

## Step Eleven

### Finding time for Serenity

As practising alcoholics, we rarely stopped to consider anything. As part of our maintenance plan, we need to put in place a quiet time to reflect upon our behaviour. We are now successfully handling all that life throws at us. Unfortunately, we can drift and revert to handling things in our old manner. It would be foolish to think that our ingrained behaviour has gone and will never again resurface. It is through the practise of step eleven that we keep our destructive instincts under control.

*Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.*

This step is near the end of the program not at the beginning. Before working through the earlier steps, the monkey can trip us up with words like prayer, meditation and Higher Power in two ways. We might have already tried a spiritual solution to our life problems and we can become convinced that this is the “real” program and ignore the rest. Alternatively, we can refuse to consider prayer and meditation and feel challenged by the suggestion of adopting such superstitious nonsense. Regardless of at which end of the spectrum we find ourselves, step eleven is part of the program. It isn’t all of it, but it certainly isn’t an optional extra.

### Sought through prayer and meditation...

Although the words prayer and meditation seem joined, they aren’t, they are two separate concepts. Whilst many people do allow themselves sufficient time to practise both elements together, others find this difficult. We can choose to pray at one point in the day and to meditate at another. It is irrelevant which part of the day we use for which activity – *it is doing it that counts!* Although we can alter how we do this as our needs and abilities change, we should try to find a routine. Planning to “squeeze in” communicating with our higher power when we get a few spare minutes rarely works and demonstrates a lack of humility.

Prayer is simply forming our queries and fears into a logical statement that can be verbalised. Some who reach step eleven adopt a “spiritual” higher power and use prayer as a means of communication. If we are using the group as our Higher Power, we can use prayer as a way of organising our thoughts regarding issues we are anxious about. Many chose to pray at the end of the day asking for help with any issues they feel are causing a problem. Possibly, a specific defect is reoccurring, such as becoming angry or resentful at the way other people seem to be treating us. During our prayer, we can ask for guidance about handling the problem.

Meditation has two phases, a calming phase where we quiet our mind and a focused phase where we use this calmed state to work on a specific problem. Mention meditation to people who have no concept of it and they will immediately react by commenting about crossed legs and saying “Ommm”. Whilst all spiritual teachings and many psychological therapies recognise the value of meditation, we immediately belittle it based upon knowledge gleaned from hearsay, television and films. If the monkey can lead us into mocking the idea before we understand it, we remain lost and unable to complete the program.

Meditating as we start the day can make it more organised. Our old way was possibly to launch into the first job that we encountered and rush through the day skipping from task to task like a bumblebee amongst summer flowers. We fall into bed feeling that we have worked as hard as we possibly can, but we often realise we missed something important. We could pass this off as part of leading a busy life, or we can consider changing.

### ...to improve our conscious contact with God (As we understood Him)

This statement is extremely clear. We are looking to improve and not simply repeat the same old prayer each day. We often realise that the monkey has tricked us. We thought that we were practising our eleventh step because believed we were spending time in prayer. We discover what we had actually been doing was reciting words, echoing little more than a grown up version of, “God bless Mummy, God bless Daddy and can I have a puppy”. Having presented our shopping list of demands and wishes, we then get on with life feeling that we have done our “duty”.

A closed mind allows our old opinions to reclaim their domination of our outlook. At the start of the program, we have the advantage of our rock bottom to open our mind to new ideas, but towards the end of working through the program, we can close it again in the belief that we have walked the path and that our path is correct. We improve by making effort and by challenging ourselves to move forwards, in doing so we become more open to growth. We could try to read something inspirational, or consciously examine why somebody or something is causing us to feel uneasy. Remember that within the framework of the program our most reliable contact with our Higher Power is through contact with others. We could take time to talk to people with a different set of beliefs and try to understand their point of view. If we undertake this with a spirit of humility, charity and compassion, we often find life becomes more satisfying and less motivated by self.

### **How much time are we willing to commit to prayer and meditation?**

When we consider this question, most of us discover that we begrudge allowing time measured in minutes. This is strange when we assess how much time we squandered drinking. Not counting the amount of time taken to acquire drink and to be sociable, we could try to estimate how much time we spent with alcohol actually in our hand. It seems reasonable to ask that we dedicate at least this amount of time each day towards our recovery. Even though alcoholics are supposed to be selfish and self-centred, we often find it difficult to take some time for ourselves. We feel that we are so busy in our daily life that we cannot consider wasting time sitting and doing nothing. *Step Eleven is not simply sitting and thinking. It is making a commitment to dedicate part of our day to self-care.*

It can be a dangerous way of thinking to use the excuse that we are having some quiet time for ourselves rather than going to a meeting. We need to be willing to change the balance of our day so that we can fit all aspects of our recovery into it in a planned and unhurried manner. We have our priorities wrong if we are not capable of allowing time for meetings, work, our family and us.

If we take the time to pray and meditate and life improves, how do we react? As alcoholics, we can have a tendency towards thinking that if something makes us feel good then by doubling the dose we will feel even better. Sadly, we don't apply this to a positive activity such as prayer and meditation. Once we are feeling good, the monkey starts to distract us by filling our lives and we are tempted into reducing the amount of time spent practising our eleventh step, or even start to skip it entirely.

### **...praying only for knowledge of His will for us...**

Although the word prayer can seem frightening, it still works on a completely secular level. If our Higher Power is the meeting, what is the meeting's will for us? The meeting wants us to get well. It wants us to be able to live our life in a comfortable and pleasant manner. The meeting certainly wants us to evolve into becoming one of the people "with a sobriety you can admire". It is only by people continuing to grow into sobriety that the meeting survives.

In addition to aspirations for our development, the meeting has its own changing needs regarding our role. As we progress, it might need us to become more actively involved in helping it to run. As time passes, we need to relinquish office and allow others to move into such positions so that they can grow.

Secular or spiritual, the important statement is that we seek only "knowledge of His will for us". It is too easy for anything else to become "our will for him". We don't always know what Gods will is for us, but our conscience is usually able to tell us what it isn't.

### **...and the power to carry that out.**

There are times when we are frightened about how life seems to be unfolding and we start to doubt the value of continuing. It is at these times we need the confidence that we will reach the end of the tunnel and it will then be obvious why it was necessary. If we are certain we are acting in good faith, then we can be confident that we will have the strength to see through whatever is necessary.

### **A meditation to start the day**

The idea that meditation can have two phases comes as a surprise to many people. We all know about the relaxing phase, but rarely learn techniques to use this mental state to focus. Below is an example of a meditation exercise, but if this doesn't work, don't give up too quickly. There are lessons, books and audio's

available to help. Don't be scared to talk to others, very few of us arrive with a full knowledge of how to meditate. Even when we believe we do, it is a good idea to check what we are doing and make sure that we are not tricking ourselves into thinking we can have an easy ride in this part of the program.

Sit upright, but relaxed, we don't want to risk dozing off. If we concentrate on breathing slowly and deeper than normal, we relax; breathing and learning to examine our body mentally for areas of tension are essential skills to master.

*Close your eyes and cast your mind out. Try to catch the sounds from far away, listen to the rumble of the trucks, the strange noises usually present. Be aware of them, not focused upon them. After two-three minutes, move your hearing into the room, listen to the noises, a clock ticking, the plaster cracking, note them but do not focus, hold this awareness again for two- three minutes, at all times keep your breathing regular, deep and steady. Finally move your hearing into your head. Listen to the noises, notice the hiss of blood in your ears, be aware, not focused. Move the focus of your senses forwards into your nose, feel the air as it runs against the skin of your nostrils and breathe steadily.*

*Imagine a cloud floating in front of you. It is a pleasant and relaxing colour. Inhale this cloud, imagining that it swirls into your head displacing "blackness". As you exhale, "see" the blackness drift away, leaving your head filled with the colour. Repeat the exercise five times and then do the same to each part of your body, neck, shoulders, arms, chest, stomach etc. Each time fill with the colour, exhale the tension, and relax as you breathe out a black cloud.*

*At this point, thoughts will start to push into your consciousness. When you recognise them, let them go, do not pursue them, enjoy the peace of not having any "real" thoughts going on. After a time, gradually bring yourself back into allowing the plan of the day to come into focus. What are you going to do? What situations require decisions? Which of these decisions are you equipped to make, which require further investigation? What sort of investigation should you undertake? Should you pass certain problems to others? Are the problems yours to carry in the first place? Should you hand them over to your Higher Power to handle? Edge your thinking back up into full consciousness and feel ready to face the day.*

## **Daily Growth**

The objective of this step is to allow us to grow as people. As practicing alcoholics, we tend to have stunted our emotional growth, like plants growing in soil too shallow, we were unable to take root and reach our full potential. We have now been replanted into a more fertile and suitable location. Any gardener will tell you that it takes time for such a plant to recover, but given time and help, a plant can grow back to a full and healthy state.

As our sobriety unfolds, we start to see that it has been our own expectations that have held us back. We can start to grow beyond anything we thought possible. Rather like if we had spent our life living in a tent, we would be able to imagine a bigger tent, but we could never conceive a mansion made of brick. The same is true for our perception of a way of life. By developing the humility to accept external guidance and influence, we allow ourselves to grow into a way of life – Beyond our wildest dreams.

## **Summary Questions:**

- Have I chosen a time of day to pray and meditate?
- How many times in the last seven days did I achieve this?
- Can I improve what I am doing?
- Have I changed any part of my life based upon my prayer and meditation?

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