

Step Ten

Don't drink and don't die...

We are now free! We have addressed our old behaviour and if we have been practising each step of the program on a daily basis, we should be finding that life has improved. There are times when things don't go as well as we would wish – "living in reality" can be tough, but we shouldn't be involved in as many dramas as we used to be and when we are, we cope appropriately. We feel good and so it comes as a surprise when we hear "old-timers" proclaim that the best is yet to come.

Anybody who has children, or remembers being one, knows the anguished cry, "You don't understand". As a child, we cannot conceive of our parents suffering our distress. As we grow, we realise how childish our adolescent outbursts were. We come to understand that "being grown up" isn't a final position, but more like the rings in a tree trunk, a point in time from where we continue to grow and each year, life becomes progressively deeper and richer. Our ability to deal with problems continues to increase in line with our acceptance and practise of the program. Our life can improve to become better than our best times drinking, but it is essential to remember that the program grants a reprieve from the illness, not a cure. The monkey is waiting for the opportunity to regain control and tempt us back into old behaviour.

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

Our building work is complete and we are now living in our house. Anybody who has moved into a new home knows that there are various phases to go through. In the first few months, there is the "snagging" process. As time passes, the plaster cracks, doorframes settle and maintenance is required, a building is only fault free for a short period and there is always another problem waiting to emerge. We have reached the end of the house building analogy, but that doesn't mean that the work is over. It is actually just beginning as we move into our maintenance phase.

Continued to take personal inventory...

Most alcoholics have learned the hard way what happens to a living space that is not regularly cleaned and tidied. House keeping is usually something that we do a small amount of every day and attend to larger tasks on specific evenings or weekends. It would be rare if we didn't have a routine and we know that our life is unnecessarily uncomfortable if we don't keep up with it. Such as, we wash the dishes after each meal. If we don't stick to this, we end up with an unsightly pile of dirty dishes balanced precariously on the draining board. We know that it makes sense to do them every day, but sometimes we just don't want to...

Similarly, we know that we have to dust, clean the toilet, change the bedding etc. A routine makes it easier to achieve all of the jobs without forgetting anything.

In the case of inventory taking, it is common to repeat a complete inventory similar to the fourth step, although some prefer to do this by maintaining regular contact with their sponsor. In addition to this, we keep an eye on ourselves by establishing the habit of performing regular "quick inventory" checks.

A good time to take a quick inventory is just before we go to sleep. It can be part of a wind down routine. We can relax, review the day and see if we have allowed any of our regular defects to creep back into our lives. By now we should have abandoned being offended by idea's "borrowed" from a specific religion. The Christians talk of the seven deadly sins, Pride, Envy, Gluttony, Lust, Anger, Greed and Sloth. In broad terms, these describe categories of defects that are part of everybody's life. It might not be a good acronym by which to remember them, but PEGLAGS can work as an aide-memoir. By simply saying each word and looking at how we have acted during the day, we can form an idea of how we have behaved.

We should also evaluate what we have done well. In our earlier step four stock-take, we focused upon the negative parts of our inventory. We should now be able to acknowledge our good traits. Done with humility, this is acceptable and desirable as it encourages them to flourish.

At times our old way of thinking and behaving seems like that of another person. Most days we cannot comprehend how we hid upstairs listening to life downstairs and felt unable to face it, or how we always tried to control everybody. Inevitably, some parts of our old behaviour will creep back in.

Anger: Where others have the freedom to lose their temper without consequence, we no longer can. This doesn't mean that we don't lose our temper, but it means that we pay for it later. Irrational emotional outbursts leave us a trembling wreck for hours afterwards and so we try not to do it any more.

Allowing the old life back in: there is the temptation to get involved with friends and situations from our old life. Whilst not all old ties and connections need to be broken, we should examine our motives. Most of us still have good friends who have been in our lives for a long time. These friends don't question us when we drink water at the dinner table. They care about our welfare at least as much as we do ourselves and accept our new way of life as correct for us.

Ever since we left school, we had always met up on a Friday night to get drunk, have a dance and a laugh. I came to AA and could see that I had a drink problem, but the people seemed so old that I couldn't imagine spending all of my evenings with them. Once I felt strong enough, I turned up on a Friday to surprise my friends and show them how much I had changed. We had a laugh and I found that I didn't need to drink to get on the dance floor. I enjoyed it so much that Friday night started to become a part of my life again. I felt that because I was sober I might also be a good influence on a couple in the gang who were starting to have problems. I got one of them to come to a meeting and I tried to talk about AA, but they laughed at me and so I never mentioned it to them again. I knew that the people at AA would not understand that I felt I was doing some good as well as enjoying myself, so I didn't talk about Friday night with them. I felt confident that I could keep both sides of my life separate without it becoming a problem.

It went wrong late one Friday, in a club, chatting to a couple of lads. My friend, who was drunk, pushed in and said "Don't talk to her, she's a nun, doesn't drink, says her prayers, you need somebody who is up for a laugh". I was hurt and furious and started downing drinks like there was no tomorrow, in fact there wasn't. Tomorrow or the next day did not exist until I came around in the hospital three days later. Hindsight is often extremely clear. The fact that I decided to keep my Friday nights secret should have set off alarm bells, in fact, it had, but I didn't want to lose my fun night out.

Obsessions: Alcoholics seem to be able to develop obsessions for just about anything. It could be buying a new pair of shoes or a bread-making machine. Once we have made a decision that we need something, we have to have it and have it now! For simple things like shoes or bread making this is not usually a problem, we can laugh about how we sat up all night searching the Internet in our quest for the perfect answer. However, this can slip over into more disturbing behaviour when directed at other things.

An obsession for another person can prove quite frightening for both the object and the onlookers, but we tend not to see what we are doing. To us we are merely exhibiting love and affection. The "buzz" of infatuation is addictive and when we feel thwarted in our current obsession, life becomes flat. We look around for something to re-ignite the spark and the ever-present whispers can take us in the direction of a drink. Possibly, not in a direct way, but thoughts along the lines of "I'll show them" will start us on the track towards misery again.

Inventory taking: It is difficult to avoid falling into the trap of taking other peoples inventories. This curse plagues us from joining the fellowship through to the grave. We can justify it, claiming that we are examining their behaviour so that we can be more helpful to them, but we are usually either gloating over their misfortune, or gossiping (in a well-meaning way...) about them. It is too easy to sit in judgement of somebody without asking the question, "What experience took the blank page of a young child and created somebody who reacts this way?" We rarely know the details of a person's past (or present), but does this prevent our judgement? Engrossed in the inventory of others, we completely disregard our own shortcomings.

...And when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

The monkey is waiting patiently to trap us into wrong behaviour. This is why it is so important to keep talking to other recovering alcoholics openly and honestly about what we are doing. By dropping our mask and exposing our current desires and objectives, we allow others to see what we cannot see for ourselves. If we become unable to share at a meeting, the illness has succeeded in driving a wedge between recovery and us. If we have done something wrong there are usually four places where we need to admit it; to ourselves, our Higher Power, our AA meeting and to the person that we have wronged. Possibly, all that is required is an apology, or

we may realise that our actions have drifted a long way from the principles we are trying to live by. We come to accept that this maintenance is a part of our life and value the ability to review and change our behaviour. When we resent change, it can be a sign that a serious defect is returning.

Review summary (The Promises)

In the first chapter, we introduced a section of the AA book referred to as the promises, when we first looked at them perhaps they seemed an impossible set of dreams.

We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us.

(Big Book Alcoholics Anonymous)

By continuing to place our recovery first, we allow our sobriety, spirituality and serenity to grow. There is no great secret or mystery, *don't drink and don't die* is how we become AA old-timers.

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