

BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by Eye.nonymous - 13 Jul 2012 07:17

“AA is a simple program for complicated people.”

—One of many AA mottos

Everything necessary to work the 12 steps is found in the book Alcoholics Anonymous (this program has been effective for millions of alcoholics since the 1930’s, and it has also been effective for many other addictions—including lust addiction). However, when reading this book on one’s own, it’s easy to overlook important facts, to miss underlying messages, and to over-complicate the simple plan of action. Also, due to our subjectivity, we can miss how the problems and solutions described in this book apply to us—even though they very well may.

Therefore, I am trying an experiment. I don’t know how well it will work in this form, but I thought it might be worth a try. I will simply post the Big-Book, little by little, and let it speak for itself (mostly). I will also draw attention to the ideas one might otherwise miss reading it on one’s own, help show how the problems and solutions described in this book apply to us, and clarify whatever actions are called for. Much of what I write is based, if loosely so, on what I gained through Duvid Chaim’s 12-step phone groups. I am also likely to share from my own experience and my own thoughts.

I hope to cover the first seven chapters (plus two preliminary chapters) of Alcoholics Anonymous, which explains all twelve steps. They are as follows:

Foreword

The Doctor’s Opinion

I. Bill’s Story

II. There Is A Solution

III. More About Alcoholism

IV. We Agnostics

V. How It Works

VI. Into Action

VII. Working With Others

I will greatly appreciate comments and questions about this thread as it develops.

--Elyah

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by Eye.nonymous - 18 Jan 2013 13:57

If a mere code of morals, or a better philosophy of life were sufficient to overcome [sexaholism], many of us would have recovered long ago. But we found that such codes and philosophies did not save us, no matter how much we tried. We could wish to be moral, we could wish to be philosophically comforted, in fact, we could WILL these things with all our might, but the needed power wasn't there. Our human resources, as marshalled by the will, were not sufficient; they failed utterly.

Lack of power, that was our dilemma. We had to find a power by which we could live, and it had to be A Power greater than ourselves. Obviously. But where and how were we to find this Power?

Well, that's exactly what this book is about. Its main object is to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself, which will solve your problem. That means we have written a book which we believe to be spiritual as well as moral. And it means, of course, that we are going to talk about God. Here difficulty arises with agnostics. Many times we talk to a new man and watch his hope rise as we discuss his [sexaholic] problems and explain our fellowship. But his face falls when we speak of spiritual matters, especially when we mention God, for we have re-opened a subject which our man thought he had neatly evaded or entirely ignored.

***COMMENT: In recovery, relying on a Power greater than yourself, you don't get to solve your own problems. You don't have to! ***

We know how he feels. We have shared his honest doubt and prejudice. Some of us have been violently anti-religious. To others, the word "God" brought up a particular idea of Him with which someone had tried to impress them during childhood. Perhaps we rejected this particular conception because it seemed inadequate. With that rejection we imagined we had abandoned the God idea entirely. We were bothered with the thought that faith and dependence upon a Power beyond ourselves was somewhat weak, even cowardly. We looked upon this world of warring individuals, warring theological systems, and inexplicable calamity, with deep skepticism. We looked askance at many individuals who claimed to be godly. How could a Supreme Being have anything to do with it all? And who could comprehend a Supreme Being anyhow? Yet, in other moments, we found ourselves thinking, when enchanted by a starlit night, "Who, then, made all this?" There was a feeling of awe and wonder, but it was fleeting and soon lost.

COMMENT: Notice God in your life; pay attention to those "awe and wonder" moments.

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Eye.nonymous - 01 Feb 2013 13:42

Yes, we of agnostic temperament have had these thoughts and experiences. Let us make haste to reassure you. We found that as soon as we were able to lay aside prejudice and express even a willingness to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we commenced to get results, even though it was impossible for any of us to fully define or comprehend that Power, which is God.

***COMMENT: Willingness = surrender. Start a new relationship with God. ***

Much to our relief, we discovered we did not need to consider another's conception of God. Our own conception, however inadequate, was sufficient to make the approach and to effect a contact with Him. As soon as we admitted the possible existence of a Creative Intelligence, A Spirit of the Universe underlying the totality of things, we began to be possessed of a new sense of power and direction, PROVIDED WE TOOK OTHER SIMPLE STEPS. We found that God does not make too hard terms with those who seek Him. To us, the Realm of Spirit is broad, roomy, all inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding, to those who earnestly seek. It is open, we believe, to all men.

***COMMENT: "We began to be possessed of a new sense of power and direction, provided we took other simple steps." This is the famous comma. Faith is not enough; this program is ACTION oriented. ***

When, therefore, we speak to you of God, we mean your own conception of God. This applies, too, to other spiritual expressions which you find in this book. Do not let any prejudice you may have against spiritual terms deter you from honestly asking yourself what they mean to you. At the start, this is all we needed to commence spiritual growth, to effect our first conscious relation with God as we understood Him. Afterward, we found ourselves accepting many things which then seemed entirely out of reach. That is growth, but if we wished to grow, we had to begin somewhere. So we used our own conception, however limited it was.

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by Eye.nonymous - 08 Feb 2013 13:17

We needed to ask ourselves but one short question. "Do I now believe, or am I even willing to believe, that there is a Power greater than myself?" As soon as a man can say that he does believe, or is willing to believe, we emphatically assure him that he is on his way. It has been repeatedly proven among us that upon this simple cornerstone a wonderfully effective spiritual structure can be built.

***COMMENT: "Do I now believe, or am I even willing to believe, that there is a Power greater than myself." This question is the transition into Step Two. ***

That was great news to us, for we had assumed we could not make use of spiritual principles unless we accepted many things on faith which seemed difficult to believe. When people presented us with spiritual approaches, how frequently did we all say: "I wish I had what that man has. I'm sure it would work if I could only believe as he believes. But I cannot accept as surely true the many articles of faith which are so plain to him." So it was comforting to learn that we could commence at a simpler level.

***COMMENT: The more we let God take control, the more comforting it is. ***

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by Dov - 17 Feb 2013 21:04

My heartfelt comments from personal experience in **Blue**, be "H.

[Eye.nonymous wrote:](#)

We needed to ask ourselves but one short question. "Do I now believe, or am I even willing to believe, that there is a Power greater than myself?" As soon as a man can say that he does believe, or is willing to believe, we emphatically assure him that he is on his way. It has been repeatedly proven among us that upon this simple cornerstone a wonderfully effective spiritual structure can be built.

***COMMENT: "Do I now believe, or am I even willing to believe, that there is a Power greater than myself." This question is the transition into Step Two. ***

That was great news to us, for we had assumed we could not make use of spiritual principles unless we accepted many **madreigos**. When people presented us with spiritual **demands**, how frequently did we all say: "I wish I had what that man has. I'm sure it would work if I could only **be a good Jew/tzaddik** I like he is. But I cannot seem to **keep His Torah right** - I still do **bittul Torah**, **don't daven so well**, **don't learn very well**, **don't have simcha all the time**, am **not successful being mekarev/inspiring others**, **don't have that 'chut shel Chessed'** around me yet, am not buddy with the Roshei yeshivah *like 'he' is* and *'he'* is always in the asorah rishonim to davening and learning, I am often late!"

So it was comforting to learn that we could commence at a simpler level. **To discover that there is humility even in ruchniyus! That we could *profoundly* benefit from being with Hashem our G-d and have all His help for sobriety and success in many things even though we were *not* keeping His Torah anything near perfectly, yet. As Chaza"l tell us: v'haboteyach baShem, Chessed yisovevenhu - *afliu rosho*, uboteyach baShem - Chessed y'sovevenhu. Hashem loves resho'im. He loves resoho'im far, far more than we will ever love the *tzaddikim*. So said the Ba'al Shem Tov and others....(and it is obvious to *any* sane person). So, kal v'chomer He loves us to pieces and is ready to help if we sincerely want to use Him and call to Him be'emess - not with *tzidkus*, but with emess, it says in Ashrei.[/i]**

***COMMENT: The more we let God take control, the more comforting it is. ***

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Eye.nonymous - 22 Feb 2013 14:42

Besides a seeming inability to accept much on faith, we often found ourselves handicapped by obstinacy, sensitiveness, and unreasoning prejudice. Many of us have been so touchy that even casual reference to spiritual things made us bristle with antagonism. This sort of thinking had to be abandoned. Though some of us resisted, we found no great difficulty in casting aside such feelings. Faced with [sexaholic] destruction, we soon became as open minded on spiritual

matters as we had tried to be on other questions. In this respect [Iust] was a great persuader. It finally beat us into a state of reasonableness. Sometimes this was a tedious process; we hope no one will be prejudiced as long as some of us were.

***COMMENT: Here's a test: Am I relating to God on His terms or mine? Being sensitive is a sign of being ME centered; any discomfort becomes an excuse to mistreat others. ***

The reader may still ask why he should believe in a Power greater than himself. We think there are good reasons. Let us have a look at some of them.

The practical individual of today is a stickler for facts and results. Nevertheless, the twentieth century readily accepts theories of all kinds, provided they are firmly grounded in fact. We have numerous theories, for example, about electricity. Everybody believes them without a murmur of doubt. Why this ready acceptance? Simply because it is impossible to explain what we see, feel, direct, and use, without a reasonable assumption as a starting point.

Everybody nowadays, believes in scores of assumptions for which there is good evidence, but no perfect visual proof. And does not science demonstrate that visual proof is the weakest proof? It is being constantly revealed, as mankind studies the material world, that outward appearances are not inward reality at all. To illustrate:

The prosaic steel girder is a mass of electrons whirling around each other at incredible speed. These tiny bodies are governed by precise laws, and these laws hold true throughout the material world. Science tells us so. We have no reason to doubt it. When, however, the perfectly logical assumption is suggested that underneath the material world and life as we see it, there is an All Powerful, Guiding, Creative Intelligence, right there our PERVERSE STREAK comes to the surface and we laboriously set out to convince ourselves it isn't so. We read wordy books and indulge in windy arguments, thinking we believe this universe needs no God to explain it. Were our contentions true, it would follow that life originated out of nothing, means nothing, and proceeds nowhere.

***COMMENT: The "perverse streak" is my desire to manipulate everything and everyone. ***

Instead of regarding ourselves as intelligent agents, spearheads of God's ever advancing

Creation, we agnostics and atheists chose to believe that our human intelligence was the last word, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and end of all. Rather vain of us, wasn't it?

We, who have traveled this dubious path, beg you to lay aside prejudice, even against organized religion. We have learned that whatever the human frailties of various faiths may be, those faiths have given purpose and direction to millions. People of faith have a logical idea of what life is all about. Actually, we used to have no reasonable conception whatever. We used to amuse ourselves by cynically dissecting spiritual beliefs and practices when we might have observed that many spiritually-minded persons of all races, colors, and creeds were demonstrating a degree of stability, happiness and usefulness which we should have sought ourselves.

***COMMENT: I would like to add that a religious person may read this whole section about agnostics and believe that it is beneath him—of course I believe in God! However, I would say that a religious person, though he may believe in God, may hold a narrow or warped perception of this God—a perception that needs to be examined, modified, and perhaps even discarded.

Also, with a touch of ego involved, a person may believe that he believes in God as He truthfully is but, in reality, he believes in a God that he fashioned in his own image. He has made a smorgasbord sort of God, picking and choosing the descriptions that suit him for whatever reason, and rejecting other descriptions of God. One tendency we may have is to embrace God Who is depicted as vengeful and punishing while we deny any description of God Who is depicted as loving and forgiving.

In summary: Although we may think we believe in God, there's a good chance that we really don't.

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Dov - 01 Mar 2013 04:16

My sponsor used to say the 3rd step this way: "to the care of the G-d of our **mis**understanding."

I always liked that, and use it myself.

Forgive me for this, eyeball - I will (or you can) edit it right out if you want:

And that Catholic guy was on the mark...for the Zohar says "*leis machshova t'fisa bei klal*." We do not really understand our own G-d.

But we *do* understand He is the borei and manhig, and that He could not possibly have been *forced* to create anything...so it is obvious that He cannot be evil, mean, or bad in any way, no matter how hard he tries. Just like He cannot break a leg, die of pneumonia, or actually 'get' angry. "Ani Hashem, lo shanisi!," He said. He can neither fail nor botch anything up.

So we *do* understand that He is **good** - meaning that He could not possibly have been forced to make us, and is not forced to be manhig us - so He must be a giver of His own 100% free will, and really cannot expect or need anything in return. Obviously, He never needs to hate, He never needs to resent, and He never does anything for spite or because of 'rage'. In reality, He could never need to 'hit someone back', 'take revenge' as we understand it, or 'slap' anyone in a fit of resentment or wrath, as we feel we need to sometimes. So He never 'has a score to pay' - ever, in reality. Nekomah and stuff like that are just meshoelim l'saber es ha'ozen, not literal, c"v. There is nothing we can do that could ever make Him decide to be mean to us - He only is good and does only good, always. "*Atoh, lo y'gurcho rah*." For He is, was, and always will be free, so everything He ever did and will do must all be - at it's root - only FREE Chessed (the only real Chessed there is, is the free kind! If you need to *deserve* it, then it is not Chessed, but *din*, right?).

[Perhaps that's is why the higher you go in partzufim, the less [i]din [/i]is there, till there is no din in atzilus *at all* - only the shorash of din from Ema, for example. Why? Because there is no 'negative' possible by Atzmuso yisborach. Cuz the shorash of His will to create the world and run every aspect of the world (and you and me) there is no 'rules', no 'forcing', at all. Just Chessed pashut, goodness. So we end Shmoneh esrei calling Him "*haTov*": "You are **the Good One**, ul'cho no'eh l'hodos." He **is** Good - and the only *real* good there is. (Sim *Shalom* is just a tag-on [Shalom is only a k'li] to the *guf* of Tefillah, which really ends with *Modim* and *haTov Shimcho*)

So...our obstinacy you write of, stems from our misunderstanding of G-d. And in recovery (and

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by Eye.nonymous - 01 Mar 2013 15:26

*** COMMENT: Another point I would like to make is that, although we have learned about God and His mastery over the whole entire world and we have talked about this for as long as we can remember, when we stub our toes (or when someone steps on our toes) the first thought that enters our mind is not exactly in line with these beliefs. In theory, we believe in God. On a practical level, we really don't. That, I think, is also a form of agnosticism to which this chapter can be applied. ***

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by cordnoy - 17 Feb 2015 01:00

[Eye.nonymous wrote:](#)

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This is a great thread to read.

I bolded, underlined and italicized one sentence.

Someone in the last few days wrote a comment how he lives with emunah.

Now, while it's true that this is a good thing (and Mrs. Emunah can attest to this), but for some of us addicts - it is simply not enough.

Read this post, and the thread.

b'hatzlachah

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by Watson - 06 Jan 2017 00:23

Bump

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by vibrantchossid - 03 Apr 2024 00:05

But how does "admitting powerlessness" shtim with bechirah chofshis?

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by jackthejew - 03 Apr 2024 18:54

If you search around, Dov has addressed this very well

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by Dov - 03 Apr 2024 21:27

And I would be very happy to discuss it with anybody. I can be reached at 917-414-8205. If I do not answer, it's only because I'm busy with something else at the time and missed your call or just did not have my phone with me then - I never screen my calls before choosing to pick up the phone. So...if I do miss your call, kindly leave a brief VM (or text) with when I can reach you back, in East Coast US time please.

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