

Seamus 2

Good evening everybody, my name is Seamus and I'm an alcoholic.

Audience: Hi Seamus.

And, once again I'm just blown away. I couldn't believe how many people are here tonight. I couldn't even park. (Laughter). I'm told there are over 200 here.

Last time the way I dealt with the First Step, or started to deal with it, was by focusing on how the Big Book explains powerlessness **before** the first drink of a relapse. The book, however, also talks about the more commonly understood form of powerlessness: the kind that is almost self-evident and what we call craving, something that seems to be triggered **after** we take the first drink.

A newcomer could easily get the impression from listening in AA meetings that it was with this latter aspect of powerlessness that AA was mostly concerned. Well, the fact of the matter is that that phenomenon — the craving of the alcoholic or addict, “jonesing” — had been recognized for thousands of years before AA came on the scene and this knowledge didn't seem to have any remarkable effect on alcoholism.

As I say jokingly, Aristotle's grandmother knew that when the old man had been on the wagon and took just one, that he was off the wagon, All Hell's a poppin'. Lay's potato chips knew that too...that you can't just eat just one. I mean, it would be simple-minded to imagine that this realization was the core of Alcoholics Anonymous; that it hadn't dawned on anybody down through the thousands of years of alcoholism until it dawned on Bill Wilson in 1935. The disaster that happens after the first drink was a well known fact for an awfully long time.

What AA added to the picture was Doctor Silkworth's description of this as an illness and characterizing it as “an obsession of the mind combined with an allergy of the body.” But perhaps more significant was the fact that the Big Book emphasized over and over the fact of the sober alcoholic's powerlessness **before** the first drink. It is this insight which is often not understood by newcomers like me. I was in the program for three years —as I mentioned in the last talk — before somebody finally got it through to me, namely that I was already insane getting into the car driving to the liquor store. Like many others I've met since, I wanted to put the blame for my insanity on the chemical entering my body.

But, as the book explains at the top of page 23 (they've just been talking about this kind of craving and what happens to you after you take the drink if you're an alcoholic), *“All of this discussion would be academic if the individual were able to not take the first drink.”* So then they get down to what Alcoholics Anonymous was really all about, namely, how to keep sober alcoholics from picking up the first drink. It was a revelation to me to have it pointed out - that every time I picked up the first drink I did it sober.

(Laughter). And for three years they listened patiently to me sounding off in a meeting about how, “It’s the first drink that did it!”

Denial is an amazing thing. And then, once you finally see it, how embarrassing! Remembering me rattling away at meetings, spouting balderdash — talking about relapse as though I was as sane as Solomon before I took the first drink and only became insane afterwards. When Walter — in his diplomatic way— pointed out to me, he said, “If you can’t see that, after being sober 6-7 months, you were already batshit days, maybe weeks, before you put the chemical in your body, you are really beyond help.” So they mean it when they tell us at the top of page 35, “*So we shall describe some of the mental states that precede a relapse into drinking for obviously this is the crux of the problem.*”

Once I got it finally, I began to see references to this crucial insight all throughout the book. One example comes to mind right off. It’s that passage in page 92 where they’re talking about carrying the message:

“If you are convinced the person is a real alcoholic, you emphasize the hopeless nature of the condition and from your own experience you illustrate the queer mental state surrounding that first drink.”

And how this insanity worked in my relapse history, as I told some of you, I had never had bock beer and, though I had been sober about three or four months at the time, I decided impulsively to have a bock beer. I’ve never had it and at that moment that was enough reason to risk everything. When we’re new we tend to imagine something much more dramatic leading to relapse. I imagined that I’d have this temptation to drink or use but then I’d have an argument with myself and that I’d fight the urge and maybe call my sponsor. When I first came in the program a phone call was a dime —there were these things called pay phones back then — and sponsors would often scotch tape a dime to their card and give it to you. In most cases we just used the dime to call our dealer or the liquor store.

Because when you’ve gone insane, you’ve lost the sense of the insanity of what you’re contemplating. Why would you fight taking a drink if you can’t recall any of the reasons why not to take a drink? That’s what the italics on page 24 talk about: If we cannot think of the reasons to not drink, “*our so-called willpower has become practically nonexistent.*” Why would I use willpower to stop doing something that seems okay?

The other thing about Step One I’d just like to touch on briefly is the business of unmanageability. For a long time I read Step One as, “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and *consequently* our lives had become unmanageable.” And it actually does not read that way at all. It has a dash. It says, “*We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – dash – our lives had become unmanageable.*” It comes as a little bit of a disappointment when we’ve been sober for a while to find how much unmanageability is still in our lives. One of the things I found out —and maybe some of you have, too — is

that I was, and still am probably, an absolutely raging co-dependent. And that I'd been seriously co-dependent long before I'd ever tasted alcohol.

I think it's funny to find this out because we, around the program, tend to divide people into alcoholics and co-alcoholics or co-dependents; yet, almost every alcoholic I've ever met is as "co-" as any member of Alanon —more so and usually since their completely unrecovered. (Laughter).

Often we were the kind of kids who had antenna that were picking up every vibe in the house. We woke up in the morning and our antenna scanned the horizon for trouble and danger and anger and all kinds of emotional hazards. Someone once described us as having the antenna of field mice. We discover alcohol and find it's a wonderful remedy for our co-dependence. The poor non-alcoholic Alanons never find that magic so they remain up-tight with no relief in sight until they find the program. (Laughter). I've also been a member of the Alanon program for many years and I recommend it highly for recovering alcoholics as a most effective remedy for a big part of our unmanageability —our anxiety and worry and the stress that results from them.

You, I'm sure mostly know that when you sober up somebody who's been screwed up, they're now just sober and screwed up. There's a whole area, then, of delayed growth and development that comes under that rubric of "*our lives had become unmanageable*" and these areas will remain unmanageable and result in lives that are often as chaotic sober as they were when we were drinking and using.

I work at a treatment center in the San Francisco bay area — I've worked at various treatments centers over the last 30 years — and one of the things I've noticed is that if you ask the resident as he or she is leaving the treatment center at the end of their very expensive stay, "What's the active ingredient in your recovery?" they can't tell you.

Most of them have never thought about recovery in those terms and yet these same people could tell you the active ingredient in every drug in the pharmacopeia. I'm amazed at how much they know about drugs and what each of them does. Why is it, do you think, that when people approach a subject like their own recovery their brains turn to mush? Wouldn't you imagine if you'd spent thousands of dollars on treatment you might get a bit analytical as to the medicine?

So, I'd like to take this as my jumping off point for discussing the second step of AA. (I also need to just say at this point that these are just my thoughts that people have asked me to talk on — not to be confused with wisdom; nor to be confused with an authoritative interpretation of the program. There's no pope in AA speaking infallibly — thank God, (Laughter). One of the things I most liked about AA.)

So, we might take a look at the story of Roland H. (we're on pages 26-27). Roland was this obviously wealthy American alcoholic who would do anything to get over his alcoholism. He went to the best. He didn't just go to the little therapist down the street, once a week paid for by insurance. He went all the way to Switzerland, to Carl Jung

himself, one of the founders of psychoanalysis and he spent damn near a year in psychoanalysis with Jung. Nothing but the best for Roland. And after he'd done this, resolved all his conflicts, had his complexes analyzed - the whole nine yards - he got drunk before he got on the boat to come back to the States.

And it tells you - down toward the bottom of page 26 - that he still had great respect for the doctor and he went and asked him to tell him what went wrong. And the doctor said,

"The methods I have used have been successful in other people but I have never had any success with an alcoholic of your type." And he said.

"If you want to live any length of time you will either have to hire a bodyguard or be committed to an institution."

I think for those of us who kind of grew up with recovery from alcoholism part of our everyday experience, almost a routine thing, it's hard to realize the plight of alcoholics a very short time ago.

I sometimes say this to clients in the treatment program, "If you guys, any of you, ever want to live any length of time, you'll have to hire a bodyguard or be put in an institution by your family." You should see how startled they become. For people whose sense of history is a little warped, it's hard to grasp how hopeless our illness was a very short time ago.

Back to Roland H. He hears the doctor pronounce what amounts to a death sentence and is appropriately desperate. He appeals to Jung, "Isn't there anything...anything at all?" And on page 27 (one of the most important parts of the book for me), the doctor replies:

"Yes. There is. Exceptions to cases such as yours have been occurring since early times. Here and there once in awhile throughout history, alcoholics have had what are called vital spiritual experiences. To me these occurrences are phenomena."

And then he gives as good a definition as I've ever seen of a *vital spiritual experience*...what I believe might be called the active ingredient in our program. These vital spiritual experiences, what are they?

"These appear to be in the nature of huge emotional displacements and rearrangements. Ideas, emotions, and attitudes which were once the guiding forces in the lives of these men are suddenly cast aside and a completely new set of conceptions and motives begin to dominate them."

This is what we, who are walking this path, are seeking. Most of us, as it says in Step One of the 12x12, came into the program looking for much less than this. We come in looking for some tricks as to how to not drink, or how to cut back on our drinking or,

maybe even, how to arrange to have drinking not cause us problems. I don't think we came in prepared to take the medicine that AA spells out for us.

Yet, on page 25, they're very emphatic about what we must have or else we die:

"The great fact is just this and nothing less: That we have had deep and effective spiritual experiences which have revolutionized our whole attitude toward life, toward our fellows, and toward God's universe."

So this is what we're seeking by the steps and the meetings and the fellowship: a vital spiritual experience. This is what we're here tonight about. This is why we're at our regular home groups. This is why we work with sponsees. This is why we have sponsors. This is why we go on 12 step calls and H&I service. We are seeking a vital spiritual experience.

For me, it was helpful when somebody pointed out to me the trajectory of the program. For quite a while I was doing what I was told, working steps, trying to pray and meditate more as an exercise in willingness than from any sense of direction.

How it was explained to me was this — like the table of contents of a book. In Step One we discover we have an illness for which there is no hope. We find out in Step Two that a vital spiritual experience is the active ingredient in the only cure we know for the illness. And Step Twelve says, "Having had this spiritual awakening as the result of these steps..." Ah! So that's why the steps are there. It is by means of them, by walking the path of steps, that I have this spiritual experience.

This syllogism had the kind of logic I could understand and subscribe to. It was not another religion — I'd already done that. Here was something entirely different. It did not depend on something or even somebody I had to talk myself into believing in. These other alcoholics told me they'd done it and it had worked for them — they'd had the spiritual experience while walking the path. Good enough for me. I believed they were not lying to me. That's what I came to believe.

I now could see the program within a logical frame. My job was clear: walk the path, be patient, willing and open-minded and something real would happen to me. I didn't have to understand this power, didn't have to call it by any particular name and above all, I was warned not to talk myself into believing something that had not yet happened to me. I saw the sense in this later. If I had talked myself into believing before I had walked the path, then I would never know for sure whether something real had happened to me or if I merely talked myself into imagining it.

It also was made clear to me that camping out on Step Three left me nowhere. I mean, if you have a nice bed upstairs and you go up to the third step of your stairs and stay there - you're nowhere. (Laughter). A step is not where I'm headed - a step is something that leads from one place to another place - this is the point of it. A step is not a destination. Sometimes we lose sight of the program for the steps — we get so

mesmerized with steps we forget the goal of them, the trajectory or path - where they are taking us.

Step Two it says, "*Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*" I've talked to a lot of clergy men who have been in recovery (not a lot of them have a lot of recovery) and one of the remarkable things in these people is the difficult time they have with walking a spiritual path - and letting it be a spiritual path as distinct from a religious one. The same thing is true of many who've been raised with a lot of training in a religion - like myself. We see the word "believe" as in, "came to believe" and the next thing you see is their brains falling out - draining right out of them. Before you know it, they're trying to recover from alcoholism by religion. And all we need do is look at history to see how little success religion has had in treating alcoholism.

I think the problem for somebody like myself who was raised in a religion, has gone through philosophy and then four years theology in seminary, been a priest, etc. is similar to what happens if my wife asks me to drill a hole - say to hang a picture. I've just drilled one but she looks at it and asks, "Can you drill it, like, about a tenth of an inch to the right?" Well, everybody who has ever tried this knows what happens - the drill bit keeps sliding back into the first hole. You cannot get it hardly to make such a subtle shift. Well, something like this seems to happen with the program. Before you know it, we're treating alcoholism, or trying to, with religion once again. And religion had two or three thousand years to do something about it - they prayed their asses off - and promptly got drunk all over again! (Laughter).

This brings to mind one of my pet peeves - sorry about that but every time I hear pious piffle like: "I'm sober today with the help of God," I cringe. What? Are you giving the little people credit? "Yeah, I shot a great round of golf today - with the help of my caddy. I really have to credit my helper. He did a great job, my assistant." (Laughter).

Many of us cling to an understanding of the "spiritual" that's very hard to shake loose from. My sponsor, Father Joe, told me, "Seamus, if you don't get it clear, the difference between religion and spirituality, you may never get sober." He'd watched me flounder about and sink, time after time. I would get as far as Step Three in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous and then I would slide back into the old track and wind up trying to treat my alcoholism with Catholicism yet again.

A guy up in Sacramento, when I was struggling with the program, gave me a useful little illustration of the difference and it remains one I use it all the time still. (My wife added a little coda at the end of it that completes it and clarifies it). Two men are looking at young horses in a field and the horses are racing around the field, and rearing up and snorting and nipping at each other - as young horses do. One young horse is particularly energetic and playful and one of the men, noticing this, says to the other, "That's sure a spirited animal." Now by spirited they mean that this animal is lively, full of life. And my wife added, "They'd never say, 'That's a religious animal.'"

This simple little story helped me immensely. It was a great beginning. I began to see how ridiculous it is to confuse the concepts of “religious” and “spiritual”. Understanding this distinction may not be of much importance to the man in the street but where your ass depends on it, it takes on a certain urgency. It does seem sort of dumb to be all invested in seeking a spiritual awakening, even depending on it happening and somebody asks us, “What does spirit mean?” and we fumble about, not able to explain what it means. Right? Or is this just me?

I was made to sit through years of Latin back in my days in seminary. We had to listen to endless lectures in Latin, even write our exams in Latin, so out of this deep resentment I am going to inflict some of this Latin on you. (You know I’m kidding? Right?) Anyway, I found that it helped me understand the concept “Spirit.” And that’s what’s important.

“Spirit” comes from the Latin word *spiraō*. And all *spiraō* means is “I breathe.” That’s all it means, “I breathe.” We use the same Latin root all the time. We have “artificial re-spire...re**spira**tion” And “I’m sorry sir, your credit card has ex-**spira**d which means, the breath has gone out of your damn card – it’s kicked the bucket, in other words. So, we use the word-root “**spir**” all the time. It’s important to realize this so that our brains don’t fall out the next time we see the words: “inspire”, “conspire”, “ex(s)pire”, “aspire” and on and on. Yes, when we get together and we whisper, we breathe together...it’s a “conspiracy”.

We use the word in many contexts and we use it all the time in referring to “spirits.” Did any of you ever taste any? (Laughter). I saw that baffled look on your face and I’m thinking, “Did I get the wrong room?” (Laughter.) When the monks distilled wine and made brandy, their name for it was *aqua vitae*, water of life. In fact Scandinavians still have a drink called *akavit*, a corruption of those same words. And then the one I really like is that my ancestors, or the Scots, probably mine (laughter) came up with a very lively little brew and they called it *u – i – s – g – e...uisge beatha*. *Uisge* is water and *beatha* is life. Except they didn’t pronounce it “ishge”, they pronounced it “whiskey”. So we get whiskey derived from the Gaelic words “water of life.”

So this concept of a spiritual awakening doesn’t really have to do with the next life, it has everything to do with this present life. (It’s not easy to hold onto this meaning of the word with all the nonsense around Halloween with the spirits and spooks). The Spirit then refers to that most natural part of us, that which is in us and which makes us who we are.

Another way of thinking about spirit that I’ve found useful is to let our minds travel for a moment back in time; back to when our very, very ancient ancestors came north as the ice cap receded. They’re huddled in some cave say in Middle East or Africa—a little family of our people—and they are surrounded by some pretty scary stuff, like maybe Neanderthals, and we don’t know how friendly they might have been, and there would have been saber tooth tigers, cave bears, and all sorts of challenges from surviving and getting food to staying warm. So here’s this close knit little survival family around a fire

in their cave. Then one day, all of a sudden, one of the central members of that family stops breathing, say the mother. All at once things have changed. All the warmth, the emotion, all the humor, the music, the art...all the things that we know them to have had, all of these aspects of her personality left the cave that day. The body was still there but everything that made her who she was left the cave that day. And ever since that day our people have been trying to figure out the mystery of this liveliness, this spirit, this breath, that is so magical that when it leaves it takes with it everything including our intelligence - and what is left behind soon starts to melt. This magical thing, this spirit, even "informs" (holds in form) the physical body which cannot stick together without it.

So, in the program we're talking about coming awake to the presence and importance of the spirit - no longer unconscious of the existence of this most important part of us and what it needs to have us do before it leaves the body. When we talk about a vital spiritual experience I have found it useful to broaden and deepen my understanding of what exactly spirit means - and what it does not mean. You don't become St. John of the Cross or some monk or hermit. It's not about becoming what we used to call "a holy Joe".

I was in Washington, D.C. when I got sober...one of the times. (Laughter). And my sponsor's sponsor was this awesome figure in Washington AA. He'd sponsored so many of those with long time in sobriety, I thought he was the President of AA - all us newbies were a bit in awe of him. Anyway, a bunch of were together in the Marriott coffee shop after a meeting - young people and pretty new - had pushed a few tables together, laughing, loud; having a great time. I feel these hands on my shoulder and I look up and it's Buck Doyle - AA god. I was sure he was going to say something critical like, "Keep it down" or "Why don't you act your age" - something negative. But instead he said, "Don't let me interrupt this. I just want to put a name on it while it's happening. This is spirituality. It's not some droopy drawer thing you have to do in church". I was a bit shocked but I got the message. Spirituality is being full of life.

So, Step 2 then says: "*We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*" Once again we have this problem of our brains falling out when people read the words "came to believe". I know of treatment centers where people are told, "You're in your third week; you're expected to have found a Higher Power by this time." Don't they realize that people have been in monasteries and convents for 20 years, praying daily for the gift of faith - and haven't got it yet? (Laughter.) And somehow here are these counselors telling people, "You're supposed to get it because the flow chart says you're in the third week." (Laughter). So, I think it's reasonable to suspect the words "came to believe" don't mean anything as spiritually silly as that - but what do they mean?

Sometimes we're not great at reading only the black print. We go off putting in stuff that is not there but that we think should be there. This may be one of those times. It doesn't say "came to believe *in*". It says "came to believe *that*", which tells you something very important, namely that a proposition follows it as opposed to an act of

faith. And the proposition is this: (that) a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

“Oh, but I’ve always believed in God,” I would protest when they told me I ought to take the Second Step and if I did I might just stay sober. There was this one guy who just loved needling me about this - claimed to be an agnostic. “Oh you’re back again, *Father*.” He said when I’d returned from yet another relapse. “What are you going to do different this time...*Father*?” I gave him all that mealy mouth stuff that repeat relapsers trot out...“I’m going to make more meetings, work the steps, blah, blah, blah... (mumbles). He listened to this then suggested, “You might take a look at the Second Step”.

“But I’ve always believed in God.”

“You’ve always believed in God, have you now?”

“Yes, I most certainly have, I’m a priest, you know.”

And the guy said, “Well, Father, if you were telling me you believed in Tylenol but you repeatedly took Excedrin for your headache, how long would it be before I’d get the idea that you had a problem with rigorous honesty?” He could see I was stumped and he went on: “You kneel to your church,” he said, “and you pray, ‘God you are my refuge and my strength, you are my hope and my consolation, my rock, my fortress. When I walk through the valley of the shadow death, I shall fear no evil for thou art with me.’ And then you go back to your room and you pour this much Jack Daniel’s and that really is your refuge and your strength and your hope and your consolation. And when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you fear no evil for Black *Jack* is with you.’ (Laughter).

He said, “You ought to read page 58, the first paragraph, because it says that if we are incapable of being rigorously honest with ourselves, we’ll never make it.” And he said, “How honest is somebody who keeps saying he believes in something and yet uses something else to help him cope with his life?”

It took me about six weeks to get over being pissed off at him. The nerve of him. No respect at all for the clergy. I reported him to my old sponsor, Father Joe, and he suggested, “He might have a point there, Seamus.” “You think so too maybe, huh?”

You often hear in AA the well-meaning advice to just get a god, anything that you can do business with. This troubles me, this idea of inventing god. There’s something inherently off about creating God. What good is it if I know I’ve made it up out of my own ideas - a composite picture from old holy cards, paintings, calendars and half-remembered notions from Sunday school? This is not something greater than myself, it’s a creation of myself, a sort of holy doll I can play with and have tell me anything I want it to say: punishing, loving, forgiving. I can even put it away till the next time I want

to play with it and since it doesn't have existence independent of my mind, it's does what I want and sees only what I see.

In Step Two I find that with new people it's important to not lay on them the burden of inventing a God. It may be more helpful to advise them to not try to capture God with their mind.

This is definitely just my opinion but I am convinced that the spiritual path is inviting us to walk out in humility, open mindedness, and willingness so we may have an experience that is way beyond anything my mind can describe or invent. If I try to control what I am going to experience by pre-understanding, chances are I will not experience anything other than what I have experienced before.

I came across a thing from Leo Tolstoy, the Russian novelist. He was talking about how he was tortured all his life trying to get an idea of God. Then one day, out walking in the fields, he realized that there probably is nothing sillier or more illogical than an idea of God.

Let me put it this way. I have these friends in Iowa. They've lived in Iowa all of their lives. They've never been to either coast of the U.S. I went back to visit them a while back but before I did I went down to the beach here and I took this little glass vial with a stopper in it and I filled it with Pacific Ocean water. I took it back there with me and I showed it to them explaining, "This will give you an idea of the Pacific. Right? You can see from this how when this water gets all riled up it can tear whole cities apart! You'd be surprised how many aircraft carriers have gone down in this too! This gives you some idea of what it's like surfing out there on the west coast, right?" Ridiculous? Absolutely!

My mind tries to tell me that it is the guide to the spiritual path; that nothing can happen if it is not in on the plan — unless it sees the map and leads the way. If I have learned anything about this journey it is that the mind is not the guide to the process. This is a realm that will exceed anything that my mind is capable of imagining. Step Two can be simple, effective and available, I am convinced, if we continue to use our common sense.

This is a good place to tell you about the Saab I bought in 1976 - yes, a car. I bought a Saab in '76 when I lived in Sacramento and anybody who had a Saab back then certainly had a Saab story. You were in Hubacker Cadillac/Saab every two weeks at least with a problem. You were there so often you got to know all the other Saab owners in Sacramento— they were in with their Saab problems too. After six months of my new Saab, AAA told me that I was over utilizing road service. I'd been towed off three times and they'd been out to the house numerous times to start it or tow it in to Hubacker. And then something happened. I was just about ready to kill it or myself when our next door neighbors moved away and a guy from City College in Sacramento bought the house. And guess what he drove? The same Saab 99GL, same model, same color even as we had. So, the first Saturday we're out there doing the lawn

mowing thing, meeting the new neighbor, comparing mowers, he says, "Oh, by the way, how do you like your Saab?"

You know guys will never admit - not right off to a stranger - that they were idiots for buying something like that. But I said, "Uhh....well, great brakes."

So he said, "The damn thing's driving you nuts, isn't it?"

I said, "Well, actually...yeah."

Then he told me something important: "Well, mine was doing the same thing exactly. I was in the shop every two weeks - this went on for months. Then a guy called me I'd met at Hubacher's with the news that he'd found a Swedish mechanic out in the north area. His name is Sven, of all things. This guy told me he'd taken his car to Sven and ever since it's been a dream."

I was definitely interested - given the trouble I'd been having. So I asked my new neighbor, "What did you do?" He said, "I took my car to Sven, of course. What do you think I'd do?"

"How is it now?" I asked and he said, "It's wonderful! No problems at all! Perfect!"

Step Two, right?. (Laughter). I came to believe that a mechanic in the north area called Sven could restore my car to running order. That's all Step Two says. When we get into confusing the business of taking someone's word for something with getting the supernatural gift of faith, we are creating unnecessary problems.

Faith, incidentally, is a theological gift from God, you know, and if I go around claiming that I already have it, I can just imagine God going, "He has? (Laughter). I never gave it to him! (Laughter). He must be doing bootleg faith — making it in his basement. Now if he were to say, 'I don't have faith worth a spit,' and asked me for it, at least he'd be a candidate for it," right? So, if I keep insisting I have it when it is obvious to everyone – including, incidentally, God, - that I don't, then I am blocked from recovery by lack of honesty.

Step Two is actually very simple, as far as I can see, once I realize that all I really believe in is alcohol and drugs. I hear from others they have found something that works and they have no reason to deceive me. So I rely on what they are telling me until such time as I have the experience myself. I'm setting out on a path hoping to come to believe in something other than alcohol. But I can't just bear down and hype myself into believing in something just because my sponsor is getting impatient with me or I'm in the third week of a treatment program.

Anytime we give ourselves this ersatz faith - belief we've talked ourselves into - we will never know whether we've had a real spiritual experience along the path of steps or if we've just talked ourselves into something that isn't real.

There is nothing wrong, I think, with setting out on the path with some humility and skepticism - much as a scientist does when trying to duplicate an experiment - wanting to see if he gets the results reported by another scientist. If I believe this is a real thing, this that happens to us along the path, then I know you will have the same experience if you duplicate the experiment. My anxiety about extracting some sort of expression of belief out of you *before* you've experienced it yourself, betrays a lack of faith in the reality of what I myself have experienced.

"Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path."

"There is no real faith without doubt." We walk out on a path out beyond what we know and we allow something to happen to us along that path we do not make happen nor control. And when it happens, we know we have not talked ourselves into it. That, I feel, is extremely important thing for the long haul. To know we didn't talk ourselves into something; that we haven't conned ourselves.

So. Any comments, remarks, questions, whatnot? Oh, yes, good.

Audience Member #1: That is such a great message for somebody new who is trying... struggling with it. And thank you.

Seamus: Thank you. You didn't talk long.

Audience Member #2: When you're taking somebody through Step Two, I always take them to...and I was told to write out what my concept of God is and basically what you had just stated was that my idea was gonna be, which it was, it was dull, and you know but would you do any.. .uh...replacement of that, or no?

Seamus: I try to encourage people to intellectual humility which means that I do not understand the mystery of what God may or may not be. In the face of the mystery, my mind begins to overheat.

Have any of you read *A Brief History of Time*? It's by this man, Stephen Hawking. He's got muscular dystrophy, cannot speak except with a mechanical thing, cannot move his arms or legs. This man is a brilliant physicist who holds the chair of physics at Cambridge University in England that Isaac Newton held. Reading his book, which is a sort of primer to his way of thinking, my brain is so far out of its depths it starts to smoke.

I can't for the life of me imagine 14 dimensions. I can get height, depth, breadth, time...but ten more dimensions? So here we're talking about just the physical laws of this little universe, right? And my mind has a hernia trying to grasp them. So what business has my little mind trying to reduce the infinite to something it can grasp, right?

I see the spiritual program as encouraging us to walk out beyond what we already know, out into the unknown beyond our old ideas and to tolerate not understanding for a while, in the certainty that we will experience something we have never before experienced.

I know it's not much of a consolation, but I think sometimes we crave certitude so badly we settle for something second rate. We want something to be packaged for us but all that does is cater to fear. If we'd catered to fear when learning to drive a car we'd still be driving around the school parking lot. Remember when someone suggested we take the car out on the street — or, God forbid, on the freeway.

Of course, you'll hear people in the program say, "Oh, I just keep it simple." But reducing the infinite to something that my little mind can understand is not simple, that is simplistic. There is a very big difference. Simplistic is when I have God reduced to some little collection of holy pictures and ideas in my head.

Have you ever noticed when you're taking the Fifth Step how easy it is to admit to God and yourself? (Laughter) But, if you have to admit to a totally independent mind who might be thinking anything she wants to think while you're talking to her - now that's scary. A mind you cannot control is having thoughts about you? You see, I think we need to have a power greater than ourselves not a little creature that we completely control.

Audience member #3: Would you call this surrender?

Seamus: Surrender?

Audience member #3: Sounds like surrender.

Seamus: Yeah. Surrender? "What do I know," sort of thing? Yeah. Humility of the intellect. Yeah?

Audience member #4: Page 53 talks about making a decision.

Seamus: Yeah.

Audience member #4: What do you say about that?

Seamus: Yeah. That's a big set piece I have for Step Three. (Laughter).

Audience Member #5: Just come back next week.

Seamus: I have that one set to music. Yeah.

Audience Member #6: What's Sven's phone number?

Seamus: Oh, Sven? That was in the 70's. Jimmy, you don't have a Saab, do you? Oh, God! Sorry!. I wound up selling the Saab eventually, over in Davis...a professor...the only people bought Saabs were pretentious intellectuals — back then, I mean.

Are we done? Do you have the money? (Laughter). Something I learned in the church, you make sure the collection is taken up before you end the service.

- END -