

Step Eleven:

And now Step Eleven. If you have downloaded the Step Eleven form to be found at www.oabigbook.info, or look at the form preceding this chapter, you will see how that form provides all specific instructions from pages 86 to 88 (plus a few others), so I'm not going to go over those specific instructions. I just want to point out a few things.

The Big Book's warning about needing to keep in fit spiritual condition begins its discussion of Step Eleven. On page 84:

It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. We are headed for trouble if we do, for alcohol is a subtle foe. We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all of our activities. 'How can I best serve Thee - Thy will (not mine) be done.' These are thoughts which must go with us constantly. We can exercise our will power along this line all we wish. It is the proper use of the will.

(A "reprieve" is a suspension of a death sentence!)

The Big Book then talks about "receiving strength, inspiration, and direction" from our higher power. The whole concept is to develop a "vital sixth sense" that gives us a direct connection to the power which is greater than we are. We are trying to learn to act intuitively—directly from our hearts with the purest of motives. We have lived, at the very least, a double life; in my case, at times, it was a triple or quadruple life. Now we have to live according to the dictates of our higher power.

Specific Directions:

The Big Book contains specific directions. "It would be easy to be vague about this matter. Yet, we believe we can make some definite and valuable suggestions." (page 86)

These suggestions are, in effect, the MINIMUM we should be doing. I know many people who spend an hour or two meditation in the morning, using any number of powerful meditation techniques. They are very spiritual people, and I respect them tremendously. But at the minimum they also do what the Big Book suggests!

The Big Book has three kinds of prayers and meditations.

The first is what we do on going to sleep, as discussed in the first full paragraph on page 86.

The second is what we do on awakening, as discussed in the last two paragraphs on page 86, and the first three paragraphs on page 87.

The third is what we do during the daytime, discussed in the last paragraph on page 87, going on to page 88.

Why is the nighttime prayer and meditation discussed first? Interestingly enough, the original manuscript had us review the day before when we woke up in the morning, and someone must have pointed out to Bill that it would be far wiser to review the day just when we're going to sleep.

Clearly the intent, whether done before we go to sleep or when we wake up, is to be clear about how we spent the day just passed.

The evening prayer and mediation:

The evening prayer and meditation is really a Step Four through Nine inventory, isn't it? Here's the annotated version:

Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest or afraid? [STEP FOUR] Do we owe an apology? [STEPS EIGHT AND NINE] Have we kept something to ourselves which should be discussed with another person at once? [STEP FIVE] Were we kind and loving toward all? What could we have done better? Were we thinking of ourselves most of the time? Or were we thinking of what we could do for others, of what we could pack into the stream of life? But we must be careful not to drift into worry, remorse or morbid reflection, for that would diminish our usefulness to others. After making our review we ask God's forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken. [STEPS SIX AND SEVEN]

Sure, it's not in the same order, but the actions are very similar. As I said in the discussion of Step Ten, I think this Steps Four through Nine is done informally, maybe even in bed, but certainly not necessarily with pen and paper. This is what we do just before we go to sleep.

Note, though, that we don't do a "Step Five" unless we have to—the question is whether we have "kept

something to ourselves which should be discussed with another person at once". Maybe we haven't. So there's a difference.

The more carefully we do this, remembering every little thing that happened to us that day and analyzing it, we will probably deal with most of the difficult things in our lives on a day-to-day basis. But I find that doing that doesn't give me the kind of overview I need to look at all the biggest things in my life. I might be irritated day to day by my children and deal with those irritations in my Step Eleven sleep-time prayer and meditation. But ultimately my big issues with my children will almost certainly be dealt with in a Step Ten.

At least that's how I do it. I know that many people who work the steps the Big Book way do their Steps Four through Nine every night by writing and analyzing their day and phoning their sponsors. They have decided that Step Ten is to be done every night, and that the sleep-time prayer and meditation includes a full Step Ten. And it certainly works for them, and those of them I know are really more spiritual than I am, so they probably know more than I do. I just find it more convenient to work it this way. I work what I would call a "good enough" program.

The emphasis on the evening prayer and mediation is to figure out what I could do better for the next day. It is not introspective. We review our past day to see how we did, and how we can do better.

The morning prayer and meditation:

Planning our day ahead on awakening is pretty clear.

We're given wonderful instructions for clearing our mind and thinking through things with the best of motives. The most wonderful and freeing thing is the instruction that if we don't know what we should be doing, if we "face indecision", we pray for "inspiration, an intuitive thought or a decision" and then "we relax and take it easy. We don't struggle." (Page 86) It is truly remarkable what happens when we do it this way. At least that's been my experience, and the experience of countless hundreds of people I've talked to over the years.

In effect, at least from a psychological point of view, we're letting our subconscious take over, and if our subconscious is filled with good motives, then it will do a great job for us! And for those who are more

religious, they find that they hear their God's directions very very clearly!

The daytime prayer and meditation:

And the daytime prayers! There are times when I have to repeat "Thy will not mine be done. Thy will not mine be done. Thy will not mine be done." over and over and over again until I calm down and get some sense of direction. But it works!

Following this page is the Step Eleven form, listing all the prayers that the Big Book sets out.

Questions:

Here are some questions:

- If you're not up to Step Ten yet, do you see the correlation between Steps Four through Nine and Step Ten?
- If you've relapsed in the past, is it possible that you failed to continue to clean house by doing Step Ten?
- Do you see a distinction between Step Ten and the sleep-time prayer and meditation?
- How do you feel about the notion of praying for the right thought or action or decision, and then just letting go?
- The Big Book suggests at page 87 that for our awakening prayers "we sometimes select and memorize a few set prayers which emphasize the principles we have been discussing." Aside from the Step Three and Seven prayers, the Serenity Prayer, and the St. Francis Prayer (from Step Eleven in the AA 12 & 12), can you suggest some short prayers "which emphasize the principles we have been discussing"?
- How do you feel about the concept that once you have recovered at Step Nine, you simply maintain your fit spiritual condition through Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve. In other words, how do you feel about the notion that, in effect, you don't go through the steps again?

STEP 11 PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS

Daily Prayer & Meditations

Evening Prayer and Meditation

Big Book, page 86;

On retiring at night, constructively review your day:

- Were you resentful, selfish, dishonest or afraid?
- Do you owe an apology?
- Have you kept something to yourself which should be discussed with another person at once?
- Were you kind and loving toward all?
- What could you have done better?
- Were you thinking of yourself most of the time?
- Or were you thinking of others, of what you could pack into the stream of life?

Be careful not to drift into worry, remorse or morbid reflection, for that would diminish your usefulness to others.

After making your review:

God, please forgive me and tell me what corrective measures should be taken.

Morning Prayer and Meditation

Big Book, pages 86-7;

On awakening pray:

God, I ask you to direct my thinking, I especially ask that my thinking be divorced from self-pity, dishonest or self-seeking motives.

Think about the twenty-four hours ahead, Consider your plans for the day...

If you are faced with indecision, pray:

I ask you for inspiration, an intuitive thought, or a decision.

After considering your plans for the day, pray:

God, I pray that I be shown all through the day what my next step is to be. I pray that I be given whatever I need to take care of such problems. I ask especially for freedom from self-will. I ask that I be given strength only if others will be helped.

Also say the following prayers:

My creator, I ask that you show me the way of patience, tolerance, kindness and love (page 83)

God, what can I do today for the man who is still sick? (page 164)

If you have resentment that you want to be free of, pray:

God, I ask that everything I want for myself be given -----, I ask for -----'s health, prosperity, and happiness (page 552)

Also select and memorize a few set prayers which emphasize the principles in the Big Book, such as the Step 3 Prayer (page 63), the Step 7 Prayer (page 76), the St. Francis Prayer (AA12&12, page 99), the Serenity Prayer, or any other prayer.

Big Book, pages 87-8;

Constantly remind yourself:

I am no longer running the show.

Say to yourself many times each day:

Thy will be done.

When agitated or doubtful:

God, please give me the right thought or action

Page 85 (thoughts which must go with you constantly):

How can I best serve thee?

Thy will (not mine) be done.

Page 67 (if a person offends you):

This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done.

Conclusion to Steps Ten and Eleven:

You can see that the Big Book leaves us plenty of time for doing things. It's not as if we spend a lot of time just meditating and praying. The Big Book is all about action!

If we do what the Big Book suggests, our Step Tens are done when we begin not to feel so spiritually fit, and doing them the Big Book way is pretty fast.

The three kinds of prayer and meditation of Step Eleven are really pretty quick too. We can do the nighttime one in five minutes in bed, the awakening one in five minutes, and the day-time ones in seconds, really. Keeping recovered doesn't seem to take much time!

That's very true in one way, of course. The Big Book does not seem to want us to spend a lot of time on internal thinking.

No, our main job, as the Big Book makes very clear, is to help others, not to waste our time thinking about ourselves.

The Big Book warns us at the end of the chapter on page 88: "But this is not all. There is action and more action. 'Faith without works is dead.' The next chapter is entirely devoted to Step Twelve."



The gatehouse of the Sieberling estate in Akron, Ohio, where Bill Wilson met Dr. Bob Smith.