

# **Alcoholics Anonymous by the Women Ourselves**

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# **Preamble: The Definition of Alcoholics Anonymous**

*Alcoholics Anonymous* is a fellowship of people who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

## **Book Preface**

*“It was four whole years before A. A. brought permanent sobriety to even one alcoholic woman. But as the communication was perfected, mostly by the women themselves, the picture changed.”*

—Bill W., Grapevine, Oct. 1959

Fortunately, when I was first handed a copy of the book Alcoholics Anonymous, I was advised to ignore the male pronouns, the antiquated language and to focus on the similarities, not the differences. That saved me as I feared that A.A. was more a men’s solution, and not of much help for a woman like me!

Other things that helped me were the wonderful ways that each of my female sponsors shared their experiences, and the suggestions that they gave me—truly inspired homework assignments suited to women—in order to help me grasp and work the steps to the best of my ability!

Still, we found that certain common A.A. suggestions for men are misleading for women. For example, for many men, self-forgetting is

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helpful. But women are often caretakers of others and neglect self-care, putting ourselves last.

Without a sense of self, we cannot connect with a Power greater than ourselves, nor can we take charge of and be responsible for ourselves and determine what we can and cannot control.

Self-forgetting is a character defect women must overcome by giving up selfishness or self-will and practicing self-care and self-discovery. We must rediscover that we are a beloved child of God. Among the topics we discuss are:

- Perfectionism
- Mother Guilt
- Surrender not submission
- Victims of abuse
- Self-critical tendencies
- False urges to apologize
- What we own and what we don't
- Personalizing our prayers

This book covers tough topics and discusses real solutions for the underlying causes and conditions of alcoholism. With women's self-critical tendencies, harsh language and a punishing God are less effective for women's recovery than a nurturing approach and a loving, caring God.

The A.A. Program transcends the language it was written in. But, as the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (12 & 12) suggests, we raise the bottom for newcomer women. We express the A.A. Principles in modern language addressing relevant women's topics.

The A.A. Fact File recognizes three kinds of literature: (1) Conference-Approved Literature, (2) A.A. Literature Prepared by Local Groups, and (3) Outside Literature.

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## Part 1: Our Stories

### Powerless and Unmanageable

I first began using alcohol to numb out to life at the ripe age of 13. Not being able to understand or accept why I was the target of my parent's abuse. Running to a friend's house, to convince strangers to buy us liquor, as frequently as possible. It was just easier to get black-out drunk, nightly; then make sense of what was happening. At age 16, my grandfather bought me a car. I finally had an escape. Quickly after, moved into my car. I wouldn't admit it was a problem; because it was the only way that I could function.

I ended up finding a place to live, on the condition that I join A.A. In so doing, my friend's mom, saved my life. Quickly at A.A. meetings, I heard the truth and reasoning behind my disease. I was confused thinking that the bottle was helping me function. It was the enabler of my dysfunction. I sobered up for over 10 years, I'm not aware of my date of relapse.

After my car accident and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), I didn't realize that I was an alcoholic. Which is total crap! My vanity and ego did not allow me to listen to my gut saying, "*this is wrong.*" I tuned out my inner frequency, because it was much easier to black out than to feel.

I fell victim to my own character defects; I allowed patterns from before I first found sobriety. Allowing everyone upon which I was codependent dictate everything, even how I was allowed to feel about myself. It took me getting blasted on a Friday night; then having the same need, not desire to repeat the following Sunday; for me to recognize my sick behavior. I actually called that friend's

mom, from all those years back to ask if I was allowed to go to an A.A. meeting. I didn't find any reason prior to this to admit that I was powerless over alcohol and drugs.

My disease couldn't allow me to accept the reality of actually feeling my life. I couldn't accept any feelings that weren't distorted by my addiction. It is interesting how Step One is admittedly beating your ego with serenity. Ultimately winning the battle of self by choosing to take care of yourself and not create further damage.

Through the First Tradition of welfare through unity, we can reduce our egos until we can accept that we actually aren't in control. I need to remember that the disease has the leg up. That it doesn't necessarily take much, for it to be back in control, leading my life. That I need my community in Alcoholics Anonymous, as much as I need my apparent self. My character defects are always there, just waiting to brim to the surface. If I am not stating my step prayers, in contact with my sponsor, and living my life by A.A. rhetoric: my defects are merely germs waiting to attack, when given the chance.

—Member 1

## **A Grateful Alcoholic**

I first heard these three words when I came into the rooms, I thought, *You all are sick, I'm sorry you're grateful to be an alcoholic.* It took three years, hard work with a sponsor, and diving headfirst into the program to realize that I am truly a "*grateful alcoholic.*"

The best and worst day of my life was on May 26, 2017. I was dying from the inside/out from this insidious disease called alcoholism. Alcohol was my best friend, and I did not know if I could live without it.

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At a young age, I remember not feeling a part of my family and different than my fellows. My father would tell me that he would send me back to India if I acted out and my mother would tell me to “*buck up*”, “*get over it*”, or “*you’re fine*” whenever I felt feelings. Things were swept under the rug and I learned how to cover up my feelings really well.

I was 17 when I had my first drink and I never looked back. As they say in the rooms, “*it was fun, fun with problems, then just problems.*”

That’s exactly how my story goes. I was a compulsive liar; I drank to get drunk and I created a lot of chaos and worry for my family and friends.

Everyone kept telling me to get help after some traumatic events happened in my life but I was fine or so I kept telling myself so I could drink the way I wanted to. I wasn’t going to “*admit complete defeat*”, I was not going to look weak. I used to believe that a “*true alcoholic*” starts drinking in the morning, drinks from a bottle wrapped in a paper bag, and does not have a job. I kept telling myself I had it under control...until I didn’t.

I quickly became the alcoholic that needed to take that 3am shot to stop the shakes at night. I needed to drink at all hours of the day to function or survive one more day. I knew I couldn’t live with alcohol, but I didn’t know how to live without it. By 2016, I weighed 80 pounds and this disease had me in its grips.

The weekend of May 26, I had no other choice but to get help. My life was saved that weekend. My detox led me to terrifying hallucinations, flatlining, and falling into a coma. If this is what alcohol did to me, then I knew it was no longer a solution for me. I

proceeded to a 90-day treatment center, lived in a Sober Living Environment and I did everything you guys told me to do. When I got out, I got a sponsor, worked the steps, and found a Higher Power far greater than myself who I choose to call “*Her*.”

Grateful cannot even begin to express how beautiful life has been in the past 3 years. I have weathered some storms but came out stronger. You told me not to leave five minutes before the miracle and I am so glad I waited. I work this program to the best of my ability every day. I turn to my Higher Power when things are good and when things are bad.

Today, I am a full-fledged grateful alcoholic, and I am honored to be a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

—Member 2

## **Getting Honest**

In Alcoholics Anonymous, there’s no specific literature that speaks to Step Zero. I have heard members speak to this unwritten step as “*the step before taking the first steps*.” For me, Step Zero was the point at which I acknowledged that I had a problem and became ready to do *something*—to take action—about my alcohol problem.

Given that pain is a great motivator, alcoholism can often seem much easier to acknowledge and accept when the evidence of its impact begins to mount. Consequently, I had to get honest about what alcohol was doing to me:

Endless hangovers (I used to be sick for days, and repeatedly suffered with alcohol poisoning requiring medical intervention)

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Black-outs (walking and talking while drunk, yet not remembering a damn thing—this was my dilemma, and the source of constant remorse, guilt, and shame)

DUI's and incarceration (I was repeatedly pulled over by county Sheriffs who reluctantly let me off with dire warnings—but that was many years ago, when I still lived on a farm)

- Failed marriages (sadly, I've had 3)
- Lost jobs (none *yet*, but alcohol did play a negative part)
- Damaged finances (absolutely)
- Destroyed relationships (both with family and friends)
- Enlarged livers, diabetes, and heart disease (I've certainly had my fair share of health consequences, though long-term sobriety has reversed much of that)
- Time in institutions (from failed suicide attempts, affording me the opportunity to escape death, the ultimate consequence)

Interestingly, even in the face of such horrific mounting evidence, countless practicing alcoholics *continue* to remain in deep denial, as I did, refusing any help or any admittance of their active and voracious disease, and their clear failure to navigate, or effectively manage life.

There are alcoholics who've been able to achieve some outward success. I managed to graduate from college with honors, secured high-paying jobs, won awards, got married, had a child, and yet always felt never good enough. Despite outward success, an utter dependency upon alcohol stifled much of the joy and life that might

have otherwise been enjoyed—this was my truth, but I could NOT get honest about this for quite a while!

For me, denial was an especially potent force! My first sponsor had me look up this word in the dictionary. This is what I found:

**Denial:** the action of declaring something to be untrue; the refusal of something requested or desired; unwillingness to accept reality; acting as if something painful does not exist; defense mechanism in which confrontation with a personal problem or with reality is avoided by denying the existence of the problem or reality.

In some instances, initial (short-term) denial can be beneficial. Such denial affords us the opportunity to adjust to a difficult, painful, or distressing situation or issue. Regrettably, for me, the denial about my alcoholism had a deep, and very dark side: I *could not* get honest! And this dishonesty kept me chained to my misery!

While denial is a legitimate psychological coping mechanism that provides the normal drinker with time to adjust to distressing situations, it's very different for the alcoholic. Remaining in denial—staying stuck—can interfere with treatment and the ability to tackle life's challenges. Inevitably, alcoholics in denial face institutionalization, incarceration, or death!

When in denial about my alcoholism, I tried (however ineptly) to protect myself by refusing to accept the truth that something painful (and potentially life-threatening) was happening to me because of my alcohol dependency. I really struggled with the concept of honesty. Lying—to myself and others—was what I did!

I had to hit a very hard, and very painful, bottom—a violent rape at gun point—before I would admit to having a problem with

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alcohol. It took this bottom for me to see the truth of my drinking, and to comprehend the depth and breadth of the harm it had inflicted on me, and those who loved me. This horrible bottom catalyzed my anguish into a cry for help that ultimately led me to A.A.

Even with a high level of catalyzed anguish and misery, few alcoholics actually do anything to seek help. Bear in mind, this is much like the Third Step decision—many make the decision, yet without the essential action following it, most will return to what they know for comfort: alcohol, and then, alcoholic oblivion.

Fortunately, I came to Alcoholics Anonymous with the “*Gift of Desperation*” (my first “*GOD*”) and quickly discovered relief from my alcoholism. Desperation got me willing to work with a sponsor and to look at my life—and my part in it—honestly. Once I conceded to my innermost self that I was an alcoholic, for which entire abstinence is the only relief, my life began to change. Getting honest had that effect upon me. For that, I am hugely grateful!

Today, some 27 years later, I know that I seriously needed a spiritual intervention and awakening in order to get, and stay, sober. A.A.’s basic text Alcoholics Anonymous reminds me that I get a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of my spiritual condition. While no human power can help me with my disease, God can, and will, if sought! So, I’ve learned to honestly, and earnestly, seek God—the God of my own understanding. And *that* has made all the difference.

—Member 3

## Chapter 2: The Doctor's Opinion

Circa 1939

A well-known doctor, chief physician at a nationally prominent hospital specializing in alcoholic and drug addiction, sent Alcoholics Anonymous the following letter.

*To Whom It May Concern:*

*I have specialized in the treatment of alcoholism for many years.*

*In late 1934 I attended a patient who, though he had been a competent businessman of good earning capacity, was an alcoholic of a type I had come to regard as hopeless.*

*In the course of his third treatment he acquired certain ideas concerning a possible means of recovery. As part of his rehabilitation he commenced to present his conceptions to other alcoholics, impressing upon them that they must do likewise with still others. This has become the basis of a rapidly growing fellowship of these men and their families. This man and over one hundred others appear to have recovered.*

*I personally know scores of cases who were of the type with whom other methods had failed completely.*

*These facts appear to be of extreme medical importance; because of the extraordinary possibilities of rapid growth inherent in this group they may mark a new epoch in the annals of alcoholism. These men may well have a remedy for thousands of such situations.*

*You may rely absolutely on anything they say about themselves.*

*Very truly yours,*

*(Signed) - - - - M.D.*

The physician who, at our request, gave us this letter, has been kind enough to enlarge upon his views in another statement which follows. In this statement he confirms what we who have suffered alcoholic torture

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must believe that the body of the alcoholic is quite as abnormal as his mind. It did not satisfy us to be told that we could not control our drinking just because we were maladjusted to life, that we were in full flight from reality, or were outright mental defectives. These things were true to some extent, in fact, to a considerable extent with some of us. But we are sure that our bodies were sickened as well. In our belief, any picture of the alcoholic which leaves out this physical factor is incomplete.

The doctor's theory that we have an allergy to alcohol interests us. As laymen, our opinion as to its soundness may, of course, mean little. But as ex-problem drinkers, we can say that his explanation makes good sense. It explains many things for which we cannot otherwise account.

Though we work out our solution on the spiritual as well as an altruistic plane, we favor hospitalization for the alcoholic who is very jittery or befogged. More often than not, it is imperative that a man's brain be cleared before he is approached, as he has then a better chance of understanding and accepting what we have to offer.

The doctor writes:

*The subject presented in this book seems to me to be of paramount importance to those afflicted with alcoholic addiction.*

*I say this after many years' experience as Medical Director of one of the oldest hospitals in the country treating alcoholic and drug addiction.*

*There was, therefore, a sense of real satisfaction when I was asked to contribute a few words on a subject which is covered in such masterly detail in these pages.*

*We doctors have realized for a long time that some form of moral psychology was of urgent importance to alcoholics, but its application presented difficulties beyond our conception. What with our ultra-modern standards, our scientific approach to everything, we are perhaps not well*

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*equipped to apply the powers of good that lie outside our synthetic knowledge.*

*Many years ago, one of the leading contributors to this book came under our care in this hospital and while here he acquired some ideas which he put into practical application at once.*

*Later, he requested the privilege of being allowed to tell his story to other patients here and with some misgiving, we consented. The cases we have followed through have been most interesting; in fact, many of them are amazing. The unselfishness of these men as we have come to know them, the entire absence of profit motive, and their community spirit, is indeed inspiring to one who has labored long and wearily in this alcoholic field. They believe in themselves, and still more in the Power which pulls chronic alcoholics back from the gates of death.*

*Of course, an alcoholic ought to be freed from his physical craving for liquor, and this often requires a definite hospital procedure, before psychological measures can be of maximum benefit.*

*We believe, and so suggested a few years ago, that the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation of an allergy; that the phenomenon of craving is limited to this class and never occurs in the average temperate drinker. These allergic types can never safely use alcohol in any form at all; and once having formed the habit and found they cannot break it, once having lost their self-confidence, their reliance upon things human, their problems pile up on them and become astonishingly difficult to solve.*

*Frothy emotional appeal seldom suffices. The message which can interest and hold these alcoholic people must have depth and weight. In nearly all cases, their ideals must be grounded in a power greater than themselves, if they are to recreate their lives.*

*If any feel that as psychiatrists directing a hospital for alcoholics we appear somewhat sentimental, let them stand with us a while on the firing*

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*line, see the tragedies, the despairing wives, the little children; let the solving of these problems become a part of their daily work, and even of their sleeping moments, and the most cynical will not wonder that we have accepted and encouraged this movement. We feel, after many years of experience, that we have found nothing which has contributed more to the rehabilitation of these men than the altruistic movement now growing up among them.*

*Men and women drink essentially because they like the effect produced by alcohol. The sensation is so elusive that, while they admit it is injurious, they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false. To them, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one. They are restless, irritable and discontented, unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks-drinks which they see others taking with impunity. After they have succumbed to the desire again, as so many do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again. This is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery.*

*On the other hand-and strange as this may seem to those who do not understand-once a psychic change has occurred, the very same person who seemed doomed, who had so many problems he despaired of ever solving them, suddenly finds himself easily able to control his desire for alcohol, the only effort necessary being that required to follow a few simple rules.*

*Men have cried out to me in sincere and despairing appeal: 'Doctor, I cannot go on like this! I have everything to live for! I must stop, but I cannot! You must help me!'*

*Faced with this problem, if a doctor is honest with himself, he must sometimes feel his own inadequacy. Although he gives all that is in him, it*

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*often is not enough. One feels that something more than human power is needed to produce the essential psychic change. Though the aggregate of recoveries resulting from psychiatric effort is considerable, we physicians must admit we have made little impression upon the problem as a whole. Many types do not respond to the ordinary psychological approach.*

*I do not hold with those who believe that alcoholism is entirely a problem of mental control. I have had many men who had, for example, worked a period of months on some problem or business deal which was to be settled on a certain date, favorably to them. They took a drink a day or so prior to the date, and then the phenomenon of craving at once became paramount to all other interests so that the important appointment was not met. These men were not drinking to escape; they were drinking to overcome a craving beyond their mental control.*

*There are many situations which arise out of the phenomenon of craving which cause men to make the supreme sacrifice rather than continue to fight.*

*The classification of alcoholics seems most difficult, and in much detail is outside the scope of this book. There are, of course, the psychopaths who are emotionally unstable. We are all familiar with this type. They are always going on the wagon for keeps. They are over-remorseful and make many resolutions, but never a decision.*

*There is the type of man who is unwilling to admit that he cannot take a drink. He plans various ways of drinking. He changes his brand or his environment. There is the type who always believes that after being entirely free from alcohol for a period of time he can take a drink without danger. There is the manic-depressive type, who is, perhaps, the least understood by his friends, and about whom a whole chapter could be written.*

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*Then there are types entirely normal in every respect except in the effect alcohol has upon them. They are often able, intelligent, friendly people.*

*All these, and many others, have one symptom in common: they cannot start drinking without developing the phenomenon of craving. This phenomenon, as we have suggested, may be the manifestation of an allergy which differentiates these people, and sets them apart as a distinct entity. It has never been, by any treatment with which we are familiar, permanently eradicated. The only relief we have to suggest is entire abstinence.*

*This immediately precipitates us into a seething caldron of debate. Much has been written pro and con, but among physicians, the general opinion seems to be that most chronic alcoholics are doomed.*

*What is the solution? Perhaps I can best answer this by relating one of my experiences.*

*About one year prior to this experience a man was brought in to be treated for chronic alcoholism. He had but partially recovered from a gastric hemorrhage and seemed to be a case of pathological mental deterioration. He had lost everything worthwhile in life and was only living, one might say, to drink. He frankly admitted and believed that for him there was no hope. Following the elimination of alcohol, there was found to be no permanent brain injury. He accepted the plan outlined in this book. One year later he called to see me, and I experienced a very strange sensation. I knew the man by name, and partly recognized his features, but there all resemblance ended. From a trembling, despairing, nervous wreck, had emerged a man brimming over with self-reliance and contentment. I talked with him for some time but was not able to bring myself to feel that I had known him before. To me he was a stranger, and so he left me. A long time has passed with no return to alcohol.*

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*When I need a mental uplift, I often think of another case brought in by a physician prominent in New York City. The patient had made his own diagnosis, and deciding his situation hopeless, had hidden in a deserted barn determined to die. He was rescued by a searching party, and, in desperate condition, brought to me. Following his physical rehabilitation, he had a talk with me in which he frankly stated he thought the treatment a waste of effort, unless I could assure him, which no one ever had, that in the future he would have the willpower to resist the impulse to drink.*

*His alcoholic problem was so complex, and his depression so great, that we felt his only hope would be through what we then called 'moral psychology,' and we doubted if even that would have any effect.*

*However, he did become sold on the ideas contained in this book. He has not had a drink for a great many years. I see him now and then and he is as fine a specimen of manhood as one could wish to meet.*

*I earnestly advise every alcoholic to read this book through, and though perhaps he came to scoff, he may remain to pray.*

## **Part 2: The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous**

(Readers may substitute “Goddess” for “God” if they wish.)

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

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

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a Higher Power as we understood such a power.

4. Made a searching and fearless personal inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of ourselves, good and bad.

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these life patterns that hold us back.

7. Humbly asked our Higher Power to remove our shortcomings.

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

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

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

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

12. 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.

## Step 1: Honesty

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

**Honesty:** adherence to the facts, fairness of conduct, freedom from deception.

*“Honesty is the fastest way to prevent a mistake from turning into a failure.”*

—James Altucher

### There Is a Solution

We of Alcoholics Anonymous know thousands of people with similarities in their stories. Many have recovered. They have solved the drink problem.

We come from many political, economic, social, and religious backgrounds. We are people who normally might not mix. But there exist among us a fellowship, a friendliness, and an understanding that are indescribably wonderful. We are like the passengers on a great cruise ship the moment after rescue from shipwreck, when camaraderie, joyousness, and democracy pervade the vessel. Unlike the feelings of the ship’s passengers, however, our joy in escape from disaster does not subside as we go our individual ways. The feeling of having shared in a common peril is one element in the powerful cement that binds us. But that in itself would never have held us together as we are now joined.

The tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a common solution. We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree, and upon which we can join in harmonious action. This is the great news we carry to those who suffer from alcoholism. An illness of this sort involves people around us in a way no other human sickness can. If a woman has cancer, everyone is sorry for her, and no one is angry or hurt. But not so with the alcoholic illness, for with it there goes annihilation of

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all the things worthwhile in life. It engulfs all whose lives touch the sufferer's. It brings misunderstanding, fierce resentment, financial insecurity, disgusted friends and employers, warped lives of blameless children, and sad spouses, parents, and others.

### **One Alcoholic to Another**

Highly competent psychiatrists who have dealt with us have found it sometimes impossible to persuade an alcoholic to discuss her situation without reserve. Strangely enough, the spouse, parents, and intimate friends usually find us even more unapproachable than do the psychiatrist and the doctor.

But the ex-problem drinker who has found this solution, who is properly armed with facts about herself, can generally win the entire confidence of another alcoholic in a few hours. Until such an understanding is reached, little or nothing can be accomplished.

The conditions we have found to be most effective are: (1) that the woman who is making the approach has had the same difficulty; (2) that she obviously knows what she is talking about; (3) that her whole deportment shouts at the new prospect that she is a woman with a real answer; (4) that she has no attitude of Holier Than Thou, nothing whatsoever except the sincere desire to be helpful; and (5) that there are no fees to pay, no axes to grind, no people to please, and no lectures to be endured.

A.A. is the pioneer of focused self-help groups. We don't need to try to get sober alone. In meetings, we share our fears, hopes, and feelings without judging ourselves or others. Each of us asks another woman to be our sobriety advisor, traditionally called our Sponsor. We work the Twelve Steps with her. We develop a network of sobriety sisters with whom we can socialize. We speak with our Sponsor and sobriety sisters regularly. If we get an urge to drink, we call one of them before we drink. We call women on our list until we reach someone live.

## Behaviors of Alcoholics

You may already have asked yourself why it is that all of us became so very ill from drinking. Doubtless you are curious to discover how and why, in the face of expert opinion to the contrary, we have recovered from a hopeless condition of mind and body. If you are an alcoholic who wants to get over it, you may already be asking, *What do I have to do?*

We will answer such questions specifically and tell you what we have done ourselves. First, here is an overview of how we arrived at this point.

How many times people have said:

- *“I can take it or leave it. Why can’t she?”*
- *“Why don’t you drink like a lady or quit?”*
- *“That one can’t handle her liquor.”*
- *“Why don’t you try beer and wine? Lay off the hard stuff.”*
- *“Her willpower must be weak.”*
- *“She could stop if she wanted to.”*
- *“She’s such a sweet girl, I would think she’d stop for his sake.”*
- *“The doctor told her that if she ever drank again it would kill her, but there she is all lit up again.”*

These are commonplace observations about drinkers that we hear all the time, based on a world of ignorance and misunderstanding. These expressions refer to people whose reactions are very different from ours.

Moderate drinkers have little trouble in giving up liquor entirely if they have a good reason. They can take it or leave it.

We also have a certain type of heavy social drinker. Her habit may be bad enough to gradually impair her physically and mentally. It may even cause her to die a few years before her time. If she develops a sufficiently strong reason to stop or moderate her drinking, such as ill health, falling in love, or a change of environment, she may be able to—even though she

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may find it difficult and troublesome and may even need medical attention.

But what about the real alcoholic? She may start off as a moderate drinker; she may or may not become a heavy social drinker; but at some stage of her drinking career, she begins to lose all control of her liquor consumption after she starts to drink.

The real alcoholic is a puzzle, especially in her lack of control. She does absurd, incredible, tragic things while drinking. She is a real Dr. Jekyll and Ms. Hyde. She is seldom mildly intoxicated. She is always more or less insanely drunk.

Her disposition while drinking barely resembles her normal nature. She may be one of the finest people in the world. Yet, let her drink for a day, and she frequently becomes disgustingly and even dangerously antisocial. She has a positive genius for getting wasted at exactly the wrong moment, particularly when some important decision must be made or some engagement kept. She is often perfectly sensible and well-balanced about everything except liquor, but in that respect, she is incredibly dishonest and selfish. She often possesses special abilities, skills, and aptitudes, and has a promising career ahead of her. She uses her gifts to build up a bright outlook for her family and herself, and then pulls the structure down on her head by a senseless series of drinking sprees.

She goes to bed so intoxicated that she has to sleep around the clock. Yet, early the next morning, she searches madly for the bottle that she misplaced the night before. She may have liquor concealed all over her house to be certain that no one gets her entire supply away from her to throw down the drain. As matters grow worse, she begins to use a combination of high-powered sedatives and liquor to quiet her nerves, so she can go to work. Then comes the day when she simply cannot make it and gets drunk all over again. Perhaps she goes to a doctor, who gives her

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a sedative with which to taper off. Then she begins to appear at hospitals and clinics.

This is by no means a comprehensive picture of the true alcoholic, since our behavior patterns vary. But this description should identify her roughly.

Why does she behave like this? If hundreds of experiences have shown her that one drink means another debacle, with all its attendant suffering and humiliation, why does she take that one drink? Why can't she stay on the wagon? What has become of the common sense and willpower that she still sometimes displays in other circumstances?

Perhaps there never will be a full answer to these questions. Opinions vary considerably about why an alcoholic reacts differently from normal people. It is unclear, once a certain point is reached, why little can be done for her.

While some alcoholics may keep away from drink for months or years, most of them eventually react much like other alcoholics. Once they take any alcohol whatsoever into their system, something happens, both in the bodily and mental sense, which makes it virtually impossible for them to stop. The experience of any alcoholic will abundantly confirm this.

### **The Problem**

These observations would be academic and pointless if our alcoholic friend never took that first drink, thereby setting the terrible cycle in motion. If you ask her why she started on that last bender, the chances are she will offer you any one of a hundred alibis. Sometimes those excuses will have a certain plausibility, but none of them will really make sense in the light of the havoc her drinking bout creates. The excuses sound like the philosophy of a woman who, having a headache, beats herself on the head with a hammer so that she can't feel the ache. If you draw this fallacious reasoning to her attention, she will laugh it off or become irritable and refuse to talk.

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Once in a while, she may tell the truth. And the truth, strange to say, is often that she has no more idea why she took that first drink than you have. Some drinkers have excuses that satisfy them part of the time. But in their hearts, they really don't know why they do it. Once this malady has a real hold, they are a baffled lot. They have an obsession that somehow, someday, they will beat the game. But they often suspect that they are down for the count.

In a vague way, their family members and friends may sense that these drinkers are abnormal, but everybody hopefully awaits the day when their suffering will rouse them from their lethargy.

The tragic truth is that if these women are real alcoholics, that happy day may never arrive. They have lost control. At a certain point in the drinking of every alcoholic, they pass into a state where the most powerful desire to stop drinking is of absolutely no avail.

The fact is that most of us alcoholics, for reasons that are still obscure, have lost the power of choice in our drinking. Our so-called willpower becomes practically nonexistent. At certain times, we are unable to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago. We are without defenses against the first drink.

The almost certain consequences that follow taking even one glass of beer do not enter our mind to deter us. If such thoughts occur, they are hazy and readily supplanted by the old threadbare idea that this time we will handle ourselves like other people. There is a complete failure of the kind of defense that keeps us from putting our hands on a hot stove.

The alcoholic may think to herself, in the most casual way, *It won't burn me this time*. Or perhaps she doesn't think at all. How often have some of us begun to drink in this nonchalant way, and after the third or fourth glass, pounded on the bar and said to ourselves, *Geez, how did I*

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*ever get started again? Only to have that thought supplanted by Well, I'll stop with the sixth drink. Or What's the use anyhow?*

When this sort of thinking is fully established in an individual with alcoholic tendencies, she has probably placed herself beyond human aid, and unless she is locked up, she may die or go permanently insane. These stark and ugly facts have been confirmed by legions of alcoholics throughout history. But for the grace of God, there would have been thousands more convincing demonstrations. So many want to stop, but cannot.

### **The Solution**

Almost none of us likes self-searching, leveling our pride, or confessing shortcomings that the recovery process requires to be successful. But we have seen that it really works in others, and we have come to believe in the hopelessness and futility of life as we have been living it. Therefore, when we are approached by individuals who have solved the problem, there is nothing left for us but to pick up the simple kit of spiritual tools lying at our feet.

After we work the Twelve Steps, we have deep and effective spiritual experiences that revolutionize our whole attitude toward life, toward other people, and toward God's universe. In the discussion of Step 2, below, we distinguish between religion and spirituality. We each define our own concept of a Power Greater Than Ourselves, which may be traditional or novel. Some of us have had to forget our past concept of God to fully embrace our own Higher Power concept.

Individuals who have religious affiliations will find in our program nothing disturbing to their beliefs or ceremonies. There is no friction among us over such matters. It is no concern of ours which religious bodies, if any, our members identify with as individuals. That should be an entirely personal affair, which each one decides for herself.

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The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that a Power Greater Than Ourselves has entered into our hearts and lives in a way that is indeed miraculous. God has commenced to accomplish those things for us that we could never do for ourselves.

If you are as seriously alcoholic as all of us have been, we believe there is no middle-of-the-road solution. We were in a position where life was becoming impossible, and if we had passed into the region from which there is no return through human aid, we had only two alternatives: (1) go on to the bitter end, blotting out the consciousness of our intolerable situation as best we could; or (2) accept spiritual help. We did the latter because we honestly were willing to make the effort.

We hope no one will consider our self-revealing accounts in bad taste. Our hope is that many desperate alcoholic people will see these pages. We believe it is only by fully disclosing themselves and their problems that they will be persuaded to say, *“Yes, I am one of you, too. I must have this thing.”*

### **Admitting That We Are Alcoholics**

Most of us have been unwilling to admit that we are real alcoholics. No one likes to think that she is bodily and mentally different from other people. Therefore, it is not surprising that our drinking careers have been characterized by countless vain attempts to prove that we can drink like other people. The idea that somehow, someday, we will control and enjoy our drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many individuals pursue it through the gates of insanity or death.

In A.A, we have learned that we have to fully concede to our innermost selves that we are alcoholics. That is the first step in recovery. The delusion that we are like other people has to be abandoned.

We alcoholics are individuals who have lost the ability to control our drinking. We know that, after the first drink, no real alcoholic ever

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recovers control. At times, all of us have felt that we have been regaining control, but such intervals, usually brief, are inevitably followed by still less control, which leads in time to pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization. In A.A, we are convinced that alcoholics are always in the grip of a progressive illness. Over any considerable period, we get worse, never better.

We are like people who have lost their legs; they never grow new ones. Neither does there appear to be any kind of treatment that will make alcoholics like other people. We have tried every imaginable remedy. In some instances, we have briefly recovered, always followed by a worse relapse. Physicians who are familiar with alcoholism agree that there is no such thing as making a normal drinker out of an alcoholic. Science may one day accomplish this, but it hasn't done so yet.

All we can say is that many individuals who are alcoholics are not going to believe that they are. By every form of self-deception and experimentation, they will try to prove themselves exceptions to the rule. If anyone who is unable to control her drinking can do an about-face and drink like a lady, our hats are off to her. Heaven knows, we have tried hard and long enough to drink like other people!

### **Nothing Seems to Work**

Here are some of the failed methods we have tried: Drinking only beer, limiting the number of drinks, never drinking alone, never drinking in the morning, drinking only at home, never having alcohol in the house, never drinking during business hours, drinking only at parties, drinking only organic wines, agreeing to resign if ever drunk on the job, taking a trip, not taking a trip, swearing off forever (with and without a solemn oath), taking more physical exercise, reading inspirational books, going to health farms and sanitariums, and accepting voluntary commitment to psych wards. We could increase the list ad infinitum.

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Although there is no way to prove it, we believe that early in our drinking careers most of us could have stopped drinking. But the difficulty is that few alcoholics have enough desire to stop while there is still time. We have heard of a few instances in which people who showed definite signs of alcoholism were able to stop for a long period because of an overpowering desire to do so. Here is one such case:

A woman of 30 was doing a great deal of spree drinking. She was very nervous in the morning after these bouts and quieted herself with more liquor. She was ambitious to succeed in business, but saw that she would get nowhere if she drank at all. Once she started drinking, she had no control whatsoever. She made up her mind that until she had been successful in business and had retired, she would not touch another drop. Since she was an exceptional woman, she remained bone dry for twenty-five years before she retired at the age of 55 after a successful and happy business career. Then she fell victim to a belief that practically every alcoholic has that her long period of sobriety and self-discipline had qualified her to drink like other people. Out came her carpet slippers and a bottle. In two months, she was in a hospital, puzzled and humiliated. Then she tried to regulate her drinking for a little while, but always ended up back in the hospital. Gathering all her forces, she attempted to stop altogether, but found that she could not. Every means of solving her problem that money could buy was at her disposal, but every attempt failed. Although she was a robust woman when she retired, she went to pieces quickly and was dead within four years.

This case contains a powerful lesson. At one time or another, most of us have believed that if we remained sober for a long stretch, we could drink normally after that. But here is a woman who at 55 found that she was just where she had left off at 30. We have seen it demonstrated again and again that *“once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic,”* or *“once a pickle, never again a cucumber.”*

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If we drink again after a period of sobriety, we will soon be as bad as ever. If we are planning to stop drinking, there must be no reservation of any kind, nor any lurking notion that someday we will be immune to alcohol.

To be gravely affected by alcohol, one does not necessarily have to drink a long time nor take the large quantities that some of us have. This is particularly true of women. Female potential alcoholics often turn into the real thing and are gone beyond recall in a few years. Certain drinkers, who would be greatly insulted if anyone called them alcoholics, are astonished by their inability to stop. We who are familiar with the symptoms see large numbers of potential alcoholics among young people everywhere. But try to get them to see it!

In A.A., as we look back, we feel that we went on drinking many years beyond the point where we could quit on our willpower. If anyone questions whether she has entered this dangerous area, let her try leaving liquor alone for one year. If she is an alcoholic and very far advanced, there is scant chance of success. In the early days of our drinking, we occasionally remained sober for a year or more, becoming serious drinkers again later. Although you may be able to stop for a considerable period, you may yet be a potential alcoholic. Some alcoholics will be drunk the day after making their resolutions; most of them, within a few weeks.

### **Achieving Abstinence**

For individuals who are unable to drink moderately, the question is how to stop altogether. We are assuming, of course, that the reader desires to stop. Whether such a person can quit upon a nonspiritual basis depends upon the extent to which she has already lost the power to choose whether she will drink or not. Many of us have felt that we have plenty of character and a tremendous urge to cease drinking forever. Yet, we have found it impossible. This utter inability to leave alcohol alone, no matter how great

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the necessity or the wish, is the baffling feature of alcoholism as we know it.

How, then, shall we help our readers to determine whether or not they are one of us? The experiment of quitting for a period of time will be helpful, but we think we can render an even greater service to alcoholic sufferers and perhaps to the medical profession by describing some of the mental states that precede a relapse into drinking—for that is the crux of the problem.

What sort of thinking dominates an alcoholic who repeats the desperate experiment of the first drink time after time? Friends who have reasoned with such an alcoholic after a spree that has brought her to the point of divorce or bankruptcy are mystified when she walks directly into a bar. Why does she? What is she thinking?

### **A Sad Case**

Our example is a friend we shall call Julie. This woman has a charming husband and family. She inherited a lucrative automobile agency, is good at sales, and everybody likes her. She is an intelligent woman, normal so far as we can see, except for a nervous disposition. Until she was 35, she only drank moderately. But then she started drinking too much. In a few years, she became so violent when she was intoxicated that she had to be committed to the Emergency Psychiatric Services area of a local hospital. When she left the psych ward, she came into contact with us.

We told her what we knew about alcoholism and the answer we had found to it. At first, she reunited with her alienated family members and began to work in sales for the business she had lost through drinking. Everything went well for a time, but she failed to enlarge her spiritual life. To her dismay, she found herself drunk half a dozen times in rapid succession. On each of those occasions, we worked with her, carefully reviewing what had happened. She agreed that she was a serious alcoholic, who faced another trip to the psych ward if she kept on. Moreover, she

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would lose her family, whom she deeply loved. When she nevertheless got drunk again, we asked her to tell us exactly how it happened. This is her story:

*“I came to work on a Tuesday morning. I remember I felt irritated that I had to be a sales associate for a company I once owned. I had a few words with the brass, but nothing serious. Then I decided to drive to the country to see one of my prospects for a car. On the way, I felt hungry, so I stopped at a roadside place that had a bar, but I had no intention to drink. I just thought I would get a sandwich. I also had the notion that I might find a customer for a car at this place, which was familiar, for I had been going to it for years. I had eaten there many times during the months I was sober. I sat down at a table and ordered a sandwich and a glass of milk. Still, I had no thought of drinking. I ordered another sandwich and decided to have another glass of milk.*

*Suddenly, the thought crossed my mind that if I were to put an ounce of whiskey in my milk, it couldn't hurt me on a full stomach. So, I ordered a whiskey and poured it into the milk. I vaguely sensed that I was not being any too smart, but I reassured myself, since I was taking the whiskey on a full stomach. The experiment went so well that I ordered another whiskey and poured it into more milk. That didn't seem to bother me, so I tried another.”*

Thus started one more journey to the psych ward for Julie. Here was the threat of commitment and the loss of family and position, to say nothing of that intense mental and physical suffering that drinking always caused her. She knew a great deal about herself as an alcoholic. Yet, she easily pushed aside all reasons for not drinking in favor of the foolish idea that she could take whiskey if only she mixed it with milk!

Whatever the precise definition of the word may be, we call Julie's behavior plain insanity. How can such a lack of proportion and of the ability to think straight be called anything else?

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You may think this is an extreme case. To us it is not far-fetched, for this kind of thinking has been characteristic of every single one of us. We have sometimes thought about the consequences more than Julie did, but there was always the curious mental phenomenon that, parallel with our sound reasoning, there inevitably ran some insanely trivial excuse for taking the first drink. Our sound reasoning failed to hold us in check, and the insane idea won out. On the next day, we would ask ourselves, in all earnestness and sincerity, how it could have happened.

### **Justifying Our Drinking**

In some circumstances, we have gone out deliberately to get drunk, feeling ourselves justified by nervousness, anger, worry, depression, jealousy, or the like. But even in that type of beginning, we are obliged to admit that our justification for a spree is insanely insufficient in the light of what always happens. When we begin to drink deliberately, instead of casually, there is little serious or effective thought during the period of premeditation about what the horrific consequences might be.

Our behavior with respect to the first drink is as absurd and incomprehensible as that of an individual with a passion, say, for jaywalking. Such an individual gets a thrill out of skipping between fast-moving vehicles. Despite friendly warnings, she enjoys herself for a while. Up to this point, you might label her as a foolish woman who has peculiar ideas of fun. When luck deserts her, she is slightly injured several times in succession. If she were normal, you would expect her to cut it out. Soon, she is hit again, but this time she gets a fractured skull. Within a week after leaving the hospital, she jaywalks again, and a fast-moving trolley car breaks her arm. At that point, she tells her friends that she has decided to stop jaywalking for good, but in a few weeks, a bus breaks both her legs.

On through the years, this conduct continues, accompanied by her continual promises to be careful or to keep out of traffic altogether. Finally, she can no longer work, her husband divorces her, and she

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ridiculed by her friends and associates. She tries every known means to get the idea of jaywalking out of her head. Eventually, she even has herself committed to a psych ward, hoping to mend her ways. But on the very day she comes out, she races in front of a fire engine, which breaks her back. Such a woman would be crazy, wouldn't she?

You may think that this illustration is too ridiculous. But is it? Those of us who have been through the wringer have to admit that if we substituted alcoholism for jaywalking, the illustration would fit us exactly. However intelligent we may be in other respects, where alcohol is involved, we have been strangely insane.

Some of you may be thinking: *Yes, what you say is true, but it doesn't fully apply to me. I admit that I have some of these symptoms, but I have not gone to the extremes you folks have, nor am I likely to, for I understand myself so well after what you've said that such things simply cannot happen again. I have not lost everything in life through drinking, and I certainly don't intend to. But thanks for the information.*

Such thinking may be true of certain nonalcoholic people who, although they drink foolishly and heavily at times, are able to stop or moderate their drinking because their brains and bodies have not been damaged as ours have been. But alcoholics, with hardly any exceptions, will be absolutely unable to stop drinking through self-knowledge.

Most alcoholics have to be pretty badly mangled before they really commence to solve their problems.

Many doctors and psychiatrists agree with our conclusions. One of these men, staff member of a world-renowned hospital, recently made this statement to some of us: *"What you say about the general hopelessness of the average alcoholic's plight is, in my opinion, correct. As to two of you, whose stories I have heard, there is no doubt in my mind that you were 100% hopeless, apart from divine help. Had you offered yourselves as patients at this hospital, I would not have taken you, if I had been able to*

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*avoid it. People like you are too heartbreaking. Though not a religious person, I have profound respect for the spiritual approach in such cases as yours. For most cases, there is virtually no other solution.”*

### **Women’s Step 1 Topics**

#### **We Don’t do it Alone**

We don’t have to attempt recovery just on our own. We connect with other women to recover from alcoholism and maintain sobriety. Other mutual-help programs, addressing various needs, hold up A.A. as the leader in best practices for peer-group-help programs.

In strong mutual-support programs, we can honestly speak of our challenges in life, our hopes for a life of sobriety, and our struggles and victories along the way. And we can do all this without fear of being judged by our peers, since they also had similarities in their lives. This kind of mutual understanding is a powerful force for women’s healing.

#### **High-Functioning Alcoholics**

It’s difficult for high-functioning alcoholics to identify the problems caused by their drinking.

*“I had a successful career as a software engineer in the Silicon Valley, owned my home, and didn’t beat my kids ;). Everything looked good on the outside. As a high-functioning alcoholic, it was very hard for me to see the powerlessness and unmanageability in my life. But alcohol called the shots, deciding who I would be with, where I would go, and what I would do. My personal relationships were unmanageable. Fortunately, I worked the steps before I lost it all.”*

#### **Perceptions of Addicted Women**

Women with addictions are judged more severely than addicted men. How many times have we heard “*Boys will be boys?*” Women are more appreciated when we don’t assert ourselves and have little power.

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Career women face a Competence-Likeably Tradeoff that men don't face. In the Heidi-Howard Study, a senior technologist's resume was distributed to two separate groups. But the second group got the resume with just a one-word change: "*Heidi*" was replaced by "*Howard*."

The group that reviewed Howard's resume said he was a man of action, highly skilled, and would be a great guy to work for. The Heidi group said she was technically competent, but was very self-centered, not a team player, and would be hard to work with.

When we are skilled, assertive, and confident, we violate people's expectations of us being motherly and nurturing. This kind of gender bias permeates all of life including recovery. Women with addiction are judged more harshly than men with addiction.

### **Asking for Help**

Women are often expected to care for others in the home and at work. As a result, we often don't make self-care a priority and lose ourselves in daily life. Asking for what we need, setting limits, and saying no are not part of our vocabulary.

I recall one woman shared this: "*I was worried about my (1) son's schoolwork, (2) husband's job, and (3) father's health. But I have to get less selfish about my problems and get into service for others.*" I silently noted that she just mentioned three people that were not her. Many women don't recognize themselves, go overboard with service to others, and put themselves last. To get sober, we have to let go of that thinking.

When we are driven to drink, we give up our power of choice. Who we are with, how we behave, where we go, and how we think is decided by alcohol.

Once more: The alcoholic, at certain times, has no effective mental defense against the first drink, which usually lead to many more drinks. "*One drink is too many; a dozen drinks are never enough.*" Except in a

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few cases, neither she nor any other human being can provide such a defense. Her defense must come from a Higher Power.

We don't have to do this alone. Teamwork makes the dream work.

*"Nothing will work unless you do."*

—Maya Angelou

*"I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand."*

—Confucius

*"I must give up what I am to become what I can be."*

—Lao Tzu

*"To thine own self be true ... and it must follow, thou cannot then be false to (anyone)."*

—William Shakespeare

## Step 2: Hope

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

**Hope:** to cherish a desire with anticipation : to want something to happen or be true

*“We must go forward with hope and not backward by fear and division.”*

—Jesse Jackson

In the preceding chapters you have learned something of alcoholism. we hope we have made clear the distinction between the alcoholic and the non-alcoholic. If, when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely, or if when drinking, you have little control over the amount you take, you are probably alcoholic. If that be the case, you may be suffering from an illness that only a spiritual experience will conquer.

To one who feels she is an atheist or agnostic such an experience seems impossible, but to continue as she is means disaster, especially if she is an alcoholic of the hopeless variety. To be doomed to an alcoholic death or to live on a spiritual basis are not always easy alternatives to face.

But it isn't so difficult. About half our original fellowship were of exactly that type. At first some of us tried to avoid the issue, hoping against hope we were not true alcoholics. But after a while we had to face the fact that we must find a spiritual basis of life. Perhaps it is going to be that way with you. But cheer up, something like half of us thought we were atheists or agnostics. Our experience shows that you need not be disconcerted.

If a mere code of morals or a better philosophy of life were sufficient to overcome alcoholism, many of us would have recovered long ago. But we found that such codes and philosophies did not save us, no matter how much we tried. We could wish to be moral, we could wish to be philosophically comforted, in fact, we could will these things with all our

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might, but the needed power wasn't there. Our human resources, as marshalled by the will, were not sufficient; they failed utterly.

Lack of power, that was our dilemma. we had to find a power by which we could live, and it had to be a Power greater than ourselves. Obviously. But where and how were we to find this Power?

Well, that's exactly what this book is about. Its main objective is to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself that will help you solve your problem. And it means, of course, that we are going to talk about God or God. Here difficulty arises with agnostics. Many times we talk to a new woman and watch her hope rise as we discuss her alcoholic problems and explain our fellowship. But her face falls when we speak of spiritual matters, especially when we mention God, for we have re-opened a subject that our woman thought she had neatly evaded or entirely ignored.

We know how she feels. We have shared her honest doubt and anxiety. Some of us have been violently anti-religious. To others, the word God brought up a particular idea that someone had tried to impress them during childhood. Perhaps we rejected this particular conception because it seemed inadequate. With that rejection we imagined we had abandoned the God idea entirely. We were bothered with the thought that faith and dependence upon a Power beyond ourselves was somewhat weak, even cowardly. We looked upon this world of warring individuals, warring theological systems, and inexplicable calamity, with deep skepticism. We looked askance at many individuals who claimed to be godly. How could a Supreme Being have anything to do with it all? And who could comprehend a Supreme Being anyhow? Yet, in other moments, we found ourselves thinking, when enchanted by a starlit night, "Who, then, make all this?" There was a feeling of awe and wonder, but it was fleeting and soon lost.

Yes, we of agnostic temperament have had these thoughts and experiences. Let us make haste to reassure you. We found that as soon as

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we were able to lay aside prejudice and express even a willingness to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we commenced to get results, even though it was impossible for any of us to fully define or comprehend that Power.

Much to our relief, we discovered we did not need to consider another's conception of God. Our own conception, however inadequate, was sufficient. As soon as we admitted the possible existence of a Creative Intelligence, a Spirit of the Universe underlying the totality of things, we began to be possessed of a new sense of power and direction, provided we took other simple steps. We found that God does not make too hard terms with those who seek Her.

To us, the Realm of Spirit is broad, roomy, all inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding to those who earnestly seek. It is open to all.

*"When I started in A.A., I tripped over the God idea. After learning more from others, I decided Life was my Higher Power. Life works a certain way. One of my business advisors once told me 'Life Calls the Shots'. So true."*

When we speak to you of God, we mean your own conception of God. This applies, too, to other spiritual expressions that you find in this book. Do not let any prejudice you may have against spiritual terms deter you from honestly asking yourself what they mean to you. At the start, this was all we needed to commence spiritual growth, to begin our first conscious relation with God as we understood Her. Afterward, we found ourselves accepting many things that then seemed entirely out of reach. That was growth, but if we wished to grow we had to begin somewhere. So we used our own conception, however limited it was.

We needed to ask ourselves but one short question: "Do I now believe, or am I even willing to believe, that there is a Power greater than myself?" As soon as a woman can say that she does believe, or is willing to believe, we emphatically assure her that she is on her way. It has been repeatedly

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proven among us that upon this simple cornerstone a wonderfully effective spiritual structure can be built.

That was great news to us, for we had assumed we could not make use of spiritual principles unless we accepted many things on faith that seemed difficult to believe. When people presented us with spiritual approaches, how frequently did we all say, "I wish I had what that woman has. I'm sure it would work if I could only believe as she believes. But I cannot accept as surely true the many articles of faith that are so plain to her." So it was comforting to learn that we could commence at a simpler level.

Besides a seeming inability to accept much on faith, we often found ourselves handicapped by obstinacy, sensitiveness, and unreasoning prejudice. Many of us have been so touchy that even casual reference to spiritual things make us bristle with antagonism. This sort of thinking had to be abandoned. Though some of us resisted, we found no great difficulty in casting aside such feelings. Faced with alcoholic destruction, we soon became as open minded on spiritual matters as we had tried to be on other questions. In this respect alcohol was a great persuader. It finally beat us into a state of reasonableness. Sometimes this was a tedious process; we hope no one else will be prejudiced for as long as some of us were.

The reader may still ask why she should believe in a Power greater than herself. We think there are good reasons. Let us have a look at some of them.

The practical individual of today is a stickler for facts and results. Nevertheless, the twentieth century readily accepts theories of all kinds, provided they are firmly grounded in fact. We have numerous theories, for example, about electricity. Everybody believes them without a murmur of doubt. Why this ready acceptance? Simply because it is impossible to explain what we see, feel, direct, and use, without a reasonable assumption as a starting point.

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Everybody nowadays, believes in scores of assumptions for which there is good evidence, but no perfect visual proof. And does not science demonstrate that visual proof is the weakest proof? It is being constantly revealed, as humans studies the material world, that outward appearances are not inward reality at all. To illustrate:

A steel girder is a mass of electrons whirling around each other at incredible speed. These tiny bodies are governed by precise laws, and these laws hold true throughout the material world, Science tells us so. We have no reason to doubt it. When, however, the perfectly logical assumption is suggested that underneath the material world and life as we see it, there is an All Powerful, Guiding, Creative Intelligence, right there our perverse streak comes to the surface and we laboriously set out to convince ourselves it isn't so. We read wordy books and indulge in windy arguments, thinking we believe this universe needs no God to explain it. Were our contentions true, it would follow that life originated out of nothing, means nothing, and proceeds nowhere.

In our personal stories you will find a wide variation in the way each teller approaches and conceives of the Power that is greater than herself.

Whether we agree with a particular approach or conception seems to make little difference. Experience has taught us that these are matters about which we need not be worried. They are questions for each individual to settle for herself.

On one proposition, however, these people are strikingly agreed. Every one of them has gained access to, and believe in, a Power greater than herself. This Power has, in each case, accomplished the miraculous, the humanly impossible. As many have said, "Let's look at the record."

Here are thousands of people, worldly indeed. They flatly declare that since they have come to believe in a Power greater than themselves, to take a certain attitude toward that Power, and to do certain simple things, there has been a revolutionary change in their way of living and thinking.

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In the face of collapse and despair, in the face of the total failure of their human resources, they found that a new power, peace, happiness, and sense of direction flowed into them. This happened soon after they wholeheartedly met a few simple requirements. Once confused and baffled by the seeming futility of existence, they show the underlying reasons why they were making heavy going of life. Leaving aside the drink question, they tell why living was so unsatisfactory. They show how the change came over them. When many millions of sober people are able to say that the consciousness of the Presence of God is today the most important fact of their lives, they present a powerful reason why one should have faith.

This world of ours has made more material progress in the last century than in all the millenniums that went before. Almost everyone knows the reason. Students of ancient history tell us that the intellect of people in those days was equal to the best of today. Yet in ancient times, material progress was painfully slow. The spirit of modern scientific inquiry, research and invention was almost unknown. In the realm of the material, men's minds were fettered by superstition, tradition, and all sort of fixed ideas. Some of the contemporaries of Columbus thought a round earth preposterous. Others came near putting Galileo to death for his astronomical heresies.

We asked ourselves this: Are not some of us just as biased and unreasonable about the realm of the spirit as were the ancients about the realm of the material? Even in the 20th century, American newspapers were afraid to print an account of the Wright brothers' first successful flight at Kittyhawk. Had not all efforts at flight failed before? Did not Professor Langley's flying machine go to the bottom of the Potomac River? Was it not true that the best mathematical minds had proved people could never fly? Had not people said that nature had reserved this privilege to the birds? Only thirty years later the conquest of the air was almost an old story and airplane travel was in full swing.

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We had to ask ourselves why we shouldn't apply to our human problems this same readiness to change our point of view. We were having trouble with personal relationships, we couldn't control our emotional natures, we were a prey to misery and depression, we couldn't make a living, we had a feeling of uselessness, we were full of fear, we were unhappy, we couldn't seem to be of real help to other people was not a basic solution of these bedevilements more important than whether we should see newsreels of lunar flight? Of course it was.

When we saw others solve their problems by a simple reliance upon the Spirit of the Universe, we had to stop doubting the power of God. Our ideas did not work. But the God's ideas did.

The Wright brothers' almost childish faith that they could build a machine that would fly was the mainspring of their accomplishment. Without that, nothing could have happened. We agnostics and atheists were sticking to the idea that self-sufficiency would solve our problems. When others showed us that God-sufficiency worked with them, we began to feel like those who had insisted the Wrights would never fly.

Logic is great stuff. We like it. We still like it. It is not by chance we were given the power to reason, to examine the evidence of our sense, and to draw conclusions. That is one of peoples' magnificent attributes. We agnostically inclined would not feel satisfied with a proposal that does not lend itself to reasonable approach and interpretation. Hence we are at pains to tell why we think our present faith is reasonable, why we think it more sane and logical to believe than not to believe, why we say our former thinking was soft and mushy when we threw up our hands in doubt and said, "We don't know."

When we became alcoholics, crushed by a self-imposed crises we could not postpone or evade, we had to fearlessly face the proposition that either God is everything or else She is nothing. God either is or She isn't. What was our choice to be?

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Arrived at this point, we were squarely confronted with the question of faith. We couldn't duck the issue. Some of us had already walked far over the Bridge of Reason toward the desired shore of faith. The outlines and the promise of the New Land had brought luster to tired eyes and fresh courage to flagging spirits. Friendly hands had stretched out in welcome. We were grateful that Reason had brought us so far. But somehow, we couldn't quite step ashore. Perhaps we had been leaning too heavily on reason that last mile and we did not like to lose our support.

That was natural, but let us think a little more closely. Without knowing it, had we not been brought to where we stood by a certain kind of faith? For did we not believe in our own reasoning? did we not have confidence in our ability to think? What was that but a sort of faith? Yes, we had been faithful, abjectly faithful to the God of Reason. So, in one way or another, we discovered that faith had been involved all the time!

Imagine life without faith! Where nothing is left but pure reason; it wouldn't be life. But we believed in life of course we did. We could not prove life in the sense that you can prove a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, yet, there it was. Could we still say the whole thing was nothing but a mass of electrons, created out of nothing, meaning nothing, whirling on to a destiny of nothingness? Or course we couldn't. The electrons themselves seemed more intelligent than that. At least, so the chemist said.

Hence, we saw that reason isn't everything. Neither is reason, as most of us use it, entirely dependable, thought it emanate from our best minds. What about people who proved that people could never fly? Yet we had been seeing another kind of flight, a spiritual liberation from this world, people who rose above their problems. They said God made these things possible, and we only smiled. We had seen spiritual release, but liked to tell ourselves it wasn't true.

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Actually we were fooling ourselves, for deep down in every woman, man, and child, is the fundamental idea of God. It may be obscured by calamity, by pomp, by worship of other things, but in some form or other it is there. For faith in a Power greater than ourselves, and miraculous demonstrations of that power in human lives, are facts as old as woman herself.

We finally saw that faith in some kind of God was a part of our make-up, just as much as the feeling we have for a friend. Sometimes we had to search fearlessly, but She was there. She was as much a fact as we were. We found the Great Reality deep down within us. In the last analysis it is only there that She may be found. It was so with us.

We can only clear the ground a bit. If our testimony helps sweep away prejudice, enables you to think honestly, encourages you to search diligently within yourself, then, if you wish, you can join us on the Broad Highway. With this attitude you cannot fail. The consciousness of your belief is sure to come to you.

She has come to all who have honestly sought Her. When we drew near to Her, She disclosed Herself to us!

## **Women's Step 2 Topics**

### **Turn it Over to Life**

We often want to defend ourselves from harm when we feel that life has cheated us, or people have betrayed us. We try to control them. This is really an illusion of control. So, we continue our addictions, leading to even more isolation. Often, alcoholics believe the solution to isolation is more isolation.

Without something to entrust, life is very difficult without being able to trust anything and anyone. Can we come to believe that we can something can be a positive reinforcement for us? Can life itself support us?

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Many of us in A.A. found the courage to believe that our sobriety sisters, Sponsor, and a Higher Power can support us very well. It takes some experience in the A.A. program to accept this idea. Truly, life would be significantly easier if we didn't have struggle along by ourselves.

We can set aside this illusion of control, and it is just an illusion, if we allow a higher power to enter our lives. As said many times, we don't have to get sober by ourselves in isolation. We found that when we start to trust, we become more at ease and comfortable.

### **Give up Self-Will, practice Self-Love and Self-Care.**

With my sponsees, I ask that they make a two-column list of “*self*”: phrases: negative and positive. On the negative side there is self-will, self-centeredness, and self-gratification. In the positive column, there is self-love, self-care, self-worth, and self-esteem. I look in the mirror and say “*I love you. You are so generous and kind to people.*”

For women who have been victims of physical and/or emotional abuse like myself, I must put aside thoughts that I deserved this abuse or that I was too sensitive.

### **Forgetting about our idea of God from the Past.**

In spite of the men's Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous) saying that any concept of a Higher Power will be effective, it continuously refers to a traditional Christian viewpoint.

For many women who faced negative male domination such as unsupportive, non-affirming, or abusive experiences, the male wording and concepts in the men's Big Book seem punitive and oppressive. But we don't have to reject the idea of a Higher Power. We just need to adapt it to a positive image for ourselves.

We can forget our old idea and others' idea of God and reinvent it for ourselves. We can call it Our Higher Power, God, Spirit of the Universe, or simply Life.

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We try to accept the steam of Life, and instead of trying to swim upstream against it, we can swim down steam and navigate life better.

*“By letting it go, it all gets done. The world is won by those who let it go. But when you try and try, the world is beyond the winning.”*

—Lao Tzu

*“It is as impossible for humans to demonstrate the existence of God, as it would be for Sherlock Holmes to demonstrate the existence of Arthur Conan Doyle.”*

—Frederick Buechner, Christian Minister

*“Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.”*

—Mahatma Gandhi

*“She who controls others may be powerful, but she who has mastered herself is mightier still.”*

—Lao Tzu

## Step 3: Faith and How It Works

**Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a Higher Power as we understood such a power.**

**Faith:** Allegiance to duty, person, or God.

*“Faith gives you an inner strength and a sense of balance and perspective in life.”*

—Gregory Peck

Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now. If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it, then you are ready to take certain steps.

At some of these we balked. thought we could find an easier, softer way. But we could not. With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start. Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely.

Remember that we deal with alcohol, cunning, baffling, powerful! Without help it is too much for us. But there is One who has all power that One is God. May you find Her now!

Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. we asked Her protection and care with complete abandon.

Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery:

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

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

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3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a Higher Power as we understood such as power.

4. Made a searching and fearless personal inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our selves, good and bad.

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these life patterns that hold us back.

7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

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

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

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

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

12. 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.

Many of us exclaimed, *“What an order! I can't go through with it.”* Do not be discouraged. No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles. We are not saints. The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We strive for spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.

Our description of the alcoholic, the chapter to the agnostic, and our personal adventure before and after make clear three pertinent ideas:

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1. That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives.
2. That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism.
3. That God could and would if She were sought.

Being convinced, we were at Step Three, which is that we decided to turn our will and our life over to God as we understood Her. Just what do we mean by that, and just what do we do?

The first requirement is that we be convinced that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success. On that basis we are almost always in collision with something or somebody, even though our motives are good. Most people try to live by self-propulsion. Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show; is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in her own way. If her arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as she wished, the show would be great. Everybody, including herself, would be pleased. Life would be wonderful. In trying to make these arrangements our actor may sometimes be quite virtuous. She may be kind, considerate, patient, generous; even modest and self-sacrificing. On the other hand, she may be mean, egotistical, selfish and dishonest. But, as with most humans, she is more likely to have varied traits.

What usually happens? The show doesn't come off very well. She begins to think life doesn't treat her right. She decides to exert herself more. She becomes, on the next occasion, still more demanding or gracious, as the case may be. Still the play does not suit her. Admitting she may be somewhat at fault, she is sure that other people are more to blame. She becomes angry, indignant, self-pitying. What is her basic trouble? Is she not really a self-seeker even when trying to be kind? Is she not a victim of the delusion that she can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if she only manages well? Is it not evident to all the rest of the players that these are the things she wants? And do not her actions

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make each of them wish to retaliate, snatching all they can get out of the show? Is she not, even in her best moments, a producer of confusion rather than harmony?

Our actor is self-centered, ego-centric, as people like to call it nowadays. She is like the retired business woman who lolls in the Florida sunshine in the winter complaining of the sad state of the nation; the minister who sighs over the sins of the modern era; politicians and reformers who are sure all would be Utopia if the rest of the world would only behave; the outlaw safe cracker who thinks society has wronged her; and the alcoholic who has lost all and is locked up. Whatever our emphatic declarations, are not most of us concerned with ourselves, our resentments, or our self-pity?

Selfishness, self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles. Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate. Sometimes they hurt us, seemingly without provocation, but we invariably find that at some time in the past we have made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt. This thinking must be replaced by a balance of acceptance of others, forgiving of others, caring for others, self-care, self-understanding, self-forgiving, and self-love.

So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though she usually doesn't think so. Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kill us! God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without Her aid. Many of us had moral and philosophical convictions galore, but we could not live up to them even though we would have liked to. Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We had to have God's help.

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This is the how and the why of it. First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our guide and mentor.

Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our own little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life. As we felt new power flow in, as we enjoyed peace of mind, as we discovered we could face life successfully, as we became conscious of Her presence, we began to lose our fear of today, tomorrow or the hereafter. We were reborn.

We were now at Step Three. Many of us said to our Higher Power, as we understood Her: *“God, I offer myself to Thee to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!”* We thought well before taking this step making sure we were ready; that we could at last abandon ourselves utterly to Her.

We found it very desirable to take this spiritual step with an understanding person, such as our husband, best friend, or spiritual adviser. But it is better to meet God alone than with one who might misunderstand.

**The wording was, of course, quite optional so long as we expressed the idea, voicing it without reservation.** It is most important to be sincere, which may be best achieved with your own prayer words.

This was only a beginning, though if honestly and humbly made, an effect, sometimes a very great one, was felt at once.

## **Women's Step 3 Topics**

### **Turn it Over to Life**

When we feel that life is taking us to places that we don't want to go, it can be depressing. We may be overwhelmed by other people's demands of us. We may try controlling things or people we cannot control, fighting back. Letting go of this burden is what Step Three enables us to do. We let a Higher Power take over, letting us have a new freedom and a new happiness. We let go giving us the power to be creative in new ways.

Some of us believed that if we tried to control people and things, we can avoid more pain. It didn't work, so we drank. The idea of letting go can be frightening and can make us anxious. Are we really responsible for everything? No, our responsibility is just our own attitudes and actions.

Will everything fall apart if we stop trying to control? Maybe some things are supposed to fall apart. Trying to prevent that is tiring. Women often fall into the trap of being the dispute broker, interceding in conflicts. Being a peacemaker will never end since there will always be conflicts.

Why is it your responsibility to manage everyone else's feelings? The situation may take a surprising new direction without your interference.

### **Worrying**

Women are expected to support others, handling their details so they are free to live life. Society expects us to worry. We worry about maintaining our household, remembering birthdays, keeping our family and friends close, and more.

*"I finally realized that other people have a Higher Power that takes care of them. We can practice self-care if we can worry about others less."*

Let's be aware of the difference between surrender and submission. When there is a force that's trying to control us and we give in, that is submission. When we let go of controlling, that is surrendering to our Higher Power.

## **Surrender, Not Submission**

Women are expected to be submissive allowing our husbands, life partners, parents, and bosses to take control of decisions. We may hear that we are a devoted wife or model employee. We need to avoid letting these breadcrumbs of praise to encourage our submissiveness. Step Three does not ask us to be submissive, but to surrender trying to control.

## **Active, Not Passive**

The original Alcoholics Anonymous (or Big Book) says, *“We had a new Employer. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well.”*

This image of a dominating father figure is very difficult for some women to accept. Entrusting our lives *“to the care of God as we understood Him”* suggests that if we are well behaved and passive, a male authority figure will save us.

Instead, we need to have a loving relationship with a Higher Power that will guide us to good decision making. We can't get sober being passive. Twelve Steps are a program of action.

## **Self-Awareness, Not Self-Forgetting**

Self-Forgetting can be a Defect of Character for women. *“How persistently we claim the right to decide all by ourselves just what we shall think and just how we shall act.”* says the Big Book. Actually, women rarely do this. We have been selfless in supporting others.

We eliminate self-will, self-centeredness, and self-gratification. We embrace self-love, self-care, self-worth, and self-esteem. Without a sense of self and not knowing ourselves, we cannot image a power greater than ourselves.

We don't do this program alone. We develop a balance between others and ourselves by learning from other sober women that are accomplishing this for themselves.

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*“Our pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses our understanding.”*

—Khalil Gibran, Christian Philosopher

*“It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no God.”*

—Thomas Jefferson

*“Do the difficult things while they are easy and do the great things while they are small. A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.”*

—Lao Tzu

## Step 4: Courage to Face Uncomfortable Truths

### **Made a searching and fearless inventory of ourselves.**

**Courage:** The strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.

*“If you risk nothing, then you risk everything.”*

—Geena Davis

Next we launched out on a course of vigorous action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning, which many of us had never attempted. Though our decision was vital and crucial step, it could have little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us.

Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions.

Therefore, we started upon a personal inventory. This was Step Four. A business which takes no regular inventory usually goes broke. Taking commercial inventory is a fact-finding and a fact-facing process. It is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade. One objective is to disclose damaged or unsalable goods, to get rid of them promptly and without regret. If the owner of the business is to be successful, she cannot fool herself about values.

We did exactly the same thing with our lives. We took stock honestly. First, we searched out the flaws in our make-up which caused our failure. Being convinced that self, manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us, we considered its common manifestations.

Resentment is the number one offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease, for we have

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been not only mentally and physically ill, we have been spiritually sick. When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically.

In dealing with resentments, we set them on paper. We listed people, institutions or principle with who we were angry. We asked ourselves why we were angry. In most cases it was found that our self-esteem, our pocketbooks, our ambitions, our personal relationships, (including sex) were hurt or threatened. So, we were sore. We were burned up.

On our grudge list we set opposite each name our injuries. Was it our self-esteem, our security, our ambitions, our personal, or sex relations, which had been interfered with?

We were usually as definite as this example:

I'm resentful at	The Cause	Affects my
Jennifer	Flirting with my husband. Told my husband of my bisexual playmate. Jennifer may get my job at the office.	Sex relations, Self-esteem [fear] Security Self-esteem [fear]
Alyssa	She's crazy – she's my friend, but snubs me. She committed her husband for drinking.	Personal relation, Self-esteem [fear] Security Personal relation
My boss	Unreasonable, Unjust, Micromanaging Threatens to fire me for my drinking and padding my expense account	Security, Self-esteem [fear] Financial Security
My Husband	Misunderstands and nags me. Likes Jennifer attention. Wants house put in his name only.	Personal relation, Self-esteem [fear] Sex relations Personal & Financial Security

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We went back through our lives. Nothing counted but thoroughness and honesty. When we were finished we considered it carefully. The first thing apparent was that this world and its people were often quite wrong. To conclude that others were wrong was as far as most of us ever got. The usual outcome was that people continued to wrong us and we stayed sore. Sometimes it was remorse and then we were sore at ourselves. But the more we fought and tried to have our own way, the worse matters got. As in war, the victor only seemed to win. Our moments of triumph were short-lived.

It is plain that a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness. To the precise extent that we permit these, do we squander the hours that might have been worthwhile. But with the alcoholic, whose hope is the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience, this business of resentment is infinitely grave. We found that it is fatal. For when harboring such feeling we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit. The insanity of alcohol returns and we drink again. And with us, to drink is to die.

If we were to live, we had to be free of anger. That may be the dubious luxury of normal women, but for alcoholics these things are poison. We might get angry sometimes. But need to let it go, because holding onto anger turns it into a resentment.

We turned back to the list, for it held the key to the future. We were prepared to look for it from an entirely different angle. We began to see that the world and its people really dominated us. In that state, the wrongdoing of others, fancied or real, had power to actually kill. How could we escape? We saw that these resentments must be mastered, but how? We could not wish them away any more than alcohol.

This was our course: We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick. Though we did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed us, they, like ourselves, were sick too. We asked God

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to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. When a person offended we said to ourselves, *This is a sick woman. How can I be helpful to her? God save me from being angry.*

We avoid retaliation or argument. We wouldn't treat sick people that way. If we do, we destroy our chance of being helpful. We cannot be helpful to all people, but at least God will show us how to take a kindly and tolerant view of each and every one.

Referring to our list again. Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened? Though a situation had not been entirely our fault, we tried to disregard the actions the other person involved entirely. Where were we to blame? The inventory was ours, not the other person's. When we saw our faults we listed them. We placed them before us in black and white. We admitted our wrongs honestly and were willing to set these matters straight.

Notice that the word "*fear*" is bracketed alongside the difficulties. This short word somehow touches about every aspect of our lives. It was an evil and corroding thread; the fabric of our existence was shot through with it. It set in motion trains of circumstances which brought us misfortune we felt we didn't deserve. But did not we, ourselves, set the ball rolling? Sometimes we think fear ought to be classed with stealing. It seems to cause more trouble.

We reviewed our fears thoroughly. We put them on paper, even though we had no resentment in connection with them. We asked ourselves why we had them. Wasn't it because self-reliance failed us? Self-reliance was good as far as it went, but it didn't go far enough. Some of us once had great self-confidence, but it didn't fully solve the fear problem, or any other. When it made us cocky, it was worse.

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Perhaps there is a better way; we think so. For we are now on a different basis of trusting and relying upon God. We trust infinite God rather than our finite selves. We are in the world to play the role She assigns. Just to the extent that we do as we think She would have us, and humbly rely on Her, does She enable us to match calamity with serenity.

We never apologize to anyone for depending upon our Higher Power. We can laugh at those who think spirituality the way of weakness. Paradoxically, it is the way of strength. The verdict of the ages is that faith means courage. All women of faith have courage. They trust their God. We never apologize for God. Instead we let Her demonstrate, through us, what She can do. We ask Her to remove our fear and direct our attention to what She would have us be. At once, we commence to outgrow fear.

We reviewed our own conduct over the years past. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, or inconsiderate? Whom had we hurt? Did we unjustifiably arouse jealousy, suspicion or bitterness? Where were we at fault, what should we have done instead? We got this all down on paper and looked at it.

In this way we tried to shape a sane and sound ideal for our future sex life. We subjected each relation to this test: was I or my partner selfish or not? We remembered always that our sex powers were God-given and therefore good, neither to be used lightly or selfishly nor to be despised and loathed.

Whatever our concept of sex turns out to be, we must be willing to grow toward it. We must be willing to make amends where we have done harm, provided that we do not bring about still more harm in so doing. In other words, we treat sex as we would any other problem. In meditation, we ask God what we should do about each specific matter. The right answer will come, if we want it.

God alone can judge our sex situation. Counsel with persons is often desirable, but we let God be the final judge. We realize that some people

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are as fanatical about sex as others are loose. We avoid hysterical thinking or advice.

Suppose we fall short of the chosen concept and stumble? Does this mean we are going to get drunk. Some people tell us so. But this is only a half-truth. It depends on us and on our motives. If we are sorry for what we have done, and have the honest desire to let God take us to better things, we believe we will be forgiven and will have learned our lesson. If we are not sorry, and our conduct continues to harm others, we are quite sure to drink. We are not theorizing. These are facts out of our experience.

To sum up about sex: We earnestly pray for the right concept, for guidance in each questionable situation, for sanity, and for the strength to do the right thing. If sex is very troublesome, we throw ourselves the harder into helping others. We think of their needs and work for them. This takes us out of ourselves. It quiets the imperious urge, when to yield would mean heartache.

If we have been thorough about our personal inventory, we have written down a lot. We have listed and analyzed our resentments. We have begun to comprehend their futility and their fatality. We have commenced to see their terrible destructiveness. We have begun to learn tolerance, patience and good will toward all people, even our enemies, for we look on them as imperfect humans. We have listed the people we have hurt by our conduct, and are willing to straighten out the past if we can.

In this book you read again and again that faith did for us what we could not do for ourselves. We hope you are convinced now that God can remove whatever self-will has blocked you off from Her. If you have already made a decision, and an inventory of your grosser handicaps, you have made a good beginning. That being so you have swallowed and digested some big chunks of truth about yourself.

## **Women's Step 4 Topics**

### **Turn it Over to Life**

#### **Fear**

The most common thing that holds us back from completing our Fourth Step is Fear. It will probably never go away completely. So we go forward and work on our Step Four with the fear, and not let it stop us. We can work on this step keeping in mind that we can embrace self-acceptance and let go of our past. We can make better choices now that we are sober.

The purpose of the step is really getting to know ourselves including our behaviors and feelings. It is a practice that leads to self-knowledge, self-awareness, and eventually self-care. This will help us avoid mistakes of the past, the consequential resentments, and the drinking to numb our feelings.

#### **Guilt**

The most common feeling that women alcoholics share is guilt. Often, we think we should have known better, and that most things that went wrong for us were our own fault. We felt terrible about ourselves. But, nothing is just one person's fault. Each person in a situation owns a part of it. Sometimes due to inexperience, we couldn't have acted much differently. We didn't understand our choices. Step Four enables us to learn from past mistakes.

Persistent guilt can be self-destructive. Downsizing guilt is difficult, but necessary in order to gain right-sized self-esteem that enables us to get sober.

#### **Moral Inventory**

Society has double standards for men and women. "*Boys will be boys.*" In the 21st century, this attitude is being rejected. We're embracing gender equality and women empowerment.

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Don't let the word moral lead you in the wrong direction. In fact, drop that word entirely. Just think of Step Four as building a Life Inventory.

### **Not Defects of Character—Unhealthy Life Patterns**

Women tend to be perfectionist and self-critical. Let's not go overboard looking for flaws and defects of character. Let's just try to identify our life patterns that hold us back. By knowing these patterns, we may be able to avoid repeating them. If we only think about The Seven Deadly Sins, we may fail to identify problems such as Submissiveness, Workaholism, and overly seeking Approval.

Women are often told by others of our flaws. We internalize these ideas and become defensive. We are hard on ourselves for fear we will be rejected. My sponsors have said to me *“Please take your foot off your neck”* and *“You say sorry to much.”*

We may be people-pleasers, trying to hang onto relationships, resulting in taking blame when we shouldn't. This is not service to others, because we let them off the hook for things for which they should be responsible. It creates a burden for us making us more fearful, anxious, and inadequate.

### **An Inventory of our Past Actions**

Remember, anything that you may have done in the past has a name because others have done the same. You are not alone. A few years ago, I sponsored a former gang member who admitted to me that he committed a Drive by Shooting. Your A.A. Sponsor will not judge you. She just wants you to lay all your cards on the table so you can see yourself more clearly.

We need to state our actions in a matter-of-fact way without judging ourselves. It is in the past. By getting sober we can make much better choices going forward.

*“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”*

—Franklin D. Roosevelt

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*“Guilt is anger directed at ourselves - at what we did or did not do.  
Resentment is anger directed at others - at what they did or did not do.”*

—Peter McWilliams

*“Have no fear of perfection - you'll never reach it.”*

—Salvador Dali

## Step 5: Integrity

**Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of ourselves, good and bad.**

**Integrity:** Firm adherence to a code or set of beliefs.

*“Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless. Knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful.”*

—Samuel Johnson

Having made our personal inventory, what shall we do about it? We have been trying to get a new attitude, a new relationship with our Higher Power, and to discover the obstacles in our path. We have admitted certain defects; we have determined in a rough way what the trouble is; we have put our finger on the weak part of our personal inventory. Now these are about to be cast out. This requires action on our part, which, when completed, will mean that we have admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our defects. This brings us to the Fifth Step in the program of recovery.

This is perhaps difficult, especially discussing our defects with another person. We think we have done well enough in admitting these things to ourselves. There is doubt about that. In actual practice, we usually find a solitary self-appraisal insufficient. Many of us thought it necessary to go much further.

We will be more reconciled to discussing ourselves with another person when we see good reasons why we should do so. The best reason first: If we skip this vital step, we may not overcome drinking. Time after time newcomers have tried to keep to themselves certain facts about their lives. Trying to avoid this humbling experience, they have turned to easier methods. Almost invariably they got drunk. Having persevered with the rest of the program, they wondered why they fell. We think the reason is

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that they never completed their housecleaning. They took inventory all right, but hung on to some of the worst items in stock. They only thought they had lost their egoism and fear; they only thought they had humbled themselves. But they had not learned enough of humility, fearlessness, and honesty, in the sense we find it necessary, until they told someone else all their life story.

More than most people, the alcoholic leads a double life. She is very much the actor. To the outer world she presents her stage character. This is the one she likes her fellows to see. She wants to enjoy a certain reputation, but knows in her heart she doesn't deserve it.

The inconsistency is made worse by the things she does on her sprees. Coming to her sense, she is revolted at certain episodes she vaguely remembers. These memories are a nightmare. She trembles to think someone might have observed her. As far as she can, she pushes these memories far inside herself. She hopes they will never see the light of day. She is under constant fear and tension, that makes for more drinking.

Psychologists are inclined to agree with us. We have spent thousands of dollars for examinations. We know but few instances where we have given these doctors a fair break. We have seldom told them the whole truth nor have we followed their advice. Unwilling to be honest with these sympathetic people, we were honest with no one else. Small wonder many in the medical profession have a low opinion of alcoholics and their chance for recovery!

We must be entirely honest with somebody if we expect to live long or happily in this world. Rightly and naturally, we think well before we choose the person or persons with whom to take this intimate and confidential step. Those of us belonging to a religious denomination which requires confession must, and of course, will want to go to the properly appointed authority whose duty it is to receive it. Though we have no religious conception, we may still do well to talk with someone ordained

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by an established religion. We often find such a person quick to see and understand our problem. Of course, we sometimes encounter people who do not understand alcoholics.

It is best to tell our life story to our sponsor. In working the previous steps with her, we develop a trusting relationship with her.

When we decide who is to hear our story, we waste not time. We have a written inventory and we are prepared for a long talk. We explain to our listener what we are about to do and why we have to do it. She should realize that we are engaged upon a life-and-death errand. Most people approached in this way will be glad to help; they will be honored by our confidence.

We pocket our pride and go to it, illuminating every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past. Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Higher Power. We may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now we begin to have a spiritual experience. The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will often come strongly. We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe.

Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet for an hour, carefully reviewing what we have done. We thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know Her better. Taking this book down from our shelf we turn to the page which contains the twelve steps. Carefully reading the first five proposals, we ask if we have omitted anything, for we are building an arch through which we shall walk a free woman at last. Is our work solid so far? Are the stones properly in place? Have we skimmed on the cement put into the foundation? Have we tried to make mortar without sand? If we can answer to our satisfaction, we then look at Step Six.

## **Women's Step 5 Topics**

### **Fear**

Many of us are fearful of revealing all in Step Five. But, we can trust this process as many women have over many decades. Many of us find it to be a great relief when we complete this step.

We find that our sponsors accept us just as we are and don't judge us. We notice that our sobriety sisters will stand with us, even if we've done terrible things in the past. We feel lifted by our understanding that we know ourselves better and can stop the wreckage of the past in sobriety.

### **Finding Similarities**

Whatever we did, there is a name for it because others have done the same. Our behavior is not unique. It is important for us to share it all, leaving nothing out. We're as sick as our secrets. Something omitted will haunt us.

### **Double Standards for Sexuality**

Women have a lot of guilt and shame around sexuality. In our society, men have greater freedom in this area. A man might be called a stud, but a woman with the same behavior is called a derogatory name.

In working the A.A. program, you might find that you have strayed from your own beliefs about sex while your alcoholic disease was active. This is your chance to correct that problem. We can let go of the past by sharing it with other A.A. sobriety sisters that we trust. We recommend against sharing all with everyone. Not all A.A. members are fully open minded. We are all on a journey towards that awareness.

### **Learning about our True Selves**

We can become more peaceful and patient with ourselves by sharing our past in this Fifth Step. We think of our limitations in such a way that we accept them and don't blame ourselves. Alcoholic disguised our true

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selves and hide our strengths. We can now change to become our best selves. We learn who we can be. No human will ever be perfect; only God is perfect. And we can learn to live with imperfection. The Fifth Steps helps us to heal.

### **Putting the Past into Perspective**

Through sharing with our sobriety sisters, we can develop compassion for ourselves, just as we would for them. A.A.'s basic text, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, says “*We won’t regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it.*” We also don’t want to repeat it. Through the steps, we identify the life experiences that have hurt ourselves or others. We keep them in mind going forward to become our true best selves.

*“Be Yourself; everyone else is taken.”*

—Oscar Wilde

*“The first step toward change is awareness. The second step is acceptance.”*

—Nathaniel Branden

*“Acceptance and tolerance and forgiveness, those are life-altering lessons.”*

—Jessica Lange

## Step 6: Willingness

**Were entirely ready to have God remove all these life patterns that hold us back.**

**Willingness:** Inclined or favorably disposed in mind, accept by choice or without reluctance, prompt to act or respond.

*“The amount of good luck coming your way depends on your willingness to act.”*

—Barbara Sher

We have emphasized willingness as being indispensable. Are we now ready to let God remove from us all the things that we have admitted are objectionable? Can She now take them all, every one? If we still cling to something we will not let go, we ask God to help us be willing.

### Women’s Step 6 Topics

#### Willingness

We work on the steps one at a time, making incremental progress. Before giving up our defective life patterns, we simply become ready to do it in Step Six. Actually doing it is the next step.

We do wonder what our life will be like after giving up some things that we do. The positive experience of alcoholic women who’ve completed the steps should minimize our fears and anxiety giving us a hopeful attitude.

In this step, we review our behaviors and our thinking that led to those behaviors. Some of our behaviors were positive and constructive. Some of them were destructive to us and others. When faced with the resulting negative consequences, we drank. But there is a solution.

We can write a list of the behaviors that had negative consequences. Then we can consider our motivation for each item in the list. Once

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written, we may see behavior patterns to avoid. We want to be truthful without blaming ourselves. In doing all steps, we want to avoid being self-critical by stating things in a matter-of-fact, non-dramatic fashion.

### **What Will Happen?**

Many of us are afraid to start acting differently in so many ways. We wonder: what will happen if we give up a certain behavior, why am I clinging to this behavior, and what behavior will replace it?

The answers will come when we experience change. It is unknown what will happen because we never tried the change before. But, it is a lot easier to avoid destructive without the influence of alcohol on our brains.

### **How do you do it?**

The simplest way is to go through your inventory of patterns and habits, concentrating on one pattern at a time, asking yourself how this pattern protects you. What do you fear will happen if you stop behaving this way?

Step Six enables us to be aware of what we do in life. Being aware of behavior patterns does not immediately lead to giving them up. That is what we will do in Step 7. For now, we just identify them. We become hopeful that we can change when we are ready.

The book Alcoholics Anonymous (The Big Book) says *“We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.”* Yet in many places it tells us to strive for perfection. Harriet Braiker once wrote *“Striving for excellence motivates you; striving for perfection is demoralizing.”* Whenever I read the word *“perfection”*, I mentally substitute the word *“excellence.”*

Anxiety, fear, self-doubt, and uncertainty can block our progress. But we now know our sobriety sisters successfully worked this step. We want the serenity and confidence that they have. Working Step Six is part of how they attained this. It is a proven path to success.

## Step 7: Humility

### **Humbly asked Her to remove our shortcomings.**

**Humility:** Freedom from pride or arrogance. Modesty. Meekness.

*“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.”*

—Proverbs 11:2

When ready, we say something like this:

*“My Higher Power, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character that stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen.”*

Or this:

*“With honesty and openness, I am now willing to let others have all of me, good and bad. I seek help in eliminating every single fear and unhealthy defensive mechanism which limits me. In letting go, I gain strength to self-care and be of service to others.”*

We have then completed Step Seven.

## **Women’s Step 7 Topics**

### **When will we Change?**

It’s up to our Higher Power and then our footwork. The best thing for us to do is cooperate with our Higher Power and be willing to change. Since you are aware of your behavior patterns, you will recognize a pattern before you act. Perhaps you will repeat the behavior before easing into letting it go. Don’t panic nor blame yourself. This is a learning process.

## **What is Humility?**

It is an accurate picture of our abilities where we don't minimize nor exaggerate our strengths. And we don't minimize nor exaggerate our weaknesses. It is being *right sized*.

The true way to be humble is not to stoop until you're lower than yourself but to stand at your real height against some higher nature that will show you the smallness of your greatness.

Being humble means having a *teachable mind and a coachable spirit*. It involves listening to other people's suggestions and acting on the suggestions that seem right for us. It our ability to be influenced by others. We remember that other people are human and imperfect. So we must still determine if those suggestions are good for us.

## **What Humility is Not**

Humiliation it is not. Humiliation comes when we act selfishly, irresponsibly, recklessly, or carelessly in a way that harms others. In Steps 8 and 9 we get the chance to make amends for those past behaviors. Step 7 enables us to avoid those issues going forward.

## **Self-Acceptance**

Faithfully executing Step 6 gives us self-awareness. Practicing Step 7 enables us to grow into self-acceptance, giving up perfectionism, self-criticism, and fault finding. With growing self-acceptance, we can change. We accept that we can't do everything ourselves. We don't have to do it alone. We accept help from our Higher Power and our sobriety teammates.

## **False Humility**

Many of us do not accept compliments gracefully. Someone might tell me that my shoes are beautiful and I might say "*Oh, they are just from the discount store.*" But, I am denying them the opportunity to be gracious. Instead I can simply say "*Thank you very much.*"

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In a group of three, I told one person that the other person, with 25 years of sobriety, had a lot of sobriety wisdom. The complimented person objected saying “*I don’t know about that.*” When I said *that* wasn’t true humility, she got mad. I’m still not sure if I should have seized that as a teachable moment or not. She stays sober anyway. But I had to give up false humility for me to make progress.

*“Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less.”*

—C. S. Lewis

*“Pride makes us artificial and humility makes us real.”*

—Thomas Merton

## Step 8: Love

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

**Love:** Strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties. Affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interests.

*“Love doesn't make the world go 'round. Love is what makes the ride worthwhile.”*

—Franklin P. Jones

Now we need more action, without which we find that *“Faith without works is dead.”* We have a list of all persons we have harmed and to whom we are willing to make amends. We made it when we took inventory. We subjected ourselves to a drastic self-appraisal.

Now we go out to our fellows and repair the damage done in the past. We attempt to sweep away the debris that has accumulated out of our effort to live on self-will and run the show ourselves. If we haven't the will to do this, we ask until it comes. Remember it was agreed at the beginning we would go to any lengths for victory over alcohol.

Probably there are still some misgivings. As we look over the list of business acquaintances and friends we have hurt, we may feel diffident about going to some of them on a spiritual basis. Let us be reassured. To some people we need not, and probably should not emphasize the spiritual feature on our first approach. We might prejudice them. At the moment we are trying to put our lives in order. But this is not an end in itself. Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us.

It is seldom wise to approach an individual, who still smarts from our injustice to her, and announce that we have gone religious. In the prize ring, this would be called leading with the chin. Why lay ourselves open to being branded fanatics or religious bores? We may kill a future

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opportunity to carry a beneficial message. But our listener is sure to be impressed with a sincere desire to set right the wrong. She is going to be more interested in a demonstration of good will than in our talk of spiritual discoveries.

We don't use this as an excuse for shying away from the subject of God. When it will serve any good purpose, we are willing to announce our convictions with tact and common sense.

The question of how to approach the person we hated will arise. It may be she has done us more harm than we have done her and, though we may have acquired a better attitude toward her, we are still not too keen about admitting our faults.

Nevertheless, with a person we dislike, we take the bit in our teeth. It is harder to go to an enemy than to a friend, but we find it much more beneficial to us. We go to her in a helpful and forgiving spirit, confessing our former ill feeling and expressing our regret.

### **Women's Step 8 Topics**

When we do the eighth step, we cannot wait until we are fearless. We must act despite the fear. We are not responsible for someone's opinion when we speak our truth.

*“Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. The fearful are caught as often as the bold.”*

—Helen Keller

Due to people pleasing, women may be driven to apologize inappropriately. We may include people on our list to whom we did no harm.

Our motivation may be to make friends with someone with whom we did not have a good relationship. As always, check your motives, keeping in mind that people rarely have just one single reason for anything. Be sure one of the most important goals is to amend the harm we have done.

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Several of my sponsors told me that I say “*I’m sorry*” way too often. Are we making a list that is too long? Lack of focus can reduce the power of this step. It can also make us think that the task is too daunting. It is better to focus on the relationships that most urgently need our attention.

I love quotes for their brief and powerful message. One of my favorites is below.

*“I’m sorry this letter is so long. I didn’t have time to write a short one.”*

—Attributed to many

When making amends, we do not discuss the other person’s harm to us. That would dilute our message. But we remember that we must hold others accountable. Everyone has responsibility in a relationship. Later, we may say something about how we were affected, but we risk coming across as resentful. A better approach is this: if a situation arises, we can take the opportunity to stand up for ourselves.

Without discounting another’s actions, we take responsibility for our actions. I often fell into the trap of cleaning my side of the street, then attempting to clean their side, too. I was taking too much of the responsibility.

Victims of verbal or physical abuse sometimes feel they are responsible because they are somehow inadequate. No one deserves abuse. It is healing when we can let go of those feelings.

When we get writer’s block, we can motivate ourselves by remembering what A.A. experience in this step has meant to others.

## Step 9: Justice

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

**Justice:** The maintenance or administration of what is just especially by the impartial adjustment of conflicting claims.

**Just:** acting or being in conformity with what is morally upright or good.

*“There is a higher court than courts of justice and that is the court of conscience. It supersedes all other courts.”*

—Mahatma Gandhi

Under no condition do we criticize such a person or argue. Simply tell her that we will never get over drinking until we have done our utmost to straighten out the past. We are there to sweep off our side of the street, realizing that nothing worthwhile can be accomplished until we do so, never trying to tell her what she should do. Her faults are not discussed. We stick to our own. If our manner is calm, frank, and open, we will be gratified with the result.

In nine cases out of ten the unexpected happens. Sometimes the woman we are calling upon admits her own fault, so feuds of years' standing melt away in an hour. Rarely do we fail to make satisfactory progress. Our former enemies sometimes praise what we are doing and wish us well. Occasionally, they will offer assistance. It should not matter, however, if someone does throw us out of her office. We have made our demonstration, done our part. It's water over the dam.

Most alcoholics owe money. We do not dodge our creditors. Telling them what we are trying to do, we make no bones about our drinking; they usually know it anyway, whether we think so or not. Nor are we afraid of disclosing our alcoholism on the theory it may cause financial harm. Approached in this way, the most ruthless creditor will sometimes surprise

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us. Arranging the best deal we can we let these people know we are sorry. Our drinking has made us slow to pay. We must lose our fear of creditors no matter how far we have to go, for we are liable to drink if we are afraid to face them.

Perhaps we have committed a criminal offense that might land us in jail if it were known to the authorities. We may be short in our accounts and unable to make good. We have already admitted this in confidence to another person, but we are sure we would be imprisoned or lose our job if it were known. Maybe it's only a petty offense such as padding the expense account. Most of us have done that sort of thing. Maybe we are divorced, and have remarried but haven't kept up the alimony to number one. He is indignant about it, and has a warrant out for our arrest. That's a common form of trouble too.

Although these reparations take innumerable forms, there are some general principles that we find guiding. Reminding ourselves that we have decided to go to any lengths to find a spiritual experience, we ask that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be. We may lose our position or reputation or face jail, but we are willing. We have to be. We must not shrink at anything.

Usually, however, other people are involved. Therefore, we are not to be the hasty and foolish martyr who would needlessly sacrifice others to save herself from the alcoholic pit. A woman we know had remarried. Because of resentment and drinking, she had not paid child support to her first husband. He was furious. He went to court and got an order for her arrest. She had commenced our way of life, had secured a position, and was getting her head above water. It would have been impressive heroics if she had walked up to the Judge and said, "*Here I am.*"

We thought she ought to be willing to do that if necessary, but if she were in jail she could provide nothing for either family. We suggested she

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write her first husband admitting her faults and asking forgiveness. She did, and also sent a small amount of money. She told him what she would try to do in the future. She said she was perfectly willing to go to jail if he insisted. Of course she did not, and the whole situation has only since been adjusted. Before taking drastic action that might implicate other people we secure their consent. If we have obtained permission, have consulted with others, asked God to help and the drastic step is indicated we must not shrink.

This brings to mind a story about one of our friends. While drinking, she accepted a sum of money from a bitterly-hated business rival, giving her no receipt for it. She subsequently denied having received the money and used the incident as a basis for discrediting the woman. She thus used her own wrong-doing as a means of destroying the reputation of another. In fact, her rival was ruined.

She felt that she had done a wrong she could not possibly make right. If she opened that old affair, she was afraid it would destroy the reputation of her partner, disgrace her family and take away her means of livelihood. What right had she to involve those dependent upon her? How could she possibly make a public statement exonerating her rival?

After consulting with her husband and partner she came to the conclusion that it was better to take those risks than to stand before her Higher Power guilty of such ruinous slander. She saw that she had to place the outcome in God's hands or she would soon start drinking again, and all would be lost anyhow. She attended church for the first time in many years. After the sermon, she quietly got up and made an explanation. Her action met widespread approval, and today she is one of the most trusted citizens of her town. This all happened years ago.

The chances are that we have domestic troubles. Perhaps we are mixed up with men, or other women, in a fashion we wouldn't care to have advertised. We doubt if, in this respect, alcoholics are fundamentally much

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worse than other people. But drinking does complicate sex relations in the home. After a few years with an alcoholic, a husband gets worn out, resentful and uncommunicative. How could he be anything else? The husband begins to feel lonely, sorry for himself. He commences to look around in the night clubs, or their equivalent, for something besides liquor. In fairness we must say that he may understand, but what are we going to do about a thing like that? An alcoholic woman so involved often feels very remorseful at times, especially if she is married to a loyal and courageous guy who has truly gone through hell for her.

Whatever the situation, we usually have to do something about it. If we are sure our husband does not know, should we tell him? Not always, we think. If he knows in a general way that we have been wild, should we tell him in detail? Undoubtedly we should admit our fault. He may insist on knowing all the particulars. He will want to know who the man is and where he is. We feel we ought to say to him that we have no right to involve another person. We are sorry for what we have done and, God willing, it shall not be repeated. More than that we cannot do; we have no right to go further. Though there may be justifiable exceptions, and though we wish to lay down no rule of any sort, we have often found this the best course to take.

Our design for living is not a one-way street. It is as good for the husband as for the wife. If we can forget, so can he. It is better, however, that one does not needlessly name a person upon whom he can vent jealousy.

Perhaps there are some cases where the utmost frankness is demanded. No outsider can appraise such an intimate situation. It may be that both will decide that the way of good sense and loving kindness is to let bygones be bygones. Each might pray about it, having the other one's happiness uppermost in mind. Keep it always in sight that we are dealing with that most terrible human emotion, jealousy. Good generalship may

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decide that the problem be attacked on the flank rather than risk a face-to-face combat.

If we have no such complication, there is plenty we should do at home. Sometimes we hear an alcoholic say that the only thing she needs to do is to keep sober. Certainly she must keep sober, for there will be no home if she doesn't. But she is yet a long way from making good to the husband or parents whom for years she has so shockingly treated. Passing all understanding is the patience fathers and husband have had with alcoholics. Had this not been so, many of us would have no homes today, would perhaps be dead.

The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring her way through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept she home in turmoil. We feel a woman is unthinking when she says that sobriety is enough. She is like the farmer who came up out of her cyclone cellar to find her home ruined. To her husband, she remarked, "*Don't see anything the matter here, Ma. Ain't it grand the wind stopped blowin'?*"

Yes, there is a long period of reconstruction ahead. We must take the lead. A remorseful mumbling that we are sorry won't fill the bill at all. We ought to sit down with the family and frankly analyze the past as we now see it, being very careful not to criticize them. Their defects may be glaring, but the chances are that our own actions are partly responsible. So we clean house with the family, asking each morning in meditation that our Higher Power show us the way of patience, tolerance, kindness and love.

The spiritual life is not a theory. We have to live it. Unless one's family expresses a desire to live upon spiritual principles we think we ought not to urge them. We should not talk incessantly to them about spiritual matters. They will change in time. Our behavior will convince them more

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than our words. We must remember that ten or twenty years of drunkenness would make a skeptic out of anyone.

There may be some wrongs we can never fully right. We don't worry about them if we can honestly say to ourselves that we would right them if we could. Some people cannot be seen, so we sent them an honest letter. And there may be a valid reason for postponement in some cases. But we don't delay if it can be avoided. We should be sensible, tactful, considerate and humble without being servile or scraping. As God's people we stand on our feet; we don't crawl before anyone.

### **The Promises**

1. If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through.
2. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness.
3. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it.
4. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace.
5. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others.
6. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear.
7. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our comrades.
8. Self-seeking will slip away.
9. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change.
10. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us.
11. We will intuitively know how to handle situations that used to baffle us.
12. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

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Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.

### **Women's Step 9 Topics**

We have decided to go to any lengths to let go of alcohol and bad habits. We hope that we can face the world without so much fear. Step Nine enables us to achieve this freedom from addiction and its consequences.

Making amends means taking responsibility for our part, apologizing, and repairing the damage we have done. Sometimes it is not possible to apologize or correct. It may be that we would injure someone by trying. Or, the person has passed away or lost contact with us. We do what we can.

We may write a letter to the person then shred it. We can pay it forward by making a donation to a charity or being generous to someone else. We need to close the issue and forgive ourselves.

Working Step Nine can free us from guilt, shame, or regret of our past, freeing us to live in the present. It can give us, or another person, hope for a better future. While making apologies, we do not mention the other person's harm to us. But we may hold them accountable for their part sometime in the future, perhaps as a teachable moment when something arises.

We speak of the harm we've done without judging ourselves. We don't minimize our actions, but we don't dramatize them either. We speak matter-of-factly. Some A.A.'s remind us that "*honesty without sensitivity is brutality.*" Even if we harbor a lingering resentment, we treat the other person with respect.

In apologizing, we relinquish outcomes and expectations. One person told me, "*That's all right.*" I responded, "*No, it was not all right. But now*

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*that I am sober, I won't do that again.*” Sometimes the other person apologizes back. We don't expect that at all. But we let them release their guilt or regret.

We stole or pay for things we shoplifted. Some of us go into the store, ask for the manager, apologize, and compensate for their loss. Others remain anonymous and mail the store a cashier's check. For a large sum, making and executing a payment plan over several months is an option.

Often, we need to make *living amends*, an ongoing practice of adopting new, healthier behaviors. Many women feel guilty about how they didn't give proper attention to their children. When I was still drinking, I would check out from my family. After getting sober, I pay attention to them much better as living amends. If my son interrupts what I am doing, I drop it, look straight into his eyes, and listen. Sometimes living amends might mean being more respectful and kinder to others.

Many of us that would hide our feelings were emotionally dishonest. Our living amends may be to speak up for ourselves. By doing this, other people may be irritated by our change. But we owe it to others to be honest so that we can have a real relationship. Also, it is easier for us to stay sober if we avoid the resentments that arise from not being our true selves. Family and friends may express resentment, not liking our new redefined selves. Their expression of their resentments doesn't mean we have harmed them. Our feelings are just as important as theirs.

By making amends to ourselves and others, we can release guilt, shame, remorse, resentment, or regret of our past, freeing us to live in the present.

*“I am making amends and seeking forgiveness. My only hope is that some good can come out of my situation.”*

—Jayson Blair

## Step 10: Perseverance

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

**Perseverance:** The quality that allows someone to continue trying to do something even though it is difficult.

*“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts.*

—Winston Churchill

This brings us to Step Ten, that suggests we continue to take personal inventory and continue to set right any new mistakes as we go along. We vigorously commenced this way of living as we cleaned up the past. We have entered the world of the Spirit. Our next function is to grow in understanding and effectiveness. This is not an overnight matter. It should continue for our lifetime. Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them. We discuss them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone. Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help. Love and tolerance of others is our code.

And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone, even alcohol. For by this time sanity will have returned. We will seldom be interested in liquor. If tempted, we recoil from it as from a hot flame. We react sanely and normally, and we will find that this has happened automatically. We will see that our new attitude toward liquor has been given us without any thought or effort on our part. It just comes! That is the miracle of it. We are not fighting it, neither are we avoiding temptation. We feel as though we had been placed in a position of neutrality safe and protected. We have not even sworn off. Instead, the problem has been removed. It does not exist for us. We are neither cocky nor are we afraid. That is how we react so long as we keep in fit spiritual condition.

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It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. We are headed for trouble if we do, for alcohol is a subtle foe. We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's hope for us into all of our activities. *“How can I best serve Thee, Thy will (not mine) be done.”* These are thoughts that must go with us constantly. We can exercise our willpower along this line all we wish. It is the proper use of the will.

Much has already been said about receiving strength, inspiration, and direction from She who has all knowledge and power. If we have carefully followed directions, we have begun to sense the flow of Her Spirit into us. To some extent we have become God-conscious. We have begun to develop this vital sixth sense. But we must go further and that means more action.

### **Women’s Step 10 Topics**

By the time we get to Step Ten, we’ve learned the spiritual tools to keep us sober. We learned about our life patterns that held us back. We forgave ourselves for the wreckage of past. In doing Step Ten, we take an inventory in the present. We take action on the previous steps as new things arise simply by living our lives. We can still make some mistakes. No human is perfect, but we strive for excellence.

By practicing a regular inventory in Step Ten, we keep ourselves aware and focused on the present. We refer to Steps 10, 11, and 12 as the maintenance steps.

As much as we might want to slow down, relax, or even stop, we need to be careful about sliding back into old habits and patterns. That’s why we practice a regular check-up in Step Ten; the observation and self-reflection monitor our lives and relationships in the present.

While we were active in our disease, many of us went through emotional turmoil when we were jealous, fearful, had unrealistic

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expectations, anxious, resentful, and other items from our Step 7 list of unhealthy patterns. If these issues arise now, we can take note of them in a Step Ten inventory. Then we can recognize them as a situation unfolds, allowing us to avoid repeating mistakes from the past. We avoid getting a resentment and escape having to make new amends. When we take care of things in the short term, we don't have them weighing us down while taking up mental space.

We find it useful to do inventories over different time periods. A spot check inventory is taken any time of the day. It may be that after a conversation with someone, something is bothering us. We may do a Step Ten inventory focused on that conversation. Some of us found benefits of doing a Step Ten inventory at the close of each day. And we can share a Step Ten inventory with our sponsor, pastor, rabbi, spiritual adviser, or a close friend. Catching them up on things that happened since their last meeting. We can do an informal inventory listening to our unconscious mind or gut feeling.

It is important to keep current with a handful of trusted close friends. Then if you need help or advice, you don't have to first tell a background story. You can get straight to the point.

As women must be compassionate and non-judgmental with ourselves. We need to be honest but avoid taking too much blame, focusing on our part. We don't minimize our actions, but we don't dramatize them. We plainly speak matter-of-factly.

Carefully think about "*when we were wrong.*" Someone may cause harm to us through insensitivity, verbal or physical abuse, lies, or gossip. The feelings we develop from this do not make us wrong. Our actions may make us wrong if we fall back to our unhealthy patterns that we had during our drinking days, such as revenge and manipulation.

We found that when we stopped people pleasing and honestly admitted being wrong, the conversation became more intimate and perhaps

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uncomfortable. There is little conflict in a discussion of facts such as “*California is north of Mexico*” or observations such as “*it is raining.*” But personally-intimate discussions often lead to conflict. Sometimes we can work through the conflict, reduce expectations, and let go of outcomes. We may need to allow ourselves and others the feel the feelings that arise.

At first practicing the Tenth Step may be hard. But by repeating the exercise, it becomes natural. It enables us to be perceptive and aware of what is happening in the present. It gives us freedom from alcohol controlling us, empowering ourselves to make great choices.

*“A calm sea never made a skillful sailor.”*

—Anonymous

*“Making better choices takes work. There is a daily give and take, but it is worth the effort.”*

—Tom Rath

*“Always do sober what you said you'd do drunk. That will teach you to keep your mouth shut.”*

—Ernest Hemingway

*“When I got sober, I thought giving up was saying goodbye to all the fun and all the sparkle, and it turned out to be just the opposite. That's when the sparkle started for me.”*

—Mary Karr

## Step 11: Spiritual Awareness

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

**Spiritual Awareness:** Relating to, consisting of, or affecting the spirit (the immaterial intelligent or sentient part of a person or being.)

*“You can't have a physical transformation until you have a spiritual transformation”*

—Cory Booker

Step Eleven suggests prayer and meditation. We shouldn't be shy on this matter of prayer. Better women than we are using it constantly. It works, if we have the proper attitude and work at it. It would be easy to be vague about this matter. Yet, we believe we can make some definite and valuable suggestions.

When we retire at night, we constructively review our day. Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest or afraid? Do we owe an apology? Have we kept something to ourselves that should be discussed with another person at once? Were we kind and loving toward all? What could we have done better? Were we thinking of ourselves most of the time? Or were we thinking of what we could do for others, of what we could pack into the stream of life? But we must be careful not to drift into worry, remorse or morbid reflection, for that would diminish our usefulness to others. After making our review we ask God's forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken.

On awakening let us think about the twenty-four hours ahead. We consider our plans for the day. Before we begin, we ask God to direct our thinking, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonest or self-seeking motives. Under these conditions we can employ our mental

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faculties with assurance, for after all God gave us brains to use. Our thought life will be placed on a much higher plane when our thinking is cleared of wrong motives.

In thinking about our day we may face indecision. We may not be able to determine which course to take. Here we ask God for inspiration, an intuitive thought or a decision. We relax and take it easy. We don't struggle. We are often surprised how the right answers come after we have tried this for a while. What used to be the hunch or the occasional inspiration gradually becomes a working part of the mind. Being still inexperienced and having just made conscious contact with God, it is not probable that we are going to be inspired at all times. We might pay for this presumption in all sorts of absurd actions and ideas. Nevertheless, we find that our thinking will, as time passes, be more and more on the plane of inspiration. We come to rely upon it.

We usually conclude the period of meditation with a prayer that we be shown all through the day what our next step is to be, that we be given whatever we need to take care of such problems. We ask especially for freedom from self-will, and are careful to make no request for ourselves only. We may ask for ourselves, however, if others will be helped. We are careful never to pray for our own selfish ends. Many of us have wasted a lot of time doing that and it doesn't work. You can easily see why.

If circumstances warrant, we ask our wives or friends to join us in morning meditation. If we belong to a religious denomination that requires a definite morning devotion, we attend to that also. If not members of religious bodies, we sometimes select and memorize a few set prayers that emphasize the principles we have been discussing. There are many helpful books also. Suggestions about these may be obtained from one's priest, minister, or rabbi. Be quick to see where religious people are right. Make use of what they offer.

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As we go through the day we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action. We constantly remind ourselves we are no longer running the show, humbly saying to ourselves many times each day *“Thy will be done.”* We are then in much less danger of excitement, fear, anger, worry, self-pity, or foolish decisions. We become much more efficient. We do not tire so easily, for we are not burning up energy foolishly as we did when we were trying to arrange life to suit ourselves.

It works it really does.

We alcoholics are undisciplined. So we let God discipline us in the simple way we have just outlined. But this is not all. There is action and more action. *“Faith without works is dead.”*

## **Women’s Step 11 Topics**

### **Seeking Serenity**

Prayer and meditation can be practiced in many ways. It could be very traditional, based on western religious beliefs or eastern philosophies. Or it can be a novel spiritual approach. It’s all up to you. The point of Step Eleven is to seek serenity for yourself and reach beyond our finite selves. We focus on letting go of our preconceived expectations, adjusting to the world instead of fighting against it.

One my business advisors once said to me, *“The World calls the shots, not us.”* A valuable concept for a startup company that can be applied to all of our life affairs

For many of us, prayer and meditation enabled us to achieve a level of serenity that we never before experienced.

We may set aside a daily time slot for meditation, perhaps to start our day with a positive outlook and an attitude of gratitude. Also, we may practice this during the day, as events unfold, to help us maintain a good emotional state. These days there are A.A. meditation meetings. Also, there are outside resources such as guided meditation recordings.

## **A Personal Experience**

We really can personalize our prayers. Depending on your discretion, your prayers may not even resemble prayers in a traditional way. Step Three encourages us to develop our own concept of a power greater than ourselves. For Step Eleven, we develop our own personal concept of prayer. Another person should not say that our prayers are wrong; it's none of their business.

Our higher power is not punishing, but rather sustains and supports us. Many of us found that developing habits and rituals can be beneficial.

*“Stressed souls need the reassuring rhythm of self-nurturing rituals.”*

— Sarah Ban Breathnach

For many of us, our father and/or ex-husbands were abusive alcoholics. The idea of “*His Will*” seems so punishing. It's better for us to strive for “*God's Hope for me.*” Some of us just think of “*His Will*” as the Spirit of the Universe with which we can co-operate with. In any case, we let go of trying to control things we can't change, accepting the world the way it is, and acting appropriately for our own good.

## **Surrender, not Submission**

When we accept the world, we are not submissive and give in. Sometimes we eliminate behaviors that harm others. Sometimes we need to stand up for ourselves, set boundaries, and avoid undue pressure to be what someone else wishes. We must remain open-minded and cooperative, realizing that no human, including ourselves, knows all the answers. We really need to listen to others and evaluate each situation as it arises.

In practicing the principals of A.A., we adopt new healthier behaviors that may make others uncomfortable or even angry. This is especially true with close family and friends that were used to our old ways. We avoid

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getting angry ourselves and deescalate the situation. Hopefully, they will adapt to your new self.

### Adapting Prayers for Ourselves

Recall what Chapter 5 of the A.A. Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous) says about the Third Step Prayer: *“The wording was, of course, quite optional so long as we expressed the idea, voicing it without reservation.”* It is most important to be sincere, which may be best achieved with your own prayer words.

One A.A. member objects to phrases like *“do with me as Thou wilt”*; they remind her of her negative experiences in past relationships. Just by changing a few words, she makes this prayer more accessible and relevant for her.

*“God, I open myself to you to work in my life today, according to divine hope for me. Remove me from the bondage of fear, shame, and low self-esteem that I might become a channel for joy, love, and peace in the universe. Remove my difficulties as you see fit, so that victory over them would bear witness to those I would help of your love and power.”*

— Dr. Stephanie Covington, *A Women’s Way Through the Twelve Steps*, (Center City, MN: Hazelden Educational Materials, 1995).

The Seventh Step Prayer focuses on character defects. But you might want to choose another word or phrase for *“defects”*, one with a more positive or neutral meaning, such as *“life patterns”* or *“defensive mechanisms.”*

The Eleventh Step Prayer encourages us to create a positive atmosphere. But *“Self-Forgetting”* is one of these life patterns that hold us back. As women we are encouraged to serve others at our own expense. We need to balance service to others with self-care. One woman learned this prayer as a child and took it to heart, going overboard, turning those virtues into character defects. Like many women alcoholics, she cared for

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others first and put herself last. Her Self-Forgetting led to isolation drinking. In working the 12 steps with the help of these Women's Step Topics, she learned balance and stays sober.

These new practices may seem difficult at first. But, similar to other spiritual practices that we learned in previous steps, it becomes easier with time.

*“Loneliness is the poverty of self; solitude is the richness of self.”*

—May Sarton

*“Be yourself, but always your better self.”*

—Karl G. Maeser

*“Be bold, be brave enough to be your true self.”*

—Queen Latifah

*“Very often a change of self is needed more than a change of scene.”*

—A. C. Benson

*“There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow men. True nobility lies in being superior to your former self.”*

—Ernest Hemingway

## Step 12: Service

**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.**

**Service:** Contribution to the welfare of others.

*“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”*

—Mahatma Gandhi

### Working With Others

Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail. This is our twelfth suggestion: Carry this message to other alcoholics! You can help when no one else can. You can secure their confidence when other fail. Remember they are very ill.

Life will take on new meaning. To watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a fellowship grow up about you, to have a host of friends this is an experience you must not miss. We know you will not want to miss it. Frequent contact with newcomers and with each other is the bright spot of our lives.

Perhaps you are not acquainted with any drinkers who want to recover. You can easily find some by asking a few doctors, ministers, priests or hospitals. They will be only too glad to assist you. Don't start out as an evangelist or reformer. Unfortunately a lot of prejudice exists. You will be handicapped if you arouse it. Ministers and doctors are competent and you can learn much from them if you wish, but it happens that because of your own drinking experience you can be uniquely useful to other alcoholics. So cooperate; never criticize. To be helpful is our only aim.

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When you discover a prospect for Alcoholics Anonymous, find out all you can about her. If she does not want to stop drinking, don't waste time trying to persuade her. You may spoil a later opportunity. This advice is given for her family also. They should be patient, realizing they are dealing with a sick person.

If there is any indication that she wants to stop, have a good talk with the person most interested in her usually her husband. Get an idea of her behavior, her problems, her background, the seriousness of her condition, and her religious leanings. You need this information to put yourself in his place, to see how you would like him to approach you if the tables were turned.

Sometimes it is wise to wait till she goes on a binge. The family may object to this, but unless she is in a dangerous physical condition, it is better to risk it. Don't deal with her when she is very drunk, unless she is ugly and the family needs your help. Wait for the end of the spree, or at least for a lucid interval. Then let her family or a friend ask her if she wants to quit for good and if she would go to any extreme to do so. If she says yes, then her attention should be drawn to you as a person who has recovered. You should be described to her as one of a fellowship who, as part of their own recovery, try to help others and who will be glad to talk to her if she cares to see you.

If she does not want to see you, never force yourself upon her. Neither should the family hysterically plead with her to do anything, nor should they tell her much about you. They should wait for the end of her next drinking bout. You might place this book where she can see it in the interval. Here no specific rule can be given. The family must decide these things. But urge them not to be over anxious, for that might spoil matters.

Usually the family should not try to tell your story. When possible, avoid meeting a woman through her family. Approach through a doctor or an institution is a better bet. If your woman needs hospitalization, she

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should have it, but not forcibly unless she is violent. Let the doctor, if she will, tell her she has something in the way of a solution.

When your woman is better, the doctor might suggest a visit from you. Though you have talked with the family, leave them out of the first discussion. Under these conditions your prospect will see she is not under pressure. She will feel she can deal with you without being nagged by her family. Call on her while she is still jittery. She may be more receptive when depressed.

See your woman alone, if possible. At first engage in general conversation. After a while, turn the talk to some phase of drinking. Tell her enough about your drinking habits, symptoms, and experiences to encourage her to speak of herself. If she wishes to talk, let her do so. You will thus get a better idea of how you ought to proceed. If she is not communicative, give her a sketch of your drinking career up to the time you quit. But say nothing, for the moment, of how that was accomplished. If she is in a serious mood dwell on the troubles liquor has caused you, being careful not to moralize or lecture. If her mood is light, tell her humorous stories of your escapades. Get her to tell some of her.

When she sees you know all about the drinking game, commence to describe yourself as an alcoholic. Tell her how baffled you were, how you finally learned that you were sick. Give her an account of the struggles you made to stop. Show her the mental twist that leads to the first drink of a spree. We suggest you do this as we have done it in the chapter on alcoholism. If she is alcoholic, she will understand you at once. She will match you mental inconsistencies with some of her own.

If you are satisfied that she is a real alcoholic, begin to dwell on the hopeless feature of the malady. Show her, from your own experience, how the queer mental condition surrounding that first drink prevents normal functioning of the will power. Don't, at this stage, refer to this book, unless she has seen it and wishes to discuss it. And be careful not to brand her as

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an alcoholic. Let her draw her own conclusion. If she sticks to the idea that she can still control her drinking, tell her that possibly she can if she is not too alcoholic. But insist that if she is severely afflicted, there may be little chance she can recover by herself.

Continue to speak of alcoholism as an illness, a fatal malady. Talk about the conditions of body and mind that accompany it. Keep her attention focused mainly on your personal experience. Explain that many are doomed who never realize their predicament. Doctors are rightly loath to tell alcoholic patients the whole story unless it will serve some good purpose. But you may talk to her about the hopelessness of alcoholism because you offer a solution. You will soon have your friend admitting she has many, if not all, of the traits of the alcoholic. If her own doctor is willing to tell her that she is alcoholic, so much the better. Even though your protegee may not have entirely admitted her condition, she has become very curious to know how you got well. Let her ask you that question, if she will. Tell her exactly what happened to you. Stress the spiritual feature freely. If the woman be agnostic or atheist, make it emphatic that she does not have to agree with your conception of God. She can choose any conception she likes, provided it makes sense to her. The main thing is that she be willing to believe in a Power greater than herself and that she live by spiritual principles.

When dealing with such a person, you had better use everyday language to describe spiritual principles. There is no use arousing any prejudice she may have against certain theological terms and conceptions about which she may already be confused. Don't raise such issues, no matter what your own convictions are.

Your prospect may belong to a religious denomination. Her religious education and training may be far superior to yours. In that case she is going to wonder how you can add anything to what she already knows. But she will be curious to learn why her own convictions have not worked and why yours seem to work so well. She may be an example of the truth

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that faith alone is insufficient. To be vital, faith must be accompanied by self-sacrifice and unselfish, constructive action. Let her see that you are not there to instruct her in religion. Admit that she probably knows more about it than you do, but call to her attention the fact that however deep her faith and knowledge, she could not have applied it or she would not drink. Perhaps your story will help her see where she has failed to practice the very precepts she knows so well. We represent no particular faith or denomination. We are dealing only with general principles common to most denominations.

Outline the program of action, explaining how you made a self-appraisal, how you straightened out your past and why you are now endeavoring to be helpful to her. It is important for her to realize that your attempt to pass this on to her plays a vital part in your recovery. Actually, she may be helping you more than you are helping her. Make it plain she is under no obligation to you, that you hope only that she will try to help other alcoholics when she escapes her own difficulties. Suggest how important it is that she place the welfare of other people ahead of her own. Make it clear that she is not under pressure, that she needn't see you again if she doesn't want to. You should not be offended if she wants to call it off, for she has helped you more than you have helped her. If your talk has been sane, quiet, and full of human understanding, you have perhaps made a friend. Maybe you have disturbed her about the question of alcoholism. This is all to the good. The more hopeless she feels, the better. she will be more likely to follow your suggestions.

Your candidate may give reasons why she need not follow all of the program. She may rebel at the thought of a drastic housecleaning that requires discussion with other people. Do not contradict such views. Tell her you once felt as she does, but you doubt whether you would have made much progress had you not taken action. On your first visit tell her about the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. If she shows interest, lend her your copy of this book.

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Unless your friend wants to talk further about herself, do not wear out your welcome. Give her a chance to think it over. If you do stay, let her steer the conversation in any direction she like. Sometimes a new woman is anxious to proceed at once, and you may be tempted to let her do so. This is sometimes a mistake. If she has trouble later, she is likely to say you rushed her. You will be most successful with alcoholics if you do not exhibit any passion for crusade or reform. Never talk down to an alcoholic from any moral or spiritual hilltop; simply lay out the kit of spiritual tools for her inspection. Show her how they worked with you. Offer her friendship and fellowship. Tell her that if she wants to get well you will do anything to help.

If she is not interested in your solution, if she expects you to act only as a banker for her financial difficulties or a nurse for her sprees, you may have to drop her until she changes her mind. This she may do after she gets hurts some more.

If she is sincerely interested and wants to see you again, ask her to read this book in the interval. After doing that, she must decide for herself whether she wants to go on. She should not be pushed or prodded by you, her husband, or her friends. If she is to find God, the desire must come from within.

If she thinks she can do the job in some other way, or prefers some other spiritual approach, encourage her to follow her own conscience. We have no monopoly on God; we merely have an approach that worked with us. But point out that we alcoholics have much in common and that you would like, in any case, to be friendly. Let it go at that. Do not be discouraged if your prospect does not respond at once. Search out another alcoholic and try again. You are sure to find someone desperate enough to accept with eagerness what you offer. We find it a waste of time to keep chasing a woman who cannot or will not work with you. If you leave such a person alone, she may soon become convinced that she cannot recover by herself. To spend too much time on any one situation is to deny some

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other alcoholic an opportunity to live and be happy. One of our Fellowship failed entirely with her first half dozen prospects. She often says that if she had continued to work on them, she might have deprived many others, who have since recovered, of their chance.

Suppose now you are making your second visit to a woman. She has read this volume and says she is prepared to go through with the Twelve Steps of the program of recovery. Having had the experience yourself, you can give her much practical advice. Let her know you are available if she wishes to make a decision and tell her story, but do not insist upon it if she prefers to consult someone else.

She may be broke and homeless. If she is, you might try to help her get into a Sober Living Environment (SLE), a house shared by other women in early sobriety.

Never avoid these responsibilities, but be sure you are doing the right thing if you assume them. Helping others is the foundation stone of your recovery. A kindly act once in a while isn't enough. You have to act the Good Samaritan every day, if need be.

For the type of alcoholic who is able and willing to get well, little charity, in the ordinary sense of the word, is needed or wanted. The women who cry for money and shelter before conquering alcohol, are on the wrong track.

The minute we put our work on a service plane, the alcoholic commences to rely upon our assistance rather than upon God. She clamors for this or that, claiming she cannot master alcohol until her material needs are cared for. Nonsense. Some of us have taken very hard knocks to learn this truth: Job or no job, husband, or no husband, we simply do not stop drinking so long as we place dependence upon other people ahead of dependence on God.

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Burn the idea into the consciousness of every woman that she can get well regardless of anyone. The only condition is that she trust in God and clean house.

Now, the domestic problem: There may be divorce, separation, or just strained relations. When your prospect has made such reparation as she can to her family, and has thoroughly explained to them the new principles by which she is living, she should proceed to put those principles into action at home. That is, if she is lucky enough to have a home. Though her family be at fault in many respects, she should not be concerned about that. She should concentrate on her own spiritual demonstration. Argument and fault-finding are to be avoided like the plague. In many homes this is a difficult thing to do, but it must be done if any results are to be expected. If persisted in for a few months, the effect on a woman's family is sure to be great. The most incompatible people discover they have a basis upon which they can meet. Little by little the family may see their own defects and admit them. These can then be discussed in an atmosphere of helpfulness and friendliness.

After they have seen tangible results, the family will perhaps want to go along. These things will come to pass naturally and in good time provided, however, the alcoholic continues to demonstrate that she can be sober, considerate, and helpful, regardless of what anyone says or does. Of course, we all fall much below this standard many times. But we must try to repair the damage immediately lest we pay the penalty by a spree.

If there be divorce or separation, there should be no undue haste for the couple to get together. The woman should be sure of her recovery. The husband should fully understand her new way of life. If their old relationship is to be resumed it must be on a better basis, since the former did not work. This means a new attitude and spirit all around. Sometimes it is to the best interests of all concerned that a couple remain apart. Obviously, no rule can be laid down. Let the alcoholic continue her

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program day by day. When the time for living together has come, it will be apparent to both parties.

Let no alcoholic say she cannot recover unless she has her family back. This just isn't so. In some cases the husband will never come back for one reason or another. Remind the prospect that her recovery is not dependent upon people. It is dependent upon her relationship with God. We have seen women get well whose families have not returned at all. We have seen others slip when the family came back too soon.

Both you and the new woman must walk day by day in the path of spiritual progress. If you persist, remarkable things will happen. When we look back, we realize that the things that came to us when we put ourselves in God's hands were better than anything we could have planned. Follow the dictates of a Higher Power and you will presently live in a new and wonderful world, no matter what your present circumstances!

When working with a woman and her family, you should take care not to participate in their quarrels. You may spoil your chance of being helpful if you do. But urge upon a woman's family that she has been a very sick person and should be treated accordingly. You should warn against arousing resentment or jealousy. You should point out that her life patterns are not going to disappear overnight. Show them that she has entered upon a period of growth. Ask them to remember, when they are impatient, the blessed fact of her sobriety.

If you have been successful in solving your own domestic problems, tell the newcomer's family how that was accomplished. In this way you can set them on the right track without becoming critical of them. The story of how you and your husband settled your difficulties is worth any amount of criticism.

Assuming we are spiritually fit, we can do all sorts of things alcoholics are not supposed to do. People have said we must not go where liquor is served; we must not have it in our homes; we must shun friends who drink;

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we must avoid moving pictures that show drinking scenes; we must not go into bars; our friends must hide their bottles if we go to their houses; we mustn't think or be reminded about alcohol at all. Our experience shows that this is not necessarily so.

In our belief any scheme of combating alcoholism that proposes to shield the sick woman from temptation is doomed to failure. If the alcoholic tries to shield herself she may succeed for a time, but usually winds up with a bigger explosion than ever. We have tried these methods. These attempts to do the impossible have always failed.

So our rule is not to avoid a place where there is drinking, if we have a legitimate reason for being there. That includes bars, nightclubs, dances, receptions, weddings, even plain ordinary whoopee parties. To a person who has had experience with an alcoholic, this may seem like tempting Providence, but it isn't.

You will note that we made an important qualification. Therefore, ask yourself on each occasion, Have I any good social, business, or personal reason for going to this place? Or am I expecting to steal a little vicarious pleasure from the atmosphere of such places? If you answer these questions satisfactorily, you need have no apprehension. Go or stay away, whichever seems best. But be sure you are on solid spiritual ground before you start and that your motive in going is thoroughly good. Do not think of what you will get out of the occasion. Think of what you can bring to it. But if you are shaky, you had better work with another alcoholic instead!

Why sit with a long face in places where there is drinking, sighing about the good old days. If it is a happy occasion, try to increase the pleasure of those there; if a business occasion, go and attend to your business enthusiastically. If you are with a person who wants to eat in a bar, by all means go along. Let your friends know they are not to change their habits on your account. At a proper time and place explain to all your

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friends why alcohol disagrees with you. If you do this thoroughly, few people will ask you to drink. While you were drinking, you were withdrawing from life little by little. Now you are getting back into the social life of this world. Don't start to withdraw again just because your friends drink liquor.

Your job now is to be at the place where you may be of maximum helpfulness to others, so never hesitate to go anywhere if you can be helpful. You should not hesitate to visit the most sordid spot on earth on such an errand. Keep on the firing line of life with these motives and God will keep you unharmed.

We are careful never to show intolerance or hatred of drinking as an institution. Experience shows that such an attitude is not helpful to anyone. Every new alcoholic looks for this spirit among us and is immensely relieved when she finds we are not witch burners. A spirit of intolerance might repel alcoholics whose lives could have been saved, had it not been for such stupidity. We would not even do the cause of temperate drinking any good, for not one drinker in a thousand likes to be told anything about alcohol by one who hates it.

Alcoholics Anonymous has helped the public to a better realization of the gravity of the alcoholic problem. But we shall be of little use if our attitude is one of bitterness or hostility. Drinkers will not stand for it.

After all, our problems were of our own making. Bottles were only a symbol. Besides, we have stopped fighting anybody or anything. We have to!

## Women's Step 12 Topics

One of the many phrases we hear in the rooms of A.A. that sounds like a paradox is "*We keep our sobriety by giving it away.*" Sobriety is not something that we use up. The more we practice it, the larger it gets. Sobriety is not a physical object, but rather it is a spiritual entity.

## **We are all Recovery Amateurs**

For us, there is so much power in one alcoholic helping another. Many of us have had conversations about our drinking with family and doctors only to exclaim “*You don’t get it. How can you possibly understand the complexities of my life?*” But when speaking with another alcoholic, we hear believable similarities. An alcoholic in A.A. does not have special interests as a family member might. They are not a paid professional with an agenda. They are just an alcoholic who has found a solution to the drink problem by practicing the A.A. 12-Step Program.

We share our stories of shame, humiliation, anger, or depression. We realize we are not unique and don’t have to try to get sober alone. Sobriety is a gift that helped us get our life back. It is fulfilling to share this gift with those who are still suffering from the alcoholic disease.

In carrying the message to other alcoholics, we describe our recovery journey of experience, strength, and hope. We don’t try to save them, give them advice, nor criticize them. We offer the wisdom that we ourselves learned from other alcoholics who stay sober.

One of the Promises says, “*God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.*” Unsaid is that “*God will not do for us what we can do for ourselves.*”

We must remember that we carry the message, not the alcoholic. Also, we need to continue to practice self-care to stay sober. As they announce on airplane flights, “*Put on your own oxygen mask before assisting others.*”

## **Spiritual Awakening**

A “*spiritual awakening*” sounds like a big mystical event such as a “*burning bush.*” It is rarely that dramatic and usually happens gradually as an educational experience. Sometimes we may have an epiphany: a sudden realization, understanding, or enlightenment. These essential

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awakenings take on many forms among different people, but also within a single individual. We awaken to the idea that alcohol gets in the way of our freedom to make good life choices.

You may feel that your spiritual journey is confirmed and validated as you hear other women speak of their own spiritual awakening. You may recognize new aspects of your spiritual awakening as you hear similarities in other women's stories.

### **We Carry the Message in Many Ways**

In some circumstances, we may make a 12-Step Call either in person or over the phone. We speak to someone in need of support about how our recovery works for us. We explain what it was like, what happened, and what we are like now. If needed, we can reassure them that A.A. is not a religious program. Emphasize that they can forget about other people's idea of God and truly form their own concept of a Higher Power.

There are many ways we carry the message. We may share a 15-40-minute summary our whole recovery story such as when we are the main speaker (chairing) at a meeting. But most often, we carry the message in 3-4 minute nuggets of wisdom in topic discussion, step study, or book study meetings. When we are an A.A. Sponsor working the steps with another woman, we carry the message in our one-on-one meetings.

A.A. meetings must be safe zones for anyone to feel safe to honestly share their experiences. We don't advise or criticize someone's share. We may say that we identify with them and share our own experience. It is important that newcomers honestly share their struggles at A.A. meetings. It enables the newcomer to learn using their own words. And, it reminds the long-timers of experiences they may have forgotten.

We allow ourselves to depend on others and enable them to depend on us. We don't have to do it all alone.

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*“Happiness doesn't depend on any external conditions, it is governed by our mental attitude.”*

—Dale Carnegie

*“I declare to you that a woman must not depend upon the protection of man, but must be taught to protect herself, and there I take my stand.”*

—Susan B. Anthony

*“Depth of friendship does not depend on length of acquaintance.”*

—Rabindranath Tagore

*“We are stronger as a group than an individual. Think in a cooperative and communal way, set up local food hubs and create growing communities.”*

—Arthur Potts Dawson

*“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”*

—Jim Elliot

## **Part 3: Conclusions & Resources**

### **Chapter 1: A Vision For You**

Our book is meant to be suggestive only. We realize we know only a little. God will constantly disclose more to you and to us. Ask Her in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the woman who is still sick. The answers will come, if your own house is in order. But obviously you cannot transmit something you haven't got. See to it that your relationship with Her is right, and great events will come to pass for you and countless others. This is the great fact for us.

Abandon yourself to God as you understand Her. Admit your faults to Her and to your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you hike the Road of Happy Destiny.

May God bless you and keep you until then.

The complete text of “A Vision for You” appears in the original basic text of A.A. Alcoholics Anonymous.

## Chapter 3: Personal Stories

### (1) WOMEN SUFFER TOO

(Pages 200–207, Alcoholics Anonymous, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition)

*Despite great opportunities, alcohol nearly ended her life. An early member, she spread the word among women in our pioneering period.*

What was I saying ... from far away, as if in a delirium, I heard my own voice, calling someone *Dorothy*, talking of dress shops, of jobs ... the words came clearer ... this sound of my own voice frightened me as it came closer ... and suddenly, there I was, talking of I knew not what, to someone I'd never seen before that very moment. Abruptly I stopped speaking. Where was I?

I'd waked up in strange rooms before, fully dressed on a bed or a couch; I'd waked up in my own room, in or own room or own bed, not knowing what hour or day it was, afraid to ask ... but this was different. This time I seemed to be already awake, sitting upright in a big easy chair, in the middle of an animated conversation with a perfectly strange young woman who didn't appear to think it strange. She was chatting on, pleasantly and comfortably.

Terrified, I looked around. I was in a large, dark, rather poorly furnished room, the living room of a basement flat. Cold chills started chasing up and down my spine; my teeth were chattering; my hands were shaking, so I tucked them under me to keep them from flying away. My fright was real enough, but it didn't account for these violent reactions. I knew what they were, all right, a drink would fix them. It must have been a long time since I had my last drink, but I didn't dare ask this stranger for one. I must get out of here. In any case, I must get out of here before I let slip my abysmal ignorance of how I came to be here and she realized that I was stark, staring mad. I was mad I must be.

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The shakes grew worse, and I looked at my watch: six o'clock. It had been one o'clock when I last remembered looking. I'd been sitting comfortably in a restaurant with Rita, drinking my sixth martini and hoping the waiter would forget about the lunch order, at least long enough for me to have a couple more. I'd only had two with her, but I'd managed four in the fifteen minutes I'd waited for her, and of course I'd had the usual uncounted swigs from the bottle as I painfully got up and did my slow spasmodic dressing. In fact, I had been in very good shape at one o'clock, feeling no pain. What *could* have happened? That had been in the center of New York, on noisy 42nd Street ... this was obviously a quiet residential section. Why had *Dorothy* brought me here? Who was she? How had I met her? I had no answers, and I dared not ask. She gave no sign of recognizing anything wrong, but what had I been doing for those lost five hours? My brain whirled. I might have done terrible things, and I wouldn't even know it!

Somehow I got out of there and walked five blocks past brownstone houses. There wasn't a bar in sight, but I found the subway station. The name on it was unfamiliar, and I had to ask the way to Grand Central. It took three, quarters of an hour and two changes to get there, back to my starting point. I had been in the remote reaches of Brooklyn.

That night I got very drunk, which was usual, but I remembered everything, which was very unusual. I remembered going through what my sister assured me was my nightly procedure of trying to find Willie Seabrook's name in the telephone book. I remembered my loud resolution to find him and ask him to help me get into that "*asylum*" he had written about. I remembered asserting that I was going to do something about this, that I couldn't go on ... I remembered looking longingly at the window as an easier solution and shuddering at the memory of that other window, three years before, and the six agonizing months in a London hospital ward. I remembered filling the peroxide bottle in my medicine chest with gin, in case my sister found the bottle I hid under the mattress. And I

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remembered the creeping horror of the interminable night, in which I slept for short spells and woke dripping with cold sweat and shaken with utter despair, to drink hastily from my bottle and mercifully pass out again. *“You're mad, you're mad, you're mad!”* pounded through my brain with each returning ray of consciousness, and I drowned the refrain with drink.

That went on for two more months before I landed in a hospital and started my slow fight back to normalcy. It had been going on like that for over a year. I was thirty-two years old.

When I look back on that last horrible year of constant drinking, I wonder how I survived it, either physically or mentally. For there were, of course, periods of clear realization of what I had become, attended by memories of what I had been, what I had expected to be. And the contrast was pretty shattering. Sitting in a Second Avenue bar, accepting drinks from anyone who offered, after my small stake was gone, or sitting at home alone, with the inevitable glass in my hand, I would remember, and, remembering, I would drink faster, seeking speedy oblivion. It was hard to reconcile this ghastly present with the simple facts of the past.

My family had money. I had never known denial of any material desire. The best boarding schools and a finishing school in Europe had fitted me for the conventional role of debutante and young matron. The times in which I grew up (the Prohibition era immortalized by Scott Fitzgerald and John Held, Jr.) had taught me to be gay with the gayest; my own inner urges led me to outdo them all. The year after coming out, I married. So far, so good; all according to plan, like thousands of others. But then the story became my own. My husband was an alcoholic, and since I had only contempt for those without my own amazing capacity, the outcome was inevitable. My divorce coincided with my father's bankruptcy, and I went to work, casting off all allegiances and responsibilities to anyone other than myself. For me, work was only a different means to the same end, to be able to do exactly what I wanted to do.

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For the next ten years I did just that. For greater freedom and excitement I went abroad to live. I had my own business, successful enough for me to indulge most of my desires. I met all the people I wanted to meet; I saw all the places I wanted to see; I did all the things I wanted to do. I was increasingly miserable.

Headstrong and willful, I rushed from pleasure to pleasure and found the returns diminishing to the vanishing point. Hangovers began to assume monstrous proportions, and the morning drink became an urgent necessity. *Blanks* were more frequent, and I seldom knew how I'd got home. When my friends suggested that I was drinking too much, they were no longer my friends. I moved from group to group, then from place to place, and went on drinking. With a creeping insidiousness, drink had become more important than anything else. It no longer gave me pleasure. It merely dulled the pain. But I had to have it. I was bitterly unhappy. No doubt I had been an exile too long; I should go home to America. I did. And to my surprise, my drinking grew worse.

When I entered a sanitarium for prolonged and intensive psychiatric treatment, I was convinced that I was having a serious mental breakdown. I wanted help, and I tried to cooperate. As the treatment progressed, I began to get a picture of myself, of the temperament that had caused me so much trouble. I had been hypersensitive, shy, idealistic. My inability to accept the harsh realities of life had resulted in a disillusioned cynic, clothed in a protective armor against the world's misunderstanding. That armor had turned into prison wall, locking me in loneliness and fear. All I had left was an iron determination to live my own life in spite of the alien world and here I was, an inwardly frightened, outwardly defiant woman, who desperately needed a prop to keep going.

Alcohol was that prop, and I didn't see how I could live without it. When my doctor told me I should never touch a drink again, I couldn't afford to believe him. I had to persist in my attempts to get straightened out enough to be able to use the drinks I needed, without their turning on

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me. Besides, how could he understand? He wasn't a drinking man; he didn't know what it was to need a drink, nor what a drink could do for one in a pinch. I wanted to live, not in a desert, but in a normal world; and my idea of a normal world was being among people who drank ; teetotalers were not included. And I was sure that I couldn't be with people who drank, without drinking. In that I was correct; I couldn't be comfortable with any kind of people without drinking. I never had been.

Naturally, in spite of my good intentions, in spite of my protected life behind sanitarium Walls, I several times got drunk and was astounded ... and badly shaken.

That was the point at which my doctor gave me the book Alcoholics Anonymous to read. The first chapters Were a revelation to me. I wasn't the only person in the world who felt and behaved like this! I wasn't mad or vicious; I was a sick person. I was suffering from an actual disease that had a name and symptoms like diabetes or cancer or TB, and a disease was respectable, not a moral stigma! But then I hit a snag. I couldn't stomach religion, and I didn't like the mention of God or any of the other capital letters. If that was the way out, it wasn't for me. I was an intellectual and I needed an intellectual answer, not an emotional one. I told my doctor so in no uncertain terms. I wanted to learn to stand on my Own feet, not to change one prop for another, and an intangible and dubious one at that. And so on and on, for several weeks, while I grudgingly plowed through some more of the offending book and felt more and more hopeless about myself.

Then the miracle happened, to me! It isn't always so sudden with everyone, but I ran into a personal crisis that filled me with a raging and righteous anger. And as I fumed helplessly and planned to get good and drunk and show them, my eye caught a sentence in the book lying open on my bed: *We cannot live with anger*. The walls crumpled and the light streamed in. I wasn't trapped. I wasn't helpless. I was free, and I didn't have to drink to *show them*. This wasn't *religion*, this was freedom! Freedom

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from anger and fear, freedom to know happiness, and freedom to know love.

I went to a meeting to see for myself this group of freaks or bums who had done this thing. To go into a gathering of people was the sort of thing that all my life, from the time I left my private world of books and dreams to meet the real world of people and parties and jobs, had left me feeling an uncomfortable outsider, needing the warming stimulus of drinks to join in. I went trembling into a house in Brooklyn filled with strangers ... and I found I had come home at last, to my own kind. There is another meaning for the Hebrew word that in the King James version of the Bible is translated *salvation*. It is: *to come home*. I had found my salvation. I wasn't alone any more.

That was the beginning of a new life, a fuller life, a happier life than I had ever known or believed possible. I had found friends, understanding friends who often knew what I was thinking and feeling better than I knew myself, and who didn't allow me to retreat into my prison of loneliness and fear over a fancied slight or hurt. Talking things over with them, great floods of enlightenment showed me myself as I really was. And I was like them. We all had hundreds of character traits, fears and phobias, likes and dislikes, in common. Suddenly I could accept myself, fault and all, as I was, for weren't we all like that? And, accepting, I felt a new inner comfort and the willingness and strength to do something about the trait I couldn't live with.

It didn't stop there. They knew what to do about those black abysses that yawned, ready to swallow me, when I felt depressed or nervous. There was a concrete program, designed to secure the greatest possible inner security for us long-time escapist. The feeling of impending disaster that had haunted me for years began to dissolve as I put into practice more and more of the Twelve Steps. It worked!

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An active member of A.A. since 1939, I feel myself a useful member of the human race at last. I have something to contribute to humanity, since I am peculiarly qualified, as a fellow sufferer, to give aid and comfort to those who have stumbled and fallen over this business of meeting life. I get my greatest thrill of accomplishment from the knowledge that I have played a part in the new happiness achieved by countless others like myself. The fact that I can work again and earn my living is important but secondary. I believe that my once overweening self-will has finally found its proper place, for I can say many times daily, "*Thy will be done, not mine*" ... and mean it.

### **(2) ANOTHER CHANCE**

(Pages 531–534, Alcoholics Anonymous, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition)

*Poor, black, totally ruled by alcohol, she felt shut away from life, my life worth living. But when she began a prison sentence, a door opened.*

I AM AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN alcoholic. I don't know when I became an alcoholic, but I do believe I became one because I drank too much too often.

I always blamed my drinking on being poor, or on anything other than the truth—that I liked what booze did for me, that when I had a drink I was as big and had as much as the next person. I would never admit that I was drinking too much or spending money that I should have used to buy food for my two little boys.

As time went on, I drank more. I was not able to hold a job; no one wants a drunk around. I was always able to get a boyfriend who had a drinking joint or sold whiskey, but it didn't last long. I would embarrass everyone by coming in drunk or passing out. Then it got to the place where I couldn't drink without getting in jail. On one of these trips, the judge must have thought I was worth saving, for instead of sending me to jail, he sent me to A.A. for one month.

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I went to A.A., at least, my body went. I hated every minute of it. I couldn't wait until the meeting was over to get a drink. I was afraid to drink before the meeting. I thought if they smelled whiskey on my breath, they would lock me up, and I couldn't live without my bottle. I hated that judge for sending me to a place with all those drunks. I wasn't an alcoholic!

Oh, I might drink too much at times, everyone I knew drank. But I don't remember that any of them ever went to sleep in joint and woke up with no shoes on in the winter or fell out of chairs. But I did. I don't remember any of them getting put out in the winter because they didn't pay their rent. But to me, whiskey meant more than a home for my sons.

Things got so bad, I was afraid to go on the street, so I turned to Mothers' Aid. That was one of the worst things that could have happened to an alcoholic woman. I would wait for the mailman each month. Like any good mother, but as soon as he banded me my check, I put on my best dress and went looking for my alcoholic friend. Once I started drinking, I didn't care that the rent wasn't paid or that there was no food in the house or that my boys needed shoes. I would stay out until my money was gone. Then I would go home full of remorse, and wonder what I was going to do until I got my next check.

In time, I began to go out and forget the way back home. I would wake to find myself in some beat-up rooming house. where roaches were crawling over everything. Then the time came when I couldn't afford whiskey, so I turned to wine. Finally I got so low-down, I was ashamed of my friends' seeing me, so I went to the worst joints I could find. If it was daylight, I would go down alleys to make sure no one saw me.

I felt that I didn't have anything to live for, so I tried suicide many times. But I would always wake up in the psychiatric ward to begin another long treatment. After a while I found that the psyche-ward was a good place to hide when I had taken something stolen to the pawnshop. I thought if the cops did come to the hospital, the doctors would tell them I

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was crazy and didn't know what I was doing. But then, one good doctor told me there was nothing wrong with me except drinking too much. He said if I came back again, they would send me to the state hospital. I didn't want that so I stopped going to the psyche-ward.

Now I had gotten to the place where I would wake up with black eyes and not know where I got them, or wake up with a lot of money and not know where I got it. Later I found out I went into stores and stole clothes, then sold them. One morning, I woke up with a thousand dollars. I was trying to remember where it came from, when two of the biggest cops I ever saw I walked in and took me to jail. It came out that I had sold a woman a fur coat. The cops had picked her up, and she told them she had bought it from me. I got out on bail right away, but when I went to trial, the judge gave me thirty days. When my thirty days were up, I started back on my rounds. I didn't last long. They tell me that I killed a man during that period, but I can't remember anything. It was a total blackout for me. Because I had been drunk, the judge gave me only a twelve-year sentence in prison.

By the grace of God, I only served three years. It was there that I really found out what A.A. was. I had rejected A.A. on the outside, but now it came to me in prison. Today, I thank my Higher Power for giving me another chance at life and A.A. and being able to try and help some other alcoholic. I have been home for a year and have not taken a drink in four years.

Since I have been in A.A., I have more friends than I ever had in my life; friends who care about me and my welfare; friends who don't care that I am black and that I have been in prison. All they care about is that I am a human being and that I want to stay sober. Since I've been home, I have been able to gain the respect of my two sons again.

The only thing that bothers me is that there are only about five African-Americans in A.A. in my city. Even those don't take part in A.A. functions

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as I would like to see them do. I don't know if it's force of habit or something else that keeps them in one place, but I do know that in A.A. there is much work to do, and none of us can do it standing still.

I do think that some of the African-Americans here, and other places too, are afraid to go to other meetings. I just want to say that you don't have to be afraid, because no one at any A.A. meeting will bite you. There are no color bars in A.A. If you give us a try, you will see that we are really human beings, and we will welcome you with open arms and hearts.

I'm writing this during an A.A. convention, where I have spent the weekend with nothing but white people. They haven't eaten me yet! I have not seen a black face but mine since I've been here, and if I didn't look in the mirror, I wouldn't know that I *was* black, because these people treat me as one of them, which I am. We all have the same sickness, and in helping one another, we are able to stay sober.

### **(3) THE HOUSEWIFE WHO DRANK AT HOME**

(Pages 295–300, Alcoholics Anonymous, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition)

*She hid her bottles in clothes hampers and dresser drawers. In A.A., she discovered she had lost nothing and had found everything.*

My story happens to be a particular kind of woman's story: the story of the woman who drinks at home. I had to be at home; I had two babies. When alcohol took me over, my bar was my kitchen, my living room, my bedroom, the back bathroom, and the two laundry hampers.

At one time the admission that I was and am an alcoholic meant shame, defeat, and failure to me. But in the light of the new understanding that I have found in A.A., I have been able to interpret that defeat and that failure and that shame as seeds of victory. Because it was only through feeling defeat and feeling failure, the inability to cope with my life and with

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alcohol, that I was able to surrender and accept the fact that I had this disease and that I had to learn to live again without alcohol.

I was never a very heavy social drinker. But during a period of particular stress and strain about thirteen years ago, I resorted to using alcohol in my home, alone, as a means of temporary release and of getting a little extra sleep.

I had problems. We all have them, and I thought a little brandy or a little wine now and then could certainly hurt no one. I don't believe, when I started, that I even had in mind the thought that I was drinking. I had to sleep, I had to clear my mind and free it from worry, and I had to relax. But from one or two drinks of an afternoon or evening, my intake mounted, and mounted fast. It wasn't long before I was drinking all day. I had to have that wine. The only incentive that I had, toward the end, for getting dressed in the morning was to get out and get supplies to help me get my day started. But the only thing that got started was my drinking.

I should have realized that alcohol was getting hold of me when I started to become secretive in my drinking. I began to have to have supplies on hand for the people who might come in. And of course a half-empty bottle wasn't worth keeping, so I finished it up and naturally had to get more in right away for the people who might come in unexpectedly. But I was always the unexpected person who had to finish the bottle. I couldn't go to one wine store and look the man honestly in the face and buy a bottle, as I used to do when I had parties and entertained and did normal drinking. I had to give him a story and ask him the same question over and over again, *well, now, how many will that bottle serve?* I wanted him to be sure that I wasn't the one who was going to drink the whole bottle.

I had to hide, as a great many people in A.A. have had to do. I did my hiding in the hampers and in my dresser drawers. When we begin to do things like that with alcohol, something's gone wrong. I needed it, and I

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knew I was drinking too much, but I wasn't conscious of the fact that I should stop. I kept on. My home at that time was a place to mill around in. I wandered from room to room, thinking, drinking, drinking, thinking. And the mops would come out, the vacuum would come out, everything would come out, but nothing would get done. Toward five o'clock, helter-skelter, I'd get everything put away and try to get supper on the table, and after supper I'd finish the job up and knock myself out.

I never knew which came first, the thinking or the drinking. If I could only stop thinking, I wouldn't drink. If I could only stop drinking, maybe I wouldn't think. But they were all mixed up together, and I was all mixed up inside. And yet I had to have that drink. You know the deteriorating effects, the disintegrating effects, of chronic wine drinking. I cared nothing about my personal appearance. I didn't care what I looked like; I didn't care what I did. To me, taking a bath was just being in a place with a bottle where I could drink in privacy. I had to have it with me at night, in case I woke up and needed that drink.

How I ran my home, I don't know. I went on, realizing what I was becoming, hating myself for it, bitter, blaming life, blaming everything but the fact that I should turn about and do something about my drinking. Finally I didn't care; I was beyond caring. I just wanted to live to a certain age, carry through with what I felt was my job with the children, and after that, no matter. Half a mother was better than no mother at all.

I needed that alcohol. I couldn't live without it. I couldn't do anything without it. But there came a point when I could no longer live with it. And that came after a three-weeks' illness of my son. The doctor prescribed a teaspoon of brandy for the boy to help him through the night when he coughed. Well, of course, that was all I needed, to switch from wine to brandy for three weeks. I knew nothing about alcoholism or the D.T.'s, but when I woke up on that last morning of my son's illness, I taped the keyhole on my door because everyone was out there. I paced back and forth in the apartment with the cold sweats. I screamed on the telephone

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for my mother to get up there; something was going to happen; I didn't know what, but if she didn't get there quick, I'd split wide open. I called my husband up and told him to come home.

After that I sat for a week, a body in a chair, a mind off in space. I thought the two would never get together. I knew that alcohol and I had to part. I couldn't live with it anymore. And yet, how was I going to live without it? I didn't know. I was bitter, living in hate. The very person who stood with me through it all and has been my greatest help was the person that I turned against, my husband. I also turned against my family, my mother. The people who would have come to help me were just the people I would have nothing to do with.

Nevertheless, I began to try to live without alcohol. But I only succeeded in fighting it. And believe me, an alcoholic cannot fight alcohol. I said to my husband, *"I'm going to try to get interested in something outside, get myself out of this rut I'm in."* I thought I was going out of my mind. If I didn't have a drink, I had to do something. I became one of the most active women in the community, what with P.T.A., other community organizations, and drives. I'd go into an organization, and it wasn't long before I was on the committee, and then I was chairman of the committee; and if I was in a group, I'd soon be treasurer or secretary of the group. But I wasn't happy. I became a Jekyll-and-Hyde person. As long as I worked, as long as I got out, I didn't drink. But I had to get back to that first drink somehow. And when I took that first drink, I was off on the usual merry-go-round. And it was my home that suffered.

I figured I'd be all right if I could find something I liked to do. So when the children were in school from nine to three, I started up a nice little business and was fairly successful in it. But not happy. Because I found that everything I turned to became a substitute for drink. And when all of life is a substitute for drink, there's no happiness, no peace. I still had to drink; I still needed that drink. Mere cessation from drinking is not enough for an alcoholic while the need for that drink goes on. I switched to beer.

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I had always hated beer, but now I grew to love it. So that wasn't my answer either.

I went to my doctor again. He knew what I was doing, how I was trying. I said, “*I can't find my middle road in life. I can't find it. It's either all work, or I drink.*” He said, “*Why don't you try Alcoholics Anonymous?*” I was willing to try anything. I was licked. For the second time, I was licked. The first time was when I knew I couldn't live with alcohol. But this second time, I found I couldn't live normally without it, and I was licked worse than ever. The fellowship I found in A.A. enabled me to face my problem honestly and squarely. I couldn't do it among my relatives; I couldn't do it among my friends. No one likes to admit that they're a drunk, that they can't control this thing. But when we come into A.A., we can face our problem honestly and openly. I went to closed meetings and open meetings. And I took everything that A.A. had to give me. Easy does it, first things first, one day at a time. It was at that point that I reached surrender. I heard one very ill woman say that she didn't believe in the surrender part of the A.A. program. My heavens! Surrender to me has meant the ability to run my home, to face my responsibilities as they should be faced, to take life as it comes to me day by day and work my problems out. That's what surrender has meant to me. I surrendered once to the bottle, and I couldn't do these things. Since I gave my will over to A.A., whatever A.A. has wanted of me I've tried to do to the best of my ability. When I'm asked to go out on a call, I go. I'm not going; A.A. is leading me there. A.A. gives us alcoholics direction into a way of life without the need for alcohol. That life for me is lived *one day at a time*, letting the problems of the future rest with the future. When the time comes to solve them, God will give me strength for that day.

I had been brought up to believe in God, but I know that until I found this A.A. program, I had never found or known faith in the reality of God, the reality of His power that is now with me in everything I do.

#### **(4) FEAR OF FEAR**

(Pages 289–294, Alcoholics Anonymous, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition)

*This lady was cautious. She decided she wouldn't let herself go in her drinking. And she would never, never take that morning drink!*

I didn't think I was an alcoholic. I thought my problem was that I had been married to a drunk for twenty-seven years. And when my husband found A.A., I came to the second meeting with him. I thought it was wonderful, simply marvelous, for him. But not for me. Then I went to another meeting, and I still thought it was wonderful—for him, but not for me.

That was on a hot summer evening, down in the Greenwich Village Group, and there was a little porch out there in the old meeting place on Sullivan Street, and after the meeting I went out on the steps for some air. In the doorway stood a lovely young girl who said, "Are you one of us souses too?" I said, "Oh, goodness, no! My husband is. He's in there." She told me her name, and I said, "I know you from somewhere." It turned out that she had been in high school with my daughter. I said, "Eileen, are you one of those people?" And she said, "Oh, yes. I'm in this."

As we walked back through the hall, I, for the first time in my life, said to another human being, "I'm having trouble with my drinking too." She took me by the hand and introduced me to the woman that I'm very proud to call my sponsor. This woman and her husband are both in A.A., and she said to me, "Oh, but you're not the alcoholic; it's your husband." I said, "Yes." She said, "How long have you been married?" I said, "Twenty-seven years." She said, "Twenty-seven years to an alcoholic! How did you ever stand it?" I thought, now here's a nice, sympathetic soul! This is for me. I said, "Well, I stood it to keep the home together, and for the children's sake." She said, "Yes, I know. You're just a martyr, aren't you?" I walked away from that woman grinding my teeth and cursing under my breath. Fortunately, I didn't say a word to George on the way

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home. But that night I tried to go to sleep. And I thought, “You’re some martyr, Jane! Let’s look at the record.” And when I looked at it, I knew I was just as much a drunk as George was, if not worse. I nudged George next morning, and I said, “I’m in,” and he said, “Oh, I knew you’d make it.”

I started drinking nearly thirty years ago—right after I was married. My first drinking spree was on corn liquor, and I was allergic to it, believe me. I was deathly sick every time I took a drink. But we had to do a lot of entertaining. My husband liked to have a good time; I was very young, and I wanted to have a good time too. The only way I knew to do it was to drink right along with him.

I got into terrific trouble with my drinking. I was afraid, and I had made my mind up that I would never get drunk, so I was watchful and careful. We had a small child, and I loved her dearly, so that held me back quite a bit in my drinking career. Even so, every time I drank, I seemed to get in trouble. I always wanted to drink too much, so I was watchful, always watchful, counting my drinks. If we were invited to a formal party and I knew they were only going to have one or two drinks, I wouldn’t have any. I was being very cagey, because I knew that if I did take one or two, I might want to take five or six or seven or eight.

I did stay fairly good for a few years. But I wasn’t happy, and I didn’t ever let myself go in my drinking. After my son, our second child, came along, and as he became school age and was away at school most of the time, something happened. I really started drinking with a bang.

I never went to a hospital. I never lost a job. I was never in jail. And, unlike many others, I never took a drink in the morning. I needed a drink, but I was afraid to take a morning drink, because I didn’t want to be a drunk. I became a drunk anyway, but I was scared to death to take that morning drink. I was accused of it many times when I went to play bridge

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in the afternoon, but I really never did take a morning drink. I was still woozy from the night before.

I should have lost my husband, and I think that only the fact that he was an alcoholic too kept us together. No one else would have stayed with me. Many women who have reached the stage that I had reached in my drinking have lost husbands, children, homes, everything they hold dear. I have been very fortunate in many ways. The important thing I lost was my own self-respect. I could feel fear coming into my life. I couldn't face people. I couldn't look them straight in the eyes, although I had always been a self-possessed, brazen person. I'd brazen anything out. I lied like a trooper to get out of many scrapes.

But I felt a fear coming into my life, and I couldn't cope with it. I got so that I hid quite a bit of the time, wouldn't answer the phone, and stayed by myself as much as I could. I noticed that I was avoiding all my social friends, except for my bridge club. I couldn't keep up with any of my other friends, and I wouldn't go to anyone's house unless I knew they drank as heavily as I did. I never knew it was the first drink that did it. I thought I was losing my mind when I realized that I couldn't stop drinking. That frightened me terribly.

Zoey tried many times to go on the wagon. If I had been sincere in what I thought I wanted more than anything else in life—a sober husband and a happy, contented home—I would have gone on the wagon with him. I did try, for a day or two, but something would always come up that would throw me. It would be a little thing—the rugs being crooked, or any silly little thing that I'd think was wrong—and off I'd go, drinking. And sneaking my drinks. I had bottles hidden all over the apartment. I didn't think my children knew about it, but I found out they did. It's surprising, how we think we fool everybody in our drinking

I reached a stage where I couldn't go into my apartment without a drink. It didn't bother me anymore whether George was drinking or not. I

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had to have liquor. Sometimes I would lie on the bathroom floor, deathly sick, praying I would die, and praying to God as I always had prayed to Him when I was drinking: “Dear God, get me out of this one and I’ll never do it again.” And then I’d say, “God, don’t pay any attention to me. You know I’ll do it tomorrow, the very same thing.”

I used to make excuses to try and get George off the wagon. I’d get so fed up with drinking all alone and bearing the burden of guilt all by myself, that I’d egg him on to drink, to get started again. And then I’d fight with him because he had started! And the whole merry-go-round would be on again. And he, poor dear, didn’t know what was going on. He used to wonder when he’d spot one of my bottles around the house just how he could have overlooked that particular bottle. I myself didn’t know all the places I had them hidden.

We have only been in A.A. a few years, but now we’re trying to make up for lost time. Twenty-seven years of confusion is what my early married life was. Now the picture has changed completely. We have faith in each other, trust in each other, and understanding. A.A. has given us that. It has taught me so many things. It has changed my thinking entirely, about everything I do. I can’t afford resentments against anyone, because they are the build-up of another drunk. I must live and let live. And “think”—that one important word means so much to me. My life was always act and react. I never stopped to think. I just didn’t give a whoop about myself or anyone else

I try to live our program as it has been outlined to me, one day at a time. I try to live today so that tomorrow I won’t be ashamed when I wake up in the morning. In the old days I hated to wake up and look back at what last night had been like. I never could face it the next morning. And unless I had some rosy picture of what was going to happen that day, I wouldn’t even feel like getting up in the morning at all. It really wasn’t living. Now I feel so very grateful not only for my sobriety, which I try to maintain day by day, but I’m grateful also for the ability to help other

people. I never thought I could be useful to anyone except my husband and my children and perhaps a few friends. But A.A. has shown me that I can help other alcoholics.

Many of my neighbors devoted time to volunteer work. There was one woman especially, and I'd watch her from my window every morning, leaving faithfully to go to the hospital in the neighborhood. I said to her one day when I met her on the street, "*What sort of volunteer work do you do?*" She told me; it was simple; I could have done it very easily. She said, "*Why don't you do it too?*" I said, "*I'd love to.*" She said, "*Suppose I put your name down as a volunteer—even if you can only give one or two days?*" But then I thought, well, now wait, how will I feel next Tuesday? How will I feel next Friday, if I make it a Friday? How will I feel next Saturday morning? I never knew. I was afraid to set even one day. I could never be sure I'd have a clear head and hands that were willing to do some work. So I never did any volunteer work. And I felt depleted, whipped. I had the time, I certainly had the capability, but I never did a thing.

I am trying now, each day, to make up for all those selfish, thoughtless, foolish things I did in my drinking days. I hope that I never forget to be grateful.

## **(5) THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM**

*This worldly lady helped to develop A.A. in Chicago and thus passed her keys to many.*

(Pages 268–276, Alcoholics Anonymous, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition)

A little more than fifteen years ago, through a long and calamitous series of shattering experiences, I found myself being helplessly propelled toward total destruction. I was without power to change the course my life had taken. How I had arrived at this tragic impasse, I could not have explained to anyone. I was thirty-three years old and my life was spent. I was caught in a cycle of alcohol and sedation that was proving inescapable, and consciousness had become intolerable.

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I was a product of the post-war prohibition era of the Roaring '20s. That age of the flapper and the “It” girl, speakeasies and the hip flask, the boyish bob and the drugstore cowboy, John Held Jr. and F. Scott Fitzgerald, all generously sprinkled with a patent pseudo-sophistication. To be sure, this had been a dizzy and confused interval, but most everyone else I knew had emerged from it with both feet on the ground and a fair amount of adult maturity.

Nor could I blame my dilemma on my childhood environment. I couldn't have chosen more loving and conscientious parents. I was given every advantage in a well-ordered home. I had the best schools, summer camps, resort vacations, and travel. Every reasonable desire was possible of attainment for me. I was strong and healthy and quite athletic.

I experienced some of the pleasure of social drinking when I was sixteen. I definitely liked everything about alcohol—the taste, the effects; and I realize now that a drink did something for me or to me that was different from the way it affected others. It wasn't long before any party without drinks was a dud for me.

I was married at twenty, had two children, and was divorced at twenty-three. My broken home and broken heart fanned my smoldering self-pity into a fair-sized bonfire, and this kept me well supplied with reasons for having another drink, and then another.

At twenty-five I had developed an alcoholic problem. I began making the rounds of the doctors in the hope that one of them might find some cure for my accumulating ailments, preferably something that could be removed surgically.

Of course the doctors found nothing. Just an unstable woman, undisciplined, poorly adjusted, and filled with nameless fears. Most of them prescribed sedatives and advised rest and moderation.

Between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, I tried everything. I moved a thousand miles away from home to Chicago and a new environment. I

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studied art; I desperately endeavored to create an interest in many things, in a new place among new people. Nothing worked. My drinking habits increased in spite of my struggle for control. I tried the beer diet, the wine diet, timing, measuring, and spacing of drinks. I tried them mixed, unmixed, drinking only when happy, only when depressed. And still, by the time I was thirty years old, I was being pushed around by a compulsion to drink that was completely beyond my control. I couldn't stop drinking. I would hang on to sobriety for short intervals, but always there would come the tide of an overpowering necessity to drink, and, as I was engulfed in it, I felt such a sense of panic that I really believed I would die if I didn't get that drink inside.

Needless to say, this was not pleasurable drinking. I had long since given up any pretense of the social cocktail hour. This was drinking in sheer desperation, alone and locked behind my own door. Alone in the relative safety of my home because I knew I dare not risk the danger of blacking out in some public place or at the wheel of a car. I could no longer gauge my capacity, and it might be the second or the tenth drink that would erase my consciousness.

The next three years saw me in sanitariums, once in a ten-day coma, from which I very nearly did not recover, in and out of hospitals or confined at home with day and night nurses. By now I wanted to die but had lost the courage even to take my life. I was trapped, and for the life of me I did not know how or why this had happened to me. And all the while my fear fed a growing conviction that before long it would be necessary for me to be put away in some institution. People didn't behave this way outside of an asylum. I had heartsickness, shame, and fear bordering on panic, and no complete escape any longer except in oblivion. Certainly, now, anyone would have agreed that only a miracle could prevent my final breakdown. But how does one get a prescription for a miracle?

For about one year prior to this time, there was one doctor who had continued to struggle with me. He had tried everything from having me

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attend daily mass at six a.m. to performing the most menial labor for his charity patients. Why he bothered with me as long as he did I shall never know, for he knew there was no answer for me in medicine, and he, like all doctors of his day, had been taught that the alcoholic was incurable and should be ignored. Doctors were advised to attend patients who could be benefited by medicine. With the alcoholic, they could only give temporary relief and in the last stages not even that. It was a waste of the doctors' time and the patients' money. Nevertheless, there were a few doctors who saw alcoholism as a disease and felt that the alcoholic was a victim of something over which he had no control. They had a hunch that there must be an answer for these apparently hopeless ones, somewhere. Fortunately for me, my doctor was one of the enlightened.

And then, in the spring of 1939, a very remarkable book was rolled off a New York press with the title Alcoholics Anonymous. However, due to financial difficulties, the whole printing was, for a while, held up and the book received no publicity nor, of course, was it available in the stores, even if one knew it existed. But somehow my good doctor heard of this book, and he also learned a little about the people responsible for its publication. He sent to New York for a copy, and after reading it, he tucked it under his arm and called on me. That call marked the turning point in my life.

Until now, I had never been told that I was an alcoholic. Few doctors will tell a hopeless patient that there is no answer for him or for her. But this day my doctor gave it to me straight and said, *“People like you are pretty well known to the medical profession. Every doctor gets his quota of alcoholic patients. Some of us struggle with these people because we know that they are really very sick, but we also know that, short of some miracle, we are not going to help them except temporarily and that they will inevitably get worse and worse until one of two things happens. Either they die of acute alcoholism or they develop wet brains and have to be put away permanently.”*

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He further explained that alcohol was no respecter of sex or background but that most of the alcoholics he had encountered had better-than-average minds and abilities. He said the alcoholics seemed to possess a native acuteness and usually excelled in their fields, regardless of environmental or educational advantages.

*“We watch the alcoholic performing in a position of responsibility, and we know that because he is drinking heavily and daily, he has cut his capacities by 50 percent, and still he seems able to do a satisfactory job. And we wonder how much further this man could go if his alcoholic problem could be removed and he could throw 100 percent of his abilities into action. But, of course,”* he continued, *“eventually the alcoholic loses all of his capacities as his disease gets progressively worse, and this is a tragedy that is painful to watch: the disintegration of a sound mind and body.”*

Then he told me there was a handful of people in Akron and New York who had worked out a technique for arresting their alcoholism. He asked me to read the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, and then he wanted me to talk with a man who was experiencing success with his own arrestment. This man could tell me more. I stayed up all night reading that book. For me it was a wonderful experience. It explained so much I had not understood about myself, and, best of all, it promised recovery if I would do a few simple things and be willing to have the desire to drink removed. Here was hope. Maybe I could find my way out of this agonizing existence. Perhaps I could find freedom and peace, and be able once again to call my soul my own.

The next day I received a visit from Mr. T., a recovered alcoholic. I don't know what sort of person I was expecting, but I was very agreeably surprised to find Mr. T. a poised, intelligent, well-groomed, and mannered gentleman. I was immediately impressed with his graciousness and charm. He put me at ease with his first few words. Looking at him, I found it hard to believe he had ever been as I was then.

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However, as he unfolded his story for me, I could not help but believe him. In describing his suffering, his fears, his many years of groping for some answer to that which always seemed to remain unanswerable, he could have been describing me, and nothing short of experience and knowledge could have afforded him that much insight! He had been dry for 2 ½ years and had been maintaining his contact with a group of recovered alcoholics in Akron. Contact with this group was extremely important to him. He told me that eventually he hoped such a group would develop in the Chicago area but that so far this had not been started. He thought it would be helpful for me to visit the Akron group and meet many like himself.

By this time, with the doctor's explanation, the revelations contained in the book, and the hope-inspiring interview with Mr. T., I was ready and willing to go to the ends of the earth, if that was what it took, for me to find what these people had.

So I went to Akron, and also to Cleveland, and I met more recovered alcoholics. I saw in these people a quality of peace and serenity that I knew I must have for myself. Not only were they at peace with themselves, but they were getting a kick out of life such as one seldom encounters, except in the very young. They seemed to have all the ingredients for successful living: philosophy, faith, a sense of humor (they could laugh at themselves), clear-cut objectives, appreciation—and most especially appreciation and sympathetic understanding for their fellow man.

Nothing in their lives took precedence over their response to a call for help from some alcoholic in need. They would travel miles and stay up all night with someone they had never laid eyes on before and think nothing of it. Far from expecting praise for their deeds, they claimed the performance a privilege and insisted that they invariably received more than they gave. Extraordinary people!

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I didn't dare hope I might find for myself all that these people had found, but if I could acquire some small part of their intriguing quality of living—and sobriety—that would be enough.

Shortly after I returned to Chicago, my doctor, encouraged by the results of my contact with A.A., sent us two more of his alcoholic patients. By the latter part of September 1939, we had a nucleus of six and held our first official group meeting.

I had a tough pull back to normal good health. It had been so many years since I had not relied on some artificial crutch, either alcohol or sedatives. Letting go of everything at once was both painful and terrifying. I could never have accomplished this alone. It took the help, understanding, and wonderful companionship that was given so freely to me by my ex-alkie friends—this and the program of recovery embodied in the Twelve Steps. In learning to practice these steps in my daily living, I began to acquire faith and a philosophy to live by. Whole new vistas were opened up for me, new avenues of experience to be explored, and life began to take on color and interest. In time, I found myself looking forward to each new day with pleasurable anticipation.

A.A. is not a plan for recovery that can be finished and done with. It is a way of life, and the challenge contained in its principles is great enough to keep any human being striving for as long as he lives. We do not, cannot, outgrow this plan. As arrested alcoholics, we must have a program for living that allows for limitless expansion. Keeping one foot in front of the other is essential for maintaining our arrestment. Others may idle in a retrogressive groove without too much danger, but retrogression can spell death for us. However, this isn't as rough as it sounds, as we do become grateful for the necessity that makes us toe the line, and we find that we are compensated for a consistent effort by the countless dividends we receive.

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A complete change takes place in our approach to life. Where we used to run from responsibility, we find ourselves accepting it with gratitude that we can successfully shoulder it. Instead of wanting to escape some perplexing problem, we experience the thrill of challenge in the opportunity it affords for another application of A.A. techniques, and we find ourselves tackling it with surprising vigor.

The last fifteen years of my life have been rich and meaningful. I have had my share of problems. heartaches, and disappointments because that is life, but also I have known a great deal of joy and a peace that is the handmaiden of an inner freedom. I have a wealth of friends and, with my A.A. friends, an unusual quality of fellowship. For, to these people, I am truly related. First, through mutual pain and despair, and later through mutual objectives and newfound faith and hope. And, as the years go by, working together, sharing our experiences with one another, and also sharing a mutual trust, understanding, and love—without strings, without obligation—we acquire relationships that are unique and priceless.

There is no more aloneness, with that awful ache, so deep in the heart of every alcoholic that nothing, before, could ever reach it. That ache is gone and never need return again.

Now there is a sense of belonging, of being wanted and needed and loved. In return for a bottle and a hangover, we have been given the Keys of the Kingdom.

## **(6) FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE**

(Pages 544–552, Alcoholics Anonymous, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition)

*Young when she joined, this A.A. believes her serious drinking was the result of even deeper defects. She here tells how she was set free.*

The mental twists that led up to my drinking began many years before I ever took a drink, for I am one of those whose history proves conclusively that my drinking was *a symptom of a deeper trouble*.

Through my efforts to get down to *causes and conditions*, I stand convinced that my emotional illness has been present from my earliest recollection. I never did react normally to any emotional situation.

The medical profession would probably tell me I was conditioned for alcoholism by the things that happened to me in my childhood. And I am sure they would be right as far as they go, but A.A. has taught me I am the result of the way I reacted to what happened to me as a child. What is much more important to me, A.A. has taught me that through this simple program I may experience a change in this reaction pattern that will indeed allow me to *match calamity with serenity*.

I am an only child, and when I was seven years old, my parents separated very abruptly. With no explanation at all, I was taken from my home in Florida to my grandparents' home in the Midwest. My mother went to a nearby city to go to work, and my father being an alcoholic, simply went. My grandparents were strangers to me, and I remember being lonely, terrified, and hurt.

In time I concluded that the reason I was hurt was because I loved my parents, and I concluded too that if I never allowed myself to love anybody or anything, I could never be hurt again. It became second nature for me to remove myself from anything or anybody I found myself growing fond of.

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I grew up believing that one had to be totally self-sufficient, for one never dared to depend on another human being. I thought that life was a pretty simple thing; you simply made a plan for your life, based upon what you wanted, and then you needed only the courage to go after it.

In my late teens I became aware of emotions I'd not counted on: restlessness, anxiety, fear, and insecurity. The only kind of security I knew anything about at that time was material security, and I decided that all these intruders would vanish immediately if I only had a lot of money. The solution seemed very simple. With cold calculation I set about to marry a fortune, and I did. The only thing this changed, however, was my surroundings, and it was soon apparent that I could have the same uncomfortable emotions with an unlimited checking account that I could on a working girl's salary. It was impossible for me to say at this point, "Maybe there is something wrong with my philosophy," and I certainly couldn't say, "Maybe there is something wrong with me." It was not difficult to convince myself that my unhappiness was the fault of the man I had married, and I divorced him at the end of a year.

I was married and divorced again before I was twenty-three years old, this time to a prominent band leader—a man whom many women wanted. I thought this would give me ego-strength, make me feel wanted and secure, and alleviate my fears, but again nothing changed inside me.

The only importance in all of this lies in the fact that at twenty-three I was just as sick as I was at thirty-three, when I came into A.A. But at that time I apparently had no place to go because I had no drinking problem. Had I been able to explain to a psychiatrist the feelings of futility, loneliness, and lack of purpose that had come with my deep sense of personal failure at this second divorce, I seriously doubt that the good doctor could have convinced me that my basic problem was a spiritual hunger. But A.A. has shown me this was the truth. And if I had been able to turn to the church at that time, I'm sure they could not have convinced me my sickness was within myself, nor could they have shown me that the

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need for self-analysis that A.A. has shown me is vital if I am to survive. So I had no place to go. Or so it seemed to me.

I wasn't afraid of anything or anybody after I learned about drinking. It seemed right from the beginning that with liquor I could always retire to my little private world where nobody could get at me to hurt me. It seems only fitting that when I did finally fall in love, it was with an alcoholic, and for the next ten years I progressed as rapidly as is humanly possible into what I believed to be hopeless alcoholism.

During this time, our country was at war. My husband was soon in uniform and among the first to go overseas. My reaction to this was identical in many respects to my reaction to my parents leaving me when I was seven. Apparently I'd grown physically at the customary rate of speed, and I had acquired an average amount of intellectual training in the intervening years, but there had been no emotional maturity at all. I realize now that this phase of my development had been arrested by my obsession with self, and my egocentricity had reached such proportions that adjustment to anything outside my personal control was impossible for me. I was immersed in self-pity and resentment, and the only people who would support this attitude or who I felt understood me at all were the people I met in bars and the ones who drank as I did. It became more and more necessary to escape from myself, for my remorse and shame and humiliation when I was sober were almost unbearable. The only way existence was possible was through rationalizing every sober moment and drinking myself into complete oblivion as often as I could.

My husband eventually returned, but it was not long until we realized we could not continue our marriage. By this time I was such a past master at kidding myself that I had convinced myself I had sat out a war and waited for this man to come home, and as my resentment and self-pity grew, so did my alcoholic problem.

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The last three years of my drinking, I drank on my job. The amount of willpower exercised to control my drinking during working hours, diverted into a constructive channel, would have made me president, and the thing that made the willpower possible was the knowledge that as soon as my day was finished, I could drink myself into oblivion. Inside, though, I was scared to death, for I knew that the time was coming (and it couldn't be too remote) when I would be unable to hold that job. Maybe I wouldn't be able to hold any job, or maybe (and this was my greatest fear) I wouldn't care whether I had a job or not. I knew it didn't make any difference where I started, the inevitable end would be skid row. The only reality I was able to face had been forced upon me by its very repetition—I had to drink; and I didn't know there was anything in the world that could be done about it.

About this time I met a man who had three motherless children, and it seemed that might be a solution to my problem. I had never had a child, and this had been a satisfactory excuse many times for my drinking. It seemed logical to me that if I married this man and took the responsibility for these children that they would keep me sober. So I married again. This caused the comment from one of my A.A. friends, when I told my story after coming into the program, that I had always been a cinch for the program, for I had always been interested in mankind—I was just taking them one man at a time.

The children kept me sober for darn near three weeks, and then I went on (please God) my last drunk. I've heard it said many times in A.A., *"There is just one good drunk in every alcoholic's life, and that's the one that brings us into A.A.,"* and I believe it. I was drunk for sixty days around the clock, and it was my intention, literally, to drink myself to death. I went to jail for the second time during this period for being drunk in an automobile. I was the only person I'd ever known personally who had ever been in jail, and I guess it is most significant that the second time was less humiliating than the first had been.

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Finally, in desperation, my family appealed to a doctor for advice, and he suggested A.A. The people who came knew immediately I was in no condition to absorb anything of the program. I was put in a sanitarium to be defogged so that I could make a sober decision about this for myself. It was here that I realized for the first time that as a practicing alcoholic, I had no rights. Society can do anything it chooses to do with me when I am drunk, and I can't lift a finger to stop it, for I forfeit my rights through the simple expedient of becoming a menace to myself and to the people around me. With deep shame came the knowledge too that I had lived with no sense of social obligation nor had I known the meaning of moral responsibility to my fellow men.

I attended my first A.A. meeting eight years ago, and it is with deep gratitude that I'm able to say I've not had a drink since that time and that I take no sedation or narcotics, for this program is to me one of complete sobriety. I no longer need to escape reality. One of the truly great things A.A. has taught me is that reality too has two sides; I had only known the grim side before the program, but now I had a chance to learn about the pleasant side as well.

The A.A. members who sponsored me told me in the beginning that I would not only find a way to live without having a drink, but that I would find a way to live without wanting to drink, if I would do these simple things. They said if you want to know how this program works, take the first word of your question—the “H” is for honesty, the “O” is for open-mindedness, and the “W” is for willingness; these our Big Book calls the essentials of recovery. They suggested that I study the A.A. book and try to take the Twelve Steps according to the explanation in the book, for it was their opinion that the application of these principles in our daily lives will get us sober and keep us sober. I believe this, and I believe too that it is equally impossible to practice these principles to the best of our ability, a day at a time, and still drink, for I don't think the two things are compatible.

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I had no problem admitting I was powerless over alcohol, and I certainly agreed that my life had become unmanageable. I had only to reflect on the contrast between the plans I made so many years ago for my life with what really happened to know I couldn't manage my life drunk or sober. A.A. taught me that willingness to believe was enough for a beginning. It's been true in my case, nor could I quarrel with *restore us to sanity*, for my actions drunk or sober, before A.A., were not those of a sane person. My desire to be honest with myself made it necessary for me to realize that my thinking was irrational. It had to be, or I could not have justified my erratic behavior as I did. I've been benefited from a dictionary definition I found that reads: "*Rationalization is giving a socially acceptable reason for socially unacceptable behavior, and socially unacceptable behavior is a form of insanity.*"

A.A. has given me serenity of purpose and the opportunity to be of service to God and to the people about me, and I am serene in the infallibility of these principles that provide the fulfillment of my purpose.

A.A. has taught me that I will have peace of mind in exact proportion to the peace of mind I bring into the lives of other people, and it has taught me the true meaning of the admonition "*happy are ye who know these things and do them.*" For the only problems I have now are those I create when I break out in a rash of self-will.

I've had many spiritual experiences since I've been in the program, many that I didn't recognize right away, for I'm slow to learn and they take many guises. But one was so outstanding that I like to pass it on whenever I can in the hope that it will help someone else as it has me. As I said earlier, self-pity and resentment were my constant companions, and my inventory began to look like a thirty-three-year diary, for I seemed to have a resentment against everybody I had ever known. All but one *responded to the treatment* suggested in the steps immediately, but this one posed a problem.

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This resentment was against my mother, and it was twenty-five years old. I had fed it, fanned it, and nurtured it as one might a delicate child, and it had become as much a part of me as my breathing. It had provided me with excuses for my lack of education, my marital failures, personal failures, inadequacy, and of course, my alcoholism. And though I really thought I had been willing to part with it, now I knew I was reluctant to let it go.

One morning, however, I realized I had to get rid of it, for my reprieve was running out, and if I didn't get rid of it I was going to get drunk—and I didn't want to get drunk anymore. In my prayers that morning I asked God to point out to me some way to be free of this resentment. During the day, a friend of mine brought me some magazines to take to a hospital group I was interested in. I looked through them. A banner across one featured an article by a prominent clergyman in which I caught the word resentment.

He said, in effect: *“If you have a resentment you want to be free of, if you will pray for the person or the thing that you resent, you will be free. If you will ask in prayer for everything you want for yourself to be given to them, you will be free. Ask for their health, their prosperity, their happiness, and you will be free. Even when you don't really want it for them and your prayers are only words and you don't mean it, go ahead and do it anyway. Do it every day for two weeks, and you will find you have come to mean it and to want it for them, and you will realize that where you used to feel bitterness and resentment and hatred, you now feel compassionate understanding and love.”*

It worked for me then, and it has worked for me many times since, and it will work for me every time I am willing to work it. Sometimes I have to ask first for the willingness, but it too always comes. And because it works for me, it will work for all of us. As another great man says, *“The only real freedom a human being can ever know is doing what you ought to do because you want to do it.”*

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This great experience that released me from the bondage of hatred and replaced it with love is really just another affirmation of the truth I know: I get everything I need in Alcoholics Anonymous—and everything I need I get. And when I get what I need, I invariably find that it was just what I wanted all the time.

## **Chapter 4: Variations on The Twelve Steps**

### **The Twelve Steps as Originally Stated**

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

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

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

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

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

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

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

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

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

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

11. 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.

12. 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.

## **The Inclusive Secular/Agnostic Twelve Steps**

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to accept and to understand that we needed strengths beyond our awareness and resources to restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of the A.A. program.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to ourselves without reservation, and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were ready to accept help in letting go of all our defects of character.
7. Humbly sought to have our shortcomings removed.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through mindful inquiry and meditation to improve our spiritual awareness, seeking only for knowledge of our rightful path in life and the power to carry that out.
12. 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.

## **Chapter 5: The Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous**

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving Higher Power as may be expressed in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

## **Chapter 6: Readings**

### **A Declaration of Unity**

(suggested for any A.A. meetings)

This we owe to A.A.'s future:

To place our common welfare first;

To keep our fellowship united.

For on A.A. unity depend our lives,

And the lives of those to come.

### **Responsibility Statement**

(suggested for A.A. service meetings with 2 year sobriety requirement)

I am responsible...

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help,

I want the hand of A.A. always to be there.

And for that: I am responsible.

### **Excerpts from Chapter 4: We Agnostics**

We found that as soon as we were able to lay aside prejudice and express even a willingness to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we commenced to get results, even though it was impossible for any of us to fully define or comprehend that Power.

Much to our relief, we discovered we did not need to consider another's conception of God. Our own conception, however inadequate, was sufficient. As soon as we admitted the possible existence of a Creative

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Intelligence or a Spirit of the Universe, we began to be possessed of a new sense of power and direction

Whether we agree with a particular conception seems to make little difference. Experience has taught us that these are matters about which we need not be worried. They are questions for individuals to settle for themselves.

To us, the Realm of Spirit is broad, roomy, all inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding to those who earnestly seek. It is open, we believe, to all.

### **Closed A.A. Meeting**

This is a closed meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. In support of A.A.'s singleness of purpose, attendance at closed meetings is limited to persons who have a desire to stop drinking. If you think you have a problem with alcohol, you are welcome to attend this meeting. We ask that when discussing our problems, we confine ourselves to those problems as they relate to alcoholism.

### **Open A.A. Meeting**

This is an open meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. We are glad you are all here—especially newcomers. In keeping with our singleness of purpose and our Third Tradition that states that “*The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking,*” we ask that all who participate confine their discussion to their problems with alcohol.

## Chapter 7: Acceptance

Acceptance is the answer to all my problems today.

When I am disturbed it is because I find some person, place, thing, or situation – some fact of my life – unacceptable to me.

And I can find no serenity until I accept that person, place, thing, or situation as being exactly the way it **is** at this moment.

Nothing, absolutely nothing, happens in God’s world by mistake.

Until I could accept my alcoholism, I could not stay sober; unless I accept life completely on life’s terms, I cannot be happy.

I need to concentrate not so much on what needs to be changed in the world, as on what needs to be changed in me and in my attitudes.

## Chapter 8: A Suggested Meeting Script

Hello everyone. Welcome to the *Women Ourselves* Zoom meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am an alcoholic and your present secretary. This is an open meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous; all women are welcome to attend.

Please treat this online meeting as you would an in-person meeting and refrain from activities that would be distracting to others. Please mute yourself while you are not speaking.

The A.A. Fact File recognizes three kinds of literature: (1) Conference-Approved Literature, (2) A.A. Literature Prepared by Local Groups, and (3) Outside Literature.

Let’s open the meeting with a moment of silence to do with as you wish followed by the Serenity Prayer. ...(*Serenity Prayer*)

• We will now hear “*The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.*” ... Thank you.

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- We will now hear “*Excerpts from Chapter 4: We Agnostics*” of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. ... Thank you.

- We will now hear “*The Acceptance Paragraph*” from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. ... Thank you.

If you are in your first 30 days of sobriety, you may introduce yourself by your first name only. ... Welcome.

Is there anyone attending this meeting for the first time and would like to introduce themselves? ... Welcome.

- Are there any A.A milestones to celebrate? ... Congratulations!

- Are there any A.A related announcements?

The format of this meeting is Reading and Open-Sharing on Step Topics. Who like to start tonight’s reading?

*(Reading)*

One at a time members volunteer to share observations for tonight’s reading. Or, anyone may share on Step 1 if they like. Sharing is limited to alcoholics and anyone with a desire to stop drinking.

Please keep your share to 3-4 minutes so that all who wish may speak. After all who wish have shared once, I will announce that members may share a second time.

To keep this a safe and open place to share, there is no cross talk in this meeting, which means two things:

1. We don’t talk during someone’s share.
2. We never advise or criticize anyone’s share.

In our turn, we may say we identify with them and share our own experience.

Who would like to start tonight’s sharing?

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*(Sharing)*

*(approx. 2 Minutes before end of meeting)*

That is all the time we have for tonight's sharing.

Let's again welcome our newcomers and visitors.

Let's also congratulate those who celebrated A.A milestones.

*"Please remember that anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions. We ask that who you see here and what you hear here, let it stay here." (all: Hear Here!)*

Let us now unmute ourselves to close the meeting with the *A.A Declaration of Unity*.