

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 - 08 Aug 2012 09:27

[Lust] ceased to be a luxury; it became a necessity. [Acting out], two [times] a day, and often three, got to be routine. Sometimes a small deal would net a few hundred dollars, and I would pay my bills at the [clubs and internet cafes].

***COMMENT: Bill has crossed a line; the addiction becomed the only thing in life. ***

This went on endlessly, and I began to waken very early in the morning shaking violently. A [stack of magazines] followed by half [an hour of chat rooms] would be required if I were to eat any breakfast. Nevertheless, I still thought I could control the situation, and there were periods of sobriety which renewed my wife's hope.

***COMMENT: We fool ourselves thinking we are in control, "I slipped but I'll just do better next time." ***

Gradually things got worse. The house was taken over by the mortgage holder, my mother-in-law died, my wife and father-in-law became ill.

***COMMENT: Bill doesn't realize that life affects his actions. ***

Then I got a promising business opportunity. Stocks were at the low point of 1932, and I had somehow formed a group to buy. I was to share generously in the profits. Then I went on a prodigious [spree], and that chance vanished.

I woke up. This had to be stopped. I saw I could not take so much as one [lust hit]. I was through forever. Before then, I had written lots of sweet promises, but my wife happily observed that this time I meant business. And so I did.

Shortly afterward I came home [after another fall]. There had been no fight. Where had been my high resolve? I simply didn't know. It hadn't even come to mind. Someone had pushed [an I-phone] my way, and I had taken it. Was I crazy? I began to wonder, for such an appalling lack of perspective seemed near being just that.

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

Posted by Eye.nonymous - 09 Aug 2012 10:10

Renewing my resolve, I tried again. Some time passed, and confidence began to be replaced by cock-sureness. I could laugh at the [internet]. Now I had what it takes! One day I walked into [an internet café] to [check the news]. In no time I was beating on the [keyboard] asking myself how it happened. As the [lust] rose to my head I told myself I would manage better next time, but I might as well [act out some more] then. And I did.

***COMMENT: A little resolve, a little bit of sobriety, 90 days, etc. then, "Now I had what it takes." I'm not really sick, after all! I don't really need help. I don't really need to be careful

anymore! Sound familiar? ***

ANOTHER COMMENT: Then, after a little fall we tell ourselves, "Since I had a fall, I might as well go on a spree." Does this sound familiar?

The remorse, horror and hopelessness of the next morning are unforgettable. The courage to do battle was not there. My brain raced uncontrollably and there was a terrible sense of impending calamity. I hardly dared cross the street, lest I collapse and be run down by an early morning truck, for it was scarcely daylight. An all night place supplied me with a dozen glasses of ale. My writhing nerves were stilled at last. A morning paper told me the market had gone to hell again. Well, so had I. The market would recover, but I wouldn't. That was a hard thought. Should I kill myself? No--not now. Then a mental fog settled down. [Lust] would fix that. So [more acting out], and—oblivion.

COMMENT: Here Bill reaches a turning point. He finally realizes, "The courage to do battle was not there."

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by tehylimzugger - 09 Aug 2012 10:27

I pressed "Notify" and it wasn't notifying me, so I'm replying. Another awesome thread, Elyah!

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Eye.nonymous - 10 Aug 2012 06:51

The mind and body are marvelous mechanisms, for mine endured this agony two more years. Sometimes I stole from my wife's slender purse when the morning terror and madness were on me. Again I swayed dizzily before an open window, or the medicine cabinet where there was poison, cursing myself for a weakling. There were flights from city to country and back, as my wife and I sought escape. Then came the night when the physical and mental torture was so hellish I feared I would burst through my window, sash and all. Somehow I managed to drag my mattress to a lower floor, lest I suddenly leap. A doctor came with a heavy sedative. Next day found me [acting out and taking] sedative. This combination soon landed me on the rocks. People feared for my sanity. So did I. I could eat little or nothing when [lusting], and I was forty pounds under weight.

COMMENT: What is the theme here? Bill hates himself.

My brother-in-law is a physician, and through his kindness and that of my mother I was placed in a nationally-known hospital for the mental and physical rehabilitation of [sexaholics]. Under the so-called belladonna treatment my brain cleared. Hydrotherapy and mild exercise helped much. Best of all, I met a kind doctor who explained that though certainly selfish and foolish, I had been seriously ill, bodily and mentally.

It relieved me somewhat to learn that in [sexaholics] the will is amazingly weakened when it comes to combating [lust], though it often remains strong in other respects. My incredible behavior in the face of a desperate desire to stop was explained. Understanding myself now, I fared forth in high hope. For three or four months the goose hung high. I went to town regularly and even made a little money. Surely this was the answer—self-knowledge.

***COMMENT: SELF-help doesn't help. The real solution is to focus on God, not on self. ***

*** ANOTHER COMMENT: Also, since our will, "often remains strong in other respects," this makes it hard to accept we've got any sort of physical and mental weakness against lust. ***

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

Posted by Eye.nonymous - 12 Aug 2012 09:15

But it was not, for the frightful day came when I [acted out] once more. The curve of my declining moral and bodily health fell off like a ski-jump. After a time I returned to the [treatment center]. This was the finish, the curtain, it seemed to me. My weary and despairing wife was informed that it would all end with heart failure during [an anxiety attack], or I would develop a [terminal venereal disease], perhaps within a year. She would soon have to give me over to the undertaker or the asylum.

They did not need to tell me. I knew, and almost welcomed the idea. It was a devastating blow to my pride. I, who had thought so well of myself and my abilities, of my capacity to surmount obstacles, was cornered at last. Now I was to plunge into the dark, joining that endless procession of sots who had gone on before. I thought of my poor wife. There had been much happiness after all. What would I not give to make amends. But that was over now.

***COMMENT: Bill has reached rock bottom; his ego is crushed. ***

No words can tell of the loneliness and despair I found in that bitter morass of self-pity. Quicksand stretched around me in all directions. I had met my match. I had been overwhelmed. [Lust] was my master.

***COMMENT: Bill realizes he is powerless over [lust]--step 1. ***

Trembling, I stepped from the [treatment center] a broken man. Fear sobered me for a bit. Then came the insidious insanity of that first [lust hit], and on Armistice Day 1934, I was off again. Everyone became resigned to the certainty that I would have to be shut up somewhere, or would stumble along to a miserable end. How dark it is before the dawn! In reality that was the beginning of my last debauch. I was soon to be catapulted into what I like to call the fourth dimension of existence. I was to know happiness, peace, and usefulness, in a way of life that is incredibly more wonderful as time passes.

COMMENT: Fear helps us stay sober a little bit--fear of getting caught, fear of catching some sort of disease--but it's not the road to freedom.

***ANOTHER COMMENT: This paragraph contains a promise to you, to paraphrase, "To be catapulted into a fourth dimension of existence and know happiness, peace, and usefulness in a way of life that is incredibly more wonderful as time passes." This is the joy of progressive recovery--life keeps getting better. Would you like to experience this? ***

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by mifatfait - 12 Aug 2012 11:43

Elya, such an important thread. Keep it up. Thanks.

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Eye.nonymous - 13 Aug 2012 07:10

Near the end of that bleak November, I sat [acting out] in my kitchen. With a certain satisfaction I reflected there was enough [magazines] concealed about the house to carry me through that night and the next day. My wife was at work. I wondered whether I dared hide a [few pictures] near the head of our bed. I would need [them] before daylight.

***COMMENT: "Satisfaction," in easy access. I think, for me, one of the biggest challenges recovery is when I first cut off access to my drug--such as installing a filter, disabling the internet after midnight, and deleting E-mail addresses of people I shouldn't be contacting anymore. ***

My musing was interrupted by the telephone. The cheery voice of an old school friend asked if he might come over. He was sober. It was years since I could remember his coming to New York in that condition. I was amazed.

***COMMENT: For AA History buffs, the "old school friend," is referring to a fellow named Ebby Thatcher. The first thing about Ebby that catches Bill's attention is not anything he said; it was simply that, "he was sober." ***

Rumor had it that he had been committed for [sexaholic] insanity. I wondered how he had escaped. Of course he would have dinner, and then I could [watch porn] openly with him. Unmindful of his welfare, I thought only of recapturing the spirit of other days. There was that time we had chartered an airplane to complete a jag! His coming was an oasis in this dreary desert of futility. The very thing—an oasis! [Sexaholics] are like that.

The door opened and he stood there, fresh-skinned and glowing. There was something about his eyes. He was inexplicably different. What had happened?

I pushed an [I-phone] across the table. He refused it. Disappointed but curious, I wondered what had got into the fellow. He wasn't himself.

***COMMENT: Here we see that Ebby has the power to choose; he doesn't have to act out. ***

"Come, what's all this about?" I queried.

He looked straight at me. Simply, but smilingly, he said, "I've got religion."

I was aghast. So that was it—last summer an [sexaholic] crackpot; now, I suspected, a little cracked about religion. He had that starry-eyed look. Yes, the old boy was on fire all right. But bless his heart, let him rant! Besides, my [stash] would last longer than his preaching.

But he did no ranting. In a matter of fact way he told how two men had appeared in court, persuading the judge to suspend his commitment. They had told of a simple religious idea and a practical program of action. That was two months ago and the result was self evident. It worked!

***COMMENT: Ebby is happy in his own skin; he has no need to debate or to win Bill's approval. The program of recovery works by attraction, not by promotion--success speaks for itself. ***

He had come to pass his experience along to me—if I cared to have it. I was shocked, but interested. Certainly I was interested. I had to be, for I was hopeless.

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Eye.nonymous - 14 Aug 2012 06:58

He talked for hours. Childhood memories rose before me. I could almost hear the sound of the [rabbi's] voice as I sat, on still [Shabbos mornings], way over there on the hillside; there was that

proffered temperance pledge I never signed; my grandfather's good natured contempt of some [shul] folk and their doings; his insistence that the spheres really had their music; but his denial of the [rabbi's] right to tell him how he must listen; his fearlessness as he spoke of these things just before he died; these recollections welled up from the past. They made me swallow hard.

That war-time day in old Winchester [Synagogue] came back again.

***COMMENT: Now the tombstone is having an effect. ***

I had always believed in a Power greater than myself. I had often pondered these things. I was not an atheist. Few people really are, for that means blind faith in the strange proposition that this universe originated in a cipher and aimlessly rushes nowhere. My intellectual heroes, the chemists, the astronomers, even the evolutionists, suggested vast laws and forces at work. Despite contrary indications, I had little doubt that a mighty purpose and rhythm underlay all. How could there be so much of precise and immutable law, and no intelligence? I simply had to believe in a Spirit of the Universe, who knew neither time nor limitation. But that was as far as I had gone.

***COMMENT: We all believe in a Power greater than ourselves, but it's hard to accept the idea of a personal God. ***

***ANOTHER COMMENT: "That was as far as I had gone," is one of the saddest sentences in the Big Book, and perhaps one of the saddest aspects of our own lives as well. ***

With [rabbis], and the world's religions, I parted right there. When they talked of a God personal to me, who was love, superhuman strength and direction, I became irritated and my mind snapped shut against such a theory.

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

Posted by Eye.nonymous - 15 Aug 2012 07:05

To [the Scriptures] I conceded the certainty of [great men], not too closely followed by those who claimed [them]. [Their] moral teaching—most excellent. For myself, I had adopted those parts which seemed convenient and not too difficult; the rest I disregarded.

The wars which had been fought, the burnings and chicanery that religious dispute had facilitated, made me sick. I honestly doubted whether, on balance, the religions of mankind had done any good. Judging from what I had seen in Europe and since, the power of God in human affairs was negligible, the Brotherhood of Man a grim jest. If there was a Devil, he seemed the Boss Universal, and he certainly had me.

But my friend sat before me, and he made the point-blank declaration that God had done for

him what he could not do for himself. His human will had failed. Doctors had pronounced him incurable. Society was about to lock him up. 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!

***COMMENT: "God had done for him what he could not do for himself." Which step is this? Correct, step two. ***

Had this power originated in him? Obviously it had not. There had been no more power in him than there was in me at that minute; and this was none at all.

That floored me. It began to look as though religious people were right after all. Here was something at work in a human heart which had done the impossible. My ideas about miracles were drastically revised right then. Never mind the musty past; here sat a miracle directly across the kitchen table. He shouted great tidings.

***COMMENT: By exerting your will, you mess things up. ***

I saw that my friend was much more than inwardly reorganized. He was on a different footing. His roots grasped a new soil.

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

Posted by Eye.nonymous - 16 Aug 2012 07:41

Despite the living example of my friend there remained in me the vestiges of my old prejudice. The word God still aroused a certain antipathy. When the thought was expressed that there might be a God personal to me this feeling was intensified. I didn't like the idea. I could go for such conceptions as Creative Intelligence, Universal Mind or Spirit of Nature but I resisted the thought of a Czar of the Heavens however loving His sway might be. I have since talked with scores of men who felt the same way.

My friend suggested what then seemed a novel idea. He said, "Why don't you choose your own conception of God?" That statement hit me hard. It melted the icy intellectual mountain in whose shadow I had lived and shivered many years. I stood in the sunlight at last.

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. I saw that growth could start from that point. Upon a foundation of complete willingness I might build what I saw in my friend. Would I have it? Of course I would!

***COMMENT: The key to the program--accept that God will lead your life. ***

Thus was I convinced that God is concerned with us humans when we want Him enough. At long last I saw, I felt, I believed. Scales of pride and prejudice fell from my eyes. A new world came into view.

The real significance of my experience in the [Synagogue] burst upon me. For a brief moment, I had needed and wanted God. There had been a humble willingness to have Him with me—and He came. But soon the sense of His Presence had been blotted out by worldly clamors, mostly those within myself. And so it had been ever since. How blind I had been.

***COMMENT: "Worldly clamors," we're too busy with distractions. Can't PAUSE for a moment.

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by mifatfait - 16 Aug 2012 08:00

Thank you again for the wonderfull thread.

I think that the last piece you posted is crucial for us religious Jews to take to heart. He says that he couldn't accept G-D as part of a religion with do's and dont's, only the idea of "G-D as I understand him" worked (as was said later in the 12 steps).

At first glance this can be hard for us, maybe even impossible. We are strictly forbidden to create our onn private understandings of Hashem, he is above all human conception. But I think the basic idea is the same, that Hashem must be part of my life, to feel and live and laugh and cry - all together with Him.

In a way the all encompassing nature of Judaism makes that harder, it's as if our relationship with Hashem has already been set and we must fit ourselves to the mold, but I think that's a mistake.

That's my musings here.

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Eye.nonymous - 17 Aug 2012 08:30

Thanks for that, ChaimCharlie. I know for myself that part of my problem is that I HAVE CONSTRUED MY OWN CONCEPT OF G-D ALL ALONG! I have believed all my life, deep-down, that God hates me and He's out to get me and all He's really interested in doing is throwing me into the deepest levels of Hell for all eternity and beyond for every slight wrongdoing, and life is a fixed game that you can never win no matter what because everyone has an evil inclination and mine is even worse than other people's and I'm nothing but a lousy sinner in God's eyes and He wants nothing to do with me except to pour out His wrath upon me. In my home growing up, the example of spontaneous prayer that I learned went something like this, "Oh God! Why are you doing this to me! Why don't you just kill me already!"

I actually think that when we come up with a conception of God "As we understand Him," what we really are doing is throwing out our own twisted misconceptions of God and embracing a concept of Him which is actually much closer to the truth--He loves us, He cares about us, He wants to help us, and He wants nothing more for us than to provide us with the greatest possible true success and true pleasure in life. (Our current concept of success and pleasure probably also needs to be revised).

--Elyah

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

Posted by Eye.nonymous - 17 Aug 2012 08:57

At the [treatment center] I was separated from [lust] for the last time. Treatment seemed wise, for I showed signs of delirium tremens.

There I humbly offered myself to God, as I then understood Him, to do with me as He would. I placed myself unreservedly under His care and direction. I admitted for the first time that of myself I was nothing; that without Him I was lost. I ruthlessly faced my sins and became willing to have my newfound Friend take them away, root and branch. I have not [acted out] since.

My school mate visited me, and I fully acquainted him with my problems and deficiencies. We made a list of people I had hurt or toward whom I felt resentment. I expressed my entire willingness to approach these individuals, admitting my wrong. Never was I to be critical of them. I was to right all such matters to the utmost of my ability.

***COMMENT: We see Bill is taking the steps here. Just to point out a few: "Fully acquainted him with my problems," is step five. "We made a list of people I had hurt," is step eight. "Admitting my wrong," is step nine. ***

I was to test my thinking by the new God-consciousness within. Common sense would thus

become uncommon sense. I was to sit quietly when in doubt, asking only for direction and strength to meet my problems as He would have me. Never was I to pray for myself, except as my requests bore on my usefulness to others. Then only might I expect to receive. But that would be in great measure.

***COMMENT: "Test my thinking," before taking action consider, "Is this bringing me close to God or further away from Him?"

Also, here is a test for self-will--am I motivated by any one of the following:

(1) Selfish (2) Dishonest (3) Self-seeking, or (4) Frightened.

And here is a test for God's will--am I motivated by all of the following:

(1) Unselfishness (2) Honesty (3) Purity, and (4) Love ***

My friend promised when these things were done I would enter upon a new relationship with my Creator; that I would have the elements of a way of living which answered all my problems. Belief in the power of God, plus enough willingness, honesty and humility to establish and maintain the new order of things, were the essential requirements. Simple, but not easy; a price had to be paid. It meant destruction of self-centeredness. I must turn in all things to the Father of Lights who presides over us all.

***COMMENT: The above paragraph contains yet another promise of recovery. Also, it contains the cornerstones of recovery, "Willingness, honesty, and humility." Are you ready to live by these? ***

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

Posted by Eye.nonymous - 19 Aug 2012 13:41

These were revolutionary and drastic proposals, but the moment I fully accepted them, the effect was electric. There was a sense of victory, followed by such a peace and serenity as I had never known. There was utter confidence. I felt lifted up, as though the great clean wind of a mountain top blew through and through. God comes to most men gradually, but His impact on me was sudden and profound.

For a moment I was alarmed, and called my friend, the doctor, to ask if I were still sane. He listened in wonder as I talked.

Finally he shook his head saying, "Something has happened to you I don't understand. But you had better hang on to it. Anything is better than the way you were." The good doctor now sees many men who have such experiences. He knows they are real.

While I lay in the hospital the thought came that there were thousands of hopeless [sexaholics]

who might be glad to have what had been so freely given me. Perhaps I could help some of them. They in turn might work with others.

My friend had emphasized the absolute necessity of demonstrating these principles in all my affairs. Particularly was it imperative to work with others as he had worked with me. Faith without works was dead, he said. And how appallingly true for the [sexaholic]! For if a [sexaholic] failed to perfect and enlarge his spiritual life through work and self sacrifice for others, he could not survive the certain trials and low spots ahead. If he did not work, he would surely [act out] again, and if he [acted out], he would surely die. Then faith would be dead indeed. With us it is just like that.

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