

Seamus – Steps 7 & 8

Seamus: Good evening everybody. I am Seamus and I'm an alcoholic.

Audience: Hi, Seamus.

Seamus: Tonight we tackle the Eighth Step and look briefly at Seven again. We're walking 12 Steps so we're more than half way along the path. On my way in, I met a man who is on his 72nd day sober who's been to each of the talks so far. That's great. If these sessions can help one person it makes this a worthwhile effort as far as I'm concerned.

I'll repeat the weekly disclaimer. What I say here is by no means an authoritative interpretation of AA, but merely some observations drawn from my own experience walking the path we're all walking. If you're new to recovery and feeling a bit befuddled or even alarmed by all this spiritual talk, I can tell you that I, for one, was just as skeptical as anyone could be at first. The steps and what people were saying didn't make a lot of sense to me either. I know that my only reason for taking a chance on it at all was that I had no other options and that I knew you were not lying about how screwed up you had been. I believed that this thing had worked for these

other people with the same problem. I also believed they had nothing to gain by deceiving me.

What got most of us to this place was that we were compulsively self-destructive; we couldn't stop destroying ourselves and everything we valued no matter how much insight, no matter how many therapies we had tried. Compulsively self-defeating to any degree is a serious condition but it's hard to imagine anything more serious than suicidal self-defeat. Of course we had lived in denial of the seriousness of our illness, though those close to us had been observing it and shaking their heads in bewilderment. Page 35 of the Big Book says, *"Friends who have reasoned with him after a spree that has brought him to the point of divorce or bankruptcy are mystified when he walks directly into a saloon. Why does he? Of what is he thinking?"*

But finally, a small percentage of us get a moment of clarity where our mind recognizes the reality everyone else has been seeing. "Oh, my God!! What am I going to do about this?"

Most of us try less drastic remedies first, everything from fitness programs, religion, self-improvement, and psychotherapy, to acupuncture, primal therapy, and hypnosis. None of these produced

lasting and predictable sobriety upon which we could build a life and career. I finally realized that not only had I lost control of my drinking, I didn't seem able to get control no matter what I tried nor how sincerely I wanted it.

It was in this demoralized condition that I found myself at the doors of AA. There I heard stories I could identify with even though the people telling them were from very different backgrounds. The man whose story I totally identified with was a furniture store owner and a 33rd degree Mason. I glommed onto him from the first month or so and even though I was a Catholic priest, we became fast friends. He told me about the remedy he'd discovered. It was truly great news. He'd been as bad as I or worse and he'd found a remedy that had been working for years already. He shared what he'd learned freely with me and got me started on the Big Book. I told Father Joe, my sponsor, and he grinned. "You've a lot more in common with Ed than you have differences."

He may have been the first one, but certainly not the last, to point out the remedy to me. I discovered pages 25 and 27 where it was made very clear that the only remedy known for the mental

illness I was dying of was something called “a vital spiritual experience.”

As I have already mentioned, I used the occasional pharmaceutical preparation in my day. When invited to parishioners' homes for dinner, as I often was, I would grasp the opportunity of conducting a medicine cabinet check (laughter). I quickly learned the importance of knowing the active ingredients in various preparations so as to not be using birth-control pills the next morning for a headache. For those who have only used liquid drugs and don't know what I'm referring to, I suggest you look at any over-the-counter cold preparation and read where it lists the “active ingredients”. You'll also see listed the “inactive ingredients”.

Does anyone know what in hell Xanthium gum is? It seems to be listed in everything, along with red dye #5 and carrageen. My point is that in treating something as deadly as our alcoholism, it is important that we know the active ingredient in the remedy and are going after that. You don't want to be counting on the xanthium gum. Do you know what I'm talking about? If what you desperately need is the vigor of Viagra, you'd better not be relying on a bottle of blue dye #4. It's helpful to know what you're seeking.

It is made crystal clear that in AA the active ingredient is a vital spiritual experience. And everything in the steps is aimed directly at achieving this. Step Twelve, for example - to take a peek at where we're headed - says: "*Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps...*"

So, with a clear purpose in mind we are working the steps. They are not destinations but rather means to an end. I am here in AA tonight because people told me of the remedy they'd discovered. I looked in the Big Book and discovered that, sure enough, this was the message Bill W. and Dr Bob had passed on to us. A vital spiritual experience or psychic change was my only hope for having a life and I would get this by this spiritual path of steps. "Well, I'll be... So that's how we change?" "Not by praying your ass off, Father!" These Masons - no respect for the cloth!

So we have set out on this spiritual path and, almost to our surprise, something happens along the way. Often we didn't notice it as it was happening but only when, one day, we looked back and it dawned on us how much we had changed. We discovered that what we had asked for in Step 3 had begun to occur. In the prayer we had asked the Higher Power we have come to trust: "*Build with me and*

do with me what thou will.” In other words, use all I have and am for your purposes. Do not let my fearful faults and personal agendas interfere with your purpose for me. To paraphrase a well-known wisdom: What does it profit me if I gain the whole world but have never done what I might whole-heartedly have done?

Of course, in order for this to come about, I have to be relieved by the *bondage of self*. Remember the two circles: the outer one representing the false *self* (that which I think is better than who I really am) and the inner circle (that which I really am). The false *self* is the very thing keeping me from being touched by this power and being changed by it.

I have also compared this false *self* to a canister sitting in a river. The canister is filled with river water but the water inside it is untouched by the river. It lacks the power of the river. It is secure within the canister but it is stagnating. “*A lack of power, that is our dilemma...*” It is this very *self* to which I am so attached that is keeping me from participating in the Power. The people in the program suggested that I needed to let go of all this *Self* that I think is my identity, my security and validity - but I am afraid. As the 12 By 12

says under Step Three: If I were to let go of this, *there would be nothing left but the hole in the donut.*

When I read that passage, I was stunned that they had known me so well - for that had been exactly my reaction. I was terrified of losing my identity. But, on second thought and after talking to some members of my home-group in Sacramento, I came to realize that there are much less productive ways to lose your identity, such as going into a box in your 20's having killed myself - the ultimate loss of identity. They assured me that if I really wanted to become what I could become, I needed to be relieved of the bondage of this false *self*. And that is the process we begin with Steps 4 and 5. I reveal to God, myself, and another alcoholic exactly who I am and what I have done.

I come out from behind the curtain and allow my mind to acknowledge the reality of who and what I am. Sanity and Chapter Five "How it Works" both aim at honesty with myself or, in other words, my mind being in touch with reality. I become willing to know who I am from my actions instead of clinging to some wishful thinking about what kind of person I imagine that I am. I had always thought of myself as a good, loyal, trustworthy man, a kindly soul, when in

fact I frequently treated people badly, betrayed people's trust, was disloyal and self-serving and often abusive - to name but a few disparities between my view of me and the reality.

And then, having brought my own mind up to date with reality, I admit my findings to God - as though it's big news to the All Knowing - and to another human being. This last was for me by far the most scary. I felt naked, revealing all this stuff about myself for the first time ever, to this man driving the car. Father Joe suggested we drive around the Sacramento freeways while I read my Fourth Step. I half-expected him to stop the car and tell me to get out. A few of the things I had to admit I felt would shock him, get us in an accident, maybe. I was almost disappointed when he shared some of his own history. Wow! Not that he was playing *Can You Top This*, or anything, but I got the impression that in my self-centered way, I had been inflating even my badness. I was a "cream-puff" in the AA terminology of the time, I'd really been through very few actual hardships except in my own neurotic mind.

But, regardless of how objectively horrible we've been, Step Five is still taking a big risk: it is stepping out, feeling naked of all pretense, and letting another human being see who we "only" are;

showing them how phony and self-centered, what liars we've been. We tell them all of this and they don't throw up. (Laughter). That's encouraging. Later that evening driving myself home, I had a thought, "I wonder if I could live this way—just being ordinary."

Last week we talked about 6 and 7. In Step Six I am entirely ready to have god remove any defects of character, and in Step Seven we humbly ask for anything that stands in the way of my usefulness to God and my fellows to be removed.

My sponsor had me read that seventh step prayer over and over again till I finally got what it said. I saw that no matter how much work and how conscientious I had been with Steps 4 & 5, I had to remember that my Step 4 writing was the product of somebody who had just got through trying to kill me. So my Step 4 list of defects and assets is hardly the blueprint for my reconstruction. So Step 7 says we "humbly" ask. And then we say, "*I am now willing that you shall have all of me, good and bad.*" Forget my lists. Forget my diagnosis. If there is anything in me that stands in the way of my usefulness to you or my fellows, feel free to remove it. So I get out of the business of self improvement.

I talked last week about the second chapter of Genesis and its description of the ultimate act of pride. (I'm not saying anything about whether you should believe this literally or not, it's just that the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament have much wisdom that was derived in those traditions over many thousands of years. For many these are sacred books of revelation, but at the very least, these books contain much wisdom.)

One of the first pieces of wisdom in the Book of Genesis is the story of the man and woman who felt it would improve their condition (they're already living in bliss) - it would give them power like unto gods - if they were to gain the "knowledge of good and evil." It turned out to not be a bit helpful, as the story goes. Many of us find that this self-examination and judging of ourselves merely furthers our neurosis - probably why we become neurotic in the first place, this judging what is good and evil in us.

We don't expect to find humor or irony in something as grim as the Hebrew Bible, but this story is down-right funny. Here's the story of God making everything and when each thing is made he looks at it and sees that it is good. Then, about a page later in the book, you have these two clowns deciding that only some of it is good and the

rest of it is bad. I think it is the author's attempt to show how ridiculous our posturing of knowing what is bad and good. In Step Seven, we give up on that. We say, "I am now willing you should have all of me good and bad."

So this brings us a bit further along the process of freeing us from the bondage of self so that we may better do God's will. We're at Step Eight. In the Big Book they don't give Step 8 much room - they're into Step 9 almost right away. They say, "Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all." And then they tell us we already have a list from Step 4, right? Well I had no sooner completed Steps 5, 6 & 7 than I began to doubt the adequacy of my Step Four list. In frustration, I remember being led by my sponsor to the 12 And 12 where I found a very good chapter on Step 8 (page 77).

Step 8 tells us that learning how to live in the greatest peace, partnership, and brotherhood with all men and women is a moving and fascinating adventure and that this is the goal advanced by this step. It concludes the chapter on Step 8 by saying that this step: *...is the beginning of the end of isolation from our fellows and from God.* This is a pretty heavy duty change.

I find it helpful to think about my bad behavior toward people as tearing the fabric of that unity which is the very essence of spirituality. How could I expect to be touched by the Power so long as I was out of step or isolated from people? *Any man who says he loves the god whom he has not seen but does not love the neighbor whom he has seen, is a liar (1 John 4:20).* I tore the fabric of relationship with my fellows pretty badly and Step 8 is the beginning of healing that. I become willing to heal it; to look and see who I have injured and how. It says that before I can learn to live in peace, partnership and brotherhood, we must first backtrack. Looking backwards we try to discern: (1) when we had been at fault. We look at all the relationships we have had, we list them all and we look and see where I have been at fault. The temptation is to say, "Yeah, but they did more to me than I did to them." The chapter then tells us that the next part of looking backwards is (2) forgiveness. Step 8 really begins in forgiveness of what's been done to us. I don't hear this talked about much at meetings, that Step 8 is about forgiveness - but it makes sense in trying to build a spiritual life. And then, (3) we become willing to make right what we have done to others.

Even the thought of facing some of those we have harmed is daunting. It's bad enough telling the sponsor in Step Five about this, but now we're contemplating going to the person we did it to. And this scares the hell out of us in most cases - in a lot of cases anyway. In Step 8 we're not doing this, we're just becoming willing to do it. You can't expect an alcoholic like me to just jump right in and do something tough like this, something that requires character.

There's another very powerful passage in this chapter that gives us something meaty to think about. *"Defective relationships with other human beings are almost always the cause of our problems including alcoholism."* So, even from our family of origin we have learned bad relational habits that led to unsatisfying relationships with our fellows and hence with God. If I look down the list of all persons I've had relationships with since birth and how I related to each of them, I may begin to understand what it was in me that's been messing up my relationships and causing my life problems. What was it in me that pissed this person off? What is it in me? Was it my need for recognition, or for approval, or security, or sex or whatever? Because as it says, we act out these relational habits in our homes, we take them to our work, to all our social

interactions. They have been the recurring cause of our problems with other people in every facet of our lives.

When I began to look at the step from this point of view, I had to redraw my list. This may not be the case for everyone. But, if you have new insights and clarity as to the goals of the spiritual path, I wouldn't hesitate to make a new one if it seemed useful. The important thing, the chapter advises, is that we glean from this examination a thorough knowledge of the ways in which our interactions with other people have caused problems. I think that is a very powerful and clarifying statement. To me it meant a change of perspective. The steps are not about detecting defects in us, things that are good or bad, but the process is about our behavior towards our fellows. What have I done that has angered others and caused them to retaliate? It was suggested to me once that if I feel I am a victim of various people and institutions, that I turn this on its head and see how they have been my victims.

The chapter gives a couple of examples we might learn from. My anger arouses anger in others. My dishonesty threatens their security and has them strike back at me. My sexual conduct arouses jealousy, resentment and desire to retaliate in others. How have I

been miserly, irresponsible, callous or cold? Maybe I have been irritable, critical, impatient and humorless in relationship.

I need to look at how I have behaved in all of my relationships before I can repair the fabric of unity that is the essence of spirituality and cease from tearing it in future. For, when I have torn that oneness I have cut myself off from this Higher Power that I need in my life.

It mentions in this chapter some minor-seeming traits that interfere with the unity. For example I might ask myself, how irritable have I been with people lately? Have I been dominating people in relationships? Have I perhaps been wallowing in self-pity? Again, let me point out these things are all behaviors. We are not analyzing ourselves trying to discover deeply buried flaws in our make-up. We don't have to if we are honestly noticing our behaviors, since my behaviors flow directly from such unconscious sources which become readily apparent as we do our behavioral inventories.

Here is a nice little list that I came across some time ago and use frequently. (Better still, compose your own since no one knows what's happening in your head but you.) In my case, the other driver sees a sedate, older gentleman driving a very un-cool vehicle. What

he doesn't know, couldn't see, is the crazed, nineteen-year-old psycho in my head who's driving a Mustang Cobra and fuming at being cut off. He doesn't know he's committed an offense for which he deserves defeat and humiliation.

My list starts with kind of the Buddhist thing: craving, clutching, clinging to my will, my opinions, my desires, my schedules, my agenda, my stuff, my individuality, my status or dignity, my leisure. (Unhappiness in life is caused by attachment and craving - the Second Noble Truth.) Then I go on to: have I been irritable, critical, impatient, judgmental, domineering, controlling, manipulating, competing, frightening, abusing (emotionally or physically), using, clinging, complaining, neglecting, deceiving? (Applause). And the list goes on *ad infinitum*. (Laughter). Useful as a 10th step inventory also.

By the time we get to this step we should be getting a really good idea as to why things have not been working in our lives. (Laughter). I mean we're lucky these people aren't out after us with guns. I know I am anyway. I sort of like that list though. It describes me perfectly. Some days I still get a depressingly high score. Progress not perfection is the goal. Having attempted Step 8 with

what sincerity we can muster, “...we may develop the best possible relationship with every human being we know.” (12 By 12, p.79]

This chapter also gives us some guidelines as to what we might mean by the word “harmed”. It suggests these harms might be the result of instincts in collision which cause physical, mental, emotional or spiritual damage to others. Good information for someone setting out to repair harm - to know what it is. Right?

Some people in the program are ambiguous about and even opposed to the 12 By 12 . At times I can see why, but mostly I’ve found an awful lot of very, very important guidance there for working the steps. If you’re approaching Step 8 for the first time or if you are going back to look at it again, I believe you’ll find a lot of helpful wisdom in the 12 By 12.

When we’re involved in working a thorough Eighth Step and we’ve spent some time examining how we’ve messed up the relationships in our lives, it’s hard not to wonder what growth would look like - how a more mature me would act in various circumstances. In other words, what is growth? In everyday conversation we often say that so and so is very mature, they’ve grown a lot since they’ve been in the program - or not. But, if someone were to ask us what

this means, our explanations would be kind of vague. Does it mean that they go around parroting everything old timers say, is that growth? Some people do just that because sounding very orthodox gets them the approval of the bleeding deacons. We do have this kind of incestuous orthodoxy in AA at times where new comers like me are tempted to describe spiritual states we cannot possibly have experienced ourselves.

My sponsor, when I was sober about *six months*, was at a meeting where I had just shred *ten years worth* of spiritual growth in my 20 minute pitch. They'd never have asked me to share if I hadn't been a priest - and if they'd had more sense. I hadn't even done the Third Step at this time - probably still deciding whether to do the steps or not. (Laughter). When I was done with what must have been a very convincing talk and people had congratulated me on my insights, my sponsor walked out with me. Joe was always really cool – he was the one who'd said, as I was balking at entering my first AA meeting, “Right then! Don't sign anything tonight.” (Laughter.) So on this occasion he said, “You sounded really good.” I looked at him to see did he mean it and found he was looking at me with the kind of a half-grin that was as close to confronting as he ever got. I said, “You

know what? Sometimes I wonder whether I mean everything I'm saying. Do you ever feel that when you share?"

"I was wondering about that myself as I was listening to you," he said. And then he added. "There's this rule somebody gave me years ago about sharing. Don't share anything you haven't already experienced." (Laughter.)

In other words, don't lie. I was the type who'd get myself so hyped up that I would start describing stuff that I was hoping would happen to me - making it sound like it had already happened. Sometimes we're so well intentioned, so eager to please, that we do this and then we're never sure whether something like a psychic change has really happened to us or if we just talked ourselves into it. It's that thing that happens in Steps 2 and 3 where newcomers talk themselves into thinking they have faith - what I call bootleg faith - that they've just given themselves. I mean, everyone agrees that Faith is a gift from God, right?

It must be very puzzling for God watching me (as this agnostic said when confronting me on spiritual dishonesty). He'd hear me telling everyone I had faith and yet God knew he hadn't given it to me. I wasn't even asking for it. "He must be running a bootleg

operation or something,” God would conclude, “making it in his basement.” I guess nowadays maybe you could probably send away for it from Amazon. (Laughter).

The problem about starting out with well-intentioned, self-given faith is that when something happens, we don't know if we talked ourselves into it or if there was something objective that changed. Whereas, if we start out with a nice scientific detachment, something along the lines of, “They said this happened to them. Why don't I duplicate the experiment and see if it happens to me? I'm not going to prejudge the outcome. It either is true or it's not.” I truly believe that if we have faith first in the people who tell us about their experience faith enough to set out on the path, then having had some change happen, we'll come to have faith in the program, and finally we'll come to have faith in a Power that brought about these changes.

I think it a tragic irony that those who talk most about faith sound as though they don't trust that something real will actually happen unless they talk themselves into it ahead of time.

When we talk about emotional growth whether in the program or otherwise, it may be helpful to look at what is a fairly accepted psychological way of looking at the topic. If we picture a horizontal

line along the page with an arrow pointing right to left, this would represent the developmental process, moving from dependency on the extreme right through various degrees of growth towards the left side of the page - some theoretical ideal of maturity. I found it helpful to imagine this process as paralleling the process from gestation through birth to physical competence. Both processes begin with dependency (physical or emotional *en-velopment*) through periods of inadequate (physical or emotional) skills toward greater and greater *de-velopment*.

We are all familiar with the gradual growth of our physical competence from the first staggering walk and attempts to feed ourselves to coordination and stamina and dexterity. In a parallel way we come out of childhood dependency with wobbly emotional competence. We have few of the following character strengths: Impulse Control, Delay of Gratification, Frustration Tolerance, Dealing with Life on Life's Terms, Healthy Boundaries in Relationships, Focusing our Energy towards our Goals. Without these character muscles, we are unable to Persevere and hence unable to sustain Commitment to anything or anybody; while, with these character

strengths, we are equipped for an adult life in family, career and society.

When we say that the newly sober addict/alcoholic is like a child, we mean that they have retreated or regressed along the Developmental Line back into the Envelopment of Dependency. We may have at one point acquired some of the emotional skills of maturity but then regressed as chemical dependency infantilized our characters. Some of us may have taken to chemical dependency even before acquiring any adult character skills and have remained infantilized until we began the recovery process. In either case, we have a process of growth ahead in which the program and sponsorship provide support and structure. The infantile and adolescent part of our character will of course tend to rebel and resist such assistance and for this reason it is best if provided by our peers in non-parental ways - hence "*suggested*" as a program of our recovery".

When I first got in the program there was a circuit-speaker called Okie Joe, a very entertaining man with a message tailored for someone like myself who wanted nothing less than magical solutions for my adult problems. Okie Joe told about when he first came into

the AA program in L.A.. “When I heard people saying that you turn all your problems over to God, I knew I was in the right place,” he said. “At that time, I had written a lot of bad checks and they were floating all around the L.A. area. When I heard about turning it all over to God, I thought this was the greatest program I have heard of and right then I turned all that bad paper over to God.” He paused then and I remember holding my breath waiting to hear how God was going to miraculously take care of the bad checks. Joe continued then, “Yeah, I turned them over to God and he turned them over to Sheriff Peter Pritchess of L.A. county and he took me to Lincoln Heights Jail.”

Oakie Joe then and there had shattered my last hope that I would find some pixie-dust solution to my real-life problems. I was condemned to finding real solutions to real problems and dealing with reality on its terms as opposed to my wishful thinking.

I would like to focus for a few moments now on the core goal of the spiritual path: finding out our usefulness to god and our fellows. “What should I be doing with my life?” is actually the same question as “How do I get the power I need?” For, as we have said before, that which is keeping me from the power is the same thing that is

keeping me from doing what I have come to do in this world, namely the Self or Ego. *Relieve me of the bondage of self that I may better do thy will.* It's not, *relieve me of self*, so I'll be a great person, or a good person or that I may do good. The sole purpose of it is, that the Power flows through me and *builds with me and does with me what it wills.*

The search for this is not one conducted with the thinking mind as our guide (though it keeps demanding that role). While we walk the road of any spiritual path we find that we are led by something other than thinking or, as often happens, by guessing. The poor old mind feels that its job is to come up with stuff to do and most of the time it's just guessing. We have come to realize that deep within us lies a source of wisdom that exceeds anything in the mind. As Dylan Thomas, the great Welsh poet put it: "*The force that through the green fuse drives the flower, drives my green age.*" We are living things and have in us the wisdom of our species. Do I doubt for a moment that an acorn will know how to be an oak tree or a zucchini sprout will make a mistake and become a tomato?

On page 55 of the Big Book it tells us that the only place we shall find the Great Reality is ... "*deep within ourselves.*". The

Second Appendix (p.567) says that: *“With few exceptions our members find they have tapped an unsuspected inner resource which they presently identify with their own concept of a power greater than themselves.”*

It is the experience of those who have walked this or any similar spiritual path for the dissolving of Self, that they have found sometimes suddenly, often gradually, but always powerfully, that there comes surging through them a power they have previously lacked. And with this flow of power comes the certain knowledge that they are standing in the center of their purpose in life and they have become channels of a Higher Power.

As I have mentioned before, C.S. Lewis, one of my favorite authors, talks about finding our purpose in life. When we are born, he says, most of us go into business for ourselves. It is only when our own business faces bankruptcy that we turn to our Maker and we say, “Was there something that you had in mind for me to do?”

Few of you are probably as deluded as I was in this regard. I always somehow expected that I’d have a direct message - from God’s mind to mine. But the sad fact is that every single thing in me

already knew from the moment I was born what I should be doing - only my poor old thinking mind was in the dark.

So (for those reading this), I'm drawing another of my very inept drawings on the board. At the top center I'm drawing a circle, then further down, near the bottom of the board, I have two horizontal arrows each pointing away from each other, i.e., towards each side. I ask that you bear with me for just a few minutes as I try to explain the mystery of knowing myself.

This top circle represents the brain or perhaps the mind. This mind of mine is great at detecting problems throughout my body. So, if I have a pain in my knee, the signals (physical feelings) travel along the nerves to my mind telling it, "Hey mind, my knee is hurting." In the bad old days, coaches were known to give athletes a shot of something to block the signals, leaving the mind unaware of the hurt. The athlete could continue to play on the injured knee until such time as it collapsed mechanically. Feelings, then, are the signals that let the mind know what is going on in other regions of the body. In a similar way the mind is supposed to be receiving signals from our emotions letting us know how we are reacting to our surroundings. The two lower arrows represent the two most basic emotions (or, if

you like, energy movements). These are various known as **Love** and **Hate** or **Attraction** and **Repulsion**.

If you think about it, you'll see that any living thing only has two directions or reactive movements as regards any other thing. It is either **attracted** toward it or **repelled** from it. In humans we often call these two **Love** and **Hate**. Looking for a second at the Hate/Repulsion movement, we see that the purpose of it is to put distance between me and something I have a bad reaction to. Depending on the relative power of me and this thing, I achieve this distance by either **Fighting** it or **Flight** from it. These correspond to the two forms of Repulsion, namely, **Anger** and **Fear**.

I am now at the board again drawing many fine lines connecting the two lower arrows (the emotions) to the Mind. These fine lines could be regarded as the emotional feelings - signals that tell the mind how I, as a living organism, am reacting to this or that person or circumstance I have just been exposed to. So, over a lifetime my mind gets a pretty accurate reading from moment to moment on how I am reacting to life's circumstances. Great!

But remember the coach that gave the shot of anesthetic that blocked the physical feelings from keeping the mind informed about

the injured knee? Imagine then what happens when we block the emotional signals that are supposed to be informing the mind. (On the board, I am drawing the eraser through the fine lines connecting the mind with the emotions indicating how the signals are no longer reaching the mind).

We often first learn to block the feelings by repressing them. Some families, such as my own, made a virtue out of repression. “No, I am not angry. You know I never get angry. But, I am extremely disappointed in you.” (She is livid with disappointment.) The woman was a saint, living with such bitter disappointment yet never a flicker of anger!!!

As a famous professor of psychopathology used to say, repression is a wonderful thing but it doesn't keep on working well enough for us. So we are obliged to pile more things on the lid of the pot to keep out of touch with our painful or inconvenient emotions. We anesthetize ourselves with food, drugs, alcohol, other addictions, compulsions, obsessions, etc., etc.

We arrive in recovery then at ages 30, 40, 50 or whatever, not knowing what we want to be when we grow up. And the reason is that we have no idea who we are. We are seeking to recover, i.e.,

get back, what we have lost or perhaps never had, and in order to do this we have to start allowing ourselves to feel who we are. From this will flow naturally the realization of what it is we are meant to be doing.

Somebody who's been systematically repressing their feelings for years and then tries to find out what they should do with their life using mainly their mind, is bound to feel confused. Their mind, the part that's been deprived of information, feels pressure to know what it cannot know. It's been treated as sort of an untethered balloon disconnected from the living organism of which it is supposed to be the curator. It's supposed to be paying attention to the signals emanating from the living being, learning what it gets energy from, is attracted to, what it is repelled from, etc. But, after repression aided by drugs and alcohol, the poor old mind has no information about this stranger it is inhabiting, so it begins to frantically guess and seek information and guidance from outside, looking for "job opportunities," guided by benefit packages, retirement programs, opportunity for advancement. It's reduced to guessing.

I can't speak for anyone else but I know that when I was first sober I began to have feelings that were totally new to me. Some of

these were great but some were uncomfortable and even scary like a brand-new phobia of bridges and tunnels. I lived in San Francisco at the time and worked in Alameda so this was no minor inconvenience. To get to work I had to cross the two parts of the Bay Bridge, the Yerba Buena tunnel in between and then the Alameda tunnel to go to work. I had never before felt fear like crossing the bridge in winter with a gale blowing my little Honda Civic all over the road.

Another, different awakening I became aware of riding the 38 Geary buses from the Richmond district downtown. This one day six men with Down's syndrome got on the bus. One of the men was obviously in charge of the others and had a watch that he proudly showed to everyone on the bus. He told us all that it was his job to make sure at Park Presidio that they all transfer to the bus going to Candlestick Park. They were going to a Giants game and they were all Giant fans.

At the right stop he saw to it that they all got off, told them where to go for the other bus, then he waved to all of us before running like an excited child to join the others. As the bus pulled out, I noticed that the whole front of my shirt was wet! I had been moved in a way that I had never been moved before, just watching human

beings coping with what they had to cope with in their lives and being delighted with this simple pleasure. This man was so proud that he had been put in charge and that the house manager had loaned him the watch.

As we start to feel, our mind begins to gather information as to who I am and guidance as to what I should be doing.

Around that same time I was working at a hospital in Daly City and absolutely hated my job. If you've even had one of those jobs where you dread getting off the elevator in the morning and feel like an escaped prisoner every evening, you can understand my frame of mind. There was this man in the program then called Frank Brennan who had about 50 years sober - something of a character - who had me drive him to San Jose to a speaker meeting. He spoke at lots of meetings all around and would sometimes appoint me as his driver. He'd just tell you that you were driving him to San Jose or wherever and mostly we felt it an honor to spend time with Brennan. As we're driving down 280 we were passing the hospital where I worked and he said, "How do you like your job up there?"

I told him how much I hated it and how I had to pray every day before I went in that I'd control my temper and how I couldn't wait to

get out of the place in the evening. I went on a bit about the stress before I felt something emanating from Brennan. I looked across the front seat. Brennan was looking at me with this quizzical look in his eye.

I said, "What?" and he said,

"Do you hear yourself?"

"What?"

"Are you waiting for a fucking angel to come and tell you to change your job?" (Laughter).

I said, "Do you think I should?" Brennan just shook his head.

I mean, talk about being out of touch with who I am! I don't even trust the information I'm getting loud and clear! That's probably why we need sponsors.

I've put these few personal experiences in to illustrate the gradual process of discovering "the will of God for us" and how we can benefit from anything that helps us get in touch with our emotions. The *Big Book* is very humble in that it says we have much to learn from the people of science. Some of these things we come across in recovery have been well known to psychoanalysts and psychotherapists for quite a long time.

If I look ahead to Step 11 where it says we pray for one thing only: “the knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out.” It’s actually there that the entire program is leading us, to a life that is tailored to our particular character. Anything that helps us along this path is welcome. We have been astray a lot of our lives and are now coming to this greatest of gifts: the sure knowledge of what we ought to be doing with our lives.

The word “*theus*” – means god in Greek. When we put “*en*” in front of it we have a word that means “the god within” or *en-thus-iasm*. When we find that about which we are enthusiastic, we know we are right on the beam, on the right track. Everything that is in us already knows exactly what we are meant to be doing except the poor old mind that we’ve been keeping in the dark. When we are on the track we will find incredible energy that is not the grudging sort that comes when we are driving ourselves by will power. This is what we mean by saying that we “love” what we are doing. And, as St. Paul said: “Love does not count the cost, love feels no pain, etc.”

Recovery might be viewed as the mind getting into the information loop and healing this terrible gap that’s been frustrating and crippling us.