

## Seamus, Step 9

Tonight we're on Step 9, which, oddly enough, comes just after Step 8. Again I want to do my regular disclaimer. These talks are just my reflections on walking this path. Please do not quote me to your sponsor. I don't want a *fatwa* or whatever other bad karma angry sponsors may issue when annoyed. Nobody wants to have an angry sponsor after them.

I would never dare to tell anyone how to do Step 9. That's your sponsor's job. Having said that, now I'm going to "suggest" how you might consider doing it. (Laughter). No – only kidding.

Step 8 sort of prepares us for it and, as I've said so many times, a step is nowhere in and of itself – it's not a destination. A step is part of a path leading from one place to another place and step 9 comes within that path after step 8. We have set out on that path in the first place because we had no choice—not because we wanted to be good or virtuous or anything like that. We were killing ourselves and destroying our lives and we couldn't find any other way to stay stopped. We'd heard from people who'd had the same sort of problem that they'd found a solution. So we said to ourselves, what

the heck, since we don't have any choice, we might as well try your way. Being scientific (or skeptical), we told ourselves, let's see if we get the result you think you got or, at worse, prove you wrong. Any *real* discovery must be able to be replicated. No need for judging it either way before we see for ourselves. Right!

So that's about as much enthusiasm as many of us had setting out on this path. We said, "I might as well do what they did." We set out by taking the decision in Step 3 to walk the path of steps. We may have tried a number of other things before we got around to the AA steps. Many of us know John B. who talks about how he tried acupuncture. He has pictures of himself with acupuncture needles inserted in various places and candles in little glass globes burning on his chest; all of it attempting to clear up his alcoholism. Some of us went around for weeks twisting things in our earlobes, some of us tried hypnosis, others tried spas and personal trainers. We were desperate so we tried all kinds of things. Many of us also went to church and prayed our asses off. Then we heard somewhere along the line that a lot of people just like us had found a solution in AA and reluctantly we made a decision to try even that.

We've talked about a decision, how it means that we eliminate other ways of doing things. And that's what we did at Step 3. We stood at a turning point and we made a decision. And that decision allowed us to hone in and to send all of our energy down one path (commitment) - the path of these steps.

When we set out on it we said a prayer of surrender to whatever it was that was greater than our poor frustrated mind: "I offer myself to thee, build with me and do with me what thou will. Relieve me of the bondage of self that I may better do thy will."

It took me a long time to get it: that the steps are all about relieving me of the bondage of self; of my own fear-based agendas – so that I might live an authentic life and discover what I really should be doing with my energy. It finally got through my thick head that nothing would become clear for me until I came out from behind my fearful mask and became rigorously honest with myself. At that point I became ready —sort of— to have this Higher Power or, as the Big Book also refers to it, this Great Reality bring about a psychic change or vital spiritual experience that the book said would transform my attitude towards life, towards god and towards my fellows.

So we've set out on a road we have no prior understanding of; a road by which we hope to finally escape the vortex of self-involvement, self-directedness and separateness that has led our lives into such a mess.

Having escaped this cycle of compulsive self-defeat, we then find that the path leads us to the life we've been designed to lead; the life we can lead with full enthusiasm in which we feel like channels of a power greater than our solitary selves. It is to this goal, then, that the path is leading us.

If we take an individual step out of its context in the path, we can lose sight of the big picture; we may have trouble understanding what we're trying to accomplish by our effort; and can become discouraged or even misled. I found myself at one point tearing off after the red herring of self-improvement; trying by gaining insight into removing defects that my ego had identified in step four. I was desperately trying to make myself over in my ego's image and likeness. To compound the stupidity, I was asking, even demanding, that God conspire in the process by following my fourth step list as a blueprint for the remodel. I had completely missed the goal so clearly stated in step three: relieve me of the *bondage of self* that I may

better do thy will. It was not, so I be a perfect character but that I become an instrument of the will of a power higher than my feeble mind.

It was only when I was directed by Father Joe to the seventh step prayer that I began to “get it”. In that step we ask humbly (not as the one writing the prescription) that our Higher Power remove from the barrel into which I’ve dumped both my “good” and my “bad,” anything that stands in the way of my usefulness God and my fellows.

Under the Step 8 chapter in the *12 By 12*, it says “*This is the beginning of the end of our isolation from our fellows and from God.*” This is the beginning of the end of isolation. And that isolation is what I talked about in the circle illustration – the false self that isolates and separates me from the oneness with everyone — in other words— from spirituality. The inner circle represents who I really am. I have, out of my fears about status, greed and security, created this false self which I’ve been using as my defense when I interact with my fellows.

*The Big Book* talks about our mask. It’s an interesting concept since the word for mask is *persona* in Latin. Person is a mask— something behind which I hide. Another point worth considering

about a mask is that the mask is what I project to the world and to other people. Consequently, people (and hence God) get in touch with the mask and not with me - as long as I am wearing it. Then I wonder why a *lack of power is our dilemma*. I have myself so protected by this shell that I can't be touched by any power— no matter how great.

I was looking up the word *persona* – already understanding that it's a mask – and discovered some interesting derivations of the Latin word. One explanation I found interesting was that in ancient Greece and Rome, the actors on the amphitheatre stage would wear these clay masks that had little megaphones of brass built into them so that their voice would carry all the way through the amphitheatre. It struck me that this mask or *persona* is how I project this false image that I am play-acting. And, the steps are all about removing it and taking the risk – in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> step - of being who I (only) am. We become entirely ready to trust living life powered by this Higher Power. *The Big Book*, in page 55, tells us that we must find the Great Reality – a term for the Higher Power few in the program speak about these days – and it tells us where that G.R. is to be found. It seems

we cannot find it until we are freed from Self and is not discoverable anywhere except: *down deep inside ourselves*.

As I have mentioned, it is the False Self that has prevented me from being affected by the Great Reality— the Higher Power, if you prefer. I've described my condition before the spiritual change as water trapped in a canister - my life surrounded by the ego I think of as my protection and individuality. Even though this canister is sitting in the middle of a great river, the water in the canister is turning stale and polluted and I am wondering why it is not being affected and purified by the river water flowing all around it —no matter how hard I pray. The worse things get, the more desperately I cling to the “protection” of the canister and wonder even more desperately why my prayers are not being answered. It was only when I finally listened to some people who had walked the path that I learned the key.

They told me what spiritually wise people have known for thousands of years, what Buddha described in the Four Noble Truths as misery caused by ego-driven craving, clinging, clutching; what Jesus described in many ways, “*Unless you become as little children you cannot enter the kingdom of God,*” and “*He who would lose his*

*life shall save it and he who would save his life shall lose it” ; or*  
again, St. Paul: *The wisdom of the world is foolishness in the eyes of God and the wisdom of God is foolishness in the eyes of the world.”*  
In other words, I cannot find peace and the right path for my life so long as I am “*in the bondage of self*”.

Many of us come into recovery wondering (still in our 30’s, 40’s, 50’s) what we should be when we grow up. We look at others who seem to have found something they can really put all their energy and enthusiasm into and wonder, why not me? What’s wrong with me? And, god forbid, I’m not for a moment suggesting that everyone will find an artistic or musical or literary talent in sobriety. By no means. In fact, one of the unfortunate misunderstandings common amongst us is that we’re going to find some eternally blissful thing to be doing every day — that work will not be work in the sweet bye-and-bye. Many of us have already tried to walk that path already, the blissed-out, zoned-out path of drugs and alcohol, only to discover that it was an attempted flight from reality; but the morning always came with a rude awakening. Sobriety is about dealing with reality on reality’s terms

We are more likely to find that, through facing reality and meeting our responsibilities, we will discover the work we are designed to do and to which we can give ourselves with enthusiasm. Many have found that, though they have a talent in the music or others arts, or sports, they need a day job to meet their obligations. As my old temporary sponsor in Virginia used to say: “Ain’t written nowhere, ‘Yer gonna make a livin’ offa you golf.” Then again, the world needs builders and carpenters, truck drivers, salesmen and farmers, grocers and realtors, plumbers and electricians, doctors and teachers.

Most of us have found that as we were walking a path, trying to be faithful to the spiritual values and dealing with reality, we started to feel led. The mind, which has so badly wanted to be our guide to the path, finds it is not getting to see the road map. It is along for the ride, so to speak, and its job is merely to recognize that we are being led by something else inside us; some power or force that has known all along what we should be doing. My mind was in the dark due to the flurry of my own plans and ideas and ambitions. To once again quote C.S. Lewis (my Northern Ireland compatriot), “As soon as we were born, most of us went into business for ourselves. It was only

when this business went bankrupt that we turned to our Maker and asked, ‘Was there some you had in mind for me to do?’”

So, Step 9 (bet you thought I’d never get to it?) is about removing some of the things obscuring that path; trying honestly to repair the damage we have done to our unity with our fellows and the Higher Power of our understanding. We set about repairing the rips we have caused in the fabric of Oneness. In Step 8 we looked ahead to making the amends in Step 9 and I, for one, found it a scary prospect indeed. Bad enough I had to tell another human being in Step 5 about the harm I’d done someone else, but that was nothing to the dread of meeting face to face the actual people I had harmed. Scary. Only our commitment to the journey keeps us on task. In Step 8 we asked for the willingness to do Step 9 and when we come to step 9 we realize how much willingness we are going to need.

(*The Big Book*, page 76 – reference given for the Protestants! Catholic and other may continue to ignore the text!) On page 76 it says, “*Now we go out to our fellows and repair the damage we have done in the past.*” Then it says something I think is very important, something I didn’t “get” for ages, and what I now believe gives meaning to the entire process. It says: “*Putting our house in order...*”

“Yeah,” you might say. “What’s the big deal about that? I hear that every time I got to a meeting!” But it’s not about putting our house in order so that we will have an orderly house; or even, that we will stop drinking and killing ourselves if our house is in order. Those would be just other self-centered goals, right?

No, what it tells us is that the reason we put our lives in order is not an end in itself. Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and others. I finally got it after a few years that the reason we put our house in order is not so I have a nice orderly house — very gratifying to my ego. It would be nice to be able to look about and say: “Nobody’s mad at me anymore, I haven’t been sexually inappropriate with anyone’s wife lately and I’ve paid all my bills.” In fact, when I got there I was often tempted to look down my nose at those whose lives were not as orderly as mine.

(Laughter). It took a sponsor’s nudge to see that I had become yet another self-righteous, self-satisfied prig — hardly the goal of a spiritual path. The book, when I read it again told me that the only reason for which we put our house in order is to fit ourselves to be of maximum usefulness to God and our fellows.

We had that same theme, if you recall, in Step 7: *“Remove from me every single defect... that stands in the way of my usefulness to God and my fellows.”* So there’s a consistent theme here right? It seems to be that the purpose of recovery is all about being useful - to God and our fellows. When I first got sober in Sacramento, I hadn’t discovered the Alano Club for some months. I announced my discovery to my sponsor, Father Joe, a man of such wisdom and tolerance he never argued with an alcoholic. (He’s the one who told me not to sign anything at my first AA meeting.)

“I’ve been down to the Alano Club every day,” I said, “and some of the guys there go to 3 or 4 meetings a day. They have great sobriety.” He looked at me and he said something that I’d not thought of before: “You don’t get sober to be sober. You get sober to be of some use to the world.” It shocked me out of the kind of self-satisfied, self-centered approach I’d been taking — which may have served for the first few weeks of sobriety but, like training wheels, become a limitation. I used to say things like, “I didn’t drink today so it’s been a successful day.” I was regarding sobriety as an end in itself. As I said, this may a helpful way of thinking for the early weeks of sobriety and detox, but if I’m still there after six months or more, I’m

sort of a waste of perfectly good sobriety. It changes the theme of the spiritual program from: “*Relieve of the bondage of self that I may better do thy will*” to something like: “*Relieve me of the bondage of self so I may be really proud of my accomplishment.*”

There’s an odd thing about this, too – yet another thing I didn’t get for a long time. [I’m not sure I’ve totally got it yet]. The book tells us that there’s not much we can do about our problem of self-centeredness by wishing and trying. If I could get rid of self-centeredness by wishing and trying, I wouldn’t have to waste all this time working steps and going to meeting and working with newcomers. I could just do it the way some of us have tried by repeating the Step 3 prayer endlessly. I used to every day make a big sincere Step 3 and wonder why nothing much changed and why everybody else kept talking about these other steps. Just didn’t get it; didn’t see any contradiction in that. “Yes, I am now self-improving as hard as I can — but, as the Country Western song goes, “My tractor’s getting no traction.” (Laughter). What do you expect? I was a therapist and it takes a long time for a therapist to gain insight into himself and I was a priest too. I didn’t have a prayer of learning from others! It

was only by the spiritual walk along the path of steps that freedom from this vortex of self-centeredness came about.

*The Big Book* says we went through society like a tornado. We ripped great tears in the fabric of human unity. This is not just some nice kind of quaint Hindu concept - this fabric of unity. Quantum physics even tells us that everything in the universe is one, right? It all started with the big bang of an atom, right? Everything spread out throughout space but all from one source. So we're all connected, whether we like it or not, to everything else. They call this, entanglement. I don't know or understand much of modern physics, but scientists tell us that everything affects everything else. They say: a butterfly flaps its wings in Indonesia and there's a tornado in Texas —connected. In other words, it's foolish for any of us to imagine we know or understand the relationships between things – all the connections — all the pulleys and buttons that make things happen in the universe —or perhaps even a multiverse. We're standing out at the very edge of what our minds are capable of understanding when dealing with spiritual change; we don't have a clue. That, I believe, is the humility of mind necessary for approaching spiritual realities. Bottom line: what any one of us does,

affects all of us. Our one-time conscience-easing denial that, “we hurt nobody but ourselves” no longer holds up.

People have been trying for thousands of years to tell us this but have been largely ignored in the face of self-interest. They had the political slogan in England back in the 1970’s: “I’m alright, Jack; F... you.” Though we’ve not had many come right out and say it here, yet there is a great deal of this thinking all around us. We’re the lucky ones, those of us in recovery, because we are not allowed to live in ignorance of the impact we have on others. We would hit disaster if we were to live such a self-seeking life. It is important that we keep this in mind to avoid the self-righteousness of pretending we are living this way by choice. We’ve got a sword hanging over our heads.

I considered alcoholism the biggest disaster in my life. Everything had been working great for me until that started to undermine my life-script. I’d had it all figured out. I had figured out the first promotion, namely how to become a bishop. The first time I got bored in Sacramento as a priest and realized I was not that into being a priest, I planned my escape. I had to impress the right people and I did that very well. In a very few years I’d been selected

for promotion. They sent me off to get a doctorate in canon law. And then the damndest thing happened: my alcoholism tripped me up. Otherwise, I would probably be a really bad bishop somewhere today, hating every minute of it, wondering if I could get secretly married — or at the very least have an affair— and not be found out. I now see that alcoholism saved my life in that it did not permit the charade to continue. My act fell apart and I was forced to emerge from behind the priestly mask.

We're talking about Step 9 as another part of healing the spiritual oneness we have damaged by our self-centered behavior. There's a lot of really good advice in both the *12 By 12* and *The Big Book*. I recommend them to you. And believe me, your sponsor will be very helpful too. No, I don't know your sponsor but if he or she's been sober and worked the steps, I'm sure he or she will have helpful suggestions. And, remember, don't go quoting me to your sponsor — I hate having sponsors mad at me. These are just my suggestions. Listen to your sponsors! Do what they tell you! [He's sucking up to sponsors big time tonight].

I love that *The Big Book* says that it's not a good idea to go to somebody and tell them that you've got religion and start to prattle on

about how you've got religion. There's an old saying that, patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels. Well, I think religion is more often the last refuge of scoundrels. If somebody's coming up to me and starts going on about their big conversion experience, I check my wallet. Most people have been stung at one time or other by these so-called converts to religion and are leery of them. On the other hand, a repayment plan that you follow faithfully is far more convincing than a sermon about your spiritual awakening. And they're very wise in recommending this in the book. They call it leading with your chin — not a really good idea. A good payment plan is more healing than a great sales pitch— though slower. It takes time to restore what we have destroyed, namely, trust. We cannot become trust-worthy instantaneously.

When we've cleaned our side of the street, we don't have to convince others of our sincerity or anything else. We just make good the damage we have done but without becoming a foolish martyr in the process.

Then there are two tricky issues it discusses: (1) legal matters and (2) how much to tell one's partner about indiscretions. The chapter has some very good advice on both these issues. For

sponsors I would say it has some implied advice, namely that one is a sponsor and not a lawyer, nor accountant, nor a psychotherapist.

Much of the stress a sponsor feels is thinking they are called upon to give advice on subjects in which they have no expertise. There was a rule common in Washington, D.C. and Northern California AA in the early years of my sobriety. The rule was that the sponsor is to help with the steps of the AA program and if he is doing anything else he's being a co-dependent. Today most would say that is too restrictive and I would agree, but there is a grain of wisdom still in the clarity with which it defines the role of the sponsor, namely, that of a guide along the path of steps they have themselves walked.

Often in the course of Step Nine we run into problems for which the book does not offer a ready means of handling. I had one such problem. I know that I mentioned earlier that my mother was that unusual person who never - ever - got angry. She would, however, get *extremely disappointed*. She would sometimes get so disappointed her hair would stand on end — livid with disappointment. But, mind you, never angry. After I had left the priesthood and, worst of all, when I got married, my mother was possessed by a big attack of disappointment. And she remained

pissed off at me for a long time. Disappointed, yes. Big time. I was very troubled by this and I asked Father Joe, "How do I make amends to my mother?" My motives were really still quite self-centered: I didn't want anyone to be mad at me, so I felt there had to be some way of manipulating everyone to like me and approve of me. He asked me to study what the word, "amends" meant and told me to come back and discuss the matter with him in a week or so.

I found out that there were amendments to the constitution. And in Sacramento the legislature amended bills and laws all the time. They corrected something that was not right. In fact, it means removing a blemish. Correcting something. I came back and told Joe, "Okay, I now know what an amend means." And he said, "So now we can talk about amending the situation between you and your mother. What were you thinking of doing? Divorcing Diane and becoming a priest again? Would that satisfy her?" "Well, probably not and I wouldn't do it anyway." So he asked, "What, then is an amendment to this situation?" He left me sitting with that for weeks and we'd talk about it some more. Finally, one day he asked, "Maybe you have corrected a situation, what do you think?" I didn't get it. "Maybe," he suggested, "the proper ordering of things all along

should have been: Seamus leads Seamus' life. Cassie leads Cassie's life. Maybe it's the amendment of the prior situation that she's angry about."

Certainly that is one example of how a wise sponsor may prevent one from going overboard with guilt from hurting someone's feelings if that person's expectations and demands are unreasonable. It is quite common for alcoholics of my type to be lacking in appropriate assertiveness — perhaps because we're so busy manipulating people into liking us we can't tell them the truth or ask for what we need. The result of this is that we give others more control over us than is reasonable or proper. When we finally get sober and begin to regain a sense of personal responsibility for our own lives, reclaiming our right to make our life decisions is often met with resistance and even anger. (Not that my mother was ever angry mind you — just disappointed, very disappointed!

Both *The Big Book* and the *12 By 12* write about attitudes we should have while making the amends of Step 9. *The Big Book* says: "...sensible, tactful, considerate, humble. Not servile or scraping. Not like a servant. You are the children of God and you stand on your feet." Sensible, tactful, considerate, and humble, good to

remember and, taken together with the admonition to avoid servility, it provides the picture of a person recovering from an illness and not repenting from a badness. However, it is a person who acknowledges that he has offended the unity that is the essence of spirituality and takes responsibility for mending it to the best of his ability.

The *12 By 12* adds to the picture somewhat when it says it takes a lot of “...*good judgment, a careful sense of timing, courage and prudence.*” Certainly for me, to achieve these attitudes and the balance recommended, it was necessary to work this step under the guidance of my sponsor. (The Protestants reading this may wish to look for the above material for themselves on page 83 of *The Big Book* and page 85 of the *12 By 12*. Catholics, Episcopalians and others just need to be reassured that I probably didn’t make it all up.)

Somewhat different from, but related to, the above is what the *12 By 12* calls “the spirit of Step 9”: *the willingness to take the full consequences for our past and responsibility for the wellbeing of others.*

It would be a mistake to give the impression that every past wrong or hurt can be repaired in Step 9. Many of the hurts we have caused, or have been party to, involved families and children. Some

of these are of such seriousness and are so complicated that they simple cannot be amended no matter how eager we are to try.

Prudence often dictates that we leave certain matters alone and live with the on-going intention of Step 8, namely, of doing anything within our power to helpful if and when the opportunity arises. It is not acceptable to resolve our own discomfort at the cost of innocent parties. Often in matters such as these and in legal and criminal matters a wise sponsor will direct us to appropriate advisors such as lawyers, therapists, clergy, and other professionals. Such a sponsor will most likely see these issues as reaching far beyond the role of an AA sponsorship.

I have a note here from several people about the word I used in reciting the seven deadly sins: pride, avarice, lust, gluttony, envy, anger and acedia. Acedia. I use that word often instead of sloth. It comes from the Greek word *kedos* which means to care (when you put “a” in front of anything, (as with *theist* is believing in a personal god, *a-theist* is not doing that) while a-*kedos* (Anglicized to acedia) means “not to care”. I feel that it is far more on the mark for many of us than just sheer sloth or laziness. It seems a far more deadly sin to walk around watching our fellows struggling for existence and not

reach out to assist them. There's something that strikes me as not very spiritual about that. And if we're striving to become one with our fellows and the god of our understanding, then wouldn't caring for my fellows be a virtue? And, consequently, not caring a deadly vice? Anyway, that was something somebody brought up and I've gone and made it a sermon out of it — typical!

But wait!! The really good stuff comes after Step 9. Remember we talked the other day about development. About the developmental line where we move and grow, from being enveloped and dependent, along the line becoming more and more competent emotionally as we move further along. The Big Book, after speaking about Step 9, uses the phrase, "If we are painstaking about this stage of our development..." So we are supposed to be developing; but what does this involve?

In developmental psychology the parallel is often made between our physical emergence at birth from the enveloping mother (followed by the development of physical competence such as walking, talking, using fork and spoon, etc.) and the process of emerging from a totally dependent emotional infancy. As we mature

we are supposed to be developing the emotional and characterological skills necessary for adulthood.

(The state of “en-velopment” I think of as opposite to the condition of “de-velopment” or, in other words, development involves coming out of the envelope on which we have been dependent.)

When we became alcoholics or addicts we regressed along the developmental line until we were once again in a state of dependency. And in the regression we reversed whatever progress we had made in acquiring adult character skills before addiction and dependency took us over. Recovery, then, is about moving away from dependency (both chemical and emotional) and beginning once again to grow in emotional and characterological maturity.

There are some elements of this adult character pretty much everybody agrees on and which we can use as litmus tests of our own progress. These emotional skills are: Impulse Control, Delay of Gratification, Frustration Tolerance, Focusing our Energy Toward our Goals, Dealing with Reality on Reality’s Terms (Life on Life’s Terms), Perseverance in the Face of Setbacks, and Capacity for Healthy Relationships.

All of us know that no matter how mature we may be, certain things get to us and we find ourselves regressing. On a bad day or if we're not feeling well physically, we can get cranky and our impulse control is not the best — constraint of tongue and pen may go out the window and we hit the SEND to launch that ill-advised email. There are times when that box of chocolates or the bag of potato chips seems a better solution than calling a troubled spouse to escape the vortex of self-involvement. It's important then that we don't hold ourselves to impossible standards. We all tend to kind of commute back and forth on this developmental line a bit from time to time and need to forgive ourselves for lapses.

We have all been selfish and self-centered not from malice but usually from fear and insecurity. We were scared often by life coming at us and retreated to the only thing that promised to help that feeling. When earlier we looked at the two concentric circles, I described the outer one as the false self or mask that I held out for others to see. The space, if you will, between this mask and the inner circle (the real me) is filled with fear — the mask is in fact a creation of this fear; the greater the fear, the more I cling to this imagined protection of the false self.

Before we finish up this section, I would like to talk to you for a moment on a condition that is lurking in the psyche of many recovering alcoholics and addicts. I'm referring to Shame.

There is some confusion as to what shame is — as distinct from its cousin Guilt. One way that the difference is often illustrated is that Guilt suggests I have done something wrong; Shame suggests that I am something wrong. There is some truth to this but I don't think it captures all of the dynamics involved in shaming. The description I like best is one that describes shame as the sudden interruption of a person's unified condition, in other words, an emotional ambush. I know that doesn't convey much at first glance, so let me give a pair of examples:

The very young child is playing on the sidewalk, running after a ball. The ball runs out into the street and the child, completely absorbed in chasing the ball, follows it into the street. A parent at that point might grab the child's arm, surprising him completely and yanking him to safety. At such a moment the parent might reprimand the child telling him to, "Watch yourself!" This is a totally legitimate use of the emotional ambush — used to administer a life saving shock. It is instilling in the child a useful self-consciousness.

In the second example, another very young child is playing in the yard and exploring the wondrous things she finds there by the hedges. This one morning she spots an amazing thing, an egg shell that is blue with pink spots. Totally absorbed in the mystery of this discovery she runs into the kitchen to share it with her mother. This poor lady has been busy all morning and when her daughter rushes into the kitchen calling, “Mommy, mommy, look what I found!” The mother grabs the girl by the arm and points to the dirt she has tracked in on the just washed floor. “Look at what you’ve done!” she scolds. The emotional ambush in this case is being used for the purpose of teaching good behavior. The child in this latter example may get the message that being preoccupied by some new and interesting discovery is dangerous; that it is far wiser to watch oneself constantly so as to not put a foot wrong and displease mother. Self-consciousness becomes a “wisdom” and unselfconsciousness is “dangerous”.

Back to the description. Shame is the emotional ambush of someone when they are in a unified or unselfconscious state, that is to say, when they are not watching themselves. A further example is probably all too familiar to most of us. A “friend” who cannot help

telling us the next day: “Boy, you should have seen yourself last night.” This is an all too common form of shaming.

“I was riding into the canyon, not a care in the world, never thinkin’ that them, goshdarn varmints, were layin’ fer me.”

In fact, I found that one of the effects I most enjoyed from alcohol early on was the freedom from self-consciousness. I could speak to strangers — even attempt ridiculous stuff like dancing. The serious consequence of having this shame instilled into us is that we are much more preoccupied with watching our P’s and Q’s than with being authentic. We have to come to distrust our unselfconscious enthusiasms, feeling that it leaves us too vulnerable to the shaming, critical eyes that are always watching. Better to be guarded at all times.

Recovery is about getting something back that we’ve lost. What we get back is our lives. When I first heard the Promises read at a meeting, I thought, “Did they just pull these things out of the air to dangle in from of us? Pie in the sky sort of stuff? It’s gonna be great in the sweet by and by?” I was pretty well jaundiced, after my previous life-experiences, with promises that had never been fulfilled. Oh yeah, more promises! Great! Sort of like in the dark ages and

middle ages: the peasants and serfs dying of starvation and cold and disease in their mud huts, while up in the castle, the bishops and the lords, interrupt their banquet momentarily to respond to the crisis. They dispatch some raggedy, ignorant friar to pacify the riff raff. "Tell them how great it's going to be in the next life. Tell them they're really lucky, being so near their ultimate reward!" That's sort of the cynicism with which I regarded the promises when I first heard them. "Oh yeah, there's going to be all these things sometime in the future if I sign up with you crowd. Meanwhile, my ass is falling off"

This was the great attitude with which I approached almost everything in the program. Then, to my great surprise, this thing was working in spite of me. They said that many of us tried to hold onto those old ideas until we let go absolutely. One of the old ideas that I held onto for a long time was that nothing was going to happen that I could not foresee. My sponsor used to tell me that I'd be surprised. Damned if I wasn't. I was the most surprised person in Sacramento when I took a one year chip.

I also never believed that I would come to like doing the things I ought to be doing. My view of God's help was that I'd still be drawn to what was wrong but that I would ask God to help me resist doing

what I wanted to do. I know now how ridiculous that is. But the flat fact is this, I never believed I would get a psychic change that would lead to my wanting things that were right. It sounded like magic — another pixi dust salesman— and I was determined not to believe in magic. I was serious allergic to pixie dust.

As I mentioned earlier, in seminary we had this prayer we said a dozen times a day in which we asked for “a taste for things that are right”, but I didn’t get it. Neither did I understand what Martin Luther meant when he said, “Love god, then do whatever you want.” I thought that meant, “I can sin all I like and I’m saved anyway.” I simply couldn’t accept that I could be so changed. I thought you people had drunk so much you’d fried your brains.

When I began to realize that some things were changing, I re-read pages 25 and 27 - the vital spiritual experience. It dawned on me that this – what I call “the active ingredient” of the program – had in fact changed ideas, attitudes, and emotions which were once the guiding force in my life and a completely new set of conceptions and motives had begun to dominate my thinking and behavior. I also read in Appendix II (page 567) where *The Big Book* reports: “*With few exceptions our members found they have tapped an unsuspected*

*inner resource which they presently come to identify with a power greater than themselves.”*

With this Vital Spiritual Experience which had happened to us (sort of behind our backs) while we were walking the path of steps, we began to see the world through spiritual eyes (A New Pair of Glass). The false self that I had regarded as my individuality but which was really my captivity, had begun to dissolve. And as this shell or mask dissolved, I found that the Higher Power — whatever it is — now seemed to have transformed so much of me.

With this gradual dissolving of the false self, no longer do we agonize that, “*A lack of power... is our dilemma...*” No longer are we driven by a thousand forms of fear and insecurity, for now, being one with our fellows and our god, there can be nothing to fear. We find we have become channels of, and instruments of, that Power.

To return to the analogy I used previously to describe our prior condition, the canister we were living in – our false self - has been dispensed with, the water within has now become united with the river’s living water. We are no longer threatened by anything that happens since we realize we are but temporary manifestation of this One Great Power, that which *The Big Book* (p.55) calls the Great

Reality. The realization that each of us is a fleeting manifestation of the Divine is, I believe, the reality; whereas our separateness is the illusion of our non-spiritual vision. It's like looking at the surface of a river and seeing here and there little whirlpools and eddies on the surface. We know that for all their appearance there's no whirlpool stuff or eddy stuff – there's just water. Similarly, I believe there is no Terry stuff or Seamus stuff or Diane stuff – there's just spirit or life. With spiritual glasses we see down through the flesh and the bone, down past the blood and molecules, the atoms and quarks, we see down beneath everything the one great Spiritual Reality, the Infinity.

And so, we come to the promises. They tell us (pages 83-84) that *...we will know a new freedom and a new happiness...we will know peace. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of financial insecurity will leave us. Our sense of uselessness will disappear.*

And then, because my mind has started getting messages from deep within, where the Great Reality dwells, it's no longer guessing as to what I should be doing with my life. I think of this as, and call it, intuition. When my head is no longer acting like an untethered balloon

guessing frantically at what to do with my life energy that is intuition. *We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that god is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.*

Here's something I brought along to read. I've mentioned how wise people have been trying to pass wisdom along to us for millennia. I mentioned the book of Genesis last week – the first book in The Hebrew Bible – and pointed out some wisdom about not judging ourselves. This is a quote from the New Testament. I'm not selling anyone on anybody's religion; it is passed along to you as a source of the wisdom of our people, *Homo sapiens*; for the wisdom that it contains and nothing else.

*“That is why I am telling you not to worry about your life, what you are to eat nor about your body how you are to clothe it. Surely life means more than the food and the body more than the clothing. Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns. Yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not worth more than they? Can any of you for all his worrying add one single cubit to his span of life?*

*And why worry about clothing? Think of the lilies growing in the fields. They have never had to work or spin, yet I assure you even King Solomon in all his regalia was not robed like one of these. If this is how God clothes the grasses in the fields which are here today and thrown tomorrow in the furnace, will he not much more look after you, you men of little faith? So do not worry, do not say, 'What are we to eat? What are we to drink? How are we to be clothed? It is the pagans who set their heart on all these things. Your heavenly father knows you need them all. Set your hearts on his kingdom first and in his righteousness that is within you and all these other things will be given to you as well. Do not worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.'*

Anybody know the source? Yes, right. You must be a Protestant! Right, I knew it! Yes, it's Matthew. There's another similar version in Luke, actually Matthew may have been looking over Luke's shoulder, copying — or was it the other way around. (As a teacher, I always am on the look-out for that.) Matthew, yes, it's the New Testament. It's a quote from this Jewish fellow, born on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December. No, not you Kenny. You've met our sound engineer,

Kenny, a Jew born on December 25<sup>th</sup>. True! He tells me he gets no respect either — Friday evenings make him nervous.

- END -