

Seamus, Step 12

My name is Seamus and I'm an alcoholic.

Tonight we're on the 12th step. Several people have noticed that we're having another session next Friday, prompting them to ask, "Are we working on the 13th step next week?" Declaring it Sadie Hawkins night, maybe?

So, Step 12 tonight. *The Big Book* deals almost exclusively with 12 step calls, helping others, carrying the message - that aspect of the step. Since this is only part of the matter contained in the step, I wanted to start with it as dealt with the *12 By 12* first, then we can return to what *The Big Book* talks about.

The *12 By 12* says, "*The joy of living is the theme of the 12th step.*" Had you ever noticed that or heard it discussed at a meeting under the rubric of Step 12? The joy of living... Just thought I'd ask.

The chapter goes on then to deal at some length with where we're coming from spiritually and emotionally. Echoing *The Big Book's* opinion that we come to the program as selfish and self-

centered alcoholics, it talks about escaping this gravitational pull towards self-centeredness. I think it interesting to notice that even our spirituality and “self-improvement” can be drawn into the vortex of self: “I am working on me,” “I am working on my defects so I won’t have any defects.” Sounds like a worthy goal, right? It may be, but it can be entirely self-related, i.e. so that I will be happier, that I will not have imperfections, that I will feel better about myself, so I won’t feel so guilty, etc. I’m not saying these are bad things but they are really in the area of “self-improvement.” And self improvement, as the name implies, is about improving “self” whereas the program of AA is about escaping *the bondage of self that I may better do Thy will.*

Even if we give an activity the title “spirituality,” it doesn’t mean it’s really spiritual in the freedom-from-self sense of that word. It may be just another form of self-involvement. “I am now perfecting me, ridding myself of defects of character.” “I am now going to work on becoming holy.” “I’m going to be so holy I’ll be the holiest person in my AA group.” We can easily take what sounds like spirituality and make it just another form of preoccupation with self. “Don’t disturb me for the next three hours. I am going in there

with my spirituality books.” (Laughter.) You may laugh but, believe me, this happens more often than we care to know.

Step 12, we’re told, is where the self-centered alcoholic turns outward. According to the *12 By 12*, “*Action is its key word. Here we turn outward toward our fellow alcoholics who are still in distress.*” We consciously make an effort to turn outward. The idea is real love of our fellows, passing along what we have been freely given in AA. *And, there is no price tag for that act of love.*

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps... The *12 By 12* explains what a spiritual awakening is; what is changed by it; things that tell us when it has happened, etc. Of course it would be arrogant - not to say, unbelievably stupid - to think that AA invented spiritual paths for leading an individual out of the bondage of self. The changes brought about by our particular path of 12 steps have long been recognized by anyone who even casually looked into such things. For thousands of years people of every spiritual tradition have recognized that there is no peace or contentment, no serenity, so long as our lives are dominated by the demands of self. Freedom from self and its cravings, clinging, and clutching are the goal of

every one of these paths. (e.g. :*Four Noble Truths and Eight-fold Path of Steps* – written by the Buddha 2,500 years ago). Or Jesus' words: "*He who shall save his life shall lose it; he who loses his life shall save it*" (2,000 years ago).

The 12 *and* 12 then lists the changes one can expect to see from this transformative process variously called 'Vital Spiritual Experience,' or 'Spiritual Awakening,' or 'Psychic Change'.

1. "*He is now able to do, feel and believe that which he could not do before by his unaided strength and resources alone.*"

2. "*He has been granted a gift which amounts to a new state of consciousness and being.*"

3. "*He has been set on a path which tells him he is really going somewhere, that life is not a dead end, not something to be endured or mastered.*"

4. "*In a very real sense he has been transformed, because he has laid hold of a source of strength which, in one way or another, he had hitherto denied himself.*"

5. *“He finds himself in possession of a degree of honesty, tolerance, unselfishness, peace of mind, and love of which he had thought himself quite incapable.”*

This new state of awareness, Chuck Chamberlain called “a new pair of glasses.” We look at our fellows and the world with different eyes.

This change in perspective on my fellows was explained to me in this way: Imagine being out in a boat in some lake or lagoon. We can look out across the water at a shallow angle and see only the beauty of the light refracted off the surface of the water - a surface sheen. Or, we can lean over and look down deep into the water and see the teeming life that lives there. In a similar way, the person looking at his fellows and seeing only the surface - the illusion - has a radically different view from that of the person looking at his fellows with spiritual eyes. With the eyes of the spirit one sees beneath the flesh and bone, beneath the molecules and atoms and quarks to the Great Reality that is manifesting itself in this person’s

physical form. We are in conscious contact then with the God of our understanding.

Remember that description in the *12 By 12*, (p. 95) of what our attitude toward people had once been. *Most of us must admit that we have loved but a few; that we have been quite indifferent to the many so long as none of them gave us any trouble; and as for the remainder – well, we have really disliked or hated them.*

What a pathetic picture of an alienated individual - and yet many of us identified with the description when we first read it. With the new pair of glasses we no longer view our fellows as rivals with whom we are competing nor from whom I need stuff or to whom we're trying to sell stuff. If I see them with the spiritual eyes, I find the god there in them. As Gandhi said, "*There is the one thing I know beyond any doubt and that is the oneness of God and therefore of humankind.*" The wise and spiritual people of every tradition have been trying to communicate this great truth to the rest of us for millennia, but each of us arrives at it only in our own time and in our own way through our own very personal pain and defeat.

“Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps...” I repeat this to emphasize, once again, the thrust of the program. We set out on the path because we have been killing ourselves systematically and compulsively. Others with the same problem have told us how by walking this path they have been freed of this suicidal impulse that plagues our existence. In the third step we make the decision to set out on the path walked by these others and we find that it is not the sort of “cure” for alcoholism we were expecting. It was not a self-improvement nor even a self-help, program. It was a path in which I will surrender whatever agendas I have for my life, put all my faculties at the disposal of a power greater than myself, and ask to be relieved of the bondage of self that I may better do the will of this higher power. Radical!

The steps are then a preparation for the gift of a Spiritual Awakening; they are to remove those obstacles preventing the full flowering of our authentic lives. The spiritual awakening is there waiting for us if we utilize the steps to remove that which is interfering with the emergence of this authentic life. I refer the reader to *The Big Book*, Appendix II, p. 567, where it tells us:

“With few exceptions our members find that they have tapped an unsuspected inner resource which they presently identify with their own conception of a Power greater than themselves.”

The famous and wise psychoanalyst, Karen Horney, talking about how one discovers what they should be doing with their time on earth, reminds us that no one has to tell an acorn how to become an oak tree. The knowledge and impulse is contained within the acorn. It merely needs to be nurtured and nourished and, if there are rocks impeding its growth, they need to be removed. Once we let go of our old ideas and “get it” that we don’t have to go out there somewhere in the stratosphere and “find” the Higher Power, we begin to see that it’s been there all along within us. *The Big Book*, (p.55) has tried to tell us where to look. *“We found the Great Reality deep down within us. In the last analysis it is only there He may be found. It was so with us.”*

People will sometimes walk up to you and tell you very excitedly that they’ve found God. You’d think that God had somehow been lost and that they’d found him. What? He was wandering about aimlessly? The old cartoon comes to mind, “I

looked behind the couch, I looked everywhere.” But God had not wandered off nor is the spiritual awakening something we have to go out somewhere and get. We don’t have to go out and get anything or find anything. We have to merely remove the rocks that are preventing what is already there from manifesting in our lives. It is this that is the purpose of the 12 step program.

If you have read the *12 By 12*, you will have noticed that after they tell us that the steps are to prepare for the spiritual awakening, they take us through all of the steps again - which makes that an awful long reading. But I think it is done to impress on us once again that there is a process at work here. It’s not about checking off boxes, Step 1, check; Step 2, check, Step 3, check; etc. A step is not a destination any more than the steps on a staircase are destinations. I have a bed upstairs but I have reached the third step and I’m going to hang out there for a while - a few weeks, months. It is a path of steps that leads us from one state of being to another state of being; from existence as a self-centered, self-defeating, fear driven,

addict/alcoholic to the life of a person free of fears, living a purposeful life of use to God and one's fellows.

In the above quote from the second appendix of *The Big Book* where it says, "...our members find they have tapped an **unsuspected inner resource...**", I find it sad that in this, the 21st century, with so much access to education and communication, something so important is still "unsuspected" by most of us. How could we have come so far down the road before being told where we should be looking for the Power that would give direction and enthusiasm to our lives? Personally, I find it unbelievable that after all the years of philosophy and theology I endured, nobody had ever thought to mention this minor detail - instead of having me look for something coming from somewhere out there. I have come to the charitable conclusion that those who ran the seminary did not know it themselves - otherwise they'd have told me. They may have earned doctorates of philosophy and divinity but never personally "tapped this resource."

I had to get drunk many times, half kill myself, run my life into the ditch and then some other drunk comes and tells me what wise

people have known for thousands of years. They told me, "Look son, it's all in here, inside you. And all you have to do..." Most of us here have tapped a keg or two in our day, so we know what happens when you tap a keg. We're talking about something so full of energy that it will shoot up of its own pressure - a far cry from checking boxes and asking something out there to come down and help me fight booze. It's about clearing the rocks so that the acorn can become an oak tree.

You would sometimes get the impression listening to some people that Bill W. and Dr. Bob discovered praying to get over alcoholism. I wonder how they picture it happening: *"One day in 1935 in Akron, Ohio, Bill had a brain storm and exclaimed suddenly, 'I'll bet nobody ever thought about praying to get over alcoholism! I'll bet you Doctor Bob, that I'm the first person in history that ever thought of this.'" I mean, you'd really be a candidate for Moron's Anonymous to believe something that silly. But, regrettably, it sometimes sounds like that - what people are telling new comers to AA. I knew people who prayed their ass off to get over alcoholism.*

I came from a town in Ireland that had two parishes. There was the town church and the country church. The country church was less busy than the other one and usually was staffed by a Parish Priest (a Pastor, in Ireland called the PP) and a curate (an assistant priest). In most places the curate is a young, active guy who does the heavy lifting and organizes the fundraising and the youth football. In our parish, however, the curate was usually an older man - older than the PP. By now you've guessed that our curates were usually alcoholics. And, of course, everybody in the parish knew why he was still a curate. "Father Frank likes the bottle," they'd say. So, as an altar boy I would go over some mornings and there would be no priest there. I would have to go down to the parochial house, ring the bell, and the housekeeper would say, "Go back up. Tell them there will be a priest up in a minute." And the PP would come up like he just rolled out of bed, all tousled-haired and grumpy.

I would go home after mass and tell my parents, "Father Frank wasn't there," and they'd look knowingly at each other and say, "I think Frank's off again." Frank would disappear then for six months or so in some drying out place. But, when Frank was in the parish,

he was the holiest person I've ever known. You would go over for 6:30 mass on a winter morning, and Frank would be kneeling in the church already, in the dark. And he'd be there when we left to go off to school. The Irish are weird anyway, but they had a kind of a cult of drunken priests like Frank because they prayed so much. "Ah, now, 'tis a good-man's fault, so it is. Poor man. He's sufferin' the torments of hell itself and prayin' till his knees are raw." The other guys were cocky and disciplined - cold men - who raised money, built buildings. "Ah, sure you'd never go to wan o' them when you were in trouble." Go to Father Frank, he'll understand.

For thousand of years they'd tried to cure alcoholism by praying but it didn't work. So there'd be no point betting your life on something that has not been working in the best of hands - like Father Frank. There's a radical difference between praying my rear-end off and practicing a spiritual program.

I've talked about Siddhartha (Buddha) - this rich young prince who had everything materially and socially any young man could want but realized that he was still dissatisfied with his life. He realized

that he needed a radical re-think of his life. He was a learned man and knew enough to know that the problem was “self”. He left his world behind and tried very stringent ascetic practices that had been practiced for thousands of years before his time for the removal of self. They did not work for him so he came up with his own path he called the Middle Way. By means of this he achieved freedom from the bondage of self and enlightenment. Upon release from the bondage of self some amazing transformation happened - no surprise to anyone who has walked our path: Egotism, Greed, and Hatred were removed.

Egotism, Greed, and Hatred.

Egotism - pride, and acardia (not caring);

Greed - avarice, gluttony, lust;

Hatred - envy, jealousy and anger.

The same seven deadly sins we learned in Sunday school no matter which Western religious tradition we were raised in. These too are wisdoms known for thousands of years in both the east and the west by those leading examined lives (to paraphrase Henry David Thoreau). These “deadly sins” have long been recognized as the

symptoms of the Self (false ego). Only when we are released from the Self by walking a spiritual path can our lives become one with the Greater Power.

In looking at Step 12 one of the big questions a person might ask is, what did they mean when they say: "Practice these principles?" What principles are they referring to? Practice these principles in all our affairs. This question has been asked by many over the years. Have you ever Googled the "Principles of AA?" You will get about ten lists of principles. Step One is humility. Maybe Step 2 is faith, Step 3 is surrender, and Step 4 is honesty, and so on. And, depending upon what guy made up the list you get various principles.

The Big Book was no help for me in trying to clarify this question so I thought maybe the *12 By 12* might have an answer. Guess what? They did. (On page 115, of the *12 By 12* - for my Protestant friends). But, first of all, maybe we should be clear on what we mean by "a principle." What is a principle? You know I'm going to do some Latin don't you. Skip this in brackets then if you aren't interested in it - there's no spiritual reason you should be.

[The Latin word is *principio*. Any of you Catholic boys or girls are old enough to remember the Latin mass? *Sicut erat in principio, (et nunc et semper et in saecula seculorum...)*; meaning: “as it was in the beginning, (is now and ever shall be...)” *Sicut erat in principio*. *Principio* means the beginning, the most important of a group, the foundation. We also get the word “prince” from *principio*, he is the first or most important.

In English we have two words, principle (a fundamental concept) and principal (as of a school). They have different meanings in English but both come from the same Latin word.]

So, from this little discourse on origins, it is clear that a “principle” is a fundamental concept. In the forward to the *12 By 12* it says, “*The 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are a set of principles.*” Obviously the author of the *12 By 12* considered the steps as principles. Whether this is exactly what was meant by the Step 12 admonition to...*practice these principles in all our affairs*, is the question?

Back to the page in the *12 by 12* I reference above (p.115). The text actually asks the question, “What about the, ‘Practice these

principles in all our affairs?’” It answers the question by challenging us: Can we extend to the world the love and trust and faith that we discover in this fellowship? Can you bring this spirit of love and tolerance to our sometimes difficult family life? Can we bring as much faith and confidence to others who are crippled by our disease, as our sponsors have to us? Can we carry this spirit to our life at work? Can we convey a joy of living into everything thing we do and into new challenges? *Love, Tolerance, Faith, Confidence, Joy of Living.*

It goes on to list some more principles. Can we come to terms with *seeming failure or success*? Can we accept whatever comes our way and adjust to it without despair or pride? Can we accept poverty, sickness, loneliness and bereavement with courage and serenity? Can we be content with humbler satisfactions when more glittering achievements are denied us? *Acceptance, Courage, Serenity, Humility, Resignation.*

Interesting the use of “...*seeming failure or success.*” Over the entrance way to Wimbledon, there is a quote from Rudyard Kipling, the English poet, “*If you can look triumph and disaster, these two*

imposters, in the eyes, then everything is yours and you will be a man, my son." Success and failure are illusions that the spiritual eye sees through as fleeting states that we cannot let go to our heads nor can we allow them to defeat us. Einstein is supposed to have said that reality is just an illusion, though an amazingly persistent one.

This is a very down to earth guide for a spiritual life in the real world. At times, inside and outside the program, when people talk of a life lived with faith, they give the impression that if you believe, your life is going to be a bed of roses. "Just have faith and everything will be hunky dory," they say. We all know this is catering to illusions; pandering to those who dislike reality and are looking for magic. If faith means anything, this passage tells us, it means that we will face whatever comes at us with courage, acceptance, faith and humility. Life is still there to be lived. Our faith does not exempt us from reality but gives us strength to face challenges with courage and determination. "Confidently" means with faith (*con-fides*). [There he goes again with the Latin]

Dr. Earl tells a story about how, when he first was sober, he started on a search for serenity. He searched in various religions and denominations, here and overseas. He decided he would do whatever it took. One day, after years of searching, he was meditating in a temple somewhere in Southeast Asia, when the thought struck him that the only thing standing between him and serenity was dissatisfaction with what was at that moment. He realized that dissatisfaction with his spiritual condition was eating at his spiritual condition and not advancing it. Similarly, he was forced to conclude that he was sober long enough, educated enough, healthy enough, and that dissatisfaction with any part of his life was taking away from his spiritual condition.

This, I believe, is a very big part of our spiritual awakening: the realization that lack of acceptance is the worm that is destroying the apple from the inside out. The only thing standing between me and perfect serenity is lack of acceptance. I don't have to be more educated, brighter, richer, thinner, more popular, any of these things.

That insight shared by Dr. Earl made a great impression on me because I had previously thought it was fine to be ambitious in

spiritual things. In fact, I reasoned, if you weren't dissatisfied spiritually, there was something wrong with you. I began to realize that this really is not where the program was taking us. It's not taking us to discontentment, it is taking us rather to acceptance. If any of you are old enough to remember the 60's, there was a great poster that said, "Accept what is, so you can move on." We cannot move on until we accept what is. Later in sobriety I came across the work of a German theologian I had studied while I was spiritually asleep. This man, Bonhoeffer, in his *Ethics*, writes: "The question is not, how shall I become good; nor is it even, how shall I do good; but it is rather, how shall I do the will of God?" It seems agreed by those more advanced than I in the spiritual path, that spiritual ambition is a hindrance rather than a help.

Another point that arises frequently and which can cause confusion is the meaning given by some to the expression, "Keep it simple." Listening carefully to what they say make it clear that they don't really mean, "Keep it simple," but rather, they mean, "Keep it simplistic." And those are concepts that can be diametrically opposite to each other. "Simplistic" means reducing something

complex in nature to an over-simplified and inadequate understanding or explanation. Being “simplistic” is often the enemy of growth and recovery and indicates an emotional need for certainty at the expense of understanding. “Simple” is a completely different thing. From our earliest years, we have been developing - or should have been developing - our emotional structure so as to become containers of greater and greater complexity. And what I mean by this is that little children go through an early developmental stage described as “good mother/bad mother.” In this stage everything is black or white; you’re either gratifying me, in which case you’re good mother and I want to be totally unified with you; or, you’re frustrating me, and you’re bad mother, and I want you dead. Disappear. Go away. So, good mother/bad mother - splitting, they call this sometimes.

We have all been growing, supposedly anyway, away from this into the next stage of development that is called “good enough mother.” In this stage we accept that she’s only human and that she can’t be perfect. So, as we grow we’re supposed to become more adequate containers of complexity. Human beings are far too

complex to be summed up in some simplistic understanding. All Irish are...; All Chinese are...; All Germans are... Such statements tell us more about the speaker's insecure need for false certitude than they do about the objects of their prejudice. Moreover, with such simplistic categories, how can I accept my own complexity?

Once again, when we arrive at this point of our growth, we find that the wise ones of our people have arrived there on their path too, hundreds and even thousands of years ago.

If you happened to have attended a Christian Sunday school you probably heard the story about the two Jews who went up to the temple in Jerusalem to pray. It's one of Jesus' parables in which he's trying by a story to illustrate a point of spiritual wisdom. The story goes thus: Two men go up to the temple to pray. One of them was a Pharisee and one was a Publican. The Pharisees were very strict observant Jews. They observed all the rules, every jot and tittle. They took things to what we would consider extremes. You couldn't eat an egg laid by a chicken on the Sabbath because that was work. They parsed every syllable of the Torah.

The Pharisees were very, very observant of their religious duties - essentially good, devout people. Maybe a bit self-righteous, but... then, who's perfect?

The other man was a Publican: a person who collected taxes for the Roman enemy who occupied their country. He was the lowest scum of the earth in that society. He also did it on commission - a tax collector on commission, a person totally despised by the people of that time.

This is a great story because it kind of recaptures a part of the history and the cultures of the time. And Jesus uses these two characters, at the very extremes of Jewish society. The Pharisee goes right up to the front of the temple and he says to The Lord, "Lord, I never break any of these laws. And I always observe every one of these." He goes on a bit telling The Lord how he's been trying to be perfect. Meanwhile, at the doors, hardly even daring to enter the temple, is the Publican who throws himself down and pleads, "Lord, be merciful of me for I am a very sinful man."

The interpretation usually given - the Sunday school interpretation - is that God was more pleased with the second man

rather than the first because of the latter's humility. The text supports this meaning too by giving a little interpretation. However, almost all biblical stories, whether in the Hebrew bible or the New Testament, have deeper meanings than the purely literal. (In fact, many of these little explanations have been added later by some monk copying the manuscript who felt he was being helpful).

Looking at the story a bit more deeply we might ask about this parable or allegory, what is symbolized by the temple? And who abides in this temple? From the most ancient times, a temple or a house represents the person. "Do not know your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?" Jesus asks. So, if I am the temple, I have in me the Pharisee and the Publican. See, I am a complex personality made up of both sides: light and shadow; the virtuous man and the sinner; the one who wants so much to be good and the one who is drawn toward sinfulness.

Now, in case you think I made all that up, you have to read St. Augustine who says that in us all is the sinner and the saint. And then we roll ahead to Martin Luther and one of the propositions that Luther nailed on the door of the Catholic Church. His proposition

was entitled: *Simul justus et peccator*. Meaning: At one and the same time (*simul*), I am the just man (*justus*) and a sinner (*peccator*). And furthermore, he elaborates: "If I forget that I am the sinner, I cannot be the just man."

I just want you to reflect on how this applies to our recovery from alcoholism. *So long as I know I am an alcoholic, I can be sober.* Right? This is the complexity that wise people have known for thousands of years. We are not some sort of either/or robots. We have all this complexity. Back a few hundred years before Martin Luther, there was a theologian named Duns Scotus - John the Scot. The Irish and Scots both claim him - but that's a different story. What he said that has bearing on the subject of complexity was this: "Whatever I see noble or ignoble in any of my fellows I must know is in me."

So when you see somebody picking up the newspaper and saying, "What kind of people does those kinds of things?" you can answer something like, "Ducks do what ducks do." It is in us to be

the sinner and the saint. So, we are that kind of person - no matter what another person has done either noble or ignoble.

In the Step 7 prayer, if you recall, we said, "I am now willing that you will have all of me, good and bad." I must remember who drew up those lists of assets and defects and put those names "good" and "bad," "assets" and "liabilities," on aspects of myself.

The book of Genesis tells how as God made everything, he looked at it and saw that it was good, right? Half a page later in the book of Genesis, you have Adam and Eve, two idiots who've decided they know better and are categorizing some things as "good" and some as "bad" - this was supposed to make them like unto God, the serpent had promised. Brilliant! So, in Step 7 we're encouraged to get out of the business of playing God - reversing the process. We say in effect, "Don't mind my lists. If there's anything - regardless of whether I've put it on a list of assets, or defects, or don't even know about it - anything, that stands in the way of my usefulness to you or my fellows, please remove it. We've come to our senses - finally.

The Big Book in talking about this step focuses mainly on what we call 12 step calls where we carry the message of hope to the

suffering alcoholic. On page 92, it talks about what we need to do. We need to tell them about the mental state that *precedes* the first drink of a relapse for, as it says on p. 35: “...*this is obviously the crux of the problem.*”

The book refers back to this and continues to emphasize the insanity that comes while the alcoholic is still sober: “*Give him an account of the struggles you made to stop. Show him the mental twist that leads to the first drink of a spree. We suggest you do this as we have done it in the chapter on alcoholism.*” They’re very emphatic about this. And then in the next paragraph it says: “*If you are satisfied that he is a real alcoholic, begin to dwell on the hopeless feature of the malady. Show him, from your own experience, how the queer mental condition surrounding that first drink prevents normal functioning of the will power.*”

I don’t know how many 12 step calls people go on these days, but back when I first got sober it was quite a common thing. Your sponsor picked you up, it might be one o’clock in the morning. He usually had a Mickey (half-pint) of whiskey or vodka with him because there weren’t any detox. centers. The safest way to transport

a sick alcoholic to the hospital so he wouldn't go into D.T.'s was to give him what they called a "hummer," a stiff drink.

In Sacramento when I first got sober, Father Joe would call me up himself or sic some of his older sponsees on me to go on 12th step calls. We would head off to some part of town to find a guy sitting on the side of his bed feeling hopeless. On the way, I'd often be the one sent into the liquor store to get the half-pint of booze. They figured that now I wasn't using it, I could afford to buy it for someone who really needed it. There were nights I really wanted it myself until we'd get through telling our stories to the sick guy. It may not have helped him, but it sure as hell kept me sober that day.

They were not much for analyzing the deeper emotional causes of relapse. If you wanted to not take a drink, you found someone who was suffering and carried the message that there was hope to him or her. It was what had worked so well for Bill and Doctor Bob as described so vividly in those chapters in *The Big Book*. The best way known for us to stay sober is to quit being the patient and start being the doctor as soon as possible.

And they didn't hesitate about sending you out on 12 step calls just because you were new in the program. In fact, they would mock the idea that you only gave it away when your own cup "runneth over," as they sarcastically put it. They implied that if you waited too long to do 12th step calls your cup might just fill up with booze.

When I was in graduate school in Washington, D.C., I had this temporary sponsor who'd send two of us brand new in the program out on 12 step calls. There was this one guy, we bird-dogged him day and night practically. We were determined he'd get sober whether he liked it or not. We went in his house, searched the entire house for pills, then we sat with him and delivered him sober to work in the morning. We picked him up for lunch and found he was drunk already. This other guy and I were so frustrated. "We need to talk to you," we said to the sponsor.

So he talked to us that night and we're fuming mad at the ingratitude of this guy who just wouldn't get sober. And the sponsor said to us, "You have to remember this is the 12th step of your program. You don't get to say whose first step something is. Stay focused on that and quit trying to convert people. It's not about you.

It's not about success or failure." He then looked at us and added, "You two clowns are both sober, right? So your program is working."

That was a great lesson for me. As I was to learn later, it was my raging co-dependence that had decided this guy must get sober because I cannot be allowed to fail. I don't know about anyone else, but I now know that I have been co-dependent all my life. Even as a kid, I had antennae that had antennae. I could detect moods through walls. First thing I did every morning was take a reading of the emotional mood of the house. In fact, I used alcohol to treat this, to relieve me of the stress of being so attuned to other people's moods. I was so attuned to what others wanted I had no idea what I wanted. Thank God for Alanon. If it hadn't been for that program I'd have gone nuts sober.

I would like to mention another very critical element in our recovery that often gets overlooked, that is gratitude. I found I was quite hypocritical about gratitude. When the subject was under discussion, I would have a nice little speech about how grateful I was and how important it was, but that was often the only time I thought

much about gratitude. One day at a meeting in Sacramento I had my little speech all ready to go and everybody else was making their little speeches about how grateful they were, when the guy sitting next to me set the cat among the pigeons by saying he really hadn't thought about gratitude much since the last time it was discussed at a meeting. Wow! He might have lobbed a grenade into the room for the commotion it caused. People scrapped their little talks and started getting honest about how seldom they thought about it. I did a quick rewrite on my little speech and told the truth - amazing how honesty by one person can change the direction of a whole meeting.

I went to a meeting for some years in Glen Ellen in Sonoma County and learned something I still consider important about gratitude one night. This man from San Francisco - a regular at the meeting - talked about how his week had been. "It's so easy to come into a meeting on a Friday night when I've had a bad afternoon and you say to me, 'Ed, what kind of week did you have?' And I say, 'I've had a shitty week.'"

He went on to explain, "The reason I say it was a shitty week is because something on Friday afternoon didn't go my way." Then he

used an analogy that made me really understand what he was getting at. "I'm like the ungrateful child whose mother has fixed the family a wonderful dinner, a wonderful main course, and tells them there's pie after. Now this boy sits down at the table and belts down this main course, never taking his eye off the pie. The mother is watching and she says, 'How was the dinner, honey?' To which her son replies: 'There was a carrot in it.' You see that boy? That's, how I live. I only taste the things I don't like. I don't taste the other good stuff in my life and then I color my entire week with a half-hour of inconvenience that has somehow frustrated me." And he concluded, "The only antidote for this is gratitude. Gratitude is the taste buds of life."

And, somehow, I heard that around the early 70's and it has stuck with me still because I truly, truly do believe that without gratitude I do not taste all the good minutes and hours. And, like the boy, if I do not taste the good stuff on my plate, I will only be aware of the one thing on the plate I did not like. Gratitude is really about far more than hurting someone's feelings if I do not thank them. Sometimes we may give the impression that God will be pissed off or

disappointed because we didn't thank him. I don't think God is that petty or that it is even about God. I think that what it is, is that, I, myself, will suffer the consequences of not tasting the good moments and gifts and have no context in which to see difficulties and challenges for what they are - often transitory set-backs or frustrations.

Back in the 50's and 60's there was a very famous Jesuit called Teilhard de Chardin, who wrote a well regarded book called *The Phenomenon of Man*. He was a world-class philosopher, paleontologist, and biologist - an all round brilliant man. Very well worth reading. But why I bring him up now is to read you a passage from his other writings in which he is encouraging those engaged in a spiritual search - walking a spiritual path such as we are doing.

"Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the journey to something unknown, something new.

Yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability,

That it may take an extended time to arrive.

And so I think it is with you.

Your ideas will mature gradually.

Let them grow. Let them shape themselves without undue haste.

Do not try to force them on as though you could be today what perseverance will make you tomorrow.

Only God can say what this new spirit gradually forming in you will turn out to be.

Give God the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you,

And accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete."

It's as profound a description of the difficulties and joyous expectations of this journey as I've ever come across. It takes some time and it takes patience. It asks us to endure that risky feeling of going out beyond our comfort zone and tolerating the anxiety of the

not knowing, long enough so you can come to know in a different way. I wish you that anxiety.

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