

## Step Two:

In Step One we found complete despair—powerlessness. We cannot solve the problem of our compulsive eating by ourselves. In Step Two we will find hope—power. A power greater than ourselves *will* restore us to sanity.

Step One is the problem. Step Two is the solution.

The Big Book discusses Step Two in part of "Bill's Story" and in the whole of "We Agnostics".

Most of the discussion of Step Two in the Big Book is aimed at persons who do not believe in a personal god—agnostics (who have come to the conclusion that they will never know whether there is a God or not) or atheists (who believe there is no God). Therefore most of today's share will concentrate on reasons why a person who does not believe in God would want to find a Higher Power through the Twelve Steps.

Why, then, would a person who believes in a specific God be interested in this discussion? There are two reasons.

- 1 The religious person will someday in sponsoring meet someone like me, and he or she should know the arguments to help someone like me.
- 2 There is an extremely important page of the Big Book which the person who believes in God but who is still suffering from compulsive eating ought to understand—if he or she is to recover!

In the following discussion, I take for granted that we have accepted our powerlessness over food—that Step One for us is a reality. (Note that we don't "take" Step One. There is no concept in the Big Book that we "take" it or "do" it. It is rather that we *acknowledge* our powerlessness, we *accept* our powerlessness.)

We understand the "double whammy" of not being able to stop when we start (the physical allergy), and of not being able to stop from starting again (the mental obsession), and realize that there is no hope for us on our own.

Because we have this mental obsession, we are insane. We need to have constant sanity to be able to say, "I don't want to eat foods or indulge in eating behaviors that cause me uncontrollable cravings."

Those who have read "Bill's Story" will recall that in his worst moment of despair—after Dr. Silkworth

tells him about the double whammy and he experiences the truth of it and the hopelessness of his situation—he was visited by his friend Ebby, who was sober; and that when Bill asked him how he had become sober, Ebby told him that he had found religion. This hit Bill hard. He was an agnostic. He could not believe in the God of religion, something he had rejected for many years.

What was Bill to do? He saw in his friend a real miracle:

Like myself, he had admitted complete defeat. Then he had, in effect, been raised from the dead, suddenly taken from the scrap heap to a level of life better than the best he had ever known! Had this power originated in him? Obviously it had not. There had been no more power in him than there was in me at the minute; and this was none at all. Never mind the musty past; here sat a miracle directly across the kitchen table. He shouted great tidings. (pages 11 and 12)

Here is the point at which we see the value that all of our past experience is able to bring to the compulsive eater who still suffers. If it is clear that we used to be like the person who still suffers, but are now different as a result of the Twelve Steps, then we fill the prospect with both *despair* (Step One—s/he can't do it on his/her own) and *hope* (Step Two—it can be done!).

But how could Bill have that miracle if he did not believe in God?

Ebby then gave Bill, and AA, and OA and all other Twelve Step programs, a great gift. Although he was part of an evangelical Christian movement (the Oxford Groups), he didn't try to persuade Bill to believe in any kind of God. He said, "Why don't you choose your own conception of God?" (page 12)

That was enough for Bill to work on. "It was only a matter of being willing to believe in a Power greater than myself. Nothing more was required of me to make my beginning."

This theme is expanded in the chapter "We Agnostics". It is designed to give the still-suffering alcoholic reasons to be willing. It is NOT designed to prove the existence of God. I misread it for years. I thought it was designed to prove the existence of God, and of course it fails in that respect.

## Outline of *We Agnostics*:

The chapter is divided into three major sections.

The *first section*, from page 44 to page 48, poses the essential dilemma facing a person who does not believe in God.

The *second section*, from page 48 to page 54, presents three powerful arguments on why one should be willing to find a Higher Power.

The *third section*, from page 54 to page 55, gives the reality of fundamental belief and is the section of extreme importance to the believer as well as to the non-believer. (There is also a fourth anecdotal section from page 55 to page 57 providing experiential testimony.) I'll summarize each section.

### First section—the dilemma:

Pages 44 - 48: Because we cannot recover on our own, we are doomed unless we find a Power greater than ourselves. This book is all about finding that Higher Power. But that's a real problem for people who don't believe in God. About half of us were like that. Don't be prejudiced by the words we use in this book to describe a Higher Power. It's your own conception that's important. And don't worry. You don't HAVE to believe in a Higher Power in order to work the Steps. You only have to be WILLING to believe.

### Second section—the reasons:

Pages 48 - 54. Here are the three reasons the agnostic or atheist should be willing to try what this book offers.

**First reason** (pages 48 to the top of 51): *Scientifically speaking, a theory that's grounded in fact—that works—is worth trying out.* All of us believe in theories about electricity even though we've never seen the atoms upon which that theory is based; but the theories work for us, and therefore we believe them. Our theory is that a Higher Power can restore us to sanity. Clearly that theory works. Therefore the agnostic or atheist should try it!

**Second reason** (pages 51 to the bottom of 53): *No real progress is ever made in this world unless we challenge established ideas that don't work and become willing to try new ideas that might work.* Until someone was willing to try out the idea that the earth was round or that the earth circled the sun, little progress was made in navigation; until someone was willing to try out the idea that a

heavier-than-air flying machine could be built, it was not built. The idea of the agnostic or atheist that he or she can handle his or her own addiction doesn't work. Our idea that we need a Higher Power does work. Therefore the agnostic or atheist should try it!

**Third reason** (pages 53 to the bottom of 54): *Regardless of the protestations of the atheist or agnostic, he or she DOES believe in things that are in fact more powerful than he or she is.* The atheist or agnostic believes in his or her own reasoning; actually worships things—like love or money—that can't be justified using logic. As a matter of fact, the things the atheist

The Appendix on *Spiritual Experience* was placed into the second printing of the Big Book, in 1941. It was put there to make it clear that a sudden spiritual epiphany was not the norm for AAers when they did the steps. What was usual was a gradual spiritual awakening. So Bill Wilson made certain that when it came time to reprint the Big Book, after the first 5,000 copies had been distributed, the Big Book would contain that explanation. The Appendix is important for three other reasons.

First, it provides a completely non-religious and in a real sense a non-spiritual definition of spiritual experience or spiritual awakening—a "personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism", and later on, "a profound alteration in his reaction to life".

This opens up the program for people who have no sense of a God at all. If I have received a personality change that has been sufficient to overcome my compulsive overeating, then I have had a spiritual awakening. I don't have to argue with anybody at all about whether or not I've accepted "God" in my life.

Second, it talks about achieving recovery "in a few months", which should give a real ray of hope.

Third, it contains that wonderful quote (wrongly) attributed to Herbert Spencer: "There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance—that principle is contempt prior to investigation."

It appears that Herbert Spencer didn't say this. It was written by a minister named William Paley. See the fascinating lengthy article by Michael StGeorge currently (2017) available at <http://anonpress.org/spencer/> or [www.aabibliography.com/pdf/Survival\\_of\\_a\\_Fitting\\_Quotation.pdf](http://www.aabibliography.com/pdf/Survival_of_a_Fitting_Quotation.pdf).

or the agnostic worships are what give him or her the essence of his or her life. "It was impossible to say we had no capacity for faith, or love, or worship. In one form or another we had been living by faith and little else" (page 54). So the atheist or the agnostic DOES believe in something that he or she can't touch or see and can't prove. So why not TRY

Chapter Two, *There is a Solution*, contains a summary of the issues relating to the allergy of the body and the obsession of the mind. It is well worth reading!

It also contains the wonderful story at pages 26 through 28 of "a certain American businessman" (Rowland Hazard), who had consulted with the great psychoanalyst Dr. Carl Jung for some time, yet who went back to alcoholism as soon as he left. Dr. Jung told him his condition was hopeless unless he could find a spiritual experience; but simply being religious wasn't enough.

Rowland found the Oxford Groups, which used a few simple actions to gain a spiritual experience. As one of them put it, you get honest with yourself (Step Four), you get honest with another human being (Step Five), you make up for what you've done wrong (Step Nine), you trust in God (Step Eleven), and you help others (Step Twelve). He had a spiritual experience and stopped drinking. He brought his message to Ebby Thacher, who then brought it to Bill Wilson. Bill adapted those steps to create the Twelve Steps.

Just before Dr. Jung died, Bill wrote him a lengthy letter thanking him for the role he played in developing AA. Dr. Jung wrote a brilliant letter back. Both of those letters can be found in the great AA publication, *The Language of the Heart*—a collection of Bill's writings in the *AA Grapevine*. Dr. Jung's concept was that alcoholism is the low-level thirst for spirituality—equal to our OA low-level hunger for spirituality—and that what AA (and OA) provides is real spirituality through the support of a like-minded community and actions which bring us closer to our spiritual center.

Some doubt has been placed on the accuracy of the Big Book's account of Rowland's contact with Dr. Jung, although the spiritual basis and the ideas behind it have not been questioned;

See [www.wejoy.org/pdf/Rowland%20Hazard.pdf](http://www.wejoy.org/pdf/Rowland%20Hazard.pdf) for a attempt to figure out when Rowland consulted with Dr. Jung and what really influenced Rowland to pursue the Oxford Groups.

the idea that this program will give you a sense of a higher power? It can't hurt!

### **Third section—deep down within us is our fundamental conception of a Higher Power:**

Pages 54 - 55: *Faith is part of our makeup, and in that is the fundamental idea of God.*

Actually we were fooling ourselves, for deep down in every man, woman, and child, is the fundamental idea of God. It may be obscured by calamity, by pomp, by worship of other things, but in some form or other it is there. We finally saw that faith in some kind of God was a part of our make-up, just as much as the feeling we have for a friend. Sometimes we had to search fearlessly, but He was there. He was as much a fact as we were. We found the Great Reality deep down within us. In the last analysis it is only there that He may be found. It was so with us. (page 55)

*So ultimately we will find a Higher Power "deep down within us".*

But—and this is what is so important EVEN for the person who believes in God—that Higher Power is "obscured by calamity, pomp, by worship of other things" (page 55). Put in other words, our Higher Power is blocked by bad things that have happened to us, by a sense of self-importance, and by worship of other things.

### **The Steps unblock us from our Higher Power:**

Here is the essence of what the Twelve Steps do for us! The Steps REMOVE the things that BLOCK us from the Higher Power deep down within us!

As soon as the block is removed, we have contact with that Higher Power. And as soon as we have contact with that Higher Power, we become sane. And becoming sane means that we no longer want to return to the foods and eating behaviors that create uncontrollable cravings. We will see in the discussion of Step Four that the Big Book talks about being "blocked" (page 71) from the "sunlight of the spirit" (page 66).

So whether we believe in God or don't believe in God, if we are not sane when it comes to food, it is

clear that we have blocked off our route to sanity. The only solution we know is to get rid of the blocks. To do that we work the Twelve Steps.

#### **What to say to the person who doesn't believe in God:**

The question to ask, therefore, of people who don't believe in God is what concepts or ideas or feelings they DO believe in that are more important than they are: What gives them any meaning at all in their lives?

Any person desperate enough to come to OA and who is relatively honest will be able to answer that question at least in part. That person will usually come up with LOVE at the very least—"Who of us had not loved something or somebody?" (page 54) They may come up with high ideals, as I did when asked that question, like Truth, or Justice, or Beauty. Or they may come up with Doing Good, Being Useful; or Not Doing Harm, Being Part of the World; or simply Intuitively Doing the Right Thing, Being Serene. Which of us can't come up with a list of one or two or three things that motivate us, things that we may have trouble attaining, but that we wish we could attain?

If we use the Big Book's image of blocking the Higher Power which is "deep down within us", we can see that our fundamental idea of a Higher Power is really the concepts or the ideals which give us whatever motivation in life we have. Some people, religious people, call that God, and give it a personality and various attributes. Some people don't. For the purposes of the Twelve Steps, it really makes no difference.

A Higher Power gives us direction.

A *personal* God gives us direction by telling us what to do, perhaps through our holy scriptures or through a revelation or through meditation or through "signs"—things that happens to us that have meaning for us. That God, in effect, "pushes" us from behind to go to a particular direction.

A Higher Power consisting of *values* gives us direction by being a beacon, a North Pole, a compass point—a place to go towards. That God, in effect, "pulls" us in a particular direction.

The image that makes sense to me is that of a compass. Out of the 360 degrees on the compass, there is the one degree direction of Truth, Love, Justice, and Beauty. The other 359 degrees consist of *my* way; and not one of those paths has ever worked!

#### **What to say to the person who does believe in God:**

The question to ask of those who do believe in God is, "Do you accept that something is blocking you off from your God?" Most people asked that question will answer Yes. They will talk about their religious schooling or upbringing that caused them not to love their God but to fear Him. They will talk about the scars of their lives and think that their God has punished them. Or they will simply acknowledge that their religious activity has become mechanical and not meaningful to them. They will intuitively understand the notion of being blocked from God.

One religious person I spoke to talked about being "functionally agnostic" before he worked the steps—although he believed in God, he didn't act according to his beliefs. That made sense to me.

For those who have rejected their childhood religion because of various issues, there is also the wonderful and calming option of their being able to choose the "best part" of their God—by focusing on the love and the understanding and the compassion that is at the very least PART of their religious upbringing without having to embrace the WHOLE of the god of their religion.

#### **The Steps provide us with a Higher Power:**

What the Big Book actually promises is that working the Twelve Steps *will* remove the blocks that keep us from our Higher Power, however we have conceived It, and that Higher Power will enter into our lives and give us sanity. There's no promise that we will believe in the God of a religion at all. The only promise is that we will have sanity—that we will feel a strength and power that we know did not exist in us when we were trying to deal with our problems on our own.

The Appendix on *Spiritual Experience* makes that very clear. A spiritual experience, the Appendix says, can

Step Two is not a huge step to take the Big Book way. As a matter of fact, we don't *take* Step Two at all.

It is simply a sense of what a Higher Power could be, and a willingness to work the steps of the program in order to see if such a Higher Power can be found.

Aside from setting out a number 2 step on page 59, the Big Book never mentions Step Two as a step. There is simply the discussion of being open to finding a higher power as set out in three chapters in the Big Book—*Bill's Story*, *There is a Solution*, and *We Agnostics*.

be slow, an awakening, and not sudden. And it is characterized by “a personality change sufficient to overcome alcoholism”.

Step Two only requires that we be willing to try to find our Higher Power. That’s all. Our willingness is enough to start the process of working the Twelve Steps. When we work the Twelve Steps, we find that automatically (guaranteed by end of Step Nine!) we become sane in relation to food, without any effort on our part in dealing with food (see the Hidden Promises at the bottom of page 84 and top of page 85)!

For agnostics and atheists, I can only say this as personal testimony. I began this program almost twenty years ago as an agnostic. I am still an agnostic, a very skeptical agnostic. But I have recovered in this program, a day at a time: I am sane about foods and eating behaviors that cause me uncontrollable craving. Therefore I have achieved a spiritual awakening as promised by the Steps, and I will continue to have that spiritual awakening so long as I continue to work the Steps and maintain a fit spiritual condition.

So to all of you who are atheists and agnostics, don’t despair at all! Just do the steps! The Big Book guarantees that if you do the steps, by the end of Step Nine you will have a personality change sufficient to overcome compulsive eating—and in the words of the Big Book, that IS a spiritual awakening! Certainly, if you’re like me, it will be a miracle!

And for believers, my experience with countless other believers in OA is that the Steps remove the blockage between them and their God, and those believers end up affirming their faith in deep and ultimately mystical ways.

#### What Step Two is and what it is not:

If we are powerless as individuals, can we derive hope from those in OA, or those in other 12-step programs, who have clearly recovered from their addictions?

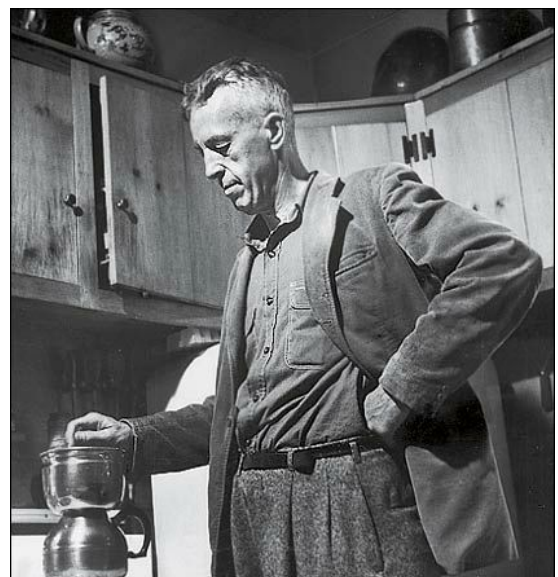
There appears to be an interpretation of OA’s Twelve and Twelve which gives the impression that Step Three is a step we can’t take until we’re really really ready, and that if we don’t suddenly find ourselves actually turning our will and our life over to the care of our god, we haven’t completed Step Three. From a Big Book point of view, that doesn’t appear to be the case at all. Step Three is simply a decision to go on with the steps. The Big Book promises that we will have our will and our life turned over to the care of our god by Step Nine.

That’s the only real question. If we can feel some hope that people who are just like us have recovered by working the Twelve Steps, then maybe, just maybe, we can try it ourselves. Step Two is only hope – nothing more. It is the promise of what happens IF we work the Twelve Steps. It doesn’t give us a Higher Power and doesn’t require us to adopt one.

#### Questions:

So, some questions:

- Do you accept that on your own you are powerless over those foods and eating behaviors that cause you uncontrollable cravings?
- Is what you’re doing about your powerlessness working?
- Do you accept that there are those people who have been as powerless as you who are full of a power that has overcome their powerlessness?
- Are you willing to do what those people say gave them power?
- If you don’t believe in God, is there anything you believe in that is more important than you are? If so, what? Call that God.
- If you believe in God, do you feel cut off —blocked—from God?
- Are you ready to go forward?



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SOBER: Bill Wilson in his kitchen, 1952