

February 2013

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Michigan City

Daily Reprieve



“Step Two is the rallying point for all of us.”

We have admitted that that we were powerless over alcohol and can never drink, so now what do we do to recover from our fatal malady? First let's look at the big book.

“If a mere code of morals or better philosophy of life were sufficient to overcome alcoholism, many of us would have recovered long ago. But we found that such codes and philosophies did not save us, no matter how much we tried. We could wish to be moral, we could wish to be philosophically comforted, in fact, we could will these things with all our might, but the needed power wasn't there. Our human resources, as marshaled by the will, were not sufficient; they failed utterly.

Lack of power, that was our dilemma. We had to find a power by which we could live, and it had to be a Power greater than ourselves. Obviously. But where and how were we to find this power?

Well, that's exactly what this book is about. Its main object is to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself which will solve your problem.”

And from the Sarpashana Sourcebook;

If we admitted we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives had become unmanageable—that's really the foundation on which the whole thing is built. And that step is easy to understand and to validate in our own experience. We have our evidence and our reaction to it. There's not much to be said about it. It's food, sex, the spouse, and all kinds of other things that we're powerless over. It doesn't have to be alcohol. The first step is the only one that mentions alcohol. And from that, you can tell that we're not just dealing with booze. Because in the realm of transformation, the content is never at issue.

The second part of the step usually presents the problem. When people look at their experience, they see that they have managed. The management system is in place and it works. It's difficult to say, “My life's unmanageable.” The way I see it is: There's a distinction between what we do achieve and our goals. Most people

want to be happy and secure. I know it's simplistic, but—let's see if our management system produces those results. I contend that it doesn't. But it does produce something.

Why do we have this management system? What's the reason for mind? To perpetuate the person and that which is important to that person—like “my position.” The mind does that real well. It does it so well that it does it to the exclusion of all else. If I consider my car to be important to the way in which I perceive my life, and I left it parked on a hill—as I walk away, it starts to roll—my mind will throw my body in front of the car! Somewhere along the line, I thought I was my mind. Then it's survival of mind and what mind thinks is important. Most people fail to notice that their mind is talking to someone.

Mind is really a friend. (Now what is this guy saying?) If you didn't have a mind, you wouldn't be able to find the door. It certainly has utility. You put your hand on a hot stove, and you don't have to do that any more. Because you have a mind. If you climb a tall tree, and you fall and break your leg, you'll evolve some system of management for “tall trees.” Like, “Stay out of tall trees,” or “Be careful in tall trees.” We evolve some system of management in life if only from the standpoint of survival.

What does survival have to do with happiness and security? Seems like it has something to do with security—but not really. And it has very little to do with happiness.

So, the management system ends up looking like this: “In order to survive, I must be right about that. In order to survive with other people, I need to dominate them to avoid their domination. I need to validate my existence, and in order to do that, I must invalidate them.” I mean, did you ever meet anybody who wasn't always right? The only time we're wrong is when, after all the evidence is in and it proves us to be wrong, then we're willing to concede to the rightness of being wrong. So we still get to be right. We're into being right at the exclusion of all else.

In order to achieve the goal of being right, the management system sells off life itself. It trades it off. You know how right you feel when you blast someone who just flipped you the bird in traffic? Boy, are we right! It's a good

February Birthdays

Phil T	2/1/2013	
Gloria A	2/8/1984	29 years
Becca D	2/9/2009	4 years
Jill M	2/6/2010	3 years

To publish announcements of AA Birthdays send name and number of years to: District 21, P.O. Box 58, Michigan City IN 46360 or email info@michigancityaa.org

Ghetto Joe

1933-2013

Jose A., a long-time Calumet Region member of A.A., died January 4th at his daughter's home in Harlingen, TX. At the time of his death, Joe had 37 years of continuous sobriety.

He is survived by a son, Reuben, East Chicago, and daughter, Yolanda, Harlingen, and extended family in Texas. He was preceded in death by his wife Connie.

Joe, by his own description, was a "low-bottom drunk." His experience, plus the fact that he was bilingual, allowed him to help many other drunks, especially those who were down and out and felt rejected by society.

A man of deep faith in God, Joe attended Mass virtually every day of his life after getting sober.

He got his nickname while talking to a group of other recovering alcoholics. One of those men introduced himself to the others by saying, "My name is Joe and I'm an alcoholic." Joe A. responded that he too was an alcoholic and said "I'm Joe from the ghetto." Though he could have said he was from the barrio, the name stuck and his fellow A.A. members came to know him as ghetto Joe.

Joe's home group was F Troop, East Chicago, but he attended many other meetings in the area. Those included the Burnham Fellowship Club, Burnham, IL, the Twelve Step House, Gary, and the Harbor Group at St. Catherine Hospital, East Chicago.

case to point out. You go looking for happiness and security in that situation—there ain't none.

In a long-winded kind of way what I'm saying is: The management system excludes the goals of life—happiness and security. It manages to its own ends and excludes the goals. That's unmanageability. That also is why it looks like we can manage. But within that system, we can't manage to our goals and dreams in life. Yes, we have a management system. No, it will never achieve the desired result.

Step Two says, "Come to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

There are two influences there: believing in a power, and sanity. Or insanity. However you look at that inference.

One thing about the management system that needs to be acknowledged is that it's not born out of reality. It's born out of thought. We thought it up. We made it up out of thin air. So, pretty much, when we operate out of our management system, we're operating right out of our mind.

In the second step, we need to look at what insanity is—operating in a reality other than the one that's real. They haul some people off for picking bugs off the wall that aren't there. We get a lot of agreement about what insanity is there. But we all operate out of our thoughts, judgements, and evaluations about life, and very little in the realm of what's so. The distinction needs to be drawn between reality and the rest of this stuff. Just for simplicity's sake, reality takes place at the level of tables and chairs, automobiles, cardboard boxes, and the like. I know that a physicist could prove that they're not "real" either—that they're just a whirl of protons and electrons, etc.—but we'll keep it simple.

We're talking at the level of utility. If you step in dogshit, the fact that it's just protons and electrons really pales into insignificance in the light of the fact that it stinks and you can't get it off your shoe.

You have thoughts, judgements, and evaluations about what's on your shoe, too. The process we're talking about, beginning in the second step, is making the distinction between what's on your shoe and your thoughts about it. What's crazy would be to think, "That's not dogshit, it's peanut butter." You take that into the world and argue that it's peanut butter, and people will say, "You're crazy. There's dogshit on your shoe." The process is drawing the distinction between what we think, and what's real. Because when we begin to do that, we begin to move toward sanity. When we begin to work these steps, that's precisely what we begin to do.

The other problem words there are: "came to believe." There's so much baggage attached to the word believe. We have so much evidence that we've been conned—so many times—it's hard for us to believe anything. It sounds, also,

like we're being asked to believe in something that we have no experience of. We have some experience of something greater than I. If the word is not a problem for you, set it aside. It's a moot point. But if you do, substitute the word acknowledge. It retains the spirit and removes the obstacle. "Came to acknowledge that my life is getting better in spite of what I think." I don't mean "getting better" from a standpoint of future projection. I mean getting better by looking at life in this moment. Experience life in this moment. Can't you see that this one is better than the last one? But only if we're willing to give up the storyline in an effort to be honest. If we look at this moment honestly—I've never looked at this moment and found that I had a better one.

If you really look, it gets so brilliant—it's stimulating. I mean it. Look at this moment.

Yeah. The story about how rotten life is? Set it aside. It ain't too bad. If you look at life on life's terms (and if you're dealing with alcoholism, you are), life's getting better.

I mean, my life used to be really painful. I didn't even know it. If I had been able to acknowledge that, I might have been able to move toward something else. But I was just in pain. And I stood there telling stories. By the time I got into the second step, there had been a radical change—in spite of my best efforts to screw up my life.

If you're not able to acknowledge that it's getting better despite your best efforts, then hang out until the evidence comes in. No step says, "I am willing to work this program."

And from 9 Essays, Buddhism & The 12 Step Model Of Recovery;

This Step can seem a formidable barrier to anyone who is unable or unwilling to accept any concept of God or spirit or anything smacking of the supernatural. Getting caught in questions and demands for certainty can stall us for a long time, perhaps forever. This difficulty can be seen as lying at least partially in the realm of definition: "What is a higher power? What is sanity? What, for that matter, does it mean to believe?"

The problems multiply as the thinking grows more circuitous: "Is the higher power God?"

Whose God? What is God like? If I have my own conception of God, as the Big Book suggests, isn't that merely my imagination—and how can I be 'saved' by something I make up? And what about this sanity? How can I be restored to a state I don't think I ever experienced before? And whose version of sanity? AA's? And if I accept AA's version of sanity, does this mean I'll be brainwashed into an AA zombie?

Actually, I don't think I should even *consider* believing such a proposition until it is intellectually coherent and

understandable, until I can give it my complete rational assent."

None of these questions is stupid or unimportant and they will bear coming back to. But when we first hear this Step and consider its possibilities and ramifications for our lives, they need to be set aside. If we are desperate enough even to consider the Steps as a means of saving our lives, we must be willing to grasp them whole. If we wait until we have worked out the philosophical questions to our satisfaction (which is, of course, rather difficult to do drunk) we may well die before coming to any answers.

In the early scriptures the Buddha offers a metaphor: *Suppose ... a man were wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and his friends and companions brought a surgeon to treat him. The man would say: "I will not let the surgeon pull out the arrow until I know the name and clan of the man who wounded me; whether the bow that wounded me was a long bow or a cross bow; whether the arrow that wounded me was hoftipped or curved or barbed." All this would still not be known to that man and meanwhile he would die.*

The Buddha is talking about accepting the teaching on suffering and its ending; but the metaphor is apt for the Steps as well.

Perhaps a way out of the philosophical labyrinth is to work with Step Two's function, rather than try to define its terms. To do this we need only attempt the tentative, experimental belief that healing is possible and we neither can nor have to do it alone. If we approach this step as an experiment we may save ourselves both time and grief. And we can always have our misery back if we wish. We might observe how well this proposition works in our lives when we determine to act as if it could be so, with a willing suspension of disbelief. This is certainly in line with the Buddha's suggestion to examine his teaching for ourselves and only accept it if it works:

Do not be satisfied with hearsay or with tradition or with legendary lore or with conjecture or with logical inference or with weighing evidence or with liking for a view after pondering over it or with someone else's ability or with the thought "The monk is our teacher." When you know in yourselves: "These things are wholesome, blameless, commended by the wise, and being adopted and put into effect they lead to welfare and happiness," then you should practice them and abide in them ..."

Another barrier to acceptance of Step Two is the idea that while it may work for other people, it certainly can't work for me. This proposition can be held either positively or negatively. Positively, we can tell ourselves "I am too different or special or too smart or sophisticated or self-sufficient or independent for AA. And anyway, I'm not a joiner." Or we can tell ourselves "I'm too bad or far gone or undeserving or stupid or unworthy for AA. And anyway, I'm not a joiner."

As Bill W writes in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*:

We have not once sought to be one in a family, to be a friend among friends, to be a worker among workers, to be a useful member of society. Always we have tried to struggle to the top of the heap, or to hide underneath it.

Why do we do this? Why do we so sabotage ourselves by accepting these delusions? The origin may be impossible to know (and is at least beyond the scope of this essay); but for most of us the mental attitudes and behaviors have been put into place, perhaps unconsciously, long ago—usually to defend ourselves from real or imagined dangers. The idea that we are either too good or too bad to mix on an equal basis with others has the function of separating us from the company of those we have come to see as threats. It is very useful to employ the experimental mode here, noticing how these beliefs function in our lives without judging them. It is this mode which can allow us both to see more clearly the engine of our behavior and to keep the distance necessary not to become overwhelmed and drawn back into the old belief system. (These are beliefs and it is useful to acknowledge that in Step Two we are trying to exchange one belief system for another.)

"When, therefore, we speak to you of God, we mean YOUR OWN conception of God. This applies, too, to other spiritual expressions which you find in this book. Do not let any prejudice you may have against spiritual terms deter (or prevent) you from honestly asking yourself what they mean to you. At the start, this was all we needed to commence spiritual growth, to effect our first conscious relation with God as we understood Him. Afterward, we found ourselves accepting many things which then seemed entirely out of reach. That was growth, but if we wished to grow we had to begin somewhere. So, we used OUR OWN conception, however limited it was." Big Book page 47

Verse 71 of the tao te ching;

Knowing what cannot be known-

What a lofty aim!

Not knowing what needs to be known-

What a terrible result!

Only when your sickness becomes sick

Will your sickness disappear

The Sage's illness has become ill

His renunciation has been renounced

Now he is free

And every place in this world

Is the perfect place to be

January 2012 GSR Indiana District 21

Area 22 Minutes

Facilitator George P.

Note taker Dan R.

Attendees Helen G., Laurie O., Dan R., George P., James F., Matt D.

Meeting Opened at 7:00 pm with a moment of silence followed by the Serenity Prayer.

Minutes from December 13, 2012 were read. The minutes were approved.

Laurie gave the financial report for December 2012. Report was approved.

James suggested we verify meetings with central service

Dan is still trying to get phone bill sent directly to District 21. Dan will pay current phone bill.

January newsletter is printed and up on the website.

Helen will place the ad in the Michigan City News Dispatch, 2 days/wk for 6 weeks, and has received \$90.00 to give to the paper.

George had issues trying to get Big Books into the prison.

George moved we transfer \$250.00 to prudent reserve and forward \$400.00 to Area 22. Motion was approved.

George is going to try to get bill from printer for the newsletter.

Monday night meeting at St. Paul's should be removed from list of meetings.

We are still working on getting schedules printed.

Next meeting is February 14, 2012 at the MC Christian Church.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:45pm with the Lord's Prayer.

The District has the following AA Conference Approved Books available for the groups to purchase at reduced rates.

The Big Book (hard cover) \$8.00

The Big Book (soft cover) \$7.00

The Twelve and Twelve (hard cover) \$7.00

The Twelve and Twelve (soft cover) \$7.00

Living Sober \$4.00, As Bill Sees It \$8.00

Daily Reflections \$8.00