

You Are Not Alone



aiséirí
recovery from addiction



Thought For The Day



The twelve step program is spiritual,
based on action coming from love.....

- Martha Cleveland

To be spiritual means to be an active person.

It means spending time with others.

It means sharing love.

It means looking for ways to be more loving to others.

It means looking for ways to make the world a better place.

Step three helps us to look at the world better.

We turn our lives over to the care of our higher power.

So let's allow care to direct our lives.

Let's always be asking ourselves "is what I'm doing something
that shows I care?"

Prayer for the Day

Higher power, let me be active in a loving, caring way.

Let the love in my heart be my guide.

Action for the Day

Today, I'll do something good for someone and keep it a secret.

Why Meditate?



Hundreds of volumes have been written about the spiritual benefits of meditation. Almost every spiritual tradition since the beginning of recorded history has recognized the spiritual benefits of meditation. I believe, however, that meditation plays a specifically valuable role in the lives of people in recovery.

First, it is important to recognize that a relapse always occurs in the mind long before the actual using begins. The entire thinking process undergoes a transition that ultimately leads to the decision to use. Meditation basically amounts to training the mind. We really don't know our mind! When you sit down to meditate, it immediately becomes clear that the mind operates quite independently from your volitional, conscious self. Your thoughts race and you find it almost impossible to quiet your mind. Over time, by watching the mind during meditation, we can come to know our mind and watch it. We can watch the direction it's going, and we can differentiate between normal mental activity and "stinking thinking" which ultimately will lead to relapse. It's all a matter of training the mind to lead one deeper into recovery.

Second, there is overwhelming medical evidence that shows significant cellular damage occurs in the brain as a result of getting drunk or high. This is one of the main reasons relapse generally occurs during the first 12 months of recovery. We also know that these cells regenerate through a process called neuroplasticity; meditation is the one activity that seems to stimulate and maintain this regeneration process. Measurements of brain regeneration show that meditation speeds the process. It is obvious that the faster the brain of an addict/alcoholic can regenerate, the better the outlook for recovery.

These, then, are two primary reasons that meditation is an important practice to undertake for people beginning recovery. It should become a lifelong, daily practice, like brushing your teeth. Spending just 20 minutes per day in meditation is one of the most beneficial things you can do to ensure your continued recovery.

George Mann MD

Chairman of the Board, The Retreat



The Serenity Prayer

GOD GRANT ME THE
SERENITY
TO ACCEPT THE THINGS
I CANNOT CHANGE;
COURAGE
TO CHANGE THE
THINGS I CAN, AND
WISDOM
TO KNOW THE
DIFFERENCE

Are we Human beings
having a
Spiritual experience?

OR

Are we Spiritual beings
having a
Human experience?

The 12 Steps of AA EXPLAINED

STEP 1

*“We admitted we were powerless over alcohol
– that our lives had become unmanageable.”*

Addiction experts are quick to say that a person has to admit there is a problem before recovery can truly begin. But the First Step of the 12 Steps of AA means *more* than this – it means finally rejecting the denial and self-deception that so often accompanies addiction.

In the First Step, the addicted person has to accept the fact that their addiction is *beyond their control*. With that admission comes the realization that “their” way of doing things simply isn’t working. And once the suffering addict/alcoholic realizes THAT, they can be more receptive to the idea that they will need help to recover.

There are two crucial words in the First Step:

- **Powerless** – This means that the person has lost control over their consumption of drugs and/or alcohol. They no longer can regulate *when* or *how much* they consume. The addiction is in charge.

The important thing to consider about powerlessness is this – it means that it is impossible to drink or use drugs “safely”. It also means that sobriety is not a matter of “having more willpower” or “trying harder”. This works well with the disease model of addiction. Addiction isn’t a moral failing. That means simply “being a better person” doesn’t work. If someone gets the flu, that’s not because they aren’t trying hard enough. It’s because a force beyond their control gave them the flu. Alcoholism works the same way.

- **Unmanageable** – This means that the drinking/drug use is having a negative impact on the rest of the person’s life:
 - Health problems
 - Relationship issues
 - Legal difficulties
 - Feelings of guilt, shame, and remorse

STEP 2

"Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

There are two considerations for the Second Step of the 12 Steps of AA.

First and foremost, the Second Step is about HOPE. Rather than being resigned to a hellish downward spiral of addiction, a person comes to understand that recovery IS possible.

In other words, although the struggling addict/alcoholic has no control over THEIR compulsion, that doesn't mean that there is not a solution.

So the second consideration of this Step is that it is possible to gain strength, inspiration, and guidance from something outside of and greater than one's self – *IF* stubborn ego can be laid aside.

In other words, when you can temporarily make yourself subordinate to someone or something that is helping you, it is possible to be guided in the right direction. That's because alcoholism is, by its nature, a selfish behavior. It's not selfish in the moral sense. But it does focus on only meeting the needs of the self. When the self is no longer the highest priority, it's easier to stop drinking.

Some people are put off by the idea of a higher power. But AA isn't a religious organization. The higher power doesn't have to be God, or any specific interpretation of God. In fact, there's an entire AA group that's focused on secular help. It's called Secular AA. It could be fate, karma, or anything else. The point is that you need to find a source of inspiration to help you stay sober.

There's also a list of secular AA meetings. The group realizes that there may not be a secular AA meeting near you. That's why they also offer online secular AA meetings. This shows that you do not need to be religious to follow the 12-step program

STEP 3

"Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him."

The first two Steps were about reflection – but the Third Step of the 12 Steps of AA is about *action*. At its simplest, the Third Step means deciding to *get out of your own way*.

For some non-religious people, the Third Step can be problematic, which is why "God as we understood Him" is important. Your Higher Power does not have to be a deity. It can also be:

- The recovery process itself
- Medical and mental health professionals
- The innate strength of human nature
- Your support system
- The fellowship you receive from other addicts/alcoholics

The exact nature of your Higher Power is personal – it only has to be something outside of and greater than yourself in which people can place their faith. This helps people look outside themselves. As a result, they are less likely to give in to their demons.

There are four parts to "turning your will over" –

- *Asking for help*, and not just at the beginning of the First Step. Surrender your ego and be willing to ask for help anytime you feel overwhelmed during your recovery.
- *Learning to pray*, which simply means having a conversation with Who or What is helping you – sharing your thoughts, asking questions, and expressing gratitude.
- *Learning to meditate*, which means taking the time every day to reflect on the things that happen to you, what you learned, and what you might like to do differently. Processing your experiences and emotions can help you learn to change for the better.
- *Practicing acceptance*, which means finding a way to meet life on life's terms, rather than trying futility to control things that are beyond you. When you concentrate on those things that you CAN control, you are better able to focus on doing what needs to be done to recover.

STEP 4

"Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

In this Step, you continue to eliminate opportunities for denial by taking an honest – *and sometimes uncomfortable* – at yourself, your behavior when drinking/using, and the effect it has, both on yourself and upon others.

Why is this so important?

Before you can ever attempt to change your behaviors and attitudes, you have to know what needs changing. This inventory is not just about finding out your *weaknesses* – those things that need changing. It is also about uncovering your *strengths* – those positive traits that you can expand upon.

Your personal inventory must be:

- Fearless – as you face truth about yourself that you may not like. But only by acknowledging your faults can you take steps to correct them.
- Searching – as you sincerely take time to examine your thoughts, words, and deeds. To this end, it is a good idea to write your inventory down.
- Moral – as you weigh those thoughts, words, and deeds against an objective standard of what is *right* against your own selfish desires.

When a person knows their strengths and weaknesses they can make better choices. For example, A person that knows they aren't good at math would never agree to be a treasurer. In the same way, a person that knows they can't control themselves when they drink has an easier time choosing to not drink.

STEP 5

"Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

This Step is absolutely necessary after a moral inventory. A person who has taken an unflinching look at the harm that their addicted behaviors have done can sometimes be tormented by that knowledge. Without productive relief, that torment can lead to old, destructive ways of coping – drinking and using.

Talking to someone else can help alleviate negative feelings of shame and guilt. When you unburden yourself of the weight of your past, you free yourself up to move forward unimpeded. Often, people will find that they are not so unique in your imperfection.

Additionally, discussing the things you've done wrong has lots of benefits. For example, group therapy is one of the most successful methods to treat addiction. It can be hard to admit that you've done something wrong. But when someone keeps that inside it creates guilt. This guilt makes them want to drink more. That's one of the ways that the cycle of alcohol addiction continues.

The old saying is that "*confession is good for the soul*", and this is especially true for addicts and alcoholics.

STEP 6

"Were entirely ready to have God remove all of these defects of character."

This is one of the more difficult Steps of the 12 Steps of AA, because it is the culmination of everything that has come before. This is where you *let go* of those behaviors and attitudes that are holding you back.

The reason that this step is so difficult is because often, those behaviors and attitudes that are being let go have been the only ways to cope that you have ever known. Sometimes, it means relearning a whole new way to interact with the world.

After all, alcohol shapes the world for many alcoholics. The nature of the addiction means they're always thinking about alcohol. That means that changing requires hard work. People need to admit to themselves that they're ready for that hard work.

This Step is not about perfection – *it is about getting better*. Throughout the course of recovery, you will find yourself repeating the Sixth Step several times. That's because no one is perfect. But that doesn't mean that people shouldn't try to improve. Any addict can overcome their addiction

STEP 7

"Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."

This Step is very much like the Third Step, but it is more specific. Now that a moral inventory has been completed, we see ourselves as we truly are, both the good and the bad.

The truth is many of our shortcomings are intertwined with our addictions. And, because we are powerless over the addiction, we are often just as powerless to overcome our shortcomings on our own.

This is where the key concept of Step Seven of the 12 Steps of AA – *humility* – comes in.

When we are humble, we admit when our way of doing things isn't working and when we need help to overcome specific problems in our lives.

There are three reasons why humility is so important in this Step:

- *It allows us to recognize the severity of our defects.* Without that humility, it is possible that we will underestimate or minimize the impact of our actions.
- *It allows us to recognize our own limits.* We have to be humble enough to understand that alone, our intellect, our reasoning, and our willpower are not enough to overcome our addiction.
- *It allows us to comprehend the enormity of our Higher Power's ability to transform our lives.* Humility allows us to come to the realization that there is something greater than both ourselves AND our addiction. And, because it IS greater, that Higher Power can restore us to sanity.

STEP 8

"Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all."

The Fourth Step was about *personal* house cleaning, but the Eighth Step of the 12 Steps of AA is about *social* house cleaning. It is about recognizing the wreckage that you have left in your wake while you were actively addicted.

In order to continue moving forward, you have to acknowledge the role you may have played in hurting others. When you become willing to repair the damage you have done, you again reduce the destructive pain, anger, hurt, and resentment that addiction causes.

This step also helps people work on the guilt they feel. Remember, guilt can cause people to turn back to drinking. Confronting that guilt makes it easier to stay sober. It also helps remind people of the harmful effects of their drinking.

Making a list of the wrongs someone's committed helps them to understand the importance of changing. It's easy to overlook one or two events. But when a person sees a list of the times that their drinking has hurt someone, it gives them more motivation to change.

In this way, the Steps work together again. Understanding the effects that a person's drinking has on those around them helps them make decisions based on overall good. That's instead of making decisions based only on themselves. This helps stop the cycle of addiction.

It is the *willingness to make amends that is important, because as you will see in the Ninth Step, it is not always possible to make reparations...*

STEP 9

"Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others."

Like so many other interlocking Steps, the Eighth Step of the 12 Steps of AA was chiefly about *contemplation*, while this Step is about *action*. Now that we know *what we have done and who we have done it to, we have to take action to right our wrongs.*

This is a difficult, but necessary Step. Difficult, because "direct" means face-to-face and in person. This may seem strange in a world dominated by text messages and email. People need courage to ask forgiveness. Asking forgiveness in person requires even more courage.

We have to face those we have wronged, take responsibility for the harm we have caused, and try to make up for that harm in some tangible way. Making amends is more than just apologizing. It also means trying to undo the damage. That means repaying old debts, whether they're monetary or otherwise.

It is necessary because it starts to clean up the messes we have left behind. Since recovery is all about moving forward, making amends for the wrongs we have done lets us "balance our books", so we owe nothing from our addicted past. It allows us to have a *fresh start.*

A word about "wherever possible"—

Sometimes, reconnecting personally with someone we have harmed in the past can reopen old wounds or cause difficulties in someone else's current life. For example:

- Seeing an ex in person can cause them embarrassment or problems in their current relationship.
- A person you may have physically harmed might be traumatized by your presence.
- Confessing to some criminal act you may have committed does not mean implicating others.

In such instances, it may be better to write a letter acknowledging the past harm, expressing the willingness to make amends the other person may deem necessary, and asking for forgiveness.

This Step requires that we (1) apologize, (2) try to repair our wrongs, and (3) ask for forgiveness. It does NOT require that the other person *grant that forgiveness.*

In fact, some people may not be willing to forgive. A recovering alcoholic needs to accept that. This is one of the ways that the steps work together. When someone is comfortable with another person's right to refuse forgiveness they demonstrate that they're able to cope with the world.

When we are sincere, but direct amends for forgiveness are not possible, we should simply "let go" of the burden we have been carrying around and resolve to do better in the future in our interactions with others.

This shows how the steps work together. The Ninth Step directly relates to the Tenth Step. Instead of dwelling on past mistakes that can't be fixed, people need to continue to try and be their best selves.

STEP 10

"Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it."

The tenth Step of the 12 Steps of AA is about continued growth and vigilance. In essence, is about laying the foundation for our future. When we are continually honest with ourselves, it is much easier to recognize triggers, behaviors, and attitudes that could result in a relapse.

This step helps to re-enforce the lessons and practices of the other steps. People constantly try to improve themselves instead of giving up. It also helps prevent people from making justifications to drink again.

Everyone's familiar with these justifications. "I've been sober for 3 weeks, so I can have a drink." This mindset isn't possible with a constant moral inventory. Instead, the self-assessment helps people see when they're wrong before they act, rather than afterwards.

These justifications can lead to a slippery slope. "I can have one drink because I've been sober for three weeks" becomes "Two drinks isn't that bad." This can easily lead to "Well, I'll just party tonight and stop again tomorrow."

This situation is especially true for alcohol. Booze hurts decision making. Once someone has some alcohol in them, they're more likely to make decisions that serve only themselves. That can lead to relapse.

Admitting when we are wrong allows us to continue moving forward in humility, without the denial and self-deception that addiction brings about. This type of honesty is essential to recovery. After all, if a person has a problem, then ignoring that problem won't make it go away. Just like ignoring a leaky roof won't keep water out of the house.

It also prevents us from accumulating more emotional baggage that can slow down our recovery. It encourages people to always try to be their best self. They may not always succeed. But just trying makes their lives better and makes the world around them better.

Perhaps the best thing that an ongoing personal inventory does is keep us "on track". It keeps us from straying too far from our path of recovery. It gives people a way to focus on improving themselves. This approach means they're less likely to fall back into alcohol abuse. That's because they focus on getting better instead of trying to numb their pain.

STEP 11

"Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out."

This is a spiritual Step, but people who have reached this point have usually come to terms with the "God" language the 12 Steps of AA contains. In other words, they have already formed their own personal concept of a Higher Power.

For some, GOD is an acronym that stands for "Good Orderly Direction" – the path that they want their life to take. For others, it can even stand for a "Group of Drunks/Druggies" – the fellowship they receive from others in their AA/NA meetings.

"Prayer and meditation" means making a *conscious effort* to improve our understanding of the path that our Higher Power has for us.

To be more specific, *prayer* means TALKING to our Higher Power – sharing our burdens, admitting our wrongs, asking for help, and expressing our gratitude.

Meditation, on the other hand, means LISTENING to that same Higher Power – putting aside our own egos and desires in order to understand what we should be doing.

STEP 12

"Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

This Step of the 12 Steps of AA is at once *self-serving* and *selfless*.

For yourself, there are few things that you can do that can better serve your own sobriety than by working with others who are still struggling. Being of service to others has several benefits:

- It reminds you of where you once were and where you no longer want to be.
- It helps hold you accountable.
- It gives you a sense of purpose.
- It keeps you from becoming complacent in your recovery.
- It enhances your fellowship with others.

But on the other hand, it allows you to be of benefit to other struggling alcoholics/addicts:

- Sometimes, a still-suffering person will trust you above others, because you understand what they are going through.
- You have insights that may allow you to help when no one else can.
- When you share your story, others may be inspired by your successful ongoing recovery – to the point that they are finally able to regain their own sobriety.

It is important to understand that addiction is incurable and lifelong. Recovery requires vigilance and work, one day at a time, for the rest of your life. You'll find yourself repeating the 12 Steps of AA over and over again as a means of safeguarding your sobriety.

No, the 12 Steps of AA are not a cure for your addiction – they are guiding principles that allow you to restore sobriety, sanity, and serenity to your life.

"Recovery is a gift, we really are very lucky people to practice these principle as a way of life. This has made my life happy and usefully whole."

"A Friday afternoon in March 2006 devoid of reality, lost in a world of addiction bankrupt of emotions, reasonability and faith. I came through the gates of Aiséirí Cahir, carrying the baggage from 30 years plus of self-destruction heartache and broken dreams wondering how I got to this point in my life. Too frightened to live and scared to die. Then my journey began with the help of the non-judgmental counselling staff, aftercare facilitator and my fellow clients. I was allowed to open my heart and soul towards recovery a road map of acceptance forgiveness and a spirituality based love of life and all its possibilities through honesty openness and willingness which I still carry with me today as a volunteer facilitator seeing in real-time the miracle of hope and recovery in the faces of people who have chosen to turn their lives around and found a new path to their lives. "

"In 2012 I hit rock bottom, my husband and children had enough of me and my drinking and I found myself in Aiséirí for an assessment. The counsellor I met had compassion and warmth in their eyes and they were not at all fazed by my story. I was such an angry, hurt and confused person. Once I was admitted and got to know the staff I soon learned that I could talk to any of them and they just seemed to have time to listen to me. I will never forget that or their warmth. I did the two years aftercare and while it was a tough time as I had a lot to learn. Today I really do have a life beyond my wildest dreams, I have my husband and children back in my life and I am so grateful to Aiséirí and AA for the life I have today."

"I am one of the lucky people that gets to sit here today and tell you my story. When I arrived at the gates of Aiséirí I was broken and so full of fear and pride it was killing me alongside the alcohol. I remember the warm welcome I got and how for the first time I felt listened to and understood by people who could relate to how I felt. The staff were so nice to me and I felt respected and slowly began to trust and open up and show just how broken I really was. I will always be so grateful to my counsellor for their kindness and gentleness with me. I worked hard and took on board what was suggested and went to aftercare for two years where I learned how to do the normal everyday things and just to cope with the day to day stresses. I met some wonderful people in recovery who have guided me through some very tough times. I am living a life I could never had lived if I had not been an addict. Each day is an adventure.

"Looking back to where I was at prior to stopping drinking scares me today. I was sad, lonely, afraid and at the end having thoughts that even frightened myself. So the greatest journey I have undertaken began. It started with a phone call to a member of AA. They listened and reassured me that I could recover. How, I asked? Do not drink one day at a time and things will get better, no promises on romance or finance though. I attended Aiséirí Wexford and was shown kindness, compassion and forgiveness by staff, family and peers. The journey has amazed even me. My three sons have never seen me take a drink. The things I have accomplished are far beyond me. I have learned tolerance, maybe need to learn more. I have the love and affection of my parents, as my mother said some time after stopping drinking 'I'm glad I have my son back'. I have gotten to know myself, what an insight. Today I take part, not take over. I have so much fun by attending AA meetings, and helping people in early recovery. Not really sure how it all works but I can assure anyone it does. Opportunities like this, recovery, may only pass once, I urge you to take it with both hands and realise the dream that is your life."

Self-Care Activities and Strategies

Self-care can involve so many different activities. It may include getting adequate sleep each night, maintaining a healthy diet, engaging in regular exercise, spending time with family and friends, participating in various forms of relaxation to include meditation or yoga, attending to your spiritual and/or religious side, playing with your pet, engaging in artistic expression, doing pleasure reading, and so much more. It also involves setting limits, saying 'no', maintaining healthy boundaries, and knowing your limits. Self-care also involves maintaining a healthy balance between various professional activities as well as between the professional and personal parts of our life.

- Make adequate time for yourself. Schedule breaks throughout the day.
- Do things you enjoy. Engage in hobbies.
- Take care of yourself physically and spiritually.
- Take care of the relationships in your life.
- Say NO!
- Don't isolate yourself.
- Keep in mind that self-care is a good thing.
- Watch out for warning signs, such as violating boundaries, self-medicating, finding it difficult to focus on the task at hand, boredom, fatigue, and/or missing appointments.
- Conduct periodic distress and competence self-assessments and seek help when it is needed.
- Focus on prevention.
- Make time for self-care!
- Seek out personal supervision.
- Participate in peer support groups.
- Accept that you're human, in need of assistance, and a work in progress.
- Don't try to be perfect, to have it all, or to do it all. Know your limits and be realistic.
- Last but not least, keep it Simple!



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