

## STEP TEN: NOT KNOWING

The fundamental purpose of Step Ten is to bring us to a point where we do not know. In particular, it is intended to place us in a position where we do not know what to *do*.

Elsewhere we have seen that we can summarize the last three Steps as follows:

- I do not know what to do;
- I ask God as I understand God what God wants me to do;
- I do it.

In this short study we will look at the relationship between the practice of Step Ten as it is outlined in our various Programs and the assertion made in the first paragraph: that Step Ten is about not knowing.

We have seen in other studies that in Step Ten we ask ourselves what we are thinking, feeling, doing, and about to do, right here and right now. This is not an occasional practice: It is undertaken continuously, as the treatment of Step Ten in the AA Big Book suggests.

But our thoughts and our feelings are closely related to our motivation. When we think to ourselves, *I disagree with that woman*, the thought is usually accompanied by another, such as *I'd like to tell her what I think of her* or *I wish I had the courage to talk about my view of things*, or even *I'd like to make her look ridiculous* or *I suppose I'm probably wrong -- I usually am*.

Similarly, our feelings are related to our motivation. If we feel sad, we are also inclined to think *I'd like to do something to make this bad feeling go away* or *if he hadn't left me, I wouldn't feel so bad -- how can I get him back?* or *I guess I deserve to feel this way because I'm worthless -- I'll just sit here and feel sorry for myself*. Lurking behind our feelings and thoughts is motivation, and motivation is just another word for *will*.

In Step Eleven we attempt to determine God's will for us by using prayer and meditation. It is sometimes suggested that we don't pray enough in Program, and certainly that we don't meditate enough, but all the prayer and meditation in the world is going to be relatively ineffective if we don't precede it with a committed practice of Step Ten.

And we have just seen the reason for this. Our thoughts and our feelings are closely linked to our motivation; and our motivation is really just our will. If

we don't do Step Ten on a continuous basis, then we never really become aware of our will.

Let's look at that a little more closely. We have seen how our thoughts and feelings are a reflection of our motivation, or our will. If those thoughts and feelings remain unexamined, our will directs us without our being aware of it. And when that happens, we approach Step Eleven with an unconscious agenda -- an agenda based on what we secretly want. If we now begin to pray and meditate in order to determine God's will for us, we are setting ourselves an impossible task -- to determine what God wants, while at the same time we are secretly seeking for what we want.

So Step Ten is at heart the practice of raising those secret desires, aversions, and fears to the level of consciousness. We look deliberately at our thoughts and feelings, because by doing so we are able to see that those thoughts and feelings are emerging from our will, from our desire to have this or to be rid of that. Once we are aware of what it is that we really want, we are in a position to do Step Eleven -- to ask God in prayer and meditation what God wants from us.

Now, on the face of it, it would seem that we are still in an untenable position, even if we acknowledge our thoughts and feelings in Step Ten, even if we are able to bring to a conscious level what it is that we really desire or are really attempting to avoid. For -- if I really want X -- how is it possible for me to ask God what God wants from me when God may instead want Y?

This takes us back to an issue we have dealt with elsewhere in these little studies. Step Ten is about raising our thoughts and feelings to the level of consciousness, of becoming aware of them, and then watching them. *But Step Ten is never about trying to get rid of those thoughts and feelings, or attempting to control them. It is merely about becoming aware of them.* Wanting to change thoughts or feelings is just another example of my own will at work. If I feel sad, Step Ten teaches me to be aware of the fact that I am sad. The reality of this moment is that I am sad, and that is the beginning and the end of it. All I need do now is watch the feeling of sadness.

So it may be that I look at my thoughts and feeling and become aware that I really want X -- even though I can see that X may not be particularly a good idea for me. At this point, my Step Ten is complete. I can now pass on to Step Eleven and determine what it is that God wants from me, *even though at the same time as I am asking God I really want X.*

It may be worth recalling here the so-called Agony in the Garden -- the situation Jesus found himself in immediately prior to his arrest and

crucifixion. For it was here that He prayed one of the greatest of all prayers: *Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but Thine, be done.*

We can now see how striking this prayer is. It is a combination of the results of Step Ten with the practice of Step Eleven. Jesus does not say, *I want to avoid this, but I know I shouldn't want to avoid it.* He says, *I want to avoid this, and I acknowledge that, while simultaneously asking You what You want and committing to doing it.*

If the Son of God was able to do Step Ten and Step Eleven in this way, if He was able simultaneously to acknowledge what He wanted in His humanity and yet to seek God's will, then this will be an excellent prayer for us to use as well. When we pray this prayer, we acknowledge what it is that we feel and think, what it is that we want; but also we acknowledge our "not-knowing-ness," our ignorance of what it is that we should in fact do. It is a prayer of submission, of total surrender, of full acceptance that our own wills are the poorest of all possible guides when it comes to determining what it is we should do.

As Bill Wilson suggested in AA's *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, Steps Ten and Eleven are intimately linked. Neither can really stand alone. Step Ten without Step Eleven leaves us in a position of not-knowing, powerless to stop following our own wills without the help of a Power greater than ourselves. Step Eleven without Step Ten causes us to try and seek God's will for us while we are still clinging unconsciously to our own thoughts, feelings, and desires. As we will see in our studies of Step Eleven, one important purpose of the continuous practice of "prayer without ceasing," of ongoing prayer and meditation, is to make the power of God available to us moment by moment in our practice of Step Ten -- so that, with Jesus and with many other spiritual thinkers throughout history, we may say to our Higher Power, "I want to do this; please give me the knowledge and power to do what You want instead."