is some variation on "If you had seen (experienced / felt) what I have, you would know there isn't a God." These are of course wonderful sound bites, but our experiences are rarely unique. In fact, others maintained or even found a faith through similar experience and adversity.

Our problem might be as simple as feeling worthless. We might feel that no higher power could consider helping us because we are so pitiful. We can feel that our life up to this point has been so contemptible that no Higher Power worth the name would associate with us, or we over-dramatically declare God abandoned us.

Possible alternatives to God

A person who is comfortable with their concept of a God or "Higher Power" probably doesn't understand why we would ever consider needing to have a section like this. However, many feel that the word God is too offensive to consider, but they can usually accept one of the following alternative suggestions.

The population of a large portion of the world are comfortable with the concept of ancestors being available to support in times of need. It is possible to use the idea of a loved one who has died to provide care and guidance. The thought of a parent, grandparent or a close friend can be both comforting and motivating. A slight shift in thinking moves them from a loving memory into a position where they can oversee and help.

It would take quite a closed mind to deny the existence of nature. The earth and its environment obviously work in some kind of harmony. We can see this from the placement of the earth in relation to the sun, the tilt of the axis that provides the seasons, the interlinked relationships between plants, insects and animals. There is a pattern and a "force" that wants life to flow in a correct manner. As much as possible, nature attempts to heal the damage done to it. There are many examples proving that nature does heal; the eyesore that was once a man made coal tip sprouts grass and becomes merged back into the surrounding landscape.

A fundamental of oriental medicine is that there is a flow throughout the body and that removing blockages and correctly balancing this flow allows a body to heal itself. The blockage preventing our recovery is our own opinion and we can change this. Once we have, this "flow" will try to correct imbalances within us. Can we let that happen?

If these suggestions and concepts of outside influence are not helpful, the undeniable solution is the power of the meeting. If we attend AA meetings with the intention of getting well, we will do. These people will guide and help us. They can provide support when we thought we could not go any further. If we grasp the first step of the program and attend meetings with an open mind, “something” removes the compulsion to drink.

Is it possible to deny that this is a power greater than we are? On our own, we could not stop, but with this help, we can. Possibly our oldest substitution trick is to use the (G)roup (O)f (D)runks in place of the word GOD.

...to turn our will and our lives over to the care of...

A misleading, but commonly used illustration of handing over is “letting go of the wheel”, but surely it would be insane for somebody driving a car to do so. Possibly a better way of viewing this is to see ourselves as an interfering passenger reaching across and trying to wrestle control from the driver. Why would we do this?

Although we may deny it, many of us exhibit a nature that might be termed “Control Freak”. We often become distressed unless we are able to control the situations and people around us. Sometimes we use subtle control by creating the environment that guides others towards our will. Sometimes it is brutal and we force and abuse those we want to control. Obviously, we don’t do this to be cruel and we justify it by telling ourselves that we are acting in their best interests.

Our dilemma is threefold and is a difficult knot to untie:

- We are uncomfortable when we don’t feel in control.
- We don’t trust other people to get things right.
- We are told that we are not in a position to control our life.

By looking for examples in our past, we can see that handing over actually works. Here are two examples of being willing to hand over, one to a “God” and one to the Meeting.

The “God” example:

I came to the realisation that I could no longer live the life I had. My wife and children were gone, my job was at risk and I knew my sanity was in question. I lay in bed and cried. I looked up and said, “If there is a God then this is the time I need you, I cannot take any more.”

Through an amazing sequence of events, I was at an AA meeting the next night, taking my first tentative steps towards a new life. To the best of my knowledge, this was the first time I had truly surrendered and asked for help. I had certainly never considered that AA might be an answer.

The Meeting example:

When I first started in recovery, my wife allowed me to see my children on Sundays. Each time I handed them back, I became distraught and wanted the oblivion of drink. One Saturday night I shared about this anxiety at a meeting. After the meeting, somebody approached me and suggested that until I became strong enough to cope I should stop seeing my children completely. My emotions screamed objections, the idea horrified me.

“Willing to go to any lengths” came into my mind and I accepted their guidance. For three months I did not see my children, we told them I was working away. I attended meetings and started to build a little sobriety. I genuinely feel that without this period of respite I would not have survived.

Other people’s examples are rarely sufficient to convince us and we need to look honestly for our own. It would be unusual for somebody reading this to have lived a life without trauma. We can try to remember our lowest moments, the times when we thought there was no way out of our predicament. If we despaired and finally surrendered all hope, what happened? It is possible to see how “by coincidence” a chain of events resolved the problem. There might only be one or two incidents, but this should be sufficient to kindle a glimmer of faith in something bigger than we are.

Made a decision...

What is a decision? We make hundreds of decisions every day, we are not even aware of most of them. We feel that we are good at making some of them, but others leave us feeling uncertain.

In simple terms, we make decisions by allowing a number of factors to “vote” and we then act upon the result of the election. Examples of these factors would be, like and dislike, comfort and discomfort. These factors are the thoughts that occur constantly throughout the day, sometimes they scream at us, but at other times they

might be subconscious and we are not even aware of them. The monkey also tries to influence the vote, certainly on anything to do with alcohol.

A simple example of the decision process occurs when we are leaving the house. We need to decide if we should take a coat with us. To do this we take all of the information we can and allow the vote to occur. Where are we going? What is the weather like and what is it likely to be in the near future? If it is cold and raining, our desire for comfort outweighs the dislike of the extra burden of a coat, guiding us into making a decision. Making a decision baffles us when we don't have sufficient information to allow the voting to produce a clear choice.

In the first steps, we gathered information about our current situation:

- We are powerless over alcohol
- Our lives are unmanageable
- We are suffering from insanity
- There is help if we ask for it

Now we can add another piece:

- Our life based upon "self" has brought us to where we are.

In the past, we have used a positive view of our "self" orientated life perceiving it as "self"-reliance and "self"-sufficient, but probably ignored the negative implications such as "self"-centred and "self"-seeking. This additional information indicates that we cannot trust ourselves to make impartial decisions.

When we consider all of the facts, we see that we are not equipped to make our own life decisions. This means that the only sensible decision is to stop interfering and hand this process over to the "God" that we trust.

Putting it all together

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

If we have understood and accepted each of the individual phrases in the step, it suddenly becomes much easier to accept.

How exactly do we hand our lives over?

Even if we are still convinced that there is "nothing out there", we don't lose anything by saying a prayer asking for help each day. We have made a great start if all we do is confirm to ourselves that we want to live our life without imposing our will during the day.

When we encounter a specific problem, there is no better way to demonstrate humility than with the simple statement, "I give up". We can then mentally "commit" the problem to our higher power. The next action is to share the problem with other members of AA as soon as possible without trying to lead them towards our preferred solution. We can then stop trying to resolve it for ourselves and get on with things that do concern us. If we find ourselves once again attempting to resolve the problem, we simply repeat the process of handing it over and sharing about it.

This is of course easy to suggest, but extremely difficult to achieve, the thoughts can creep in at any time and we sometimes need support in handing over our problems. Visualisation is one way that works. Imagine taking the problem and wrapping it up in a blanket. Visualise placing this bundle on the table at the meeting and humbly asking the meeting to take it away. Hold this picture for a time and "watch" as the bundle opens and the contents evaporate. This visualised activity moves into reality by sharing honestly about the efforts we are making to have our defect removed.

Keeping it in place

It seems unimaginable that we would discover a way to improve our life only to disregard it at some point in the future, but most of us find it difficult to keep these principles in place. Over time, we take back the control and guidance of our life and we literally seem to forget to hand things over to our higher power.

We will never be perfect and there is no reason to give ourselves a hard time for allowing this to happen. If we are practising the rest of the program within our life, we detect the drift before there is too much harm done.

A typical indication that we have taken back control is that we realise we are in conflict with those around us and *nobody seems to be doing what they should*. By recognising this thought, we can see that we are judging the actions of others and assuming that we know better than they do what should occur.

The more we try to control, the less satisfaction we experience in our lives. We become frustrated and we finally start to think about alternative ways to remove the difficult feelings. Thoughts like this prove that the illness is active and cunningly trying to draw us back towards drinking.

Summary

With step three, we decide that we will stop grasping for the steering wheel and allow a power outside of us do the driving. This allows us to look out of the window and enjoy the ride. If this all makes sense, we have successfully completed step three and started to construct a new and successful life.

Summary questions

This is a major checkpoint. Anybody who successfully reaches this point within the program has already progressed a long way into recovery. Remember that we don't have to make firm decisions regarding our Higher Power or God. We can switch our thinking to whatever idea works for us.

- Can I honestly identify an acceptable concept of a Higher Power?
- Am I willing to hand over control to this Higher Power?

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