

## STEP 12: INTRODUCTION

There are at least two broad ways of looking at Step 12.

The first way is to see it as a means of bringing the specific message of recovery to other addicts, or to others who suffer from the same basic problem that brought us to Program to begin with. It is this view of Step 12 which guides the AA Big Book's treatment of the step. Appearing only a few years after the discovery that one recovering alcoholic could help a still suffering alcoholic when no one else could, the chapter dedicated to Step 12 brims over with advice as to the best way to approach and talk to the desperate alcoholic.

Chuck C. in the book *A New Pair of Glasses* pointed out that the newly recovering alcoholic is in no position to carry the message to the still-suffering alcoholic -- after all, what message does he have to carry, if he has been sober only a short time himself? "You cannot transmit what you don't have," as the Big Book says. So why were many of us told in our early days of recovery that we should work with newcomers in Program? Because, as Chuck C. says, if we can't carry the message to the alcoholic, we can at least carry the alcoholic to the message. We can tell the prospect that there is help, and we can take him to it. We can go with him to an AA meeting. This business of working with the newcomer to Program occupies most of the attention of the Big Book in its treatment of Step 12.

The second way of looking at Step 12 is as the step which builds on the continuing practice of Steps 10 and 11 and results in action -- compassionate action. This view of Step 12 sees it more as a natural consequence of working those other two steps. When we look at Step 12 in this way, we see that the distinction between carrying the message to others and practicing these principles in all our affairs is really no distinction at all -- for to practice these principles *is* to carry the message.

It is this second way of looking at Step 12 with which these little essays concern themselves. There is relatively little about this view of the Step in the chapter "Working with Others" in the AA Big Book; and so since we cannot use it as our guide, as we were able to for much of the time in our studies of Steps 10 and 11, we shall have to look elsewhere in Program -- and outside Program -- for guidance as to how to work Step 12 as part of our daily practice of the last three Steps.

We can make some preliminary statements here, though, about the way our studies of Step 12 are likely to lead us:

Firstly, Step 12 is concerned with *action* -- specifically the action that arises out of our practice of Steps 10 and 11. We have seen that the purpose of Step 10 is to bring us to the point, moment by moment, where -- with increasing clarity as to what we are thinking and feeling -- we acknowledge that we do not of ourselves know what to do, and we do not have the power to do it even if we did know. We have seen that the purpose of Step 11 is to determine what it is that God as we understand God wants us to do, and to obtain the power to do it. And now we are at Step 12: We *do* it.

Secondly, Step 12 is concerned with doing what we determined in Step 11 that God wants us to do. By definition, therefore, Step 12 consists of actions which are at their heart, to a greater or lesser extent, *compassionate* -- that is, they involve us in participating in the suffering of other people. Step 12 actions are not selfish -- our working of Step 10 has assured that. They are not actions which arise out of an attempt to merge our will with God's will -- our practice of Steps 10 and 11 together has assured that. The actions we take in Step 12 therefore involve our own wants and desires very little, and the needs of other people almost exclusively. As we shall see, this does not mean that most of the compassionate actions we take as a result of doing Step 12 are done on the grand scale. These are generally not actions which are going to stop world hunger, involve us in terrible personal privation, or make us famous as exemplars of charitable works. They *may* be, but in reality they very rarely are. Most Step 12-based actions are in fact trivial, as we will find out, and would barely be noticed by anyone other than a very observant onlooker. Nevertheless, they are actions that are focused on other people, specifically the sufferings of other people, and not on ourselves.

Thirdly, the compassionate actions we take in Step 12, simply because they are the result of the ongoing practice of Steps 10 and 11, can sometimes be *strange*. We find ourselves drawn to do things that are alien to our previous existence. We find ourselves working for, or alongside, people with whom we would perhaps not have associated in the "old days." But then the actions we used to take were motivated by things like religious imperatives, or political affiliations, or ideas from our childhood about what we ought and ought not to do. By contrast, Step 12 actions come from none of these things. We do them, not because we think we ought nor because some religious figure said we should nor because the political groups we belong to are committed to them ... but because it seems to us from our practice of Step 11 that God wants us to do them. Step 12 actions are therefore intensely *personal* in nature and origin, even if we find we are doing them alongside other people who *may* be motivated by these other reasons.

Finally, our Step 12 actions lead us to *commitment* and to an understanding of the role of *drudgery* in living the spiritual life. For if we have decided to start doing what God wants us to do, we will inevitably find ourselves taking on certain tasks which have to be done over and over again. If God seems to be suggesting that we work with the indigent, for example, it's unlikely that He is suggesting we do this *once*. And so we find ourselves engaged with a concept that most addicts, even recovering addicts, hate: *commitment*. And -- again inevitably -- if we commit to some ongoing action, one day it will become drudgery, and in our practice of Step 12 we shall come to learn that taking on drudgery is one of the most important keys to the Kingdom. As a great poet wrote:

*All may of thee partake;  
nothing can be so mean,  
which with this tincture, "For Thy sake,"  
will not grow bright and clean.*

*A servant with this clause  
makes drudgery divine:  
who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,  
makes that and the action fine.*

*This is the famous stone  
that turneth all to gold;  
for that which God doth touch and own  
cannot for less be told.*