

## Seamus – Step 4

Good evening, it's good to see you all again; to see you're prepared to tackle the dreaded Step Four - on our way to Twelve. Do you think if we had been on the decimal system in 1935, Bill and the others would have stopped at ten? (Laughter).

There is something I need to say at the start of each session - my sponsor used to warn me before I spoke at a meeting, "Make it clear that what you say does not reflect the views of your sponsor." (Laughter). Anyway, I want to make it very clear that these are just my thoughts and reflections and experiences drawn from my time walking this path that we're all on together. I'm merely hoping that what I say adds something to someone's understanding of the steps. What I say should definitely not be taken as being "the real AA," nor is it "the right way to think" about the steps; it is not anything like that at all. I would hope these thoughts might add to the on-going conversation within AA - other ways in which a person might think about the spiritual path. It isn't intended as an official interpretation or anything so grandiose.

The other thing that occurs to me is that we keep talking about: “recovery”. The word “recovery” is used so much around the program; so much that we hardly ever stop and reflect on what the word itself means.

I used to work in a treatment program and we used the word so often that it had come to mean “getting well” more than anything else. But then one day as I came home in the evening and turned on the television set, I became aware they were talking about “...the recovery process...” I was reading through the mail, not watching what was on the TV until after a few minutes I looked up and there were divers - all rigged out with deep-sea diving hats - bringing gold up to the surface from a 400 year-old wrecked Spanish galleon. I was taken aback by the conflict between what I was expecting to see, maybe a hospital, and what I was seeing on the TV screen. It dawned on me then that “recovery” doesn’t mean getting well, except by analogy. Recovery, as any lawyer here will tell you, means getting back something...getting back something that’s owed you or bringing something that’s been lost back up to the surface.

In early recovery I didn’t understand that “bringing to the surface something I had lost” was what the program of AA was all

about. I had reconciled myself to doing stuff, dreary stuff, like going to meetings and reading the book and working the steps, unexciting, even boring, things. And I had to do these basically because I'd been bad. It's as though I was telling myself, "I've been living a bad and immoral life, so I'm sentenced to a lifetime of following this sort of third rate, amateur religion - one that didn't even have good music, for heaven's sake (laughter); a drab religion without costumes or colorful ceremonies, nothing to relieve the monotony." A life-sentence to dreariness in church basements.

I think it's a great pity if we allow this path that we're on to be viewed this way: as a series of dreary things we have to do, boxes we have to check, so our sponsors won't become annoyed and drop us. It's a shame how often this is how the program is presented when in fact it is the most exciting and important pursuit anyone with a scrap of maturity can be engaged in.

Oh, I realize that it won't seem as interesting or important to us when we're still living in emotional adolescence - children's minds in adult bodies - as I was when I first got to the program. "A thirty year-old sitting in a high chair banging my spoon," was one unflattering description by a sponsor in Washington, D.C. In that frame of mind I

thought like a child, namely that my life is someone else's job. But once I came awake as an adult human - at the moment when the mind comes out of hibernation - it dawned on me that this was my life and no one else was going in the box with me at the end of it. It was at that moment of clarity that I realized the importance of discovering (recovering) my authentic life.

That said, tonight we are – eventually - going to get to something resembling Step Four. But first, in order to keep the step in its context, because a step in itself is not a destination, we'll take another look at the path so far. Steps in the program are like any other steps: part of a path leading from one place to another. Once I'd got that picture of the path into my head, the steps didn't seem so dreary; it seemed that, after all, there *was* a point to them – not just some kind of penance for my sinful life.

I know there are some people present tonight who haven't been here before, so I want to take a moment to talk about where we started from — before we even started out on the path.

To start with: we're all people who have been involved in compulsive self destruction. (Laughter). That's our insanity. We're compulsively self-destructive. Many of us have been sober and gone

back to using or drinking again. We picked up the first one sober.

How insane is that?

So, to even get started I must stop blaming the damned chemical for this most insane act, the act of picking up again after a period of sobriety; the insanity is in us - this we must realize or we're condemned to repeat the process - *even to the gates of insanity and death*. This compulsive self-destruction has fascinated people for hundreds of years at least, maybe thousands, but around the time that *The Big Book* was being written in 1939, another brilliant person was writing another important book, a man by the name of Carl Menninger.

Many of you probably know of the Menninger Clinic in Kansas. It's like the Mayo Clinic as far as reputation and status except that it's for psychological disorders. Carl Menninger in 1939 was writing a book entitled *Man Against Himself*, the phenomenon of self defeat. Why do human beings self destruct? And he called these people "chronic suicides" and guess what group is featured (laughter) prominently? Yes! Alcoholics and addicts. So we are compulsive self-defeaters...that is, in a way, what our illness is. We are compulsively self-destructive and we used alcohol and drugs in order

to accomplish this self defeat. We are chronic suicides in that we destroy everything we value first: our families, their love for us, our reputations, finances, health, freedom, then we die of our compulsion.

You, who have decided to walk the path of the AA program, didn't just wake up some morning at Step One. It wasn't some morning when you were feeling good, loads of money in the bank, the yacht moored at the foot of your lawn and all the servants wages paid; on such a perfect day when you're feeling really chipper, you turn to your lover in bed and say, "You know, honey, I think I'm going to surrender my will and my life today to a Higher Power." (Laughter). That is not how I got here and doubt that it is your story either.

And so on page 31 of *The Big Book* it talks about what I like to call the steps before Step One. Any of you with any kind of minor math skills knows that before Step One there would be a Step Zero. So, what we call Step One is really the end of a process, right? And, there would be, Steps Minus One, Minus Two, Minus Three back to say ... Minus Ten. "I don't have a problem" would probably be Step Minus Ten.

And then with time many of us we get closer and closer - our denial becomes thinner and thinner. And eventually many of us get

down here, to where we say, “I think I need to cut back,” or “I think I need to cut it out completely,” or “I think I need to leave the hard stuff alone,” or “I think I need to leave the hard *drugs* alone and stick strictly to good quality weed,” (laughter) or... whatever our progression was. Page 31 describes how we tried this, we tried that, we tried not having it, we tried having it, we tried...*ad infinitum*.

I used to work in a treatment center where we had staffing every week and we would often have new counselors come in and report that, “Joe is at Step One.” And the more experienced counselors would ask, “How do you know he’s on Step One?” “Well,” the new counselor would reply, “he says that he knows alcohol is destroying his life. He knows he has to quit it totally and he’s really determined to do it.” And the new person would be shocked when we would tell him that his client was only about at Step Minus Two.

What this inexperienced person had not yet understood was that the next step for this client would be Step Minus One which might read: “I tried everything I could think of: treatment programs, AA meetings, church, praying. I tried all these things.” And then sadly would come Step Zero, the failure of his best efforts: “None of these things I tried have worked.”

And then, at some point for some reason, we surrendered - or not - and we admitted we were powerless over alcohol - or did not - and our lives had become unmanageable - or we did not. If we did admit complete failure of my best attempts, we were at Step One — if not...

And it was “surrender” after a period of trying that made the difference between being at Step One - or not. I personally admire people who are very self-reliant. I think it shows character. If you go out in the morning and you have a flat tire and you go, “I’m powerless.” (Laughter). I mean, that doesn’t show much character. (Laughter). I think most of us showed a lot of character. I remember going to work on days when I should have been in the ICU. We fought this damn thing right down until it had us really whipped and then we said, “Okay, okay, okay! As a last resort, I’ll surrender.”

So here we are, we’ve surrendered. I believe that we need to set out from just such a starting point on the path or it will be virtually impossible to stick with it. But, having set out from this point of hopelessness, I am then faced with the problem of what to do about something over which I’ve just admitted that I’m powerless.

Then, I went to an AA meeting and I heard from you that you'd had exactly the same problem - the very same quandary. Hearing this, I go, "Oh my god, you had this problem too? You have a Saab too? And it's been driving you nuts too?" And you tell me, "I have exactly the same model and for ages it drove me nuts." Then you said you'd found a mechanic called Sven, a referral in turn from another guy who'd had the same problem.

Oh, I'm sorry. No. What I mean is: You had a problem with alcohol and it was kicking your ass, right? And you say you've found a solution to be a referral from some people who'd had the same problem. And I believed you.

Step 2: Came to believe... what? Do I believe in Crest toothpaste for cavities or Ban deodorant or Dunlop tires? Do I believe I'll have another drink? When we see the word "belief or believe" we sometimes go crazy - our brains fall out and we want to fall on our knees and get all religious. Luckily we usually resist the urge to kneel when we see a tube of Crest or a Ban roll-on or a Dunlop tire, but you'd be amazed at how many new people in the program think they're being asked to worship something in Step Two.

Came to “believe.” It’s just a word that means, “I trust...I accept that what you say is true.” That’s what belief says. And I came to believe that you guys were as screwed up as you said you were and that you’d found a solution to the problem. The wording is important: (read just the black print, they told me). Came to believe **that** (not Came to believe **in**) a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. The significance of the word “that” is that it introduces what you people tell me about your experience, namely, that you’ve found a solution to the problem we have in common.

And then in Step Three I decided to take my car to Sven. I decided to do what you told me you did that brought about a solution for our common problem. And we also talked the last time about decision. Right? How important a decision was and that if we don’t make a decision?

For those who weren’t here, a decision is a process by which I cut off alternatives. I eliminate the options - because once I have eliminated alternatives, I am then able to com-mittere – send all together, which is what com-mittere means. (Latin verb, to send - *mittere*; 1<sup>st</sup> person singular is *missio* – I send.) I can send together all

my energy down one road. I can be single minded and not “of two minds” about walking the path.

I also talked about what many in the program call, “stinking thinking.” I didn’t know what that was until somebody explained to me that it’s when I start thinking of loop-holes, “Maybe...maybe beer (like beer wasn’t contained in the meaning of the statute). (Laughter). Maybe good weed. Pure, no seeds.” (Laughter), or, really good whiskey- with none of that fusel oil on the top that people around home used to warn against drinking - they blamed it for addiction. They’d be careful to spill it off on the floor before pouring from a new bottle. You notice how nobody from Ireland ever became addicted to whiskey? Now you know why. Fusel oil - gets you every time.

When we start contemplating loop holes - either as to the substances (beer, marijuana, etc.) or the components of our program (number of meetings, sponsor calls, etc.) - we have begun to do real damage to our commitment; we’ve begun sapping the energy out of it.

I learned as a five year old child what I had to re-learn as a 30 year-old: that I could stop the 20 foot high wheel of a water mill by just opening the sluice gate and letting the water that was turning the

wheel run off down a bypass. Energy always follows the line of least resistance so as I open a sluice gate in my mind to an easier, softer path, my resolve weakens and my commitment is gradually withdrawn. Those things I did eagerly before, I now do reluctantly, grudgingly - if at all.

Are any of you procrastinators? (Laughter). Do you see how this applies also to the habit of putting things off? Which takes the more energy: to do the task today, right now, or to put it off till tomorrow? I've opened a little sluice gate and instead of the water turning the wheel, which takes work, it will always run downhill. Hell, I can do it tomorrow. The very same principle is behind much of procrastination as leads to the beginnings of a relapse, namely, creating alternatives that require less effort — or what the program calls, stinking thinking.

So anyway, that kind of gets us to the Third Step prayer. For the longest time I hadn't made the connection between what was said in the Third Step Prayer and what the other Steps were trying to bring about. I just didn't see it until someone talked about it at my home group meeting in San Francisco about 25 years ago. Typically, we pick up stuff at meetings and we often don't know we picked it up until

days or weeks later. This guy who was sharing kept repeating, “Relieve me of the bondage of self that I may better do they will.” Huh... “Build with me and do with me what thy will. Relieve me of the bondage of self that I may better do...”

It was at least a few days later that I got what the man had been trying to get across by his repetitions. The steps, beginning with Step Four, I realized were all about relieving me of the “bondage of self,” whatever the hell that was. And then I heard this woman with a lot of years in the program talking about how we’re actors and we need to drop the act if we are to get sober, and that I should be trying to be who I “only” am.

I knew there was something important in what she was trying to get across and I thought about it for days. Finally, I caught a glimmer of the meaning. Actually, I saw her point in a picture - I understand things best if I can picture them.

I find it helps if you can picture it this way: I have this circle that represents what I really, authentically, am (only me). And then, because I don’t think I’m enough in so many ways, I draw this larger, outer circle around it. And this is the “me” that I show you. I think this outer circle - this false self - will be more adequate and will be more

respected by you and more impressive generally. It also hides my vulnerability and feelings of inadequacy.

So what I show you is this outer circle that I think you'll respect. But, I'm constantly afraid you'll see through it and despise me, so I'm all the time working at keeping my act together. But then, if you do approve of the false self, I don't feel any better because I know the truth - that you don't see the real me. The more I'm accepted or successful the more I feel like an imposter.

This is the bondage of self as far as I can understand it and this poor thing that is trapped inside the false self is who I really am. As a temporary sponsor I had back in Washington, D.C. used to say, this program ought to be called "Phonies Anonymous". He meant that when I came into recovery I'd been living a life in which I was trying to keep this act of mine in place - but it was threatening to fall apart. Funny how we often talk about "getting our act together."

I can't let you see who I **only** am. I'm using "only" advisedly, because when I first try to be sober I don't think what I am is enough. Some of the oldest wisdoms have realized this about human beings, for example the biblical passage that tells us, "He who would save his life shall lose it. He who would lose his life shall save it." Or, another

analogy used in the bible goes, “Unless the grain of corn falling into the ground decays it will bear no fruit.” Or the other enigmatic one that tells us: “We come to our salvation through fear and trembling.” In other words, we have to let go of this outer shell, this false self, in order to be saved from our fears. But when we do let go of this shell we are risking the fear. But, I have to risk coming out from behind this false self, this bondage of self, otherwise I cannot grow or be sober.

O.K., so I got it that getting out from the imprisonment of self was what the program was about but I was still missing a big part of the picture. And that was the part about why I’ve got no power. In other words, “*A lack of power. That is our dilemma.*” Why is it that when I prayed I got the answering machine, “Your call is very important to us... but...” No matter how much or sincerely I prayed, I seemed not to get through.

Then my sponsor, Father Joe, explained it to me in a way that I could picture. He said that I might view myself as a canister of this mystical thing called LIFE. And that this canister is sitting in the middle of a powerful river of LIFE. Got it? So, why is the LIFE in me not participating in the power or the LIFE that is flowing all around it?

What is keeping the LIFE in this canister — from being one with the power surrounding it? The answer became clear to me then. The problem was the very canister or container it thought was protecting it; that it thought of as its individuality. Like water isolated in a canister which will become stale and putrid even though the canister is sitting in the middle of a river of fresh, clear, living water. The canister, that my life or spirit is confined in, is that false self which I wrongly thought of as being my identity or individuality. I finally got the remark about being afraid there would be nothing left but the hole in the donut —if I were to let go of that false self that the Twelve and Twelve speaks of.

In the process of walking the steps I have the means of removing this false self — this outer ring — and once that canister is dissolved I can become one with the power of life that surrounds me. I can become a participant in the power of That “...in whom I live and move and have my being.”

But, I’m afraid to let go of the security of this imagined identity. Even if I should want to get rid of the false self I am unable to do it by wishing or trying, as the Big Book and all ancient spiritual wisdoms attest to. From the earliest time people everywhere have found that it

is only by walking a spiritual path we come to *spiritual awakening* or *enlightenment*, or whatever one chooses to call the condition of being unified with everyone and everything and standing in the center of the Great Power. Wise people have been trying to tell us it's by letting go of the "illusion of separateness" and the preciousness of our separate identities that we gain real power — but we have not listened to their wisdom until we've been forced to do so out of desperation. But, when we listen and begin the walk, the spirit that has been trapped and dying inside this false self - behind this mask or persona - begins to thrive as it renews its connection with all the Life that surrounds it.

Because we are one with this Higher Power or Great Reality, we all have within us this mystical energy and we come to see each other and ourselves as the very embodiment of that which we think of as God. As Ralph Waldo Emerson told the graduating class of Harvard Divinity School in 1835, "*God incarnates himself in each one of us and goes forth anew each day in us to take possession of his world.*" We are, each one of us, incarnations of this great power. Each one of us, once we know who we are, has the power of this God that is within us.

But if I, intended as an expression of the Higher Power, am trapped by this bondage that I think is my uniqueness, is it any wonder then that I have no power? And, if I do not know who I am, is it any wonder then that I have no clue what I should be doing with my life? I see people all the time, of every age, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, who don't know what they want to be when they grow up. How could I know what I should do when I am blind as to who I am and to the power that is imprisoned within me? To take a peek ahead, in Appendix II, we are told: "*With few exceptions our members find they have tapped an unsuspected inner resource which they presently identify with their own conception of a Power greater than themselves.*" (See, I didn't make this stuff up! The Power was trapped until we were freed of the false self.)

Again, Step Three, "*Build with me,[ my Creator], build with me, do with me what Thou will, relieve me of the bondage of self that I may better do Thy will.*"

This then is the context in which we do our Step Four inventory. (He finally got to the step. Had you given up hope?) We do the inventory of those things which are keeping me from being in contact

with the Power. And mostly they have to do with my fear-driven ego or false self.

The chapter on Step Four is very enlightening. If you are doing Step Four or have not yet got to Step Four, absolutely do what your sponsor guides you to do in this chapter. God forbid your sponsor comes to resent me — it's bad Karma. So, "Do what your sponsor tells you." Right!

The chapter suggests that we list our resentments, our fears, those we have hurt in any way and those I have hurt by unruly sexual appetite. It is in these ways that we have damaged the unity that is the essence of spirituality: the Oneness with God and our fellows. I found it helpful when someone described this oneness as a fabric which I had torn and damaged by my self-centered behavior and attitudes. I finally got it that this was not about my avoiding Hell but that these aspects of my character were what had separated me from my fellows and thus from the power of God.

Siddhartha, Buddha, talks about what was removed from him in his progress towards enlightenment: his egotism, greed, and anger. If we just think about what these mean: egotism, greed and anger:

Prideful clinging, craving clutching to status in the eyes of others.

Greed for more wealth/ security (Avarice).

Greed for more sexual and emotional satisfaction (Lust).

Greed for more gratification through food and drink (Gluttony).

Anger in its various forms: Resentment, Envy, Jealousy, Acedia.

They sound of sort of familiar, don't they? Pride, avarice, lust, gluttony, envy, anger, and sloth. The seven deadly sins go back far into the Hebrew bible. These traits or their near equivalent are to be found listed in every system of spiritual wisdom and identified as the traits which separate and set me at odds with you, my fellows.

This Step Four inventory. Do it with your sponsor if you haven't done it already. I think it's important that we do it knowingly as part of the spiritual path leading us out from the bondage of the false self into the realm of the spirit, and not as a confessional of sins.

[A Note of Caution] The Step Four inventory, as I see it, is not an examination of conscience for the purpose of forgiveness of sin, such as one finds in certain Christian denominations. Catholics, Episcopalians, and Orthodox, have what is known as the Sacrament

of Penance which consists in an examination of conscience, the confession of sins, absolution, firm purpose of amendment, and restitution for harm done. Those are all part of what is often called “Confession”. As with some other parts of the program, it is often too easy to find oneself slipping back into the familiar when it and the AA steps seem similar. I believe it is important that we stay with the specific spiritual program that has worked for alcoholism.

The same is true of psychotherapy. As with religion, some aspects of the AA program can be confused with the psychotherapy process of self-improvement. It is easy to believe that the Step Four inventory is the beginning of a self-improvement process and will proceed from there with a methodical, self-managed program for the removal of those items identified. Some have reported keeping a check-list of the defects they have been successful at eliminating and having the goal of living one day entirely free of defects. I am doubtful if such a self-perfecting condition could be described as enlightenment.

I feel it is important to remember that neither religion nor psychotherapy have had much success in alcohol recovery even in the best of hands. Yet AA can say without fear of contradiction:

*“Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path...”*

Keeping in mind the spiritual purpose of the Fourth Step inventory, namely, seeing how we’ve been damaging the unity with our fellows and thus with God, we may be less likely to avoid doing it through guilt and fears engendered by religious beliefs about life after death. This inventory is not about such matters as avoidance of Hell, nor, so far as we know, the appeasing of an offended God. Those are concerns better left to our religions. The various Christian denominations mainly concern themselves with living this life so their members may be rewarded rather than punished in a life that will follow death. AA has the modest goal of helping us live this life in a meaningful way for its own sake. The old AA’s used to put it simply. “Religion is about saving your soul; AA is about saving you ass.”

The Fourth Step inventory, on the other hand, is an integral part of a spiritual path in which we are seeking the only remedy known for our illness, namely: A vital spiritual experience.

A vital spiritual experience. We’ve talked about what spirit means. Spirit, the word *spirao* merely means, I breathe, i.e. I am alive. This is not intrinsically a supernatural concept. There are few

things more natural than breathing or being alive. In fact, when we die they say we have ex-spire-d – in other words, the spirit has left the building. Or:

“I’m sorry madam, I’m afraid (the life has gone out of) your credit card has expired.”

When we make “spirit” into something sort of “woo woo,” otherworldly - Halloween and all that kind of goofy stuff - we’ve really distorted the meaning of the concept. Such a distortion is, of course, just fine for trick-or-treaters. But for us, whose lives depend upon a clear understanding of the only remedy known for our illness, such ignorance can delay or prevent our recovery if it leads us down a mistaken path or repels us because we think of such things as superstitious and unenlightened.

Spirit, properly understood, is the word we use to describe that mystical energy which makes us human, which leaves us the day we die taking with it everything that makes us who we are - leaving behind only the abandoned casing which soon decays. We call this expiring...we expire. The spirit goes out. The breath goes out. And in this spirit was everything that made you identifiable as you: your

intelligence, your humor, your music, your warmth, your emotions; every single thing that is you leaves the room that day.

So then, the spiritual life we speak of in the program of AA is a life in which we are aware of this spirit and make it a priority to respond to its urgings. For contained in it is all the wisdom necessary for our life and only our thinking mind is not in on the information — yet. Until now we have been only half aware of this spirit —sleep-walking thorough life, it is called. And it is this spirit, this very essence of who I am, that becomes fully awakened when freed from the bondage of the false self by means of these steps. We find ourselves awakened also to a newly vivid awareness of our fellows and our purpose in life: we see life with *A New Pair of Glasses*, as Chuck C. calls the change that takes place.

If you have read the chapter on the Fourth Step. We have there the three columns and from following the instructions we begin to gain some understanding of our motivations, e.g. why we resent Mr. Brown — because he was paying attention to my wife. We see how this threatens my sexual security, or my relationship, and that it is basically propelled by fear.

In the effort to re-knit the unity that we have torn or damaged, it is of primary importance that we look at resentments and the fears that underlie them.

Some friends of mine moved from the Bay Area to Paris and they're telling me there's a great Sunday morning meeting there called "Hot Grudge Sunday" that deals primarily with removal of resentments. At the Hot Grudge Sunday meeting they have a large bowl of marbles on the table, you go up, take a marble and tell the group about the resentment you have. You talk about how you feel about that son of a bitch who did this or that, how you've been wronged, etc. ...all the things that are poisoning your insides. It is this poison that's been separating you from the oneness that is the spiritual view of life; that's keeping you from the power you seek. You keep the marble with you and every week share about your resentment, where you are with it. Have you got flashes of compassion for that person? Have you been able to pray for that person? Have you even become willing to let go of the resentment? And you keep reporting every week, following the program recommendations for getting free of it, until the day you can come in and say, "I honest to God feel compassion for this other frail human

being and I can see my part in it.” You then return your marble to the bowl. A wonderful way, I think, to have an AA group focused since we’re told how resentments can be one of an alcoholics greatest killers.

I have a friend up in the Bay Area, he’s six months more sober than I am - he insists that it shows. (Laughter). One of the things about him I most remember was that for years in early recovery he maintained that he was never angry till he began to define anger more broadly. And there are still people in the program who claim they don’t have any resentments and that they never get angry because they don’t have murderous rage. Having been a psychotherapist for many years, I found that that is quite common also in people not in the program. For some people it’s just not acceptable to say you’re angry or that anger is a problem. I have found it helpful to look at anger as a spectrum or continuum. At one extreme end, of course, there’d be murderous rage. But then there’s so many gradations of it down to the lesser varieties such as irritation or annoyance or even boredom. Somewhere along the continuum would be Resentment. Resentment is actually, if you can stand a bit

more Latin, re-feeling, “*re*” meaning, again; and *sentire* meaning, to feel.

So resentment is kind of like fried onions: anger that keeps repeating on you. It keeps coming up; every time you think about the situation, there it comes. It’s awfully important for us to know when we are angry, even at the lowest intensities, for it affects our relationships in so many ways — while we’re maintaining that we are “not angry.” Our anger takes many forms, such as lack of compassion, lack of feeling for people, or it may be boredom in which we feel we are not being sufficiently entertained or given enough variety that is our right.

Didn’t your kids ever tell you on a wet day that they’re bored? You know what they’re telling you? They’re angry that you’re not entertaining them sufficiently. It’s a protest, registering a complaint. My mother was an exceptional person. She denied ever being angry. You were not supposed to be angry if you were a good person. Sometimes, though, she would let you know in no uncertain terms - mouth firmly pursed - that she was “very, very disappointed.” (Laughter). “No, of course I’m not angry, but I’m **very** disappointed.”

So, there's all these gradations of this thing we call anger: envy, jealousy, annoyance, irritation. There are so many gradations of it that we often don't even think of them as anger. But when we're looking at the things that keep us from being one with each other...

I'm a very competitive driver, for example. And that keeps me from oneness —often. Are any of you that competitive? Somebody that sneaks into the line ahead when you've been good and merged when told to by the signs. Some people just don't have any... etc., etc. This is one of many ways I damage the fabric of unity many times in the course of a week. Another is telling somebody off that royally deserves it. I do this less nowadays, but my self-righteousness rears its head still from time to time.

Some of you may have known San Francisco in the old days. They had a place called Playland at the beach - a sort of cheesy amusement park. I used to drink there often or rather I'd go there after I drank and had consumed some energy boosters. Mother's little helper was very big in those days. There was even a song about it - you can Google it. It was a miracle drug called Dexamyl. All the ladies of my age group of delinquents had Dexamyl. It was dexadrine

and Miltown. That's an upper and a tranquilizer in one pill. The genius behind the idea was, we thought, unbelievable. (Laughter.)

But anyway, what happened sometime in the 70's - they tore down Playland and they put up a Safeway. A Safeway grocery store, if you don't mind, and on the sacred soil of Playland. And it so happened that that was the store we frequented later on when we lived out there. I used to get really annoyed at the checkers almost every time I went into that store. It was displacement activity, my therapist told me. I was displacing my anger at the loss of Playland. So I talked to my sponsor and he said, "You know, Seamus, you probably need to start working on it seriously because that's a real resentment you're having." And he suggested that when I had spoken angrily to a checker I would put the groceries in the car and then walk back in from the parking lot, wait for the next break between customers and tell the checker, "I had no right to talk to you like that." And then I was to take five dollars up to St. Thomas the Apostle's poor box at 40<sup>th</sup> and Balboa on my way home.

I had to take that medicine twice but thereafter, when I'd feel the anger well up as I was standing in line, I'd remember that walk from the parking lot and the five bucks. It's funny how that works.

Viktor Frankl is supposed to have said that: "Between the incident and the response there is a pause, and the action we decide on during that pause decides our growth and our freedom." A commitment to some uncomfortable and prompt amends appears to be a great tonic for gaining control of impulses - like an electric fence for cattle.

As is the case with anger, so also with fear. There is a spectrum or continuum. I imagine it on a meter with a needle moving from low to high, from concern at the low end to terror at the other extreme. People often deny they have fear. I should say, men, often tell you they don't have fear but when you talk to them about their worries they'll probably start the next sentence with, "Oh, I'm afraid that such and such may or may not happen." Similarly with anxiety. "What are you anxious about?" "Oh, I'm afraid that...."

What we need to know about fears as it relates to the Fourth Step is that fear is that which propels most of our other character defects. My old sponsor, Father Joe, used to say that if he could draw, he would draw a piano and on it would be the 7 keys representing the Seven Deadly Sins and then he'd draw this sleazy guy with a cigarette out of the corner of his mouth who plays the

instrument and his name would be Fear. I like the image because that's sort of been of my experience: "I'm afraid I won't be smart enough. I'm afraid I won't accomplish enough. I'm afraid you'll get more than I do, or that you'll get what's mine, or get more credit, or more attention or more love. I'm afraid of you." Yes, fear propels our defects, as it tells us in pages 67 - 68 of the Big Book.

There's another aspect of fear that I think is really important in understanding why we do a lot of what we do that is dysfunctional and even harmful to ourselves and others. Have any of you suffered from insecurity? Ah! A popular condition, obviously. Well, insecurity is something I've done a lot of thinking about it and you can guess why. I've always been very insecure - behind all the façade of education and togetherness. It's nothing like as bad as it once was thanks to the insights of Alan Watts in his book, *The Wisdom of Insecurity*.

He showed me for the first time how I was being sold something called "Security". If your family is not riding on this brand of tires, they are not secure. If your investments are not in our fund or stock or brokerage... Funny in the middle of Our Great Recession to see those losers called "securities". If any of you had a mutual

fund in the last few years, you know how secure the securities are. Everything is about security, right? From Pampers to Depends. From deodorant to mouthwash, it's all about security. Right? You lift your arms, are you secure? Security, security, security. Here is the thing that I finally got: Alan Watt's definition of insecurity was if you believe there is a thing called security, you are incurably insecure.

Just think about it. Security is a static concept, safe condition, right? Something that will not change. But life is a process. Do you see how incompatible a static condition is in a process? It's like somebody up in the Sierra in the spring watching the snow melt into this stream of beautiful, sparkling water that is leaping over rocks. It's alive, catching the sun, shining and shimmering. And you're moved to say, "I'm going to take a bucket of that shining, shimmering, leaping water home with me in the car." Do you see what I mean? You cannot capture the vitality of a process in a static thing like security. I can have all the money in the world but there is no secure guarantee that my heart will not stop tonight nor that any of a thousand other variables will not disrupt my peace and safety. Therefore, if I believe there is something called security, I know I do not have it. And therefore I am...?

Audience: "... insecure."

Seamus: So, how then do we get the feeling of security?

There is no security, folks, and that's okay because we're perfectly designed for this environment. We're like porpoises in the ocean.

We are problem solving beings. Yes! We're a problem solving species. When we don't have a problem at work, we invent problems for play, right? Chess, crosswords, football and, need I mention, golf. We are compulsively problem solving. So if you're thinking, "I'm going to get done with these problems; I'm going to solve this last batch of problems, then I won't have any more problems", you'll either create problems for fun or new serious ones will appear - sometimes the result of our previous solutions.

In fact, this old sponsor back in Washington used to say, problems are like Dixie cups. You pull one out and another one drops down. And if one day a new one doesn't drop down, there are a couple of guys screwing the lid down on top of you. It's over. You've kicked the bucket. Cashed in your chips. (Laughter).

So, in Step Four, we are taking a look at those things in my personality that are preventing my spirit from leading the life it came to live. It's not really about sucking up to God because I was a bad

boy. This step is the beginning of the answer to the initial problem of a lack of power. It starts me along the process in which I will become one with the Power that is all around me in the universe. I can become free of fear by losing my desperate investment in my separate individuality. I come to see myself as a temporary manifestation of a greater Reality.

If I see life as this great river, I see myself as a temporary eddy or whirlpool of this thing called life. If you look at one of those little whirlpools on the surface of a river, you know there is not a substance called whirlpool stuff, it's just river water in a temporary form. The water passes on then and joins the river - nothing is lost. A wave breaks on the beach, nothing is lost - there is no wave stuff. Similarly, I believe that we're just Life; that each of us is a temporary manifestation of Life. We have come from it, we are going back to it, and while we are here we're having a physical experience.

I find that when I keep this understanding of the program in the forefront of my mind, I am freer from fear and anger because with spiritual glasses I glimpse beneath the surface flesh and bone, down past the molecules, atoms and quarks, to where the God is. The purpose of my life becomes clearer the more false self is burnt away

and usefulness to God and my fellows is the goal rather than self-perfection. Build with me and do with my as thou wilt. Make me an instrument.

It's sad that we can spend our lives trying to become and do what we will never do well when there is something we could have done with complete enthusiasm. And discovering that way of serving God in our fellows is, I believe, the spiritual awakening we've been talking about. In fact, casting ahead to Step Eleven, the only thing we pray for on the spiritual path is knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out. This is the destination.

Step Four is where I identify the walls of this false self - this canister - in which my spirit is imprisoned and that is keeping me from being in touch with the Power. We get a sense of the elements of it in Step Four and the subsequent steps are about how it is dissolved. The steps of the program are so much more than a remedy for drinking that it is disappointing when we hear AA being treated as some sort of remedy. "You're drinking too much. Go to AA."

In Step One we talked about how we came here looking for little tricks to quit drinking or at least cut back. We'll listen to these AA's and see what tricks they have about controlling it or going on the

wagon. I suppose, in a good way, the program does a kind of bait and switch. We come in looking to get tips about drinking from the pros or maybe a handy-dandy remedy for our drinking. Then they lower the boom and tell us that the bad news. No, not that it's going to cost an arm and a leg, nor, that they going to sign us up for weekly envelopes or baptism. "Oh, no, they said. "I'm sorry but the only remedy is a vital spiritual experience." We go, "A what?" "Go back and tell the judge (laughter) that you're going to have to stay long enough to have that, or whatever." (Laughter).

It's five to and actually, Milt had a really good suggestion. In past weeks I have asked if anybody had any questions and, apart from Jimmy, nobody has. His was about his Saab. (Laughter). He wanted to know...he showed me the paper tonight. Saab has been spared. Did you see that in today's paper? A Dutch auto company has bought Saab. They're going to be around to break the hearts of yet another generation. People ten years from now are still going to know what I'm talking about.

Milt's suggestion was this: since people seem to be very polite and don't seem want to ask questions, what about if you write out

your questions and put them up here. I'll answer the easy ones next week.

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