

## THE LAST THREE STEPS: INTRODUCTION

Welcome to these little studies on the last three Steps of Program!

Having welcomed you, we should perhaps give you a warning: These studies are not for everyone. In Program we do our best to avoid controversy, but sometimes it is not possible to say things that are simultaneously true and that will make every member of every 12-Step fellowship feel comfortable. And these studies are not intended to make readers feel comfortable -- rather the reverse, perhaps. They are intended to help you to *wake up* -- to wake up to what the founders of Program said about Steps 10 and 11, and what many people say about the real significance of Step 12.

The founders of AA -- Bill Wilson in particular -- had a vision of what the recovered life looks like, and they wrote about that vision in just a few pages of the AA Big Book -- pages 84 to 88, which are devoted to the practice of Steps 10 and 11. They also devoted a chapter to the practice of Step 12, but that chapter in the main deals with how to approach the alcoholic who still suffers, and while this is an important aspect of our practice of Step 12 it is far from being the whole story.

The vision which Bill Wilson had of a life lived in the last three Steps came to him from heaven knows where (some people would say, quite literally from heaven knows where), and it may be that he lived it himself for some years -- it seems that he did, though whether this is true or not we cannot know. What we suspect is that he lost to a significant extent the reality of that vision in subsequent years. He suffered from depression; he had ongoing problems with sex; he used AA to promote private ventures; he came to believe that the spiritual awakening could be induced using hallucinogenic drugs; he smoked himself to death. And AA also lost to some degree the reality of Bill Wilson's original vision too. By the time of the writing of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, the vision had become diluted; while parts of the *Twelve and Twelve* are excellent, it is by no means the spiritual masterpiece that the AA Big Book is. What Bill Wilson saw and experienced that enabled him to write the Big Book we can never really know, despite his attempts to tell us. But what can never be taken away from him is that he *was* for all practical purposes the author of that supreme work of spirituality, regardless of whether he himself was able to practice in later years what he had written about at the beginning.

The vision never died completely, of course; it never has, and it never will die; it was alive millennia before AA was even dreamed of, and it will live as long as humankind lives. With regard to these final Steps, in the 1980's there appeared the work that would round out the AA Big Book's treatment of Steps 10 and 11, and talk about how to practice the last three Steps everywhere, all the time, in all areas of our lives, within the walls of our 12-Step program and also outside them, in the everyday world in which we live. That work was *A New Pair of Glasses*, by Chuck C., and it is -- in our opinion, and even though it comes with some rough edges -- the greatest work that Program has produced other than the Big Book itself.

You may want to re-read the previous paragraphs. If reading them upsets you, or annoys you, then these studies are probably not for you. They are intended to help you get to the very core of the practice of the last three Steps, and as ever if we are going to go and explore somewhere new, we must begin by leaving the place we are now. So if your recovery is based on ideas of the near-sainthood of Program founders; if you believe that other "Big Books" from various fellowships are every bit as good as the two works we have mentioned; if you think that 12-Step discussion meetings are much more fun and beneficial than book study or Step study meetings; if you believe that the last three Steps are "maintenance steps" rather than the very heart and soul of Program; if your recovery consists mainly of working the first nine Steps over and over; if you feel still that you are distinct from most other people on this planet because you are an alcoholic, an over-eater, a compulsive gambler or whatever; then we urge you to read no further.

If, however, you suspect that a life based on the last three Steps is simplicity itself; if you have given up on the idea that you can't really work this Program unless you are a devout Christian (or Jew, or Moslem, or whatever); if you have come to see that the first nine Steps are merely intended to bring you to the place where you can work the last three for ever and ever; if you are starting to feel that you may have something fundamental in common with everyone else in the world, regardless of whether you are an "addict" or not; if you have begun to sense that "God" is not some giant Santa Claus "out there" but courses through every atom in your body and through the world and the universe ... if you are starting to entertain any of these ideas, then you may find something here that is of use to you.

It is worth saying right now that there is not a single original idea in these little studies. All of its "insights" are thousands of years old; they are rediscovered from time to time, and the world always seems to have a tiny, tiny minority of people who incorporate these ideas into their spiritual practice. Many of these ideas were rediscovered in the 1930s by the early AAs, and since then they have transformed the lives, not merely of millions of addicts desiring sobriety, but of far fewer people well into 12-Step recovery who have asked themselves this question: "Isn't there more to life than this?"

Yes, there is. If you are willing to go to any lengths to find it; if you have started to find it already, and want more of it; or if you live your life to the best of your present ability in the last three Steps ... then you may want to read on.

Thank you for "stopping by."