

Seamus, Step 11

Good evening. My name is Seamus and I'm an alcoholic. Still.

And my usual disclaimer: What I say is my opinion from my experience of working the steps, is not necessarily the right way to work the steps nor is it the best way of working the steps - and don't quote me to your sponsor.

We're on the 11th step tonight on the 10th Session. That means we are going to do the 12th Step on the 11th week. That's just to keep it interesting. Because then the 12th week we wanted to have a wrap-up with questions, discussion, what-have-you. A kind of "A Vision for You" sort of thing.

One of the things I was thinking of was that when I was a kid I was fascinated with treasure maps. I always loved stories like *Treasure Island*, *Treasure of Sierra Madre*, that kind of thing with maps telling you where the treasure was buried. I always knew where the treasure was buried because the spot was marked on the map with an "X". "X" always marks the spot. And here's my point: the Latin word for a cross or "X" is *crux*. So, when I read page 35 of *The Big Book* and it told how they went about writing *The Big Book* in the first place, they said the following: "*So we will describe some of the mental states that precede our relapse into drinking for obviously this is the **crux** of the problem.*" "X" marks the spot.

I just thought this might be worth mentioning because it took me three years wandering aimlessly around the program before I noticed that "X" marked

the spot. I kept repeating all those dangerous half-truths, thinking *they* were the crux of the AA program, things like, "It was the first drink that did it," and, "No matter what, don't take the first drink." Well, if *I* had been able to arrange not to take the first drink, then *I* would not have needed all this stuff, this AA business of spiritual paths and removal of ego. So, while none of that is false, it still wasn't what Bill and Dr. Bob discovered in 1935. As I've said, Aristotle's grandmother probably knew that if you were on the wagon and took a drink, you were off the wagon. Lay's potato chips knew that too, "Bet you can't eat just one."

So we have this mental condition that - even when we're sober for months or years - makes us forget what ought to warn us. I was finally persuaded to read what's in italics on page 24. It pointed out for me the central insanity: namely that when I am clean and sober for months or years, I am unable to remember (*...with vividness sufficient to prevent relapse*) the suffering and humiliation I inflicted on myself and those who loved me and counted on me. You and I may have trouble grasping the insanity of this, but tell a sane person that you can't think of a good reason not to drink and watch how their mouths drop open at witnessing our lunacy - our sober insanity. On page 42 they call these insanities "strange mental blank spots." For these failures of the mind, there is no medicinal remedy known at this time.

We went on from there to talk about what I call the *active ingredient* in the program. Karl Jung's description of this phenomenon can be found on page 27.

They talk about it also in Appendix II (p. 567). At Step 2 we've heard that there is a remedy discovered by some people who themselves have had the problem. I don't necessarily fully believe them at the time but, on the other hand, since I'm fresh out of other places to look. What the... Can't work any worse.

As a psychotherapist wanting a specialty in chemical dependency, I trained for two years with people from the Hazelden treatment program. It is sort of the granddaddy of treatment in the U.S. and was the model and training-ground for the Navy program at various sites [including the Betty Ford program in Rancho Mirage - a spin-off of the navy program] and hundred of others. One of the many things the counselors brought from Minnesota with them was a way of looking at Step 3.

They ask us to imagine some people trapped by a raging forest fire on the banks of a deep, fast-flowing river. The wind-born heat of the fire is roaring at them, becoming more unbearable by the minute but the only option to death by fire is to leap into this raging river that is heading into dangerous looking rapids.

Finally, in desperation, some of the friends leap into the water, leaving one hold-out standing on the bank. They'd rather drown than burn, they've decided. But, moments after they've jumped into what seems certain destruction, they are cast up by the current onto a little beach just downstream on the far side of the river - within sight of the remaining hold-out.

This character, the hold-out, is still standing on the riverbank, looking with panic into the deep and rushing water while feeling the hot wind off the fire

beginning to singe his pants. What to do? His friends are calling to him to jump. He's shouting that he can't swim. They're telling him that they couldn't either. He says he doesn't trust the river. If he jumps in he's likely to die. They tell him that he's sure to die if he stays where he is. They'd felt the same way but just jumped in and the river carried them to safety - in spite of themselves.

Finally, after dithering and hesitating, then dithering some more until the flames were licking at his ass, he shouted to no one in particular, "Shag it!" (or the equivalent), took a deep breath and leapt into the fast-moving torrent, half expecting to die. Next thing he knows, he's washed up on the same little beach as his friends. He's amazed.

The act of jumping into the unknown in spite of our misgivings about what was in store for us is how they explained the decision of Step 3: We made a decision to jump into something we didn't understand or trust, we did it on the word of others who'd been rescued by doing this. We let go of our desperate mental control long enough for something we did not understand to begin working on us.

That kind of desperation was just what it took to have me give up control - to surrender. I had to have my ass on fire. "*We stood at a turning point and we made a decision*", *The Big Book* says. One way I think of this decision point is this: In some games, such as chess and checkers - even cricket, I'm told - you can tell that the game is over, that you've irrevocably lost without playing out the last few hopeless moves. Only a rank amateur insists on putting himself through the

torture of holding out hope where none remains. He knows so little of the game he wants to play those last desperate moves. Everybody else just shakes their head and tries to tell him. "Hey, it's over, man!" He doesn't accept that he's lost, he keeps on pushing pieces, trying to make it work. His friends ask, "Why are you putting yourself through this?"

My life, as I was leading it, may not have been totally over but a sane person could have seen the end from where I stood.

So we make a decision. Remember we talked about a decision as cutting off some unproductive or diseased branches so the energy of the tree could be concentrated and bear better fruit. Following the decision, we became capable of commitment which I explained was sending all my energy together down a single path - being single minded rather than being of two minds. The path we head down with all our energy is the spiritual path of twelve steps which leads to the only remedy we know for addiction.

Of course, any time I choose, I can go back and try finishing that game. Some of us do just that. We have second thoughts as to whether the game was actually over. There were still some moves, maybe I could still pull it out of the fire, maybe, maybe, just maybe. Right? So we go back and convince ourselves all over again.

Only when we've been finally convinced that our old life is really over do we make a go of the new way of life we find in AA. The other game is always there waiting to be finished, but we have a daily reprieve from the insanity of

trying once again to have it come out differently. "I can still win that chess game. I can do it, I just know it - in spite of what everybody says."

And so this process, or something like it, has brought us to where we are tonight. We've made a decision, we've assented to what the Third step prayer says, "*Build with me and do with me what thou wilt.*" In other words, I've given up being in business for myself - I've declared bankruptcy - now I head down the road into a new life in which *my* agenda is not what determines what I do - I have a new employer.

On a daily basis we have to remember that our former life is over; going back and trying to finish the game will lead to disaster. Most of us who've been around here awhile have seen friends do that and watched as they finished out their game. Those of us who are here tonight can be very grateful that somehow we retained enough sanity and enough support that we kept on this spiritual path.

Step 11 says, "*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.*"

Prayer? What is it? *The Big Book*, (p. 86), says: "Upon awakening, we think of the day ahead..." and it goes on to suggest some of the things we might ask for. We ask God to direct our thinking, we ask for inspiration, we ask to be shown the next step when we're confused, we do not ask for things for ourselves

and we pause when agitated or doubtful and ask for the right thought or action and we ask to know the will of God. So, that's quite a bit of prayer right there.

Then, looking at the *12 By 12*. (I feel I should cover what's in these books first. I know these are things anyone can read, but if you're anything like me, you can read and not see - as I did for several years.) "Prayer and meditation," it says. Why prayer and meditation? "To improve my conscious contact with God as I understood Him." Why should I do this; why do I need conscious contact with God? It's not because God needs company. I believe it is so that I may come to know His will for me. This, of course, raises the question as to where I come into contact with this "God of my understanding"? Is it some being *out there* somewhere? Is it the god I meet in everybody I see and interact with in the course of a day? Or is it maybe also the god that is within me: that "unsuspected inner resource which I identify with my concept of the god?"

So the whole project is about finding out what I ought to do with my life. "*Build with me and do with me what Thou will. Relieve me of the bondage of self that I may better do Thy will.*" This set the course in Step 3 and we stay with that heading all the way through.

I had this sponsor when I was in Washington, D.C., a Virginian called Hugh Magee. He always introduced himself as Hugh M. and he'd explain that the M was for Mility. Hugh Mility! Funny, when you saw this flamboyant criminal attorney about six-six in his alligator shoes. Magee said to me one day: "You know, Seamus, you think this program is about getting perfect, getting

holy. You have to remember that this program is like a finger pointing the way we should go with our lives. And you're like a stupid dog who doesn't get it. You just want to suck the finger." (Laughter).

You ever have a dog like that? You go, "Go Spot!" He doesn't get it. Some of us are like that. We want to bask in the program and bask in prayer and meditation and keep God company, get cozy with him, become really, really good boys and girls. We don't get that it's all about "*...usefulness to God and our fellows.*"

In seminary I learned a lesson about that. Some of the guys, to avoid manual labor during free time, would go into the chapel and sit meditating. Then one day the dean was on a bit of a tear and he came into the chapel, saw all these pious Joes sitting around with their prayer books in rapture or something. He walked out to the center of the sanctuary, clapped his hands loudly and said in a loud voice, "Can I have your attention please? *Laborare est orare!*" (To work is to pray)", then added, "We need you out there cutting grass, pulling weeds, immediately. Come on, hurry it up! Time for weed-pulling prayer."

There are people who spend two or three hours every morning with their readings and meditation and prayer books and what-have-you when they'd probably be better employed hitting the pavement, looking for a job to pay the bills. Sometimes I imagine God saying, "Alright already! I know, I know. Okay.

You've turned your life over to me. Great! I got it the first time you said it. Now go do something useful."

So, I believe prayer has purpose, it's not just something to help us feel cuddly. Nor do I think it is something to help us escape from reality but rather a way to give us the strength to deal with reality on reality's terms. The kind of prayer that we engage in also depends to a great extent in how we conceive of the higher power, the Great Reality, as *The Big Book* calls it on page 55. For many, perhaps most, in the AA program their spirituality is focused upon and given meaning by their relationship with a personal God of their understanding. The simple idea of a father and child is suggested in *The Big Book*.

That said, it is a common misunderstanding that a spiritual program *necessarily* involves a relationship with a personal God. For some this misunderstanding, often reinforced around the tables of AA, is a source of stress and bewilderment. They imagine that their program is failing if they do not have such a relationship with the higher power. For them I would like to point out that Buddhism is a perfect example of spirituality without belief in a personal God. In Buddhism one follows a spiritual path whose purpose is the relief from the bondage of self and whose goal is a spiritual awakening ("Bodhi" means awakened - Buddha is one who is awakened or enlightened.) For some people with many years of spirituality-based sobriety, the idea of praying to a personal god is abhorrent.

There's a great variety even within AA as to what people believe. We are seekers - we are not finders. We are all somewhere along the path. At times we think we have found it, that we've arrived, only to find that it was an illusion and we have to resume the search. It's a good thing to know we're not at the end of the search, that we have not found the ultimate truth about anything. I saw the definition not too long ago of a "conclusion." A conclusion does not mean I have arrived at truth. It only means I have stopped looking. Let us be tolerant, then, of the opinions of others. They may have already passed the point where we are and we may tomorrow notice the flaws in what today looks to us like the answer.

Prayer and meditation can take a number of forms. It can be the recital of prayers composed by others, e.g., the Lord's Prayer, Serenity Prayer, and Prayer of St. Francis. Participating in liturgies in church is yet another form of prayer. Prayer can also include some forms of meditation such as contemplation in which a person reads some passage from a spiritual book and allows the mind to think about spiritual and religious matters. Some Eastern forms of meditation we have become familiar with in the West derive from Hindu and Buddhist practices and generally involve gentling the mind into stillness either by means of a mantra or by focusing on breathing.

In the *12 By 12* they are speaking more of contemplation when they describe meditation as taking a prayer or a reading and thinking about the material we've just read.

It's always beneficial to get the mind quiet and free of all the chatter, the descriptions and worries that occupy it so much of the time. Many of us are terrorized by our running commentary or descriptions on everyday events, "Here I am doing this. I wonder why I'm doing this. I don't think I did that last week as well as I should have." We act and think as if there was another line of music besides the one that we are actually playing. "I should have done this, etc." There is no point in this and it wears us out. Often, too, it is describing something other than what is happening. It is the problem of the alcoholic who says to himself he can control his drinking any time he wants to, yet does not. Or the person who describes himself as kind and loyal but does not act in kind and loyal ways. Or the person who thinks of himself as spiritual yet judges and ignores the less fortunate. I'm walking down the street and I'm describing it as riding a bicycle. Self-delusion of this sort is what Chapter 5 (p. 58), *How it Works*, is speaking of when, in that first paragraph, it speaks three times of rigorous honesty.

I remember in school this professor talking about the various forms of mental illness who illustrated sanity by having the spread-out fingers of one hand fit nicely over the corresponding fingers of his other hand. "This hand," he'd say indicating his right hand, "is the mind and the other hand represents reality. When your mind corresponds to reality that is sanity. But, when your mind is somewhat off reality" (a few fingers not quite touching the reality fingers), that would represent neurosis. And when the mind is not really in

touch with reality at all, we have psychosis.” You may have heard it described as, “Neurotics build castles in the air and psychotics move into them.” Some wag usually adds, “And the shrink collects the rent.” (Laughter).

Back for a moment then to meditation, one of the inductions (i.e., things to help us get to a quiet mind) that I really like I got in seminary at a time when I didn't know or appreciate the value of quiet mind meditation. Luckily, I remembered it and have found it works for me sometimes when nothing else does. It goes like this:

I invite myself to sit and know that I am known through and through, even to the marrow of my bones. Known by what? By the Universe, by Life, by the Great Reality, by whatever and whoever I believe the God to be. To sit in this way I find invokes a deep humility of mind and removes all necessity of describing myself. In fact, any description of myself detracts from the truth that is. What is, is. My description of it adds nothing to it. So, when I thus stun my mind into humbly surrendering, it's a pretty quick way to still the chatter.

One way of thinking of meditation is that in it we are trying to capture the sense of awe that we owe the mystery that completely baffles and exceeds the capacity of our mind. I read something like *A Brief History of Time* by Stephen Hawking, and find that many of the laws of physics he can understand and visualize absolutely exceed the capacity of my mind. When I read about 14 dimensions, my brain smokes trying to see it. And these are just the laws of physics. These are not the Infinity. These are not something of the order of the

Creator and Sustainer of life; the great mystery that informs us all. I, who can't even understand the laws of physics of this little planet in this little corner of the universe, do not have the computing power to tackle such mysteries as the Infinite. Therefore, I owe it total awe when my mind is in its presence.

I mentioned a poem I read a couple of weeks ago. I just want to read a little bit of it again because in discussing this form of meditation, it seems to be right on the mark. It asks,

"How does one address a mystery?

Cautiously. Let us go cautiously to the end of our certainty, to the boundary of all we know, to the rim of uncertainty, to the perimeter of the unknown that surrounds us.

How do we address a mystery?

Reverently. Let us go with a sense of awe, a feeling of approaching the powerful holy whose lightning slashes the sky, whose persistence splits concrete with green sprouts, whose miracles are present in every place and moment.

But what shall I say?

Anything or perhaps nothing. Simply be in the intimate presence of mystery, unashamed, unadorned, unafraid and at the end say, 'Amen'."

Some of the effects of prayer are listed in the *12 By 12*: we get unusual strength from it, unusual wisdom, peace in difficult times to go through traumas and difficulties and guidance for our lives. On page 108 of the *12 By 12* there's a great paragraph I'm going to inflict on you: "*Perhaps one of the greatest rewards of*

meditation and prayer is the sense of belonging that comes to us. We no longer live in a completely hostile world. We are no longer lost and frightened and purposeless. The moment we catch even a glimpse of God's will for us, the moment we begin to see truth, justice and love as the real and eternal things in life, we are no longer deeply disturbed by all the seeming evidence to the contrary that surrounds us in purely human affairs. We know that God lovingly watches over us. We know that when we turn to Him, all will be well with us here and in the hereafter. We are not lonely humans calling out to a distant Creator. We know that the Creator is in us and it is in the Creator we live and move and have our being."

Many of you are familiar with the name Thich Nhat Hanh (the great Buddhist teacher who comes regularly to Deer Park Monastery in Escondido). It is interesting what he has to say about many spiritual matters. But I was reading what he has to say about gaining perspective as part of a spiritual awakening or enlightenment. He used the analogy of the blood stream. If you examine the blood stream up close, really close, under a powerful microscope, you would see all the fighting: the invaders, the defenders, the struggles between the forces attacking and repelling. It's a jungle in there! But, if you back away from it, you see this harmonious stream, coursing through the body, delivering vital oxygen and nutrients to the various organs. The teacher invites us to back off then from our species and see that we are all components of this large organism of humans living as part of a great living universe. Backing off in that way gives us

perspective, a spiritual view of our world and with these glasses we are less likely to be upset by the strivings in our daily lives.

Now we come to the promises. Step 11 has promises and actually, they're the kind of promises we don't often hear about. Remember we talked about the ones in Step 10? When did you last hear it said in an AA meeting that sanity has returned? It's like we're afraid to say it in case somebody thinks they're sane and will lord it over the rest of us. But, *The Big Book* is not afraid to say it: "*By this time, sanity will have returned.*" So if we've all worked the 10th Step, we're all sane. Congratulations!! They promised us that in Step 2: "*Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity,*" Right? And now they've delivered. Similarly, after Step 11, they tell us our thinking becomes more and more on the plane of inspiration. Hey! How cool is that? Not only are we sane, we're also inspired. A lot of us when we read that think, "Oh, that's dangerous! That person there might get the wrong opinion and start thinking they're sane and inspired." Or else we remember the times before when we thought we were inspired and it turned out to be just a passing fad. The garage is maybe full of hobbies and enthusiasms I thought were inspired. Maybe even in sobriety we've had fads we mistook for inspirations; everything from the clothes now draping the Stairmaster in the bedroom to the keyboards behind the door in the laundry room. *The Big Book* even says that at first, because we're not used to using our intuition, we are going to make some foolish mistakes. I'll bet even the first time walking on water we'd get our socks wet - till we got the hang of it.

By Step 11, we will have found answers to things that previously baffled us. So long as my thinking is not beset with self-pity, dishonesty and self seeking, guess what? I can use my mental faculties. And how often you hear people with years of sobriety saying things like: "Any time I get a good idea I immediately get rid of it." Or, "My mind is a dangerous place to go." In *The Big Book* it tells us that, "God gave us brains to use." Maybe we don't believe in the promises or else we believe that we're still only dry drunks and don't deserve anything so good. Sounds like trying to make a virtue out of self-hating. "Nothing so good could happen to me. I could never be sane or inspired or know the answers to things which previously baffled me."

For many years in early sobriety I subscribed to this rather Calvinistic view of my own recovery: I am really a wretch whose mind is rotten and cannot be trusted. The example of this that stands out in my memory is this: I've mentioned this man in San Francisco, Frank Brennan, who had about 50 years in the program at the time I'm referring to. He used often have me drive him to San Jose or anyplace in the Bay Area he was speaking. I was working as a psychotherapist in this hospital along the 280 freeway south of the city. As we were passing my place of work he asked me, "How do you like your job up there in Mary's Help?" I told him, "It's awful! I hate the job! I hate getting off the elevator in the morning. I feel like I just got released from San Quentin in the evening. And the weekend, I just can't wait for it to be Friday afternoon. And I don't even enjoy Sunday because I know Monday is coming." We're riding in

the car and I noticed he wasn't saying anything. He was sort of staring at me. "What?" I demanded. He's sitting with his back to the passenger door looking at me, saying nothing. And I demand, "What?" Finally, he shakes his head and says, "What are you waiting for, an angel to come down from Heaven and tell you to go and get another job?" I don't know how to reply. "Don't you listen and pay attention to yourself?" he asked. "Do you want some special message from God to tell you to change jobs?" And my response is a commentary on where I was in my program. I said, "Do you think I should?" (Laughter). And he just shook his head. "What kind of a program do you have? You're asking me whether you should change your job after you just told me all this stuff! How does any ordinary person discover how they should act?"

It's like that story that Diane and I were talking about in the car tonight. Talking about the man who was drowning and he was praying to God to save him. And somebody came along in a canoe and he said, "No, no. God's going to save me." And then somebody came along in a helicopter and he said, "No, no. God is going to save me." He does drown finally and when he gets to the Pearly Gates he sees God and he says, "I've got to tell you, I'm really pissed off at you. Here I was trustin!g you. Why didn't you answer my prayers?" And God says, "I did all I could. I sent you a canoe and then a helicopter...But oh no, you're too special for that ordinary stuff"

This is often the case with us. We're looking for magic, looking for the angel Gabriel to come and tell us stuff like whether I should change my job or

get out of a relationship that is abusive. So what we do is, we go and we ask our sponsor - like they've got a direct line. Wise sponsors don't usually tell us what to do. They tell us to ask the Higher Power - which we now know is *that unsuspected inner resource* we have come to know as our Higher Power.

The other part of this was when I was still a priest (and wasn't being a particularly good one), my life was complicated by the celibacy requirement. It was complicated in a way that today would be considered practically virtuous - if you know what I mean. (Laughter). My sponsor was trying to get me to make some decisions. He suggested that I might look at the second half of the first step. "Do you think my life is unmanageable?" I asked. And he said, "After what you have told me? Frankly, I do." "But I'm managing it all," I protested. He gave me one of those skunk-eye sponsor looks. "Two girlfriends and a vow of chastity? That's called a juggling act! They have those in circuses."

After I got sober again - for around the fourth time - he said, "Seamus, you're going to have to make a decision." I said, "I don't know what I should do." I was lost, wrestling with the 'shoulds,' and 'oughts' in my head. "What do you think I should do?" I was almost pleading with him for an answer. He then asked me a question I had never been asked before, "What do you want to do?" You know what my answer was, right? "What does that have to do with anything?" Honest to god! His question seemed ridiculous and irrelevant - maybe even dangerous. I'm thinking something like: "What does what I - this defective person - want, have to do with anything? Who ever heard of such

nonsense? I was all about 'shoulds' and 'oughts' and what people will think and embarrassing my family and all of that kind of stuff. What I would want was the last thing to be factored into the decision. What was wrong with this man, asking stupid questions like this? I realize now that he could see from my behavior that the life of a celibate priest was not what I wanted but I could not bring myself to even think that. I just acted out what I wanted and drank for the guilt. It was probably very obvious to everyone but me. Joe was very kind and patient – very persistent.

So the problem is that until I start to listen... Remember we talked about how my mind is not getting any information because I'm repressing and using alcohol to repress more. The result is I'm keeping my poor old head, like an untethered balloon, out there guessing what I am supposed to be doing with my life. While this living organism, that I am, is not being listened to. The mind that is supposed to be the curator of the living being doesn't know it from Adam and is shut off from any useful information. As was the case of me turning to Brennan and saying, "Do *you* think I should?" and asking Joe, "What do *you* think I ought to do?"

It's funny sometimes how spiritual awakenings come to us. We moved out of San Francisco to Marin county when I was sober a number of years. And we had enough room for a little garden at the side of the house. If you've never put in a vegetable garden, I highly recommend it. It's a great learning experience - quite spiritual. So I dedicated one weekend to it. I cultivated the soil, and

planted zucchini and corn and tomatoes, different kinds, and beans and other things. Finally, on Sunday afternoon I'm standing there, proudly watering it, when suddenly I got a powerful feeling of sadness. At that moment I realized that there was one living thing in that garden that I did not trust to know what it should do with its life energy. You would never catch me standing over the zucchini plants warning them not to have yellow squash on them! You'd never in a million years catch me warning the beefsteak tomatoes not to get lazy and produce cherry tomatoes! They'd lock somebody up for being that crazy. Yet most of my life to that point I'd been that way with myself.

Not too long ago some friends of minds began to manage a huge orchard up in Julian, an apple orchard. It got me thinking, after talking to them about all the pruning and work that goes into producing great apples. While I was thinking about this apple orchard, I started thinking about the people that I work with, the newcomers in the chemical dependency treatment center and how there's a certain common ground between the two projects. If you can bear with me for a moment I'll try to explain where my mind went.

I was thinking, wouldn't it be interesting if one of the apple trees in the orchard - there's like five or eight thousand apple trees in this orchard - if one of these trees developed intelligence. "Just think about an apple tree that has intelligence; how would it use this?" It would probably sneak its roots over to a better part of the orchard and really get the good stuff, the best nutrients, over there. It could also, using its intelligence, anticipate the movement of the sun.

Instead of its leaves lagging behind the sun and being forced to catching up, it could be smart and anticipate the sun and get more photosynthesis going on the leaves. It would produce the best apples anywhere in Julian - the talk of the whole countryside! "Get Your 'Smart' Julian Apple Pie Here!" the signs would read. But then, one day, the wind blows a *Wall Street Journal* into the orchard and the business page gets caught in the branches of this tree. Being very smart, it can of course read and what it reads is that the price of apples has crashed. Everybody everywhere was apparently demanding Bing cherries and their price was going through the roof. So this intelligent apple tree thinks about it and finally decides it absolutely has to grow cherries. The following Spring it tries to keep the fruit from getting any bigger than the size of a cherry. And it tries to get them as red as possible – whole bunches of little red things. It is so disappointed when no one is praising it any more for being smart. Nobody seems to want its "cherries". What's the problem? Will it ever be a cherry tree? No. (I'm going to break my rule. I feel it coming on.) It's only ever going to be a fucked up apple tree! (Laughter). And that's what the AA program is for. We're to go back to growing our apples. We're supposed to use our intelligence to grow the best shagging apples we can produce.

So when it says in Step 11, "*Praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out,*" it means we are to stop looking in the newspaper for "job opportunities." Sometimes we forget we're living things and that our

intelligence is for seeing that this living thing does what it came here to do. *“At the head of the book it is written, I come to do thy will, oh God.”*

The greatest tragedy is this: if at the end of my life, I have spent my time and energy trying to be what I could never be and have not been that which I could have been with total enthusiasm. Again the ancient wisdom: *“What does it profit a man if he were to gain the whole world but suffer the loss of his soul?”*

This then is what we set out to do: to follow a spiritual path that would lead us to discover what we should be doing with our lives. It is sad to hear something so exciting and practical being made to sound like some third rate religion. What can possibly be more exciting for the individual than this, the recovery of their authentic life? We get the opportunity to actually become the person we are meant to be, doing the work we are meant to do. A spiritual life is not about becoming holy, it's not about the next life, it's not about being saved in the supernatural sense. It's about finding the life we can live with enthusiasm. What need is there to worry about a next life if I've lived this one with integrity and authenticity – no matter what my religious beliefs.

I explained one night, “enthusiasm” means “the god within.” *Theus* is the Greek for god and en-thus-iasm means “the god within -ism” – in other words, when we tap into the god that is deep within us, we have become a force of nature.

A great old Irish curmudgeon name George Bernard Shaw, very much a non-theist, still had a deep sense of the spiritual as is evidenced by his concept of

a good life: *“This is the real joy of life, the being used up for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy”.*

And one last bit of stuff to throw at you. We have this word which has been bandied around so much we’ve forgotten its meaning. The word is “education.” We hear, “Education this, education that” but we’ve forgotten what education really is about. The root is the Latin word *ducere*, meaning “to lead.” It’s where we get the word “duke,” “el duce,” “duct,” “viaduct,” “aqueduct.” It all comes from this word *ducere* - to lead. When we put “e” or “ex” in front of a word it signifies “out” as in “exit,” “egress,” etc. So, “E-ducation” is the process of *leading out* that which is within. But we have come to think of education as a process of stuffing stuff into someone’s head. Historians tell us this change came about in the Industrial Revolution era when people needed skills - to be useful. Schools were set up to give common folks a working knowledge of reading and writing and some arithmetic. Skills training really - not to be confused with education.

Now, an “e-duc-ator” was someone who was entrusted by parents with the delicate task of finding out who and what their children were and to bring that to fulfillment in later schools. Ideally, when a child was given an introduction to several topics in school and came home with a report card, the parents and teachers would look at the report card with respect and say

something like, "Oh, I see Jimmy is really interested in those topics, see he got A's in them. It's obvious too that he is completely uninterested in those where he got F's and, these with mediocre C's, he doesn't care so much about those." In this way, they all learn quite a bit about Jimmy by respecting what the tests say. Contrast this with what happens today. Mary comes home with her report card, the parents look at some A's and then at the C's and D's and say, "You must bring all those up to A's." In other words, we don't care who you are, we want you to rig the test results so we will not know you and you'll be equally confused as to who you are. Ever wonder why children lose interest in school? In fact, the great Greek teacher, Socrates, long before the Romans, called his system of learning, *Maieutic* (from the Greek, *maieutikos* - midwifery). The idea was that the teacher's job was to draw out, as a midwife delivers a child, that which is within a person.

Real education, then, is not about learning facts and skills, it was about finding out first of all who we are. Imagine how many fewer confused and unhappy people there would be if this were followed. *First Things First*. And if you think about it, why is it so many of us don't know what we should be doing with our lives? Most likely because we've no clue who we are or what we're really interested in. Finally, we must become our own educator in the process of recovering our lives.

Step 11 is the culmination of a process in which I make it my duty to get my agendas out of the picture. It is these plans of mine, derived from external

sources without input from the living being deep within, that prevent me from finding out what it is I came here to be and do. *“Remove from me the bondage of self that I may better do Thy will.*