

THE AKRON GUIDE TO THE TWELVE STEPS

A Guide to the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

Glenn Chestnut : In the form in which this was sent to me, this was a copy of a sixteen page pamphlet, 3.5 by 7.5 inches, which said on the front cover that it was distributed by A.A. of Greater Detroit at 380 Hilton Road, Ferndale, Michigan 48220, phone 541-6565. Nevertheless, on the basis of historical research, this seems to be simply a Detroit reprint of the pamphlet on the Twelve Steps which was originally written and distributed by THE AKRON GROUP at some time in the 1940's. (Detroit already had its own guide to the twelve steps in the Detroit Pamphlet which they had been using for their Beginners' Lessons since 1943.)

INTRODUCTION

A GUIDE to the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous is intended as a simple, short and concise interpretation of the rules for sober living as compiled by the earliest members of the organization. Great care has gone into the preparation of the pamphlet. Most of the ideas and explanations were brought out in a series of instruction classes conducted by veteran members of AA.

The Twelve Steps are the logical process by which an alcoholic finds and maintains sobriety and becomes rehabilitated. It has been the history of AA that any alcoholic who has followed this program without deviation has remained sober. Those who have tried to cut corners, skip over steps, have eventually found themselves in trouble. This has been the rule rather than the exception.

Upon being asked which is the most important of the Twelve Steps, one of the early members once replied with another question: "Which is the most important spoke of a wheel?" If a wheel has twelve spokes and one is removed, the wheel will probably continue to support the vehicle, but it will have lost strength. Removal of another spoke weakens it even more, and eventually the wheel will collapse. So it is with AA. Removal of any of the Steps will eventually result in a collapse.

It is important that the newcomer be introduced to the Twelve Steps at as early a date as possible. On these rules depend his full recovery. If you feel that the Steps are a bit too complicated at first, you can introduce them to your "baby" in a simplified form, going into the complete program later. The condensed form:

1. We honestly admitted we were powerless over alcohol and sincerely wanted to do something about it. In other word we admitted we were whipped and had a genuine desire to quit for good.
2. We asked and received help from a power greater than ourselves and another human. (Note: In almost all cases that power is called God. It is, however, God as we understand Him. For purposes of simplification, the word God is used in this pamphlet, meaning whatever higher power you choose to accept. In the case of the agnostic, the atheist or any unbeliever it is only necessary that he recognize some power in the universe greater than he is. He can call it God, Allah, Jehovah, the Sun, a Cosmic Force, or whatever he chooses. He is almost certain to admit that we live in an orderly world, a world where night invariably follows day, where spring follows winter, where corn ripens at a certain season, where the young are born on an invariable schedule,

where the planets and other heavenly bodies maintain an orderly course. So it is only logical that there is some greater power behind this orderliness. Such an admission is all that is necessary.)

3. We cleaned up our lives, paid our debts, righted wrongs.

4. We carried our new way of life to others desperately in need of it. The Twelve Steps follow a logical sequence, one that has been used almost universally by successful members of AA. They were carefully thought out by the founders of the organization and are as true and as necessary to successful recovery from alcoholism today as they were when they were written.

FIRST STEP

We admitted we were powerless over alcohol --that our lives had become unmanageable.

WITHOUT the first step there is no chance of recovery., It has been demonstrated over and over again that a person becomes sober and stays sober only when he is doing so for himself and himself alone. He may become sober temporarily for the sake of some person, fear of some sort, because of his job, but unless he is sincerely, genuinely determined to sober up for himself, his days of sobriety are numbered.

It is a difficult step to take. It is a step in which no assistance from an outside source is possible. the prospect must make it alone. It is not easy to admit defeat. For years we have said, "I can stop drinking any time I want to." For years we have believed that sobriety was "just around the corner." tragically enough, we never rounded that corner; and we suddenly discovered, much to our dismay, that we could not quit. We were like rabid baseball fans who still hope for a miracle when the home team goes into the final inning trailing by half a dozen runs.

So we finally came to the fork in the road. We either honestly admitted that we had a problem or we continued sinking deeper and deeper into the bog of alcoholism, resulting in loss of mind or death. Until the admission is made, to ourselves, that our alcoholic problem has gone out of control we have no inspiration to stop drinking. But once that admission has been made the way is cleared. It is at this point that Alcoholics Anonymous can step in and lend a helping hand in the remainder of the program. The remaining steps are automatically made easier.

The symptoms of alcoholism are clearly defined. There are scores of them, but among the major ones are:

- The inability to stop drinking after taking one drink.
- The necessity for a drink in the morning to "straighten up," that morning drink developing into another drunk.
- Getting drunk at the wrong time. That is, getting drunk when every instinct tells us that the occasion is one calling for sobriety.
- Inability to sleep without the use of alcohol.
- Loss of memory during a drunk and the deadening of memory even when sober.

The prospect will doubtless recognize many symptoms as his own when he listens to the stories of members of the group. When he recognizes them, it is imperative to impress on him that even if he isn't an out and out alcoholic he is studying hard to be one, and the time when he will be in serious trouble is not too far away.

There is no known cure for alcoholism. Once a person becomes an alcoholic (he won't recognize it when he crosses the border line) he is an alcoholic for life. He may go years and years without touching intoxicants, yet when he does, he will be back in the same old squirrel cage again. Strangely enough, case histories prove that he will be worse than he was before.

So it is not only important that we admit that we are powerless over alcohol, but that we continue bear in mind at all times that we are alcoholics. Only complete sobriety can make us and keep us normal.

If, as a newcomer, you can honestly say to your AA friend, "I have an alcoholic problem; I am certain that I am an alcoholic; I want to do something about it," half of the battle is won. You are then open to teaching. Your mind is prepared to receive instructions in the AA way of life.

SECOND STEP

Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

HAVING taken the first step we naturally ponder what we can do to receive assistance. Looking into the past we discover that our attempts to give up alcohol through our own will power have always failed. It is comforting to know, however, that many great minds are agreed that trying to use will power is like trying to lift yourself by your bootstraps. The sincere efforts of our families and friends to help us have been unsuccessful. We have fancied ourselves as rugged individualists. We have liked to think "I am master of my fate, I am captain of my soul." A little honest thinking convinces us that we have been miserable failures as captains and masters.

Many of us tried doctors and hospitals. Some of us tried religion. We found deep sympathy, but we did not find sobriety. The results were always the same -- we got drunk again.

Will power, help from families and friends, medicine, and formal religion having failed, there is but one place to turn. That is to God as we understand Him. This is not as difficult as it might seem. You are not asked to go to church. You are not asked to seek the advice of a clergyman. You are only asked to quit trying to run your own life, and to keep an open mind. You are asked to accept teaching from a group of men who have ironed out the same problem that is bringing you deep trouble.

Perhaps the easiest approach to the Second Step is to think back to our childhood. When we got into trouble we ran to our mother or father, knowing there was complete safety in their arms. We told them our troubles and our minds were relieved. Picture, then, God as a universal Father, ready to listen to your troubles, ready to give you the same understanding and protection you received from your parents in childhood. If your faith is not too strong at first try solving it this way: Look around at your new friends in AA. The program has worked for them. Their troubles were as great as yours. They were down-and-outers morally and in many cases physically. Yet they have followed the rules and have managed to keep sober. It is just a matter of following the advice of your new friends. Follow the program they lay out for you. Have faith in that program. It has worked for them. It can work for you.

THIRD STEP

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

ONCE having come to believe there is a Power greater than ourselves, it is not too difficult to turn our lives over to that Power.

It was explained in the Second Step that as rugged individualists we were rank failures. Forever looking into the future, we were forever disappointed when our plans failed. It is at this point that the Day by Day, or the Twenty-Four Hour plan comes to our assistance.

We have found that by giving up planning, by letting each day take care of itself -- and it always will -- we have been able to keep sober. We can't control the future. The past is done and can't be returned. And so if we can do a good job this day we are doing the best we possibly can. We start the day by deciding to stay sober for just twenty-four hours. We ask assistance from God to stay sober for that brief period. And when the day ends we thank God for the help He has given us. And on the next day and the next we follow the same program.

This is the first step in turning our will and our lives over to God as we understand Him. From this small beginning we develop until we find we are no longer headstrong, we are no longer trying to run our own lives and making a sorry job of it.

FOURTH STEP

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

AGAIN we come to a step that requires courage. One of our chief reasons for drinking was to escape from ourselves. We were afraid of our own thoughts and knew we could escape from them through alcohol. We were afraid to face facts. We were afraid of our jobs, afraid of our families, afraid of responsibility. And we were afraid of thinking about them.

So having fortified ourselves by taking the major hurdles embodied in the first three steps, we find the time has come to actually do something definite about our problem. So very much like a bather diving into an icy lake we plunge into an inventory of ourselves.

And what do we find? We have been dishonest. We have lied. We have cheated. We have broken hearts. We have stolen. We have slandered others. We have indulged in extra-marital activities. We have cursed God and man. We have broken faith. We have smashed most of the laws of God and man. In all, we find that we are pretty sorry, miserable individuals, and every one of these facts can be traced back to alcohol.

To continue the inventory, we consider our physical selves, finding that health is impaired, memory is faulty, appearance is becoming more careless and slovenly, finances are at a low ebb. And having honestly taken ourselves apart we wonder how on earth people have put up with us all this time.

It is a brave act to dissect ourselves thus. But we are fully compensated in the great feeling of satisfaction we experience in having at last squarely faced an issue. No man in his right senses wants to continue in this manner when he finds out what is wrong with him, so we logically come to the Fifth Step.

FIFTH STEP

Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

HERE again we find a very logical sequence. Having analyzed ourselves we find it makes sense to do something toward righting what we have found wrong. If we have taken the Fourth Step we have already fulfilled the first and second parts of the Fifth Step requirements. For a calm diagnosis of ourselves brings our defects. So we come to one of the oldest truths in the world -- a trouble shared is a trouble cut in half.

To admit our wrongs to another person may sound like an insurmountable obstacle, but actually it is very easy if we go about it in the right way. And any good AA can show the path. It does not mean that we formally sit down with someone and say: "I have done wrong in the following manner: First, I have been, etc., etc." If that were the method used, AA would not be the great organization it is today.

The AA member will pave the way by first telling his story. The newcomer will be amazed at his frankness, at the ease with which he tells of usually unmentioned escapades. He will tell how rotten he has acted toward his family, or how he spent weeks of his life in jail or institutions; of dishonesties; of lies and subterfuges; the whole sorry picture.

One or two conversations like this and the newcomer will begin to unburden himself. Things that he thought he would never tell a living soul start to come out. And as he shares his secrets his mind becomes unburdened of the terrific weight he has been carrying.

He literally gets his troubles off his chest, and one reason for drinking -- drinking to forget -- immediately disappears. It is at this point that real sobriety begins. Nor can an alcoholic be safe until he has unburdened himself. He begins to feel that he "belongs." And after he has stood up in public, leading his first meeting, he then feels that he is a full-fledged member.

The newcomer is definitely progressing, and is ready for the next two steps, which are grouped together for explanation and interpretation.

SIXTH STEP

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

SEVENTH STEP

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

IT IS VERY likely that we will willingly take the Sixth Step. As we scan the faces of our new friends in AA we see something we want. We see contentedness, freedom from fear, happiness, serenity and peace. We have been harassed by fear of losing our jobs, fear of divorce, fear of creditors, in fact, fears without end. We want to be like our new friends. And so, remembering back that no human agency has helped us before, we are willing to have God remove all defects of our characters.

But how do we ask Him to do it?

In the first place, we must remember at all times that we cannot bargain with God. In our drinking days we would get into trouble and pray something like this: "Oh God, if you will get me out of this jam I'll never get in trouble again."

But whether or not we got out of that particular jam, you were right back into another one. Instead of asking for outright help, ask for guidance. Ask merely to be shown the way, so that you can do your own part. As we said earlier in this booklet, ask for guidance for one day at a time. The days will grow into weeks, into months and into years. Yet it has been but one day at a time.

Do this humbly. Humility is sometimes difficult to attain. In our cups we were big shots. They were all out of step but Jim. Try to remember that regardless of who you are, you are but a tiny cog in the great universe. Look at a distant star at night. Remember that it took the light from that star a century or more to reach the earth. Remember the star on which you gaze could probably swallow the sun without noticing it. Consider that the earth is one of the lesser planets. And then consider your own physical insignificance. It will make you feel small and humble. And it is with that attitude that you should ask God to remove your shortcomings.

To be humble is not to grovel before men. It is not to become a doormat for society.

Yet while in the flesh we are but infinitesimal specks, always remember that the very essence of the Christian religion is that the soul of man is eternal. It is the most precious thing in the world. In the very least of us is a little spark of the divine. It is that divinity that makes us rise above the lower animals.

Humility is based on the recognition that we are the children of God. It is the consciousness of the need of a power greater than our own and a willingness to let that power control our lives.

Very simply put, humility is teachability, an open mind to the truth.

And when we can bring ourselves to this state, our recovery is well under way.

EIGHTH STEP

Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

NINTH STEP

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

THESE TWO steps are in such direct relation to each other it is simpler to discuss them as one.

It is at this point that we begin the physical act of rehabilitation. Here is something physical that we can do. It is where we clean up the book of our lives and start a brand new ledger.

Our debts are of two kinds, the physical and the moral. A very satisfactory way to square accounts is to take a piece of paper and list your debts.

As you square accounts check off each one. It is comforting process to watch the list grow smaller and smaller until it disappears. This is not an easy step. We would prefer to forget the past and its debts. But as long as we owe them, they are impossible to forget. They come back to haunt us. And an alcoholic can't afford to be haunted by the past.

So we set about paying back our physical debts. There are those long-neglected bar bills what have driven us from some of our favorite haunts. There is the doctor, and the butcher, and the baker, and the friend who loaned us money. There is the vase we broke on a drunken party at a friend's home, perhaps our financial condition does not permit us to clean up our debts all at once. Do not hesitate to pay a dollar here and a dollar there. It is remarkable how soon they are cleared up, and we will find we have gained new friends. Or perhaps a bank or other financial institution will lump all your debts together and pay them off, taking your note. By all means pay off this note as rapidly as possible.

It is not so easy with the moral debts. Some of these we can never repay. There is your employer who has given you chance after chance -- many more than you actually deserved. It would be well to let him know, not only by word but by deed that you are doing something to solve your drinking problem. He will be skeptical at first, perhaps, but he is going to admire you more and more as time passes.

There are your friends whom you have let down. A few apologies are in order here. There are those you have maligned, ridiculed, or slandered. As you make amends you will find yourself increasing in strength and stature. Finally there are your dear ones who tried so hard to love you, to help you. How many times have you broken their hearts? How many times have you disappointed them? How many times have you promised to quit drinking, only to break the promise within a few hours or a few days? How many times have you let them down in a crisis? And yet they have stood by you. They have nursed you back to health when the worst thing wrong with you was a bad hangover. They have paid your debts. They have protected your names and reputation. They have fought for you when you could not fight for yourself. They have put up with your lies, your subterfuges, your wanderings into extra-marital excursions, your dishonesties, your vile morning-after disposition. And they still love you.

Here is a debt that cannot be repaid by words -- even though you apologize until the very moment of death. This moral debt can never even fully be repaid by deeds. But it can be reduced to a minimum. The history of AA sparkles with families reunited and happily living together. But don't expect this miracle to happen overnight.

Always remember, it took you years to become an alcoholic. Full rehabilitation cannot be expected in a day or a week or a month. The road to rehabilitation is not as long as the road to alcoholism, but neither is it as tough. If you have successfully made the Sixth and Seventh Steps you will fully understand this. Always remember, easy does it. We must take life and its problems a single thing at a time. The longest journey starts with but a single step.

Do not minimize the importance of the Eighth and Ninth Steps. Without having taken them you will never be on firm ground. Having conscientiously taken them, your future is more assured.

TENTH STEP

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

WE FIND in AA that after a few months of sobriety, after the alcohol is completely out of our systems, our problems are more mental than physical. It is very likely that a psychic quirk scarred us on our drinking careers in the first place. It has been the rule rather than the exception in AA that as long as a person thinks straight he remains sober. When he goes back to the old alcoholic way of thinking, he gets drunk.

There are certain luxuries common to the average person that an alcoholic cannot afford. He cannot afford resentment, nor self pity. He cannot afford envy nor greed. He cannot afford dishonesty of any kind. He cannot afford procrastination, putting off till tomorrow what should be done today. He cannot afford to do anything that will cause him regret or disturb his peace of mind later. And so we must keep our thinking straight and clear. We must recognize that our enemy is alcohol, and that enemy is lurking to slay us on the slightest excuse, at the slightest opening.

And so it is important that we continue to take personal inventory. Perhaps we find ourselves criticizing some other member's method of staying sober. Instead, admire him for doing a fine job, whatever his method. Perhaps you resent something a leader has said. Forget it, it will be your turn to lead before long, and you will probably offend someone yourself. Perhaps you don't think your boss is advancing you fast enough. Just how long have you deserved to be advanced?

This list could be prolonged by thousands of words. But by this time you have advanced far enough in this new way of living to recognize what is good and what is harmful to you.

So, take time off occasionally to check up. Are you doing your best? If you are, don't worry. You are making progress.

ELEVENTH STEP

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 it out.

WHAT HAVE I to meditate about? This will be answered within a very few days after you have become associated with AA. For the first time in your life you are giving of yourself, and for the first time in your life you will find that good is repaid with good. You will waken in the morning with clear head and eye. You will not be tortured with fears of what you did the night before. People will go out of their way to be cordial, kind and helpful. Happiness will shine in the faces of your loved ones. You will be free from fear, each day will add to your contentedness, you will not be dodging into alleys and crossing streets to avoid moral and physical creditors, you are beginning to have the power to help others. Surely, you have much for meditation.

When you meditate on this new way of living you cannot but realize that there is a God above, guiding you through each successive day and night. As you become more conscious of this you will seem to better understand this Guiding Power. Before long you will find it is easy to pray. But if it doesn't come easily, don't let it worry you.

Even churchmen will admit that prayer as we commonly hear it is phrased in language stilted and archaic. The Thee and Thou form has been used since the days of King James when the present version of the Bible was written. If you don't like it don't use it. It is not hard to say before retiring, "Thank you, God, for keeping me sober today." Nor is it hard to say in the morning, "Please, God, guide me in the path of sobriety and decent and useful living this coming day." Make your talks with your Guiding Power a personal thing. Give thanks for help and ask for assistance as though you were addressing your earthly father. Your sincerity is what counts, not the form of language you use. And be certain that the God to whom you pray will make it easier for you to work out your own salvation.

TWELFTH STEP

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

NOW YOU ARE on your own. Your AA friends have given you your tools and showed you how to use them. From now on it is your job to fashion your life.

In the first place, don't be thrown by the phrase "Spiritual experience." It may bring to mind something supernatural -- perhaps the lightning flashing, the thunder resounding. Or as in the case of Saul of Tarsus, a blinding flash of light. A sudden spiritual experience or awakening is extremely uncommon. Perhaps a score out of the thousands in AA have experienced it. But it is a slow process for the average person. We are inclined to confuse spirituality with theology, dogma, creed and ritual. Just remember that most of us are pretty new to this useful, decent way of living, so we must learn the spiritual side of the picture slowly and simply.

Remember this simple thing: The entire structure of the Christian religion is built on Love. The word has many synonyms, such as Charity, Grace, Good-will, Tenderness, Generosity, Kindness, Tolerance, Sympathy, Mercy, and others. When we help a fellow being, when we are kind to one another we are performing a completely spiritual act. Spirituality is simply the act of being selflessly helpful. If you will start with this simple explanation you will find that the green light has been flashed on. Christ taught that there are two great commandments: to love God; and to love your neighbor as yourself. If you can follow these you will have no trouble.

What you don't understand don't worry about. It will all become clear in a short while. If anything puzzles you, consult an older member of the group. He most likely will straighten out your thinking in a few words.

If you have gone through the first Eleven Steps you have come far. It is now time that you are carrying on the work. You owe your sponsor and your group one thing -- to carry the blessings of AA to some other alcoholic in need. You will be asked to call on a prospective member. Don't lose any time in doing so. Tell him your story. Tell him what you are trying to do. Tell him what AA has done for others. If you think you are too new, just remember that he is even newer, and if you have been sober only one day, he will look on you as a veteran.

Before long you will have a "baby" of your own. Then you will really have something to live for. You will worry about him, you will try to keep sober for him, you will guide him to the best of your ability, you will almost suffer with him as he comes out of his alcoholic fog. In doing this you will be giving of yourself, and you will find new joy in living.

Always keep it before you that the more you put into this work the more you will take out of it. The harder you work, the more activities you get into, the easier will be your road to sober living. There is no excuse for missing a meeting. There is no excuse for not helping someone when asked to. Always bear in mind that your alcoholic problem is the first thing in your life. It comes before everything else. For without sobriety you will have nothing -- no family, no job, no friends. And before too long you will have no sanity -- and will lose life itself. Share this new life with others. It will repay you ten thousandfold.

In conclusion, practice these steps in all your affairs. The Twelve Steps are not something to be gone through once and then forgotten. They are a set of rules for living that must be practiced at all times, never forgotten. Remember that you are an alcoholic, and but one drink away from drunkenness again.

Remember that you are completely dependent on God as you understand Him.

Remember to keep your thinking straight.

Remember that a wrong act will prey on your mind until you either do something to rectify it or get drunk.

Remember that defects will creep into your life if given half a chance.

Remember that if only through gratitude, we must help others in order to help ourselves.

And if at any time you feel uncertain of yourself, read the Twelve Steps carefully, applying them to yourself. You will find an answer to your problem.

If the answer is not there, a telephone call or a visit to another member of AA will bring the answer.