

Step Twelve

So that's it then?

The house is built, the course is run, and all of the other mixed metaphors are completed. It is at the twelfth step that we pull all of the elements of the program together and complete our framework for life.

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

We often use "Twelfth Step" as short hand for working with others and we hear visiting somebody who has called the help line described as going on a "twelfth step call". In reality, the twelfth step is much bigger; it suggests how we should continue to live our lives. We can break it down into individual phrases and check that we are comfortable with them.

Having had a spiritual awakening...

The term spiritual awakening means that we now base our life upon spiritual principles. The foundations of these principles are humility, honesty and compassion. We are not the centre of the universe and we accept that others have as much right to be here. We recognise that we don't have to be self-sufficient in all things and that we can rely upon an outside power. This power will provide support and guidance in our life, *to any extent we will allow*.

Snakes and Ladders

If spiritual concepts are still causing any discomfort, we are probably not ready to work through step twelve and should try backtracking over the steps to find out where we missed the path. How could we have thoroughly done step nine and achieved a fundamental change without accepting spiritual principles? How could we have humbly asked to remove our defects in step seven? How could we have made a decision to turn our will and our life over, in step three? How could we have come to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity, in step two?

The monkey plays games with us and we can think of this as Snakes and Ladders. Just as we thought we had climbed the ladder of the twelve steps, we hit a snake that slides us all the way back to the start. Although it is essential that we complete the program in sequence, we now see that the program is not a "grading system". Maths lessons start by teaching us how to add simple numbers together. We then progress to subtraction, multiplication and division. It would seem degrading if we were sent back to learn how to add up again after reaching the stage of advanced calculus.

This is not the case with the program. Whilst step one should always be practised with "hundred percent acceptance" *we admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable*, it is common to realise that our willingness to hand over our lives has slipped away or that we have hurt other people and have not made amends for doing so. It is a life long program. Step eight is no more important or complex than step three. All of the steps have their place in our daily life and we constantly call upon the lessons embodied within each of them.

...as the result of these steps...

We often ended up at the doors of AA because we thought we were "Special" and "Different" and even at the end of the program, we can become diverted by this style of thinking. This step states that we have our spiritual awakening as *the* result of following the program. A few of us experience a thunderous and inspirational awakening, but we are falling for a trick of the monkey when we hope for something that removes the need to work diligently through all of the steps.

...We tried to carry this message to alcoholics...

The step quite specifically does not say, *help, save or rescue*. The only message we have is that the program of AA worked for us. The people we visit are free to continue to drink and die. It is not our role to get them sober. It is essential to remember that step twelve exists in the program that we are doing - it is our step twelve.

It is common to hear people say that they are not being successful at carrying the message and that people they talk to fail to stop drinking. This will frequently be the case, but we simply try to carry the message. We

might want to do other things, but that is not part of the twelfth step. Many arrive at the door of the fellowship wanting somebody else to take responsibility for their illness. They want a magic pill or a ritual that will fix them when everything else has failed. It is essential to allow people to stand on their own two feet. We show them that it worked for us and they can choose to recover if they want to.

Being there for the newcomer

Most of us are apprehensive when we go to our initial meeting. Ideally, the first contact a newcomer should have with AA is a sober person holding out their hand in friendship. We go to meetings for ourselves, but we have a responsibility to provide the newcomer with their *best possible chance to recover*.

If the person from AA attending a "Twelfth step call" appears to be eccentric in their appearance or behaviour, they can be off-putting. Whilst we feel we are being ourselves wearing worn out jeans and a leather motorcycle jacket, we must be conscious of the impression we are projecting to the person in front of us. We don't need to turn up looking like tailors dummies, but some thought about our outward appearance goes a long way towards calming a nervous newcomer.

If we experienced the handshake offered by strangers and the comforting nods as we poured out our heart, then we should provide this without question. We have received a precious gift in sobriety and the best way we know to keep this gift is to be willing to give it away to other people.

What can I say?

A person who has no knowledge of AA or of the illness of alcoholism can be antagonistic towards somebody who appears to be a do-gooder with a lecture. The chances are that family and friends have repeatedly told them to "pull themselves together". Their last chance seems to be reaching out to AA.

When we visit somebody in their home, it is important to encourage them to talk. Once they start, we can then expose elements of our own story that they can identify with. The strange fact is that a sober alcoholic can establish a rapport with a suffering one incredibly quickly.

All that is required is a simple display of the principles that saved our lives and the offer that they can follow the same path. If the person wants to argue and debate, we can point out that we used to do that, but no longer do so. It is pointless trying to argue somebody into sobriety and it will be damaging in the end.

Sometimes we feel that we have something important to share for the newcomer at a meeting. We must be careful about hogging the time in an attempt to make our point. We really don't know what it is the newcomer needs to hear to save their life and it is better to allow a meeting to proceed naturally. Although there is little difference between the male or female shares, we don't know this at our first meeting. When possible, we should allow them to hear some same sex shares either by sharing or remaining quiet, even when we don't want to.

We must always remember that we are dealing with people's lives. We have the power to kill by our unguarded statements. Our opinions are dangerous and we should almost certainly not discuss them with somebody when we are attending a twelfth step call. If we stick to the time-honoured script of Experience, Strength and Hope and nothing else, we can be confident that we are offering them their best possible chance of recovery.

When can I start doing this on my own?

It is unwise to attend a twelfth step on our own, regardless of length of time in the fellowship. There are times when this will happen, but it should not be normal behaviour, certainly never with the opposite sex. This is to protect both parties and the reputation of AA. A person making their first call for help can be in an unpredictably fragile state and we may encounter something outside of our control and experience.

Keep going to meetings.

Regardless of how long we have been around, it is part of our twelfth step to keep going to meetings. One of the greatest tricks of the monkey is to let us work through the program and then to attract us away. We fill our lives with important and interesting activities and we start to feel that we cannot spare the time to attend meetings. We justify this by claiming that we came to the meetings to enable us to rejoin normal life. *This is not true*. We came to stop drinking and it is important that we continue to turn up not just for our own well-being, but to give back something given freely to us. As a responsible member, we should try to:

Turn up on time so that the meeting can commence promptly without disruption. Nobody can avoid being late occasionally, but if we realise that we are always the last person into the room we need to question and change our behaviour.

Share openly to make sure we keep ourselves in perspective and to allow other people to identify with our story. We don't know what element of our journey will be the meaningful trigger that somebody identifies with.

Be approachable. We can become engrossed in "catching up" with friends at the meeting and assume that somebody else will talk to the newcomer. It is intimidating for them to break into a conversation and easy for them to feel rejected.

By being there and available we provide the gift of support and this should never be underestimated.

...And to practice these principles in all our affairs.

It is easy to use the words "living in the program", but what is really meant by this statement? By practicing the opposite of our known defects and adopting the activities of steps ten, eleven and twelve we make sure we remain a fully functioning worthwhile member of society. As time passes, the positive aspects of our personality will show through and people will begin to see us as a "sober" person.

Humility: Without humility, people will not see much of a change in our behaviour. We should have ceased to offer uneducated opinions to those around us, but be willing to shoulder responsibility as required. We should always keep an eye on our motives. If we are successful, others come to rely on our sober judgement and action in a way that we would not have thought possible. We can be part of a team without needing to be the star and take real satisfaction on the day that they credit another member of the team with something we did and we don't immediately demand the recognition.

Honesty: Self-honesty, visible to everybody we meet is a habit that will become second nature to us. We leave our fantasy world behind and fit in to reality.

Moderation: Life is more peaceful when we are content with what we need, rather than desperate for what we want. By replacing our greed with moderate behaviour, we see that our needs are usually within our reach whereas our "wants" rarely are.

Self-Awareness: Only by considering our own needs as much as we consider the needs of our family and friends can we continue to grow and successfully practice the twelfth step. We don't have infinite resources and if we drain them, old thinking rushes in to flood our life with chaos.

Compassion: Other people have their right to an opinion and they can have a bad day without us making it worse for them. When we are living within the program, it is difficult to react spitefully to another person. We are able to hold out our hand to those in trouble and no longer have a hidden agenda for our behaviour.

Gratitude: When we have it, gratitude for our recovery would seem fundamental, but it is surprising how often we forget. We know that we should be grateful for the new way of life we have, but we can find ourselves complaining that things are not how we want them to be.

Summary

"Living in the program," means that our actions and behaviour are those expected of every respectable and sober member of society. Can we really take pride in acting normally? Yes, we can. When we started our recovery, we were living a life so far from these principles that they were entirely alien concepts. The practice of the program has transformed us. If we ask how much each of the words highlighted above was a part of the "old us" we can see how much we have changed.

It will take time for those close to us to gain the confidence that we are serious about our new behaviour. They are the people who bore the brunt of our actions in the past and will be the last to acknowledge the change. It can take years of consistently demonstrating our recovery before they are convinced, but we shouldn't be discouraged. Although we desperately want these people to accept us as we now are, we will merely harden their attitude against us if we try to demand that they do so.

In time, people recognise that the drunken liability of old has now become a worthwhile person. They don't know how this change has occurred, but they can see that it is the case. We start out on the journey through the steps because we have to. When we reach the end of the steps, we continue with them because we want to. There will be times when we have problems and we always have a choice about how we will face them:

- We can face them with a clear and sober mind with the strength of other recovering alcoholics and a Higher Power to lean on.
- We can face them alone, drunk and befuddled with a monkey swinging from our neck screaming insane directions at us.

Remember that this choice presented a dilemma when we started the journey.

Final questions...

- Have I resisted being dishonest for self-gain today?
- Have I held out my hand to somebody today?
- Have I avoided mocking or judging other people today?
- Have I been grateful for my life today?

If the answer to these has been yes, then today should have been a good day.

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