

STEP 11: AN INTRODUCTION

Step Eleven suggests that we seek through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understand God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.

By the time we reach Step Eleven, most of us are familiar with the concept of, and routinely practice, prayer. Not all of us meditate, though, and AA as a whole -- not to mention other 12-Step fellowships -- seems to have forgotten that an hour's "quiet time" each morning was regarded as mandatory for the early AAs in Akron. This practice came from the Oxford Group, which was uncompromisingly Christian. During this period, the recovering alcoholic would ask for guidance. If he received any specific guidance, it was recommended that he check this with someone else in AA before acting upon it.

There may be various reasons why the recommendation of an hour's quiet time did not appear in the AA Big Book. One possibility is that the Oxford Group, and its founder Frank Buchman in particular, had fallen into some disfavor by the time the Big Book was published, to the extent that one looks in vain in its first 164 pages for any mention of Buchman or the Oxford Group. But another may be that the Big Book does not seem much interested in prayer and meditation for their own sake, but rather emphasizes the *results* of their practice. This is an important observation, and we will be looking at it in more detail in these little studies.

By contrast with the Akron AAs, for most people in Program today, "meditation" consists of reading so-called "meditation books" and then presumably thinking about what they have read. This makes no more sense than claiming that we pray because we read so-called "prayer books" and then think about what *they* say. Prayer and meditation are basic *actions*. We don't merely talk about praying, read about praying, think about praying, or believe that praying is a good idea. We *pray*. Similarly, we don't merely talk about meditation, read about meditation, think about meditation, or believe that meditation is a good idea. We *meditate*. As we have said already, most people in Program pray. However, most people in Program don't meditate. Furthermore, if meditation is mentioned to them, the response can vary from discomfort to horror. Thus a basic practice of the early AAs, and a fundamental recommendation of the Twelve Steps, is not merely ignored but regarded with distaste.

The way the Step is phrased means that many of us see its main purpose as being improving our conscious contact with God as we understand God. However, when we look at it more carefully, we see that prayer and

meditation are regarded simply as a means to an end. That end is the determining of God's will for us and finding the power to do it.

And that is why Step Ten precedes Step Eleven. Despite what some people in Program maintain, these last three Steps are in a particular order for a very good reason, and the reason that Step Ten comes before Step Eleven is that determining God's will for us is going to be much more difficult if our minds are still fully occupied with what *we* want. Step Ten, as we have seen, is really designed to bring us to a place of *not knowing what to do* -- which is the state we will be in when we do Step Ten thoroughly. Step Eleven, by contrast, is designed to tell us what to do -- right here and right now.

Unfortunately, those in Program who *do* pray and meditate can tend to regard these as an end in themselves -- particularly meditation. Now, there are many benefits to be derived from meditation -- peace, tranquility, acceptance, and so on. But those are simply side-benefits. The main purpose of both practices is to determine what God wants us to do and to obtain the power to do it. So, Step Eleven looks forward to the Twelfth Step -- compassionate action. In the end, that compassionate action is the only purpose of prayer and meditation.