

**An Unpopular Guide
to
Step 10**

by

Several Program Members

Revised with the assistance of
CA, JB, DD, and VO
Thank you

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Version 140116

A Note

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About the Unpopular Books and Guides

Why is this series of books and guides called “Unpopular”?

The so-called Big Book of the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous is the basis for recovery for countless millions of people around the world. The reason for this is that the Big Book “show[s] other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered” and offers “clear-cut directions ... showing how we recovered.” Consequently, most of us follow its recommendations closely.

But for some reason, certain sections of the Big Book – sections which are just as explicit as other sections – are generally ignored. Not only that: when it is pointed out that they are being ignored, the reaction of many people in recovery can range from bewilderment to hostility.

Mainly, therefore, these books and guides focus on those neglected sections of the Big Book ... however unpopular they (and we) may be.

Introduction

Step 10: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it

An Unpopular Guide to Step 10 is intended for those members of Twelve-Step programs who are interested in developing a spiritual practice around Step 10. It is based entirely on the treatment of Step 10 in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* (which we will call the Big Book from this point onwards). In particular, it focuses on one short part of the section which is devoted to Step 10.

The purpose of the *Guide* is to inform and remind readers of the *precise process* outlined in the Big Book for the ongoing practice of Step 10. That is not to say that we think *you* must or even should practice Step 10 exactly the way it is described in the Big Book. It may well be that, even if you read this *Guide*, you continue to practice Step 10 quite differently from what the Big Book suggests. Obviously, you are quite at liberty to do so: each of us must determine for ourselves how we are to work our programs.

But there is a world of difference between – on the one hand – knowing exactly what the Big Book suggests and then doing something else, and – on the other – *not* knowing what the Big Book suggests to begin with. In our experience, most people in Program don't even know what the Big Book recommends about the working of Step 10. Even so-called old-timers in Program are generally not aware that the Big Book offers precise directions for the ongoing practice of Step 10. One purpose of this *Guide* is to do at least something to correct that situation.

Let's now examine what the Big Book suggests should be the practice of Step 10. Because the Big Book is a spiritual work, and because it makes suggestions about exactly how the spiritual life should be lived, we will be taking those suggestions quite literally.

What we will be talking about

Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them. We discuss them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone. Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help. Love and tolerance of others is our code.

-- Big Book, page 84

This *Guide* is based primarily on this short section from the Big Book *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

We wish to edit it slightly, and then deal with it as follows:

The practice of Step 10:

1. Continue to watch ...
2. ... for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear.
3. When these crop up ...
4. ... we ask God at once to remove them.
5. We discuss them with someone immediately ...
6. ... and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone.
7. Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help.
8. Love and tolerance of others is our code.

1. Continue to watch ...

“*Continue to watch* for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear,” says the Big Book on page 84.

This recommendation appears about halfway through the paragraph. The first half of the paragraph is summarizing the point we have reached in our recovery. We have entered the world of the Spirit, it says: our next function is to grow in understanding and effectiveness. And this won't happen in a flash: it will take the rest of our lives.

Although there is nothing in the formatting of the text of the Big Book to suggest it, this paragraph marks one of the great watersheds in the process of recovery. We may already be aware of or be a part of the world of the Spirit. But it is at this point, as we begin to work Step 10, that we truly enter that world. Something in us has changed profoundly. Everything up to this point has merely been a preparation for living in this world. Our surrender in the first three Steps, our working of Steps 4 through 9, all has been a preliminary to what happens now.

So much for the first half of the paragraph: it's a summary of what has happened, and where we now are. The next three words say simply, *Continue to watch* What words could be more important than the very first suggestion about how we should act now that we have entered the world of the Spirit?

The first thing that we notice about these three words is that, whatever the action or actions may be that are being recommended, they are to be performed *continuously*.

Some people believe that the phrase *Continue to watch* merely suggests that we are continuing some activity that we have been engaged upon prior to this moment, namely the working of Steps 4 through 9. And indeed, that is one perfectly reasonable understanding of what is meant by *Continue*

But Step 10 is not simply a continuation of Steps 4 through 9. It also works the other way around: Steps 4 through 9 are recommendations as to how to perform Step 10 for the very first time. It's possible to see the suggestions about working Step 10 as simply a summary of the work we did in Steps 4 through 9; but it would be just as reasonable to look at the situation from the opposite point of view: namely, that Steps 4 through 9 are an expansion of what is suggested as a continuing practice in Step 10.

And if we think about the matter for a moment, we will see that this is indeed the case. The work we did in Steps 4 through 9 was simply the practice of Step 10 for the first time in our lives. Because it was the first time we had ever done Step

10, there was a huge amount of resentment, fear, and selfishness to deal with, and so we set about it using a structure offered to us in six Steps: Steps 4 through 9. But now we can look back on what we did, and understand that it was merely an intensive practice of Step 10 for the first time in our lives.

So it is true that the word *Continue* ... in Step 10 reflects the fact that we are going to persist with activities that we have already undertaken. But it means much more than that. The word *continue* occurs four times in just this one paragraph. The suggestion is being made that Step 10 should be a *continuous* practice – not one that is engaged in once, twice, several times a day, but *continuously*.

And what is it that we are supposed to do *continuously*? The answer is: *Watch*. We are to continue to *watch*.

If we are asked to watch for a particular event, that implies that we are to watch *continuously* – otherwise we won't know if it's happening. As we shall see in the next section, we are being invited to watch for four specific things. These things may not occur all the time. But the only way we will know when they are occurring is to watch all the time.

This idea of continuous watching is present in various faiths. The Christian can find it in Mt 26:40-41; Mk. 13:33 and 14:34, 37-38; Lk. 21:36; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2; and 1 Pet. 4:7, as well as in stories such as the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Mt. 25:1-13).

It is also found in Buddhism: one form of Buddhist meditation, called *vipassana*, consists in watching the mind. A famous story describes a monk asking his teacher, "What is the fundamental teaching in Buddhism?"

"Attention," the master replied.

Dissatisfied with this answer, the monk said, "I didn't ask about attention. I want to know the essence of Buddhism. Please tell me more."

The teacher responded: "Attention, attention, attention."

So attention, or watching, is of great importance. It's particularly important, given the fact that it is the very first thing recommended to us when we enter the world of the Spirit in Step 10.

This being so, you might want to pose the following question to yourself: Has anyone in Program ever asked you if you *watch*?

Think about it. You may have been asked if you pray. You may have been asked if you go to meetings, and if so which ones and how often. You may have been asked whether you do "service work." You may even have been asked if you meditate. But have you ever been asked if you *watch*? – let alone whether you watch continuously?

And if you have never been asked these questions, here's something else to consider: *Why* have you never been asked this? *Why* have you never been asked if

you watch, or watch continuously, when to do so is the very first thing suggested in our practice of Step 10?

Clearly the Big Book thinks that watching is important: so important that it comes first in the list of Step 10 recommendations. So why don't *we* think it's important? Why is it not talked about in meetings? Why do we not show others who are new to Program *how* to watch?

Well, it is easy enough to start, and happily it can be done anywhere and at any time. We simply say to ourselves:

*Right here, right now, what am I thinking?
What am I feeling?*

How often should this be done?

Continuously.

You are probably thinking to yourself, *I can't do that. I might be able to do it some of the time. But there is no way that I can do it constantly.*

And of course that is quite true. We can't do it all the time. In fact, it is truer than we may suspect. For the truth really is that *we can't do it at all*. Well, maybe once or twice. Perhaps nine or ten times. But after that, we'll probably forget for five minutes or an hour or a couple of days or a week. We can't watch continuously, any more than we could stop drinking or gambling or people-pleasing – whatever our core addiction is. And if we can't watch, why does the Big Book suggest that we do so continuously?

A clue to the answer to this question comes from the story of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Those of you who are Christians will be familiar with the story. He invites the disciples to watch *with him*: “Tarry here, and watch with me.” When he returns, the disciples are asleep, and Jesus asks them, “Could you not watch *with me* one hour?”

What this story suggests is that watching is not, and cannot, be something we undertake alone. Alone, we can't do it, as we reflected a moment ago. In other words, when we watch, we watch *with* our Higher Power. In fact, it's only our Higher Power that enables us to watch at all. That is why, when we watch our thinking, our feelings, our actions, we have a sense of being, not one, but two people: the person doing the thinking, and the person *watching* the thinking: the person doing the feeling, and the person *watching* the feeling: the person doing the action, and the person *watching* the action. We are, in a sense, both ourselves and the Higher Power who watches with us.

If this is true, then the ongoing watching that we undertake in Step 10 is more than simply watching. Again, we are watching *with* our Higher Power. We are having a *relationship* with our Higher Power. We are *experiencing* our Higher

Power as we watch with that Higher Power. It may not always *feel* like a relationship with our Higher Power: but if you have followed the reasoning outlined here, you will see that it *has to be* a relationship with that Higher Power. *To practice watching in this way is to have a relationship with our Higher Power.*

This matter of our practice of Step 10 being effectively a relationship with our Higher Power is of very great importance. For it is something that happens *every time we do Step 10*; and as we take on this practice, we do Step 10 very frequently. So it follows that, insofar as we watch in Step 10, we are experiencing a relationship with our Higher Power *very frequently*.

Why is this important? Because, if you reflect on most religious writings that you may have read, you'll recall that those writings generally talk about the *rarity* of this experience of the reality of "God." The experience of "God" is spoken of in many such writings as occurring infrequently, often only after considerable effort on the part of the believer.

But *that is the exact opposite of what our experience of watching demonstrates to us* in our practice of Step 10. Instead, that relationship with our Higher Power becomes a part of our everyday recovery. It does not require any effort on our part because no amount of personal effort will enable us to watch, just as no amount of personal effort could stop us using drugs or getting involved in calamitous relationships with inappropriate people.

When we practice Step 10, we routinely experience a relationship with our Higher Power. Indeed, it's impossible for us to practice Step 10 at all without that relationship. This practice of watching shows us that the actual experience of a relationship with our Higher Power is *commonplace*. And it comes to us without effort, if only we commit to practice it continuously.

2. Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear

What are we supposed to watch for? The treatment of Step 10 in the Big Book tells us: *Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear.*

Dishonesty lies at the heart of our addiction. We're told by the Big Book at the start of the fifth chapter that we don't need very much in order to recover, but one thing we must have is self-honesty. If we are in the business of deluding ourselves and buying into that delusion, our "chances are less than average."

Resentment, fear, and selfishness were the three things we were recommended to look for when we first did our Step 4. The inventory we took then looked first at the people we resented, the cause of those resentments, and how they affected us. In each case, fear of something or another is associated with those resentments. But we were also a prey to fears which were not perhaps associated with any resentment. So in the second part of our inventory we listed those fears too. And the third part of our inventory, the sex part, focused strongly on the extent to which selfishness drove our sex lives.

Now we continue to watch for these four menaces: selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. We ask ourselves: Are we merely trying to take care of ourselves at the expense of others? Are we being honest with ourselves about our thoughts, our feelings, our motives? Are we feeling resentful – even just a little resentful – about people, places, and things? And are we afraid: are we trying to protect ourselves from some terrible consequences that may happen if we *don't* protect ourselves?

So we continue to watch: watch *ourselves*, moment by moment.

Sometimes we are inclined to think that this is a very tiring business. What? – we are supposed to watch ourselves all the time? Isn't that going to be something of a strain?

Well, we can always consider the alternative: *watch everybody and everything else in the world.*

Because that's the only alternative to watching ourselves. If we do watch ourselves, then we are able to recognize – and then do something about – our selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. But if we *don't* watch ourselves, then we are at the mercy of our selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. If we don't watch ourselves, then we become concerned about our own advancement, about our own private agenda, about protecting ourselves, about winning at all costs, about getting "our fair share." And then our only option is to watch

everybody and everything else in the world to make sure that we are getting what should be ours, that other people are not taking advantage of us, that our friends are not abandoning us

Actually, that is what most of us do – even those of us who have been in recovery for a long time. We watch others intently; we pass judgment on them; we decide they are to be trusted or not trusted; we measure ourselves against them to determine how “well” we are doing; we hold them in high esteem or else we despise them; we envy them or else we pity them; we decide how things ought to be and then we criticize others because they don’t measure up to our expectations, or we criticize ourselves because *we* don’t measure up to our expectations.

A constant stream of judgment plays in our minds. *Look at the way he’s driving ... what does she think she looks like in that outfit? ... he’s much smarter than me, so I’ll keep my mouth shut in this meeting ... how can she possibly think about voting for that candidate ...?*

Nearly all of us do this ceaselessly. And, in and of itself, that’s not necessarily a bad thing. After all, our minds are intended to think. It’s the job of the mind to generate thoughts. It’s not the thoughts that are the problem: it’s what we may do with them. If we simply watch them come and go (which is really the practice of Step 10) then no harm will result. If, though, instead of watching them we start to listen to them, entertain them, or believe them, trouble is not far away.

It’s in order to deal effectively with this constant judgment that some of us practice Step 10-based meditation, where we simply watch our minds ceaselessly thinking, creating the supposed drama of our existence. If we don’t watch ourselves, we don’t realize that we are creating this drama, because we do it all the time. And because we do it all the time, it doesn’t tire us too much: practice has given us plenty of stamina to watch everybody and everything else. By contrast, when we start to watch ourselves constantly, we find it fatiguing, precisely because we’ve never done it before. But common sense tells us that, if we are to choose between watching ourselves and watching everybody and everything else in the world, it’s going to take far less effort to watch ourselves.

Not only is it less effort to watch ourselves: it’s also much less spiritually debilitating. Judging or measuring other people as worse (or better) than we are may offer us a temporary “good feeling,” but we know that it’s only temporary. Practiced as a way of life, judging other people depletes the soul.

Look at any unhappy people you know, and you will see that their unhappiness goes along with their tendency to measure themselves against others and to find themselves lacking or superior or different or unluckier or poorer ... the list goes on and on.

Now look at people who instead watch themselves. You will probably find that they are much more at ease, much more glad to be just who they are. And that’s

because they're being honest with themselves about how they feel and think, instead of comparing themselves to others. They are able to maintain this practice precisely because they *practice* it as a way of life. It's not easy to do for any of us, when we first begin it. But as we continue, it becomes easier.

Above all, we watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment and fear.

3. When these crop up ...

When these [selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear] crop up, says the Big Book. Not *if* these crop up, but *when* these crop up.

All of us, from the start of our time in Program, experience changes and improvements in ourselves. As we move away from the practice of our core addiction, everything else seems to get better too. Our relationships with our families, with those we associate with at work or in a social context, all improve. We handle money better, we worry less. In fact, we begin to experience the so-called “promises” of the Program that are linked to our working of Step 9.

Unfortunately there is a downside to these changes. We can make the mistake of seeing them, not as a consequence of our new way of life, but as a *measure* of how well we are doing. Slowly, we can begin to think that, if our lives are pleasant and comfortable, it shows we are doing things right. Conversely, if we experience reversals or things don’t go our way, it shows that we are doing things wrong.

But the changes we experience are not necessarily a measure of how effectively we are working our Program. In particular, we need to rid ourselves of the idea that we are aiming for some mode of existence where we are so perfectly in relationship with our Higher Power that we never have any problems at all. As the Big Book says, we claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.

Not only is it the case that we will continue to some extent to experience selfishness, resentment, dishonesty, and fear: it is the case that we are *meant* to experience these things.

This is not an easy idea to grasp, much less to accept: in fact, this seems to be the most difficult idea for members of Program to accept, even those who are dedicated to an ongoing practice of Step 10.

Here is the problem: Most of us think that we are developing a relationship with our Higher Power who is pleased with us when we do well and is less pleased with us when we experience these negative emotions. But that is far from being the case. Our Higher Power does not seem to be seeking a relationship with us where we are graded on how well we perform. Instead – as we have seen already – the goal seems to be an ongoing, moment-by-moment relationship which we experience at its most intimate level *precisely when we are selfish, dishonest, resentful, or afraid* and when we turn as a result to that Higher Power for help. In other words, if we were ever to reach a point where we never felt these negative emotions, we would never experience this intimate relationship.

As we said a moment ago, this is not an easy concept to grasp. It almost looks as though we are saying that it's a good idea to be selfish, dishonest, resentful, or afraid, because that will cause us to have a closer relationship with our Higher Power. In other words, it seems as though we are suggesting that we should be *bad* in order to *get good*.

But we did not say that we are selfish, dishonest, resentful, or afraid because we are *bad*. We said that we are selfish, dishonest, resentful, or afraid because – unaided – we are *powerless* over what we think and feel.

In fact, that powerlessness is what brought us into Program to begin with. When we felt like drinking, sooner or later we drank. When we felt abandoned, sooner or later we ended up in a relationship with someone unsuitable who could rescue us. When we felt like placing a bet, we were ultimately powerless *not* to place a bet.

And now, as we practice Step 10, we are powerless – unaided – over our thoughts and feelings with respect to everyone and everything else in our lives. Again, we're not *bad*. We're just *powerless*. And when – in the presence of our Higher Power – we acknowledge that powerlessness, we simultaneously experience a relationship with that Higher Power and find the power we need to deal with our thoughts and feelings. Paradoxically, to surrender continuously to our powerlessness – which is one of the things that lies at the heart of the practice of Step 10 – is to be given, is to experience, the Power we lack.

4. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them

Let's summarize what we've learned to do up to this point:

We have learned that, first and foremost, we are to watch. We are to watch continuously for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. We have also learned that we are not capable of watching ourselves continuously, any more than we were capable of dealing by ourselves with our core addiction when we first came into Program. This continuous watching is something we can only do at all with the help of a Higher Power. And we have also seen that, since we can only watch continuously with the help of our Higher Power, when we do watch ourselves it must mean that we are simultaneously experiencing a relationship with that Higher Power. It may not *feel* like an ongoing relationship with a Higher Power ... but then, as addicts, we were never particularly insightful with the *feeling* aspect of our lives, were we? Since we cannot watch continuously without help, the fact that we are watching at all in our practice of Step 10 shows that we are experiencing that relationship: that when we watch ourselves, we are watching with "God."

When we watch ourselves, we frequently find that we are being selfish, dishonest, resentful, or afraid. If we do determine that this is happening, what should we do about it?

Well, let's begin by asking ourselves what most of us *actually* do about it. The answer, all too frequently, is *nothing*. We tell ourselves that we should "pull ourselves together." We tell ourselves that we "ought not to be feeling this way." To tell ourselves these things is the equivalent of doing nothing. To try and focus on what we should or ought to feel or not feel is completely useless.

If I determine that right here, right now, I'm feeling afraid, then that is the situation I am confronted with. No amount of telling myself that *I ought not to feel like this* is going to make any difference at all. I *do* feel afraid: so what am I going to do about it?

The next – incorrect – response is this: I'll go and talk to someone about the situation. I'll call my sponsor: he or she ought to know what I should do. Or (and this is usually the very worst "solution") I'll raise it as a topic in a 12-Step "discussion meeting."

If I *do* call my sponsor, and if my sponsor is someone who is actually working Step 10 on an ongoing basis, I will get the following response:

“Have you asked God [your Higher Power] at once to remove it [the feeling]?” And if I answer, “No,” an effective sponsor will reply, “Then why are you talking to me?”

When these crop up, says the AA Big Book, *we ask God [our Higher Power] at once to remove them*. This is the *first* response to finding that we are being selfish, dishonest, resentful, or afraid. Talking about the situation to someone else comes later. (It’s useful to remember here the phrasing of Step 5: *Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being Turning to our Higher Power comes before turning to someone else.*)

Asking our Higher Power to remove these things only takes a moment. We can close or half-close our eyes, and silently or out loud ask for them to be removed. However, as recovering addicts we are capable of making mountains out of the simplest molehills, and many of us over-complicate this simple task. Here are some of the things we can do to make it complex and painful:

- 1) *We can tell our Higher Power how miserable we are that we have let Him/Her/Them/It down yet again, and what pathetic individuals we are* No. If we look back at the previous section again, we can remind ourselves that *it is inevitable that these feelings crop up for us. We’re made that way*. In fact, we’ve discovered that if we *don’t* feel this way, it makes an ongoing relationship with our Higher Power more difficult.
- 2) *We can promise we’ll never do it again.* No. In all likelihood we’ll do it again: we’re made that way. Quite possibly it may happen less. Quite possibly a relationship with another person or situation may improve. After all, we are “claiming spiritual progress,” as the Big Book reminds us. But whether or not that happens is out of our hands: it is impossible for us to work directly on the matter. Certainly any change can only come about through a relationship with that Higher Power, so there is no point in making promises which, without aid, we don’t have the power to keep.
- 3) *We can expect that our Higher Power will remove these things, just because we’ve asked for that to happen.* No. The simple recommendations for Step 10 tell us to ask our Higher Power to remove them. Nothing whatever is said about when, or even whether, these things will be removed. We don’t ask for them to be removed on the basis of some imagined 12-Step warranty that says they will be removed. We ask for them to be removed because *we have no alternative*.

There’s the key. *We have no alternative*. It may be that these things will be removed by our Higher Power. It may be that they won’t be removed, for whatever reason. But the very basis for our working Step 10 in the first place is that we can be absolutely sure that we – or anybody else – are incapable of removing them ourselves.

5. We discuss them with someone immediately ...

The word *discuss* or some variant of it occurs many times in the Third Edition of the AA Big Book. However, if we put the stories aside the occurrences are far fewer. Similarly, if we put aside the first four chapters (which are really dealing with the practice of Steps 1 and 2), we are left with relatively few instances. Several occur with respect to Step 5 – which are important, as we will see later. There is an incidental instance in Step 9, but that is a reference to *not* discussing. And there are several references in Step 11. But the one we are interested in here is the reference in Step 10. After we have asked our Higher Power to remove our selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, or fear, it suggests that *we discuss them with someone immediately*.

We *discuss* them. The implication is that we are doing more than simply *telling* someone else how we feel. There does not seem to be any idea here that we are somehow abasing ourselves in front of someone else who is “better” than we are. We are simply having a discussion, presumably with someone we are familiar with, and preferably with someone *who has no idea what we ought to do about the situation*.

The word “sponsor” is absent from the first 164 pages of the Big Book, and some people in Program consider that it is no worse for the omission. Here in Step 10 is a hint at the real, basic role of a sponsor. A sponsor is someone we can have Step 10-based discussions with, in an interchange with someone who is our equal. A sponsor is not someone who can part the Red Sea, to whom we turn for ongoing advice, who never encounters any problems with his or her own program. A sponsor is someone who is willing to discuss with us our feelings of selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. A sponsor is someone who experiences the same powerlessness with respect to his or her own fears as we do with respect to our own. And if it is the case that a sponsor has no idea what to do about his or her own negative emotions, it’s also going to be the case that that same sponsor can have no notion what *we* should do about *ours*.

What a sponsor can do is to share any similar experiences he may have had. A sponsor can talk about what she did. That’s what makes this Step 10 discussion a discussion: we talk about what is happening to us, the other person talks about what’s happening with him or her.

Of course, there is no reason at all why that other person should be a sponsor. Anyone who is genuinely practicing Step 10 on a routine basis, with whom we feel

comfortable discussing our feelings, and who has sufficient humility to see that he or she doesn't know what to do about his or her own life, much less ours, will do.

Now we recall what was said earlier about Step 5. Most people work Step 5 by reading their written Step 4 inventory to another person. But the Big Book makes no mention of such a process (and it would be interesting to know how the practice arose in the first place). Instead, the Big Book represents Step 5 as a *discussion*: the word, or a variant of it, occurs several times in its treatment of Step 5. In fact, Step 5 is simply an extended version of this particular section of Step 10, except that it's being undertaken with respect to "our whole life story," rather than around the "crop[ping] up" of some negative feelings.

The implication, we hope, is obvious. Very little is said in the Big Book about obtaining advice from people in Program who supposedly know better than we do. Our significant interchanges with others about our thoughts and feelings do not occur in the framework of us asking questions and some 12-Step guru giving us the answers. Those interchanges occur as *discussions*, exchanges between equals in the sense that both parties to the discussion accept that they have no idea how to run their own lives, much less the life of the person with who they are having the discussion.

The Epistle of James, after whom the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous was almost named, perhaps says it as well as anyone:

Confess your faults to one another (James 5:16).

6. We discuss them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone

One of the results of the constant watching that is the basis of Step 10 is that our actions change. We find increasingly that we are much less prone to say the hurtful or thoughtless things that we used to say. We don't take the same rash actions we used to take without first thinking about them. We may still think judgmentally or feel selfish or self-protective. But – to an increasing extent as we practice watching ourselves – those thoughts or feelings remain just thoughts and feelings: the destructive actions that automatically accompanied those thoughts and feelings simply don't seem to happen as frequently as they used to.

This change is one of the key signs of recovery. When we worked the first nine Steps of recovery, one of the results was a dawning feeling of neutrality about our core addiction. It simply ceased to be an issue. It wasn't that we didn't sometimes think about that core addiction. It was that, even if we thought about it, we took no action on it. We had discovered that it was possible to think about taking a drink and yet not take a drink. We had discovered that it was possible to think about involving ourselves in an inappropriate relationship, and yet not get involved.

And now, against the background of continuously watching ourselves, we find that pattern repeating itself with respect to everything else in our lives. The miracle that has occurred around our core addiction is now occurring in others areas too. We experience over and over again the situation of thinking about doing something, feeling like doing something, perhaps even wanting very badly to do something ... and yet not doing it. As we just noted, this is a key sign of recovery. And as time passes, we find that it happens more and more frequently, and in more and more areas of our lives.

But it doesn't happen all the time. There are still occasions when we say or do something unwise, foolish, or hurtful. And when we do these things, we can still avail ourselves of the process we used when we did Step 9: making amends. By contrast with many of our Step 9 amends, though, our Step 10 amends are made “quickly” – in other words, as soon as possible after we have made the mistake.

“Quickly” may sometimes turn out to be a relative term. Of course, there will be those occasions where we say or do something damaging and then find it in ourselves, with the help of our Higher Power, to make amends more or less immediately. But there is another aspect to the continuous practice of Step 10 in our daily lives, and that is the possibility of becoming aware over a long period of time that we are indulging in wrongful behavior that we have been unable to see

before. This can happen particularly in close relationships with family and friends. We can come to see that we routinely behave towards some of these people in a negative way. In most cases we are not talking about severely abusive actions: most of those will have been taken care of when we originally did Step 9. By contrast, it tends to be the unthinking negative remark, the slight invasion of someone else's affairs, in particular the attempts to make other people change the way they behave "for their own good," perhaps, by making a sly comment that might be barely noticeable to a casual onlooker. As we have said, it is often the case that we direct behavior of this kind towards those we care about most. And it can go on and on, for years and years of our recovery ... until, one day, our practice of Step 10 shows us what we are really doing.

*This is a process of self-discovery that will never, ever end, no matter how long we may have been in Program. It is something that the new member has in common with someone who has many, many years of recovery. **Hopefully we are not, and never will be, one of those with long-term "recovery" who have ceased to find, or even to watch for, these deep-seated behaviors. There are no heroes in Program. There is no one who can afford to ignore this ongoing process of self-examination.***

In some cases, negative behavior which we discover that we have practiced over a long period of time may justify another written inventory, just on that issue. It may merit sitting down with someone in Program and discussing at considerable length what it is that we have just discovered about ourselves. And it will in all likelihood result in making direct amends to the people we have harmed by our behavior. These are the tools of Steps 4, 5, and 9. But this is not, strictly speaking, a repetition of Steps 4, 5, and 9. It is an ongoing part of our practice of Step 10.

Ideally, when selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear crop up in our day-to-day lives, we make amends quickly. But there will be occasions when "quickly" has to mean "as quickly as we are able." With respect to our more subtle attempts to control others, our old habits may die hard simply because it takes us a long time even to become aware of them. But a commitment to a constant practice of Step 10 will allow our Higher Power to reveal even those habits to us. And when we become aware of them, we follow the same procedure as we talked about earlier. We ask our Higher Power to remove them. We discuss them with someone. And we make amends. Whether the associated wrong actions happened quite suddenly an hour ago, or whether we have quietly practiced them for years without being aware of them; whether we can take care of the matter with a quick apology, or whether it will be better handled with another written inventory, a long discussion with someone in Program, and a formal amends, the practice of Step 10 is broadly always the same.

7. Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help

At first sight, this looks as though it is another version of Step 12. When we have completed our Step 10-based actions, the Big Book suggests, we turn our focus to others. It is easy to think that the implication is that we should immediately carry the message of recovery to another person.

But that is not actually what is being said. There is no direct call to action. Instead, there is only the suggestion that we should *think* of someone we can help.

Why is this phrased in this particular way?

Let's go back and look over what is being suggested in Step 10.

We continue (says the Big Book) to watch ourselves. We are watching for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these seem to be occurring, we ask our Higher Power to remove them. We discuss them with someone else. And we make amends quickly if that is necessary.

While Step 10 is an essential spiritual practice, it carries a potential danger with it. And the danger comes from the fact that, at least initially each time we do Step 10, we are focusing on *ourselves*. As the saying goes in Program, *I may not be much, but I'm all that I ever think about*. In other words, there is always the possibility that we may be returning to the fixation with ourselves, that we are in danger of that same self-indulgence that was the initial cause of all of our addictive problems in the first place. There is always the chance that becoming over-absorbed in my selfishness brings with it the renewed possibility of further selfishness. Briefly, we can find that we are attempting to be free of self by focusing on self.

It is true that the process outlined in Step 10 begins with our focusing on ourselves. So did the process we undertook in Step 4. Part of the genius of the program of recovery outlined in the Big Book is that much of it starts with "I" because "I" is the main thing we have on our minds in our addiction and at the beginning of our recovery. So, our Step 4 written inventories begin with "I am resentful at" And our Step 10 practice begins in the same place. Am I being selfish? Am I being dishonest? Am I being resentful? Am I afraid?

However, the rest of the process of Step 10 moves the focus, first to our Higher Power ("we ask God at once to remove them") and then to other people ("we discuss them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone"). Now we are told to turn our thoughts to yet another person, namely someone we can help. The whole direction of Step 10 is away from

ourselves, even though the practice of the Step always begins with ourselves. The purpose is not to forget ourselves, to place ourselves at the bottom of the heap, to mortify ourselves or count ourselves as nothing. It is to see ourselves as being just the same as other people, neither more or less important: it is, in fact, to see ourselves *as* and *in* those other people, to see them and ourselves as what Christians would describe as “members one of another” (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:25), or as part of what Buddhists call the *sangha* or the community. In Program terms, it is expressed in the First Tradition: *Our common welfare must come first: personal recovery depends upon [our fellowship’s] unity.*

Turning our thoughts to someone we can help enables us to avoid another problem: that of asking ourselves *Why?* Why am I resentful? Why am I afraid? The short answer is that *it doesn’t matter.*

Not everyone will agree with this. There are some 12-Step programs that appear to focus on the supposed origins of our problems, even in the later Steps. But Step 10 is not about *analysis* of my negative thoughts and feelings: it’s about *what to do about them, right here and right now, over and over.* When we wonder *why*, we are wondering right here and right now – not twenty years ago.

Wondering *why* can too often be a form of self-indulgence, or an attempt at amateur psychology. And when we resolutely turn our thoughts to others, the temptation to ask *why* begins to go away. When we ask ourselves *why*, we’re too often fixated on ourselves all over again. When we stop asking *why* and start thinking about someone else, our thoughts are in the right place.

8. Love and tolerance of others is our code

This short paragraph on page 84 of the Big Book, and in particular the second half of that paragraph which we have been considering here, ends at this point with what seems on the face of it to be an observation, or a recommendation, or even a “rule.” *Love and tolerance of others is our code*, it says. It sits a little oddly with the other parts of this paragraph that we have been discussing.

Or does it?

Might it be that this brief sentence instead enables us to determine how effective our practice of Step 10 is – each time we do it?

Here is what we are suggesting:

A. (We) continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear.

B. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them.

Now we ask ourselves: Do we, right here and right now, feel love, or at least tolerance, for the person, people, or institutions that seemed to be the cause of our selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, or fear?

If the answer is, *Yes: right here and right now we feel love or at least tolerance*, our Step 10 is complete.

If the answer is *No*, we move on to

C. We discuss them with someone immediately, and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone.

Now we ask ourselves again: Do we, right here and right now, feel love, or at least tolerance, for the person, people, or institutions that seemed to be the cause of our selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, or fear?

If the answer is, *Yes: right here and right now we feel love or at least tolerance*, our Step 10 is complete.

If the answer is *No*, we move on to

D. Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help.

Now we ask ourselves again: Do we, right here and right now, feel love, or at least tolerance, for the person, people, or institutions that seemed to be the cause of our selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, or fear?

If the answer is, *Yes: right here and right now we feel love or at least tolerance*, our Step 10 is complete.

If the answer is *No*, then it is probably best to

E. Start the whole process over again.

If the selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, or fear persists, we may choose to do Step 10 in more depth, using the tools that we were taught when we did Steps 4 and 5, Steps 6 and 7, and Steps 8 and 9.

Of course, the question we have suggested above applies, and can only apply, to what is happening *right here and right now*. We may be resentful at someone. We start our Step 10, and perhaps discover almost immediately that our negative feelings about that person seem to have been replaced at least with tolerance for him or her, and perhaps love for him or her. *But that situation may not persist*. Later in the day, perhaps the original feelings of resentment towards that person resurface. And then we go through this Step 10 process all over again.

Remember that, when we were discussing the recommendation that *we ask God at once to remove them*, we came to see that these negative feelings may not actually be removed. Asking our Higher Power to rid us of these things is a different matter entirely from our Higher Power removing them. We saw then that we ask our Higher Power to remove them because we know that we are powerless to remove them ourselves. We don't ask for them to be removed because there is some sort of guarantee that, if we do so, our Higher Power will remove them.

Having said that, it's true that over a period of time most of us find that these things *are* removed, to a greater or lesser extent. But they're removed on a schedule other than ours.

*A convenient one-page version of this suggested practice
appears in the Appendix.*

Conclusion

In a very real sense, our practice of Step 10 is about *not knowing*.

When we practice Step 10 continuously, or as close to continuously as we can with the help of our Higher Power, we learn to live in *not knowing*.

We find we are selfish, dishonest, resentful, or afraid, and although initially we want to blame other people, places and institutions as being the cause of those feelings, we come to see in our practice of Step 10 that *we don't know* why these feelings have arisen. And now they have arisen, *we don't know* how to make them go away, though we slowly realize that we certainly can't make them go away by ourselves. We ask God at once to remove them, though *we don't know* how, when, or even whether this will happen. We discuss them with someone immediately, even though *we don't know* how that can help us – not to mention the fact that (if we have chosen well) we are talking to someone who *doesn't know* either what we should do. We make amends because making amends seems somehow to work for us, even though *we don't know* how. We resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help, though *we don't know* how we can help them any more than we know how to help ourselves.

But – as we have seen – this activity takes place (indeed, *can* only take place) within an active relationship with our Higher Power. It is not an activity we can pursue on our own: we can only even attempt it as an experience of that relationship. We don't watch ourselves alone: the very act of watching is something we do, and can only do, with our Higher Power. As we practice Step 10, it becomes increasingly borne upon us that, while *we* may not know what to do, Somebody or Something Else – our Higher Power – *does* seem to know. We gradually get the sense that, to precisely the extent that we admit *we do not know*, it seems that our Higher Power does know ... and that this Power is guiding us and empowering us to live, generally happily, in our Not Knowing. Developing our relationship with that Higher Power even further is the purpose of Step 11. But that is a subject for another *Guide*.

This, then, is what the AA Big Book suggests should be our practice of Step 10. As we said at the start of this short *Guide*, we are not suggesting that you must or should follow this practice. Each of us must decide how, or even whether, we should practice Step 10. All we have offered here is an exploration of what the Big Book suggests. We hope you have found it useful. We can probably all agree that, if we are truly familiar with the outline of Step 10 in the Big Book, it will have an effect on our own practice that can only be positive, whatever that practice may be.

Step 10 may be about powerlessness. Step 10 may be about not knowing. But a member of Program put it well in a recent meeting. She said that, as a result of working Step 10, she was “happily powerless.” And to be happily powerless in Step 10 is to experience what real power is.

Appendix: A suggested practice of Step 10

- A.** (We) continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear.
- B.** When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them.

Now we ask ourselves: Do we, right here and right now, feel love, or at least tolerance, for the person, people, or institutions that seemed to be the cause of our selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, or fear?

If the answer is, *Yes: right here and right now we feel love or at least tolerance*, our Step 10 is complete.

If the answer is *No*, we move on to

- C.** We discuss them with someone immediately, and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone.

Now we ask ourselves again: Do we, right here and right now, feel love, or at least tolerance, for the person, people, or institutions that seemed to be the cause of our selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, or fear?

If the answer is, *Yes: right here and right now we feel love or at least tolerance*, our Step 10 is complete.

If the answer is *No*, we move on to

- D.** Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help.

Now we ask ourselves again: Do we, right here and right now, feel love, or at least tolerance, for the person, people, or institutions that seemed to be the cause of our selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, or fear?

If the answer is, *Yes: right here and right now we feel love or at least tolerance*, our Step 10 is complete.

If the answer is *No*, then it is probably best to

- E.** Start the whole process over again.

If the selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, or fear persists, we may choose to do Step 10 in more depth, using the tools that we were taught when we did our Steps 4 and 5, Steps 6 and 7, and Steps 8 and 9.