Seeing the Invisible

The Second Step of the Spiritual Principles of Change

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Seeing the Invisible: The Second Step of the Spiritual Principles of Change

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Haymarket Center is at five locations in the Chicago Metropolitan Area. The main location is at 932 West Washington Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois 60607. If you have any questions about our programs, you may write, call us at 312-226-7984 or fax us at 312-226-8048.

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Second Edition

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Seeing the Invisible

The Second Step of the Spiritual Principles of Change

Only he who can see the invisible can do the impossible.

Frank Gaines

Give us clear vision that we may know where to stand and what to stand for, because unless we stand for something, we shall fall for anything.

Peter Marshall

Open your eyes and the whole world is full of God.

Jakob Böhme

Vision is the art of seeing the invisible.

Jonathan Swift

CHAPTER 1
WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME?

INSANITY

The conception of insanity as implied by this step is not to be understood technically as a diagnosis. Instead, it is the faulty belief that simply wishing that things would be different without having to do anything differently will cause them to be different. The wisdom in 12 Step meetings says it this way: "Insanity is continuing to engage in the same old behaviors expecting different results." So, this step is clearly pointing out that to continue in our old fantasies is surely dysfunctional thinking. The good news is when we stop denying reality, a process of correction in our dysfunctional thought process will start .

Every addict, regardless of what it is they are addicted to, has come under some external control. For the chemically dependent addict the chemicals have been the external control. But more than that, the chemicals have become a power greater than them. The experience of consuming mood-altering chemicals in an addictive way results in far more harm than we could have ever imagined in the beginning would happen.

Isn't that really true of us? Whenever we have been faced with the consequences of our problematic patterns, usually we have just tried harder doing what we have only done before. We repeat unhelpful patterns because we don't know what else to do.

SANITY

The second step focuses primarily on one thing—the possibility of having our **sanity restored**. Some may think that the focus is on "a Power greater than ourselves" or on the conception of believing. But believing only allows the Power to begin to work at restoring that which has been lost as a result of our extreme need to control—our *sanity*.

What is it exactly that I lost when my sanity went as my addiction and dysfunctional behavior took over my life? Well, sanity means

> mental health, soundness of mind, saneness, mental balance, and normality, soundness of judgment, reason, rationality, sense, lucidity, and clear-headedness. (Family Word Finder 1975, 690)

Living in an extended addictive lifestyle usually results in the possibility of several different thought disorders (also known as crazy thinking) developing. Some of the common consequences of these thought disorders include isolation and withdrawal from intimate relationships, lack of awareness of feelings, passive-aggressive behavior, faulty thinking and therefore faulty decision-making, being generally suspicious all the way to being paranoid, perfectionist and controlling, intense and pervasive moodiness, and an anti-social personality in which we are either very charming as long as we are not resisted or very hostile, angry and blaming when opposed. No one caught in an addiction is characterized by all of these but every addicted person has one or more of them.

Now here's an interesting thought! Could it be that my insistence that this life grant me more fulfillment than it possibly can, and my tenacity to figure out some way to get it, lie beneath what is called *psychological disorder?* Lets consider this from a biblical perspective. This was written almost 2000 years ago by Paul of Tarsus as he explained the disastrous result of "doing things my way":

> What happened was this: People knew God perfectly well, but when they didn't treat him like God, refusing to worship him, they trivialized themselves into silliness and confusion so that there was neither sense nor direction left in their lives. They pretended to know it all, but were illiterate regarding life. They traded the glory of God who holds the whole world in his hands for cheap figurines you can buy at any roadside stand.
>
> So God said, in effect, "If that's what you want, that's what you get." It wasn't long before they were living in a

pigpen, smeared with filth, filthy inside and out. And all this because they traded the true God for a fake god, and worshiped the god they made instead of the God who made them—the God we bless, the God who blesses us. Oh, yes!

Worse followed. Refusing to know God, they soon didn't know how to be human either...Since they didn't bother to acknowledge God, God quit bothering them and let them run loose. And then all hell broke loose: rampant evil, grabbing and grasping, vicious backstabbing. They made life hell on earth with their envy, wanton killing, bickering, and cheating. Look at them: mean-spirited, venomous, fork-tongued God-bashers. Bullies, swaggerers, insufferable windbags! They keep inventing new ways of wrecking lives...

And it's not as if they don't know better. They know perfectly well they're spitting in God's face. And they don't care—worse, they hand out prizes to those who do the worst things best. (Romans 1:21-32 MSG)

Paul surely had it right. He has described how people have this inborn tendency to search after something—anything—that they think will bring them the good life they want. But they won't look to God because they don't think much of him. They recognize he has a different agenda than they do.

The result of this conscious decision to avoid God is ineffective thinking. Instead, their lives revolve around good health, gratifying relationships with the people around them, success at work—in fact, anything other than God. And that dedication to the gods of their own making releases all kinds of personal trouble. The world, as we see it on the never-ending media news programs, can be seen in all it's wretchedness. We see a world ruled by selfishness and self-centeredness.

When people don't get what they expect—what they are certain they are entitled to and deserve—they then feel they are justified in using any means to get it. Personal disaster strikes—they become people they never intended to become.

They are deceived into hoping for a better life of blessings rather than the better hope of the opportunity of hanging-out with God. Instead, they are miserable, unhappy, unfulfilled, and everything in their life flies apart. They struggle just to hold the pieces of their life together.

No one who has the resulting kinds of thought disorders and personality characteristics is truly happy. We may pretend that we are, declare that we are, but it is usually a cover-up for the stuckness we are sensing and not liking.

Therefore, the insanity implied by the second step is the distorted thinking that developed, as we have lived in an addicted lifestyle. A lifestyle where we demanded absolute control of our life and disregarded the idea that there is a God to whom we owe obedience. This has resulted in defective patterns of living causing the unhappiness, misery, and confusion that we are experiencing or have experienced.

In our attempts to maintain control of our life, we have ended up being controlled by the defective characteristics that were developed as the result of our misguided attempts at independent living—also known as "doing it our way."

In the Hebrew Scriptures we see this attitude in the idea of folly. The fool is one who engages in folly.

> Folly is the opposite of wisdom. It is not imbecility or error. It is wrongheadedness. It has to do with practical insights into the nature of things that lead to success or failure in life. Folly involves rejection or disregard of the revealed moral and spiritual values on which life is based. The fool sins against his own best interests and rejects God (Psalm 14:1). (Dayton 1976, 581)

So, we engage in folly when we decide hastily, or attempt to live in a self-sufficient way, or are impervious to instruction, or are the victim of our own stupidity. The fool is characterized as ignorant, thoughtless, contentious, without understanding, and as having a madness that is expressed in rage. Therefore, the person who refuses to examine his life and the results of his decisions is at best foolish. As he

steadfastly resists changing, the way he sees and understands what has happened in his life, and then makes decisions, he will stay stuck in the madness of his addicted and dysfunctional lifestyle.

When I begin to grasp the fact that the **unmanageability I have experienced is directly due to my faulty thinking and belief system**, then truly changing faulty behavior begins to be a possibility in my life. It is essential that I admit and accept that the fix I have gotten into is directly due to **the poor decisions I have made**. These decisions have been made while the addiction and my problematic behavior has been in control of my life. Still, I am responsible for the decisions made regardless of the circumstances or the forces at work in my life. The first step truly leads me to accept the responsibility for the decisions I have made.

Here in the second step I am beginning to deal with the results of my faulty decision-making in a different way. Instead of continuing to engage in the same old failed pattern of self-sufficiency, I begin to look outside of myself to a "Power greater than" myself for appropriate help. This is a major step that directly impacts my previous faulty thinking that I now see as the insanity. **Therefore, simply becoming willing to turn to outside help is a step in the direction of restoring sanity.** Then as I allow the Power greater than myself to take control, the remainder of the restoration process begins to take place.

I find that I no longer am forced to stay stuck in the old patterns or characteristics. I am less and less characterized by insanity, madness, derangement, irrationality, and incoherence. I begin to be

> characterized by soundness of mind, saneness, mental balance, normality, soundness of judgment, reason, rationality, sense, lucidity, and clear-headedness. (Family Word Finder 1975, 690).

All this is the result of being willing to seek the most appropriate way of dealing with the disastrous condition my

life has degenerated into. The Big Book is surely correct when it says

> *Our description of the alcoholic, the chapter to the agnostic, and our personal adventures before and after make clear three pertinent ideas:*
>
> *(a) That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives.*
>
> *(b) That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism.*
>
> *(c) That* ***God could and would if He were sought.*** *(Alcoholics Anonymous 1976, 60 emphasis added)*

CHAPTER 2
NEEDFUL RESTORATION

RESTORE

The word *restore* means to bring back, get back, recoup, recover, retrieve, rescue, reclaim, reinstate, reestablish, to reconstruct, rebuild, recondition, rehabilitate, refurbish, convert, renew, renovate, remodel, make over, do over, fix, mend, repair, bring back to health, make well, strengthen, revive, and refresh. Notice that most of the synonyms for restore also begin with the prefix *re-*. This prefix is used to indicate that something is being done again, anew, or done over. Therefore, when the second step talks of having our sanity restored, it means that we are in the process of having our *sanity* brought back to its former or normal condition. It means that we need a different perspective on life and *restoration* will provide that.

By using this word, the step is indicating that the extreme need to control does something to us that results in the removal of that which is normal and so makes us somehow *ab*normal. Restoration is the process of bringing back that, which was lost, destroyed, neglected, or marred. Another person does the work required for restoration. A neglected painting cannot restore itself. A dilapidated, run-down building cannot restore itself. A person who has gotten to the place of needing restoration cannot restore himself. Each needs someone from the outside to cause the restoring to take place.

The second step affirms this when it says that "a Power greater than ourselves" performs the restoration that the addict needs. This means that the addict has some sort of restorative action taken in his life by someone who has more power than he does. That Power is willing to act so that the action results in a return to some previous state that is *normal*. Also, this implies that something external to the addict has already acted in his life to cause him to become *abnormal*. Of course, what has acted in his life was the addictive

behavior. The addicted behavior was caused by *and* caused the ever-increasing abnormal thought and behavior patterns.

What is the basis of these abnormal patterns? Why of course it is the lie that in order to feel good I *must* be in control of my life. This lie has a second one that is also part of it. This second lie is, *it is possible* for me to have complete control of my life. *Believing and acting on a lie will always result in bad things happening in my life.*

It is just as hard to see the reality of this statement, as it is to see the lies about being able to control my life. This is why I need restoration. **Left to myself, I will continue attempting to make good, somehow, come out of the lies I continue to believe and act on.** The only thing that I am able to do in this abnormal state is to see that *perhaps* something is wrong. That's the result of the facts of unmanageability leaking into my conscious thoughts. Once I have glimpsed that, then I will be able to begin to feel the vulnerability and powerlessness that the unmanageability continues to bring into my life. Those feelings will break through to my consciousness only if I have the courage to face them or the overwhelming desire to do whatever is required to fix the pain that keeps seeping through my denial. Reality always has a way of breaking through my denial into my delusional world as that world continues to collapse. That's a good thing, otherwise the lies would hopelessly trap me forever with no chance *ever* for change.

The goal of always feeling good and the seemingly intolerable pain of feeling bad cause me to deny what is really going on until I can no longer contain the pain through denial. By that time things are so far out of normal that I usually have no way of getting my bearings straight. I am at a loss as what to do or how to do it. This is exactly why I am in desperate need of restoration. Beginning to admit the reality of my pain is painful in itself. But also realizing that I have no clue as what to do about it is also painful. Without external intervention I would be caught in a never-ending cycle of pain, my own feeble and increasingly ineffective attempts at

dealing with the pain, increased pain, failed attempts at stopping the pain, to more pain. On and on it would go with no real relief.

The help I so desperately need comes in the form of restoration. Restoring help comes from outside of the miserable merry-go-round on which I find myself. This help comes to restore me physically. It comes to restore me mentally. It comes to restore me emotionally. It comes to restore me socially and relationally. And it comes to restore me spiritually. The restoration that the "Power greater than ourselves" brings is not partial but whole. It usually doesn't come in one giant change. It usually comes slowly in each area but inexorably, as I continue to put into practice the process of change.

As I see recovery beginning and building, even in small ways, the hope of continued restoration also builds in me. At first, I am unaware of it. When others first vaguely mention that there is something different about me, I can't see it and may even deny it. But as the feedback continues and becomes more specific, I start to see the results of the continuing restoration taking place. I begin to allow myself to hope. And the gift of faith begins to take over in my life. All this happens because faith "...is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot see" (Hebrews 11:1 MSG). The beginning of restoration that occurs in the second step triggers a move from hopelessness to hope.

Does faith characterize your life? Do you have a vibrant hope working in your life? What is it you have hope in? Is the process of restoration taking place in your life? What causes you to think restoration is happening? What was it that moved you from denial and delusion to reality? How has your life changed since that move took place? How is your life more *normal* today; more *spiritual* today?

COULD

The second step says that we "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves ***could*** restore us to sanity."

This word, could, is generally equivalent to the verb "can" in meaning and use. The difference lies in the sense of contingency. By that I mean there is no doubt about the ability of the one who would act. The actor is fully capable of accomplishing the needed action.

The contingency involves the permission of the one in whom or for whom the action is to take place. The word "could" indicates that the actor is restrained from acting until the go-ahead is given. The picture is that of a building contractor who is fully able to remodel a building you own but does not begin until you have given permission and agreed to the contract by signing it. Once you make the agreement and grant permission, the contractor is then able to begin the job and see it to completion.

This is exactly the sense of the word "could" here in this step. The "Power greater than ourselves" is completely able to accomplish the restoration to sanity as planned. The only thing necessary for that to happen is our giving permission to begin the work. This all seems too good to be true. We are being presented with the golden opportunity to be restored to sanity. What would stop the process from beginning and then brought to completion? Failing to give permission for the restoration to take place.

We fail to give permission because we don't *believe* that the restoration can take place. Or we don't believe that there is a "Power greater that ourselves." Or we have a great misunderstanding as to what *believing* is. Or we're afraid that if we admit that we need to have our sanity restored, we will be admitting that we are currently insane and therefore liable to be institutionalized. Therefore, we will deny the need to have our sanity restored.

Once these basic issues are settled, then the activating of the "could" happens without much thought. "Coming to believe" results in changing the "*could*" to a "*can*" *to a "will."* This transaction makes it possible for us to immediately move on to the third step where we make further decisions confirming the decision we have made "to believe that a

CHAPTER 3

BELIEF

Belief is usually a hurdle for everyone. For some of us, it's a very difficult hurdle. Some of what makes belief unnecessarily difficult are the many misconceptions surrounding it. Belief is often seen as an irrational process—one in which you seem to kiss your brains goodbye, eliminate all reasonable thinking...just "believe" or act on your feelings or impressions. In this view, belief is seen as the antithesis of careful, thoughtful analysis.

Often, well meaning people will urge us to believe without grasping the necessary mechanics involved. Therefore, they will demand that we exercise belief without providing the slightest help in knowing or understanding just what it is that we are to believe in. This is similar to being encouraged to have faith in faith. The thought is: if I just have faith then I will be able to recover or change or whatever.

THE OBJECT OF FAITH

The Letter to the Hebrews in the Christian New Testament makes a clear and definite statement about faith in the beginning of the 11th chapter:

> What is faith? It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot see. (Hebrews 11:1 NLT)

There is nothing magic about faith. Faith or belief is simply having confidence in something or someone, relying or depending on someone or something, or being convinced or persuaded that something or someone is capable of what I expect or hope for. As I can quickly deduce, **belief always has an object**. I have faith in someone or something. So, when urged to have faith, I need to ask, "What do you want me to have faith in?" This question will bring the basic issue out in the open. Either the person will give me a straight answer about who or what they want me to place my confidence in or I will just get more vagueness. I must evaluate

carefully the answer I get. If all I get is vague answers to my question, "What is it you want me to have faith in?", I just keep asking the same question until the person gives me a straight answer or admits they don't know who or what I must place my confidence in.

In the Christian New Testament there is an incident that illustrates the reality of faith's object:

> As Jesus entered the village of Capernaum, a Roman captain came up in a panic and said, "Master, my servant is sick. He can't walk. He' in terrible pain"
>
> Jesus said, "I will come and heal him."
>
> "Oh, no," said the captain. "I don't want to put you to all that trouble. Just give the order and my servant will be fine. I'm a man who takes orders and gives orders. I tell one soldier, 'Go,' and he goes; to another, 'Come,' and he comes; to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it."
>
> Taken aback, Jesus said, "I've yet to come across this kind of simple trust in Israel, the very people who are supposed to know all about God and how he works...
>
> Then Jesus turned to the captain and said, "Go. What you believed could happen has happened." At that moment his servant became well. (Matthew 8:5–13 MSG)

Jesus remarks that the Roman captain has the kind of simple trust that is necessary for anyone who is going to live in the Kingdom of God. The captain comes to Jesus because he is confident that Jesus can actually do something to solve the problem of his sick servant. He also understands somewhat how Jesus works. He believes that Jesus has authority over things such as physical illness. He knows that having this kind of authority is just the same as the authority he has when it comes to his soldiers and servants. Therefore, presence is not required for his authority to be exercised.

This means that we can trust God to act in our lives even though we can't physically see him. God continues to have the same kind of authority as he did when the captain asked Jesus to say the word of authority over the illness and his servant would be healed. Initially, we are doubtful about the

story and whether God could really do the same kind of thing in our lives. This is a normal response. Whenever something is presented for which we have no personal experience, and it has the potential of powerfully affecting how we see and live our life, there will always be doubts.

HERE COME THE DOUBTS

So, in addition to knowing that faith must always have an object (someone or something to trust); we must realize that doubts will always be present—especially in the beginning. The number and strength of our doubts are directly proportional to the importance of trusting the person or thing. It will also be proportional in magnitude to the consequences of believing or not believing. Therefore, when dealing with something as important as our life, we are bound to have many doubts and questions in the beginning. Of course, this will be the case all along the way as new issues crop up.

Doubts are very important in the process of coming to believe. They must never be simply dismissed as unimportant or seen as an indication of a failure of the desire to change and recover. *In fact, doubts should be encouraged in the beginning.* As counselors or sponsors, we should be helping those we work with identify as many doubts as they possibly can. Having unexpressed doubts can cause the person to simply agree with us too early in the process and fail to make the decision theirs.

Many attempts at change end in failure because the seeker of recovery doesn't fully grasp the reality of the seriousness of their situation. Also, the seeker may agree with a suggestion to "believe" just because we, as their counselor or sponsor, have made it. They think agreeing with what we have said is the belief required for recovery. This is a potentially destructive mistake. We are not capable of changing anyone or causing recovery in anyone. We merely point the seeker of recovery to the person—God—who is able to change them. Therefore, we want them to believe *what we report* about believing in "a Power greater than ourselves [who] could restore us to sanity." This belief of what we re-

port to them should encourage them to learn all they can so that they, too, may believe in the true God of the Universe who is the only One who can make the needed changes in their life.

Belief begins when I give mental assent to something I know. The next part of the process—acting—is having enough confidence in what I have given mental assent to that I will trust myself to it. It is actively relying and depending on something or someone. When I am trusting, I am convinced or persuaded that someone or something is worth staking my life on. ***This is no light decision!***

The doubts we have really fall into two groups. The first are those that we recognize as making no sense when examined carefully. We might think of them as irrational. Those that make sense are the second group. These are really statements that can be turned into an insightful questions that we need the answer to before we can act in trust.

Carefully examining information allows me to take a potential object of belief and hold it at arms-length investigating it objectively. This is where I begin in the process of coming to believe. Knowledge admits that there is a possibility that the suggestion to believe in someone or something might be correct. It's in this phase that I am evaluating the suggestion to believe against the doubts that I continue to have. In this process, I gather enough data to answer the question(s) that the doubt(s) has/have presented. It is also helpful to know that it's usually impossible to dispel every part of every doubt. Very little in the spiritual realm needs to be proved conclusively before it is possible to put it into practice. But it can be comforting to know that most legitimate doubts can be, at least, partially answered.

So, what does all this mean?

When faced with the challenge to believe in someone or something there will always be three or four parts to the process. 1) I will have doubts about it. 2) I have the need to gather increasing amounts of data about what or who I am to believe in. And 3) At every step of the way there is a deci-

sion to be made—which is believed, the doubt or the data. In the beginning, that will be easy; I will decide for the doubt. But as more data is collected, the balance of the scales will begin to tip toward the data until finally there is enough data that causes my decision to go from the doubt to the data. The fourth part of the process actively demonstrates the reality of deciding for the data—I act on the data rather than the doubt. This is known as trusting.

Frequently, I will guess that the problem preventing me from acting on something I am beginning to believe is a lack of faith. I think I don't have enough faith, as if faith is a commodity. In reality, **faith is something I have or don't have**. It is never a question of quantity, despite the many pastors or teachers who may say otherwise.

Jesus makes that very clear when talking with his disciples:

> The apostles came up said to the Lord, "Give us more faith."
>
> But the Master said, "You don't need more faith. There is no 'more' or 'less' in faith. If you have a bare kernel of faith, say the size of a poppy seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, 'Go jump in the lake,' and it would do it. (Luke 17:5 and 6 MSG)

So, the important thing about faith is not the *amount* of faith, but the *object* of my faith—what I have faith in. If what I have faith in is unreliable or untrustworthy, then my faith is misplaced. If who I am trusting is unfailing and dependable then I have someone I can surely trust to do what I am trusting them to do.

Belief isn't much until it is acted upon. This means that without action belief is merely mental assent. Mere mental assent will not bring true change into my life. Continuing to **act** according to the doubt will prevent change. True recovery requires acting according to the new trustworthy data. When I **act** on what I have come to believe, I am trusting in what I believe.

When I am convinced and strongly persuaded that an-

other course of action is necessary and I take it, belief becomes reality. This painstaking dealing with doubts is necessary if I am ever going to be different.

Don't ever let anyone rush you to decide against your will. If you do, you will be fooled into thinking that real change is going to happen. Move ahead deliberately gathering the information that is most effectively answering the questions that the doubts bring up. As you continue single-mindedly to do this, you will eventually come to the place of either dismissing the suggestion or genuinely and whole-heartedly believing. You will look back at the process and be very thankful that you examined all the evidence prior to making your decision.

The book *Alcoholics Anonymous* says it well when it quotes Herbert Spencer:

> "There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which can not fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance—that principle is contempt prior to investigation." (1976, 570)

A POWER GREATER THAN US

Our addictive or dysfunctional behavior has already been "a power greater ourselves" controlling our life for a long time. This power certainly has been more powerful than us.

Over the years I have asked many patients and clients in lectures and in individual sessions, "Do the drugs talk to you?" The answer is usually, "Yes, of course" or "Yeah, how did you know?" Of course, inanimate objects do not talk to us. So, how is it possible for the chemicals to "talk" to us? It is the spiritual powers behind the chemicals that are communicating with us. Therefore, we have been living under the control of a power greater than us for a long time and just didn't grasp the reality of it.

This means I am suggesting that power has not served me well. In fact, it hasn't served me at all. Instead, I have been serving it!

Therefore, I recommend that you fire that power that has been wrecking your life and hire one like mine. One like

mine will certainly treat you better. Mine will consistently work to improve your life rather than destroy it. Once you understand what's been happening, it can make it easier to accept the necessity of "a power greater than" you to pull you out of the mess caused by the drugs and/or dysfunctional behavior and the powers behind it all.

At this point, it can still be difficult to "believe". Don't be discouraged. All it means is you continue to have doubts. So, as you did before, write down all the reasons you can now think of that prevent you from moving ahead to belief at this point.

This is exactly the process every human being goes through to believe in anything. Everyone who is not stuck in a serious mental illness believes in many things—very appropriately, too. I urge you to not let the process or anyone discourage you. Keep doing all you can to become convinced that the object(s) and/or the person(s) suggested that you believe in to provide the needed change in your life are truly able to do that.

If there is a spiritual reality behind the chemicals that has taken over your life, then it is surely possible for you to feel internal resistance to believing in a positive Power greater than you and the chemicals. Don't allow those feelings to prevent you from objectively examining the information you are given. This is why you need someone who will allow—even encourage—you to state your doubts; then help you search for the truth you need to deal appropriately with the doubt.

It's obvious, once we recognize that we have not been living and acting independently, but have, through it all, been under the influence and direction of other destructive powers, we can begin to understand why things have been so chaotic. It's then my suggestions begin to make sense. It's then most resistance to the idea of a "power greater than us" stops. It's then we can "put our pride in our back pocket and sit on it". It's then we have a real chance at becoming the person we've always wanted to be.

Choice, not chance, determines destiny.

Why not let God have your life? He can do more with it than you can.

The most important things in life aren't things.

CHAPTER 4

PAY YOUR MONEY; TAKE YOUR PICK

At any given moment, each one of us is living our life in one of two ways. The first way is the path all of us have followed. On this path, the reality of life brought us face to face with our inability to successfully make our desires and decisions become a reality. This is the path of self-sufficiency.

As I've rushed along this path, without the advice of others I've decided what it was I wanted, and then have done all I could to get that.

This is the way I've lived most of my life. Stepping back, I realize that my life has been lived in a pressure-cooker of my own making. If you could look into my soul, you would see that I am an exhausted person. And if you were to ask me, "Why don't you just get out of the rat-race", I would probably wonder why you would ask such a question. From my perspective, there is no other way to live; and I've grown accustomed to this way of life. I may complain about it, but I have no real expectation that anything will change.

But there is another way to live. The twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous do a good job of outlining, in plain language, how to begin to live another way. This different way of living gives me hope when previously I had none. I find it strange because the results are so different. I can be experiencing all kinds of struggles internally; struggles that you can't see, but there is a sense of being alive. I sense freedom, a freedom that gives me true joy. I can't explain it completely, but it's real.

The old way of living might be thought of as learning and applying the rules that are supposed to make life work. So, if I do what I should, then I'll get what I want. It's based on the idea we are dealing with a God and a world that rewards good behavior. This means that I am in control of how things will work out in my life. So, the old way assures an improved life in which I get whatever I want that will make me happy and secure.

Despite its assurances, the old way does not deliver what I expect. It won't for one simple reason; I am never able to keep my end of the deal—at least not completely. I have never been able to do anything perfectly, and I never will. That's the way it is with all of us. If I try to live by the old way, I am required to do everything flawlessly. Failing in even one instance means that I have failed. It's like the old true-false tests. If the question isn't all true—even if it's 99% true—then the statement is false.

The second way—"the new way"—of living is totally different. The 12 Steps can help me understand how it works. But even before I get to the point of being willing to apply the 12 Steps, God has already been at work in my life planting a desire for him in my inner-most being. I am usually not completely aware of this desire. This yearning is for him rather than the things he can provide. It's an urging to give up the obsession with making life work my way. *Forgetting about needing to do it my way takes me out of control, but it sets me free.* I am no longer pursuing the *better life* of blessings from God or the fruit of my labor. Instead, I'm pursuing the *better hope* of nearness to God.

As I have pursued the better life promised by my addiction, I have discovered that it has never been able to give me what I really needed and wanted, but I was unable to understand that clearly. I may not even know what I have been so compulsively searching for, but I know I haven't gotten it.

This is where the 12 Steps come in. I have already discovered the disastrous results of the old way of doing life "my way". Now I am at the point of being willing to try a different—a second way—of approaching life. I can no longer stand to live with the responsibility of running my life, but I am uncertain how to proceed.

The second step tells me that I now have an option. I am no longer stuck in the old life—the old self-life, the old self-centered life. I now have the choice of living under the control of self *or* under the control of a positive Power greater than me *and* greater than my addiction. I may or may not fully grasp the reality of that, but it's true.

Additionally, I often need help grasping the reality of the insanity of self-life living. Usually, just reciting to myself the facts of how my life has become unmanageable will often be enough for me to recognize it. It's also helpful for me to see that my failure is not due to lack of trying. I have tried very hard to make my methods of living work. The results have always been the same—inability to maintain the control needed to insure feeling good.

I've found it's scary to live as the 12 Steps suggest. It's kind of like riding in a high-powered sports car driven by someone whose driving frightens me, going through rush - hour traffic way too fast, weaving in and out of the traffic. As God takes control of those parts of my life I surrender to him, it may feel scary, but I begin to experience a new sense of freedom. This new way of living promises me something different than the old way of living. It promises me a *better hope* rather than the *good things* of life. This new way promises nearness to God. This nearness to God comes immediately, but usually the feelings don't come right away. frequently this nearness comes as a result of pain and suffering.

CAUSE AND EFFECT LIVING

Unfortunately, most people live their whole life in the old way of chasing after the *good things* of life. People who live this way believe in what might be called the *"Law of Cause & Effect"*. This is just a fancy way of saying, "I believe there is always something I must do in order that I will get something I want." Here are a few ways this thought is revealed:

- If I want to get a raise/promotion, I must work hard and long.
- If I want to recover from my addiction, I must diligently apply the principles of the recovery program.
- If I want to be emotionally healthy, I must faithfully practice spiritual disciplines *and* trust God for all my needs.
- If I want a good marriage, I must learn, understand, and practice healthy ways of relating to my spouse.

- If I want close friends, I must learn to accept myself and to be vulnerable, authentic, and forgiving.

So you see, this way of living urges me to *figure out what I must do, do it, and I'll have the life* and the things in life that I want most of all. But that puts me under the gun of performing; that puts me under pressure to do it right.

The good news is there is a new way of living which might be called the *"Law of Liberty"*. The 12 Steps outline a way of living that has as its goal a relationship with God. Unfortunately, the purpose of the steps has been misinterpreted by many since their inception. They have been wrongly thought of providing a list of things to do, and doing them will result in recovery and a better life. **The only thing that the steps claim for themselves is the gaining of *a spiritual awakening—a relationship with God.***

Look, in the first step I have come to the conclusion that I am a mess—what I think, how I think, what has been important to me, and the way I've treated the people around me as I've scrambled to get what I thought I deserved/needed. Nowhere am I instructed to make any changes—all I'm asked to do is to admit the reality of the mess. So, if I understand the second step correctly, I am to feel absolutely no pressure to change—inner or outer life. All I need is to arrive at the place of *wanting* to be different in both areas.

Despite the efforts of the founders, in recent years the steps have become a vehicle to another religion. (I will discuss this further later in this chapter.) Any religion is an attempt to figure out a way to be in control of what happens in my life. I think this is an accurate distinction between religion and spirituality. More than a century ago, these two terms were used rather synonymously. Why the difference today? Quite simply, language changes dynamically over time.

If I grasp the intent of the founders in this step, the third step, and the eleventh step, **I will no longer see God as the means to getting what I want.** Instead, my desire has changed from wanting the things that I think will make my

life comfortable to simply wanting to know and enjoy God's company. (If you don't believe me, reread those steps.)

My goal used to be grabbing for everything that was reported to be the better life in this world. But as I've wheedled, manipulated, cajoled, demanded, and pushed to get my way, I've discovered all the stuff promised wasn't worth the trouble. As soon as I got it, it no longer satisfied or fulfilled me.

You, too, may have felt the emptiness this old way of living gives us. Maybe you, too, have worked hard to make life work so that you could feel good, only to find you rarely felt good but instead have felt the pressure to keep on keeping on to continue to feel good. You probably discovered, as I have, as time goes on it takes more and more effort to get less and less good feelings . Then you, like me, have found yourself trapped in your addictive thinking and belief system. Neither you nor I have to live that way any longer .

This new way involves simply coming to God just as I am. All I want is to do whatever will produce the opportunity for change. I've tried so long to change me; I now know I can't make it happen. When I am convinced that I can do nothing, along with the understanding there is someone who can actually do something to change my plight, then there is no pressure on me to do something.

Although this sounds really great, there are some problems that face us as we come to choose this way to live. The first is found in the *patterns of living* that have become habitual in our belief and thought systems. The second is the *fantasy we have about our ability* to consistently do the right thing. The final reason has to do with the *natural bent toward religion* the vast majority of us have.

OH, THOSE TREACHEROUS PATTERNS

I must never underestimate the power of habit— especially those habits that were formed in the earliest days of my childhood. Unfortunately, they seem to be the most difficult to break. That's unfortunate because those habits were based on decisions I made when I had the least experience,

the least amount of data, and the least amount of wisdom to make a decent decision.

It was in those early years that I learned how things in this world work (at least I thought and maybe still think to this day). If I made the right choices, then what I wanted seemed to happen. So, even now, when things don't go the way I expected them to go I am tempted to think, "What did I fail to do to prevent what I wanted to happen?" Or, "What could I have done to make this happen?"

This kind of thinking indicates at least two things. *First, it shows my continuing fantasy about the amount of control I actually have.* This is the heart of addictive thinking and belief. My tendency to believe that I actually have a lot of control is the primary problem in any addiction. We'll come back to this later.

The second is my strong belief that if I make the right choice, then I will get what I want. This, of course, is one of the strongest patterns of living I have learned from my earliest days. It's so powerful that I will always act according to this pattern unless I force myself to be aware of the thoughts and beliefs behind my choices and actions.

Basically, this means I lead a life dominated by cause-and-effect thinking. I suspect that you are like me. I want my life to work; I want to be comfortable, and happy. This means that I have come to the firm, settled persuasion that I must do whatever it takes to make my life relaxed and contented. The paradox is, this is a perfect setup to feel a great deal of pressure to make my comfort and happiness happen. Therefore, I struggle with a whole lot of cynicism about life and uncertainty about my ability to make "it" happen. This is especially true when the cause does not cause the expected effect.

You probably respond as I do when the expected effect doesn't happen. I just redouble my efforts to make it happen. When my continued efforts fail to produce the expected results, I have my own negative response, just as you do. The particular response is directly related to my total experi-

ence in life and can range from severe depression to insane rage. In every instance, the response is predicated on defective belief and thinking patterns ingrained into my life, and into yours too

JUST CALL ME MR. RIGHT

The second attitude that keeps me from quickly giving up on my ability to perform is my *fantasy that I am able to consistently do the right thing.*

This is directly related to my overpowering belief in the law of cause-and-effect. Erroneous evaluation of my life has caused me to believe that every effect is the result of a cause that **I** initiated. *If it's gonna be, it's gotta be me!* Therefore, deep inside me is a belief that if I just try hard enough, if I just apply myself well enough, then, what I want and expect will surely happen.

On the other hand, there are some of us who have learned through living that we can *never* do the right thing. We become right by attempting to be wrong; sort of a stubborn way of being the best at being the worst. We, too, believe in the law of cause and effect, except we believe that we are the cause of everything bad that happens, or maybe, most everything bad.

This really gets interesting when I apply this belief to situations involving others, whether people or God. Simply, it amounts to the fantasy of control over others. *If I say the right word, you will be unable to resist me. Do what I demand or I will make you crazy or sorry by what I say to you.*

When I apply this thinking to my relationship with God, I'm surely living a delusion, The creature can never have control over the creator because no creator is able to make something that has inherent characteristics that are beyond what the creator has. God loves you and me , therefore, he will not allow either you or me to dictate how *he* is to function.

I am always limited in my knowledge, understanding, and wisdom—the appropriate application of that knowledge and understanding. I will never have the inherent ability to al-

ways, or even consistently, make the right decisions in life. And strangely, it seems as if the more significant the issue is for me, the greater the possibility I will fail to choose the right course of thinking or action. I must learn to distrust my tendency to have great faith in my abilities. I surely need someone with greater abilities than I have to decide for me. This is a major issue addressed by the 1st and 2nd steps.

I SURE DO LOVE THOSE RITUALS

The third reason that keeps me from quickly depending on God in whatever situations I face is my *love of religion.* At first glance this reason doesn't seem to make a lot of sense. Larry Crabb, well-known Christian psychologist has written:

> ...The theology of religion can be expressed in a simple tenet: *The effort to harness whatever power is available in the service of whatever goal we value is a right and noble endeavor.*
>
> Moral religion, of course, stipulates that the pursuit of our goal must not violate others' pursuit of their goal. More generally, making life better for yourself, and for others if you can, is the idea. That's religion. **It leaves narcissism, a core commitment to our own well-being above all other values, firmly in place.** (Crabb, 2003, 76 emphasis added)

I am driven to look out for "number one" at all costs. In that driving need I will use anything I can to meet my needs. As Crabb suggests, *whatever* I can do to get my current goal accomplished is fair game.

This means that my goal, whatever it happens to be, is the focus of my attention—the most important thing in my life. It can easily be said that whatever happens to be most important in my life at any time is then the object of my worship. To worship something means to idolize, revere, or dote upon. The word worship comes from the same Old English word *weorth*, meaning worth or value. So whatever I give my full attention to is whatever is of most value or worth to me.

Religion may be defined by such ideas as adoration, devotion, reverence, veneration, and homage. So, religion is a the

giving of respect, caring about something or someone; it is lifting up something giving it great importance in one's life. "Religion is the self-absorbed search for a way to be in control of our own well-being." (Crabb, 2003, 76)

How can this possibly be? Perhaps it will become clearer if I put it in the context of magic. True, supernatural magic (often spelled Magick) involves calling on spirit beings to perform some action if I know the verbal key to cause them to act. This is often called "the magic word". The purpose of this religious activity is to cause something I want done to actually be done—simple cause and effect. This is what religious practice is about, regardless of the object of the religious practice. It always involves attempting to cause someone in the spirit world to do something that results in me getting what I want.

Religion simply is the natural outworking of my decision to freely choose what is most important in my life. Left to my own devices, I will always value **my** goals and **my** life over anything or anyone else. That is, until I experience the futility of engaging in religion.

This is exactly where the addict has the advantage over the non-addict. Technically, we have been engaging in religious practices throughout our career of practicing an addiction. Our drug of choice or behavior of choice has been what we have venerated—respected most of all. There was no mountain too high, no valley too deep, and no river too wide to keep us from practicing our addiction. That is the essence of religion—*the self-absorbed search for a way to be in control of our own well-being.*

This is the point where I got hung-up when it came to belief. Maybe it has been true for you also. I was asked to believe in someone over whom I would have no control—that was made clear to me. I was to release control of my life, my well-being, into the hands of another. I had never believed that anyone else was looking out for me. How could I believe that surrendering control of any aspect my life was going to be for my best good?

The only way I will ever come to that conclusion is through careful examination of my experience in living. This is precisely the purpose of the first step. It's very painful because I am being forced to acknowledge my narcissistic need to *have-it-my-way* is not working. Of course, once I get over that, I find that I can move from bondage to freedom through entering the land of reality.

In some way all religion tells me, "Do this! Do that! Protect yourself. Look out for your own well-being. Listen to me, I'll tell you how to make your marriage work; to make your depression lift; to be nice to people you can't stand, be patient and kind. Get busy! Work harder! Keep trying! Sooner or later you'll get it and your life will work the way you want it to work." If you don't believe me, just listen to a wide variety of sermons given by well-meaning preachers or talks at open meetings given by well-meaning speakers.

So, we see that the common feature of all religions is to repackage the old principle that being in control is a wonderful idea. That has always been the underlying message of the evil one. It worked with Adam and Eve, and as Adam's child, I want control. I want to run the show so that my way is the way it's done. And I think that whoever I choose to trust, should cooperate.

THE BETTER WAY OF THE 12 STEPS

The 12 Steps outline a better way to approach life. They systematically force us examine the reality of our life. Initially we were shocked to discover that our life was not as we thought. In fact, it was much worse.

This means that the steps will urge those willing follow their suggestions into a totally different way of living. The book *Alcoholics Anonymous* expands on this in the story of Fred in the third chapter.

> **...I saw that will power and self-knowledge would not help...**I had never been able to understand people who said that a problem had them hopelessly defeated. I knew then.
>
> Two of the members of Alcoholics Anonymous came to

see me...**they outlined the spiritual answer** and program of action which a hundred of them had followed successfully...But the program of action, though entirely sensible, was pretty drastic. It meant I would have to throw several lifelong conceptions out of the window. That was not easy. **But the moment I made up my mind** to go through with the process, I had the curious feeling that my alcoholic condition was relieved, as in fact it proved to be.

Quite as important was the discovery that spiritual principles would solve all my problems. I have since been brought into **a way of living** infinitely more satisfying and, I hope, more useful than the life I lived before. (AA 1976, 42-3 emphasis added)

So, the answer as advocated by the 12 Steps involves something besides "will power and self-knowledge". Additionally, a great revelation came to Fred when he discovered that "spiritual principles would solve all my problems". The spiritual principles he discovered result in an amazing, astonishing opportunity.

...all of us, whatever our race, creed, or color are the children of **a living Creator with whom we may form a relationship upon simple and understandable terms** as soon as we are willing and honest enough to try. (AA 1976, 28 emphasis added)

The 12 Steps outline a process that is called a "spiritual awakening". The question is, "To what are we awakened to?" The answer the founders give us is very simple but true, "... a living Creator with whom we may form a relationship...". Therefore, the steps are not intended to lead us into another set of rules and regulations—a religion. Instead, they lead us into an opportunity for a close, intimate, and personal relationship with our Creator God—no rules to keep, just a person to relate with.

People of faith have a logical idea of what life is all about.

...since they have come to believe in a Power greater than themselves...there has been a revolutionary change in their way of living and thinking.

They said God made these things possible, and we only smiled. We had seen spiritual release, but liked to tell ourselves it wasn't true. Actually we were fooling ourselves, for deep down in every man, woman, and child, is the fundamental idea of God.

When we drew near to Him He disclosed Himself to us!

All quotes from Alcoholics Anonymous, Chapter 4, pages 49, 50, 55, & 57

CHAPTER 5

THE MEANING OF THE SECOND STEP

Came to **believe** that a Power greater than ourselves **could restore** us to **sanity.**

The concepts of the second step are the necessary bridge between the issues of failure, defeat, and brokenness of the first step and the surrender of the third step. We've seen that this step is difficult for everyone the first time they encounter it. But once we have diligently examined and appropriately evaluated the concepts of the second step, we are more able to come to an intelligent decision regarding their usefulness in our situation. The willingness to use the basic ideas presented in this step keeps us from being stuck in a state of chronic relapse.

A crucial part of truly grasping and using the ideas of the second step involve understanding the reality that there are only two ways of living your life: The first, living in such a way that you, unilaterally, decide what you need and how you are going to go about getting it. As I mentioned, this is known as "doing it my way".

This is the way all of us have lived our life. Taking into account our life experiences, we can predict, with a great deal of confidence, what the outcome will be in most instances—failure and defeat. Of course, we continued to live this way for a long time despite the outcomes, because we had no idea there was another feasible way to live.

The second way involves discovering that I no longer have to figure out what the problem I'm facing is, and then have to fix it. Instead, I can be relived of the pressure to fix or change by allowing God to step in and take control and responsibility for the remodeling of my life.

It's the presentation and realization of this other way to live that caused, and maybe continues to cause, us to have a "jaw-dropping" experience. What's so amazing is the simplicity of the way. What's so scary is the requirement for living in the new way—choosing to release control of our life.

We also discovered that it's rather easy to deceive ourselves into thinking that we are surrendering control of our life when, in reality, we continue to call the shots. It is so very hard to not grab back control. We have lived for so long believing that life is, or should be, based upon cause and effect: If I do the necessary, the right thing, then I will receive the good things I expected.

This is an idea that most of us want or have wanted to live with. We had no idea that this idea of cause and effect is not necessarily the way life works. Really nice, good, wonderful people lose out despite all their good efforts. And the opposite also happens. Mean, awful people come out of situations we were hoping would destroy them without a scratch. Life is not fair, at least in the way we want it to be.

It's essential that I grapple with this, here in the second step, or when things don't work out the way I want and expect, I will give up this alternative way of living—the only way to genuine, lasting change.

Making life here on earth more comfortable and convenient has not been God's agenda. Within the last hundred years or so the knowledge and understanding of God's agenda has been generally lost. This is why so many—not just addicts—are confused by life.

God's agenda involves helping us to see that the only way to deal with the unexpected situations in life is with him in control. But even more than that, God wants us to grasp that he wants to have a relationship with us. He wants us to want to hang out with him. He wants us to want him; to want him more than the expected "good life" offered by the other way of independent living.

The second step is intended to draw me into this new way of living. It is urging me to stop living in the old way of trying

to be responsible for what I have had little or no power or authority over—the outcomes in my life. I am being lead by the step to stop trying to make failed strategies work. Based upon my life experiences, I can see the validity of the step's concepts. I just struggle with living them.

We also discovered there are some problems that face us as we come to choose this new way to live. The first is found in the *patterns of living* that have become habitual in our belief and thought systems. The second is the *fantasy we have about our ability* to consistently do the right thing. The final reason has to do with the *natural bent toward religion* the vast majority of us have.

We can work through each of these barriers. We can actually choose a different way of dealing with life. We have seen that the second step is focused on the restoration of our life to a semblance of normalcy. This can only take place as Someone with more power than we and the drugs and/or the habit patterns have in our life acts to cause changes. But before that action can happen, we must come to the point of believing that it can take place and then confirm our decision for the process to begin. This is the essence of this step in the process of change.

Once we have come to this point, there should be no delay in moving on to the third step in the process where we actively act on what we've come to believe. To choose to put as our most important priority being with God. This is the essence of the third step...but that's another story, isn't it.

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