

Step Three:

Step Three is discussed in the Big Book from the bottom of page 60 to the bottom of page 63. We will find that this section contains extremely important information, but that the step itself is a relatively simple step. It is the first step in which we actually DO something, but what we do is not that complicated or time-consuming.

Before we start discussing Step Three, however, it's important to discuss the first two and half pages of Chapter Five ("How It Works")—pages 58 to 60.

Page 58 stresses "rigorous honesty". It points out that the only thing that stands in the way of recovery is a lack of the ability to be honest with one's self. It also asks us if we are committed "to go to any lengths" to find recovery.

Page 59 to the top of page 60 sets out the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, which have been adapted for OA, with only two changes (in Steps One—what we're powerless over—and Twelve—to whom we try to carry the message).

The original steps:

Originally AA had six steps and not twelve. There are many sources for this statement (see *AA Comes of Age* and *The Language of the Heart*, both available from AA); you can find one source in the Big Book on page 292 of the third edition or page 263 of the fourth edition.

As you may know, the Big Book was written as a do-it-yourself manual for people who were not able to have contact with AA members who had recovered.

Bill Wilson, who basically wrote the Big Book, considered it necessary to make certain that he provided more detail for the steps than existed previously. He therefore added what turned out to be six more steps.

That's important to know because the six steps that he added are clearly not steps which have the same kind of significance as the original six steps.

Here are the twelve steps of Overeaters Anonymous. Immediately after six of them, in [brackets], I've put the original six steps (as found first in the Big Book on the pages above, underlined, and then in *italics* from *AA Comes of Age* on page 160):

1. **We admitted we were powerless over food, that our lives had become unmanageable.**
[Complete deflation. *We admitted that we were licked, that we were powerless over alcohol.*]
2. **Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.**
3. **Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him.***
4. **Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**
[Moral inventory. *We made a moral inventory of our defects or sins.*]
5. **Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.**
[Confession. *We confessed or shared our shortcomings with another person in confidence.*]
6. **Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.**
7. **Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.**
8. **Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.**
9. **Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.**
[Restitution. *We made restitution to all those we had harmed by our drinking.*]
10. **Continued to take personal inventory and when were wrong promptly admitted it.**
11. **Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.**
[Dependence and guidance from a Higher Power. *We prayed to whatever God we thought there was for power to practice these precepts.*]
12. **Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this**

message to compulsive overeaters, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

[Continued work with other alcoholics. *We tried to help other alcoholics, with no thought of reward in money or prestige.*]

So you can see that the original six steps were basically Steps One, Four, Five, Nine, Eleven, and Twelve. The other steps were added in order to make certain that there were no loopholes. They were not and are still not the essence of the program. We'll see how this plays out as we go.

Step Three is merely a *decision* to do the rest of the steps:

Step Three is therefore not a huge step that requires lots of time and action. It is simply an acknowledgement of the *consequences* of the willingness through hope that we developed in Step Two.

If you are willing to try to find a Higher Power through the steps (Step Two), then you have to make a decision to *work* the steps. And that really is all Step Three is—a *decision*.

I could decide to write an article on Step Three, but if I don't actually sit down at my computer and write it, my decision to write is of no value whatsoever.

So my decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of my Higher Power is *simply a decision*. It's not actually turning my will and my life over. It's just a *decision* to do that. In order to turn my will and my life over, I have to get rid of the things in myself that are blocking me from my Higher Power. We'll see the complete truth of this statement when we discuss Step Four next chapter.

The discussion preceding Step Three:

So what of the discussion on pages 60 through 64 about Step Three? Why is it there?

I believe there are two main purposes of that discussion. The first is to explain WHY we have to make the decision to turn our will and our life over; this involves a discussion of "selfishness" from the Big Book perspective. The second is to tell us WHAT we have to do in order to make that decision; this involves setting out the words of the Step Three prayer.

The pages discussing the WHY are divided into two parts. The first part (bottom of page 60 through

bottom of page 63) discusses the WILL part of "turn our will and our lives over to the care of" our Higher Power. The second part (bottom of page 63 to top of page 64) discusses the LIFE part of "turning our willing and our life over".

The Big Book discusses what it considers the universal characteristic of the alcoholic/compulsive eater. It uses as an example the actor in a play who wants to be the director/producer of the play, who knows the play would go much better if his or her way were adopted.

I remember where I was sitting (in a small basement restaurant) when my first sponsor pointed those words out. They struck me right to the heart. Of course I wanted to be in charge! And it was the fact that I wasn't in charge, that the play wasn't going my way, that was at the heart of my problems!

The Big Book uses a number of words to describe that universal characteristic: self-willed, self-propulsion, self-seeker, manager, self-centered, egocentric, selfish, self-centered, fearful, self-deluding, self-pitying.

These words are all used to describe a person who basically wants life to go his or her way, *regardless of the motivation*.

So from the perspective of the Big Book, the motivation of wanting life to go your way is irrelevant.

Sometimes the motives can be quite outer-directed. Certainly I have my own convictions of how the world could be a better place and people could get along better, and my motives are really quite good in that respect. I don't suffer from the effects of poverty or torture or suppression or imminent disease or death; yet I would like to have a world in which other people don't suffer from that either. My children are adults now, and I want them to be happy in their lives purely because I love them.

Sometimes, however, the motives can be quite inner-directed—or selfish in the dictionary definition. I want people to like me so I can feel good about myself; I want people to give me business to keep me financially secure; I wanted girlfriends (I'm happily married now!) to satisfy physical and social desires; when my kids were young, I didn't want them to embarrass me by bad behavior.

And sometimes there's a mix of motives. I don't want close relatives to get very sick both because I don't want them to suffer AND because I don't want the inconvenience of having to take care of them. I don't want there to be bombs both because I don't

want innocent people to suffer AND because I don't want to die.

But whatever the motives, I want life to go my way rather than the way it is going. I therefore understand wanting to be the director of the play rather than the actor. It makes a lot of sense to me. Sometimes I tried to impose my will on others. Sometimes I just gave up and played the martyr. But in all cases I KNEW the right way – and it wasn't happening. And that was killing me!

The Big Book's special definition of selfish:

The Big Book says at page 62:

Selfishness - self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles. Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate. So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so. Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us!

This notion of selfishness—wanting my way—is at the heart of the Big Book's approach to the steps. Selfishness according to the dictionary is “wanting my way for my own comfort or convenience”.

The Big Book, however, discusses selfishness in a broader, more generic, way—as “wanting my way”, period—not only for my own comfort or convenience, and perhaps even for the best of motives.

This broader approach will become extremely important when we discuss Step Four and ask where we have been selfish in relation to other people.

The Promises of the program:

At the top of page 63 the Big Book has some promises, and some people interpret those promises as being the promises of Step Three. I've been taught that this is not the case.

Let's read those promises carefully. I'll emphasize the conditional and forward-looking parts of these promises:

When we SINCERELY took such a position, all sorts of remarkable things followed. We had a new Employer.

Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, IF we kept close to Him and performed His work well. Established on such a footing we BECAME less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we BECAME interested in seeing what we could contribute to life. AS we felt new power flow in, AS we enjoyed peace of mind, AS we discovered we could face life successfully, AS we became conscious of His presence, we BEGAN to lose our fear of today, tomorrow or the hereafter. We were reborn.

These are really the promises of the whole program, not of Step Three. They are conditional on doing the steps; and Step Three is simply the beginning—the decision to do the steps.

(Note that we have a new employer. We don't get our job description until we have recovered. See page 102 for our job description: “Your job now is to be at the place where you may be of maximum helpfulness to others”. We can't do that job until we have worked the steps and recovered. The Big Book makes that clear on page 164: “But obviously you cannot transmit something you haven't got.”)

Another way of proving that these are the promises of the whole program is to show that the only real promise that's made about Step Three is found at the bottom of page 63: “This was only a beginning, though if honestly and humbly made, an effect, sometimes a very great one, was felt at once.” We're promised an effect of some kind. And further, look at the top of page 64: “Though our decision was a vital and crucial step, it could have little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us.”

So from a careful reading of the Big Book and in the light of the history of the steps, I think we can see that Step Three is a vital and important step, but it's not a step we spend a lot of time on. It's a step where we reflect on what brought us to our knees—the broad notion of selfishness, wanting our way regardless of the motives—and make a decision (in effect, while still on our knees!) to find a Higher Power by working the steps.

Our job is to unblock the channel between ourselves and our Higher Power deep down within us. To do that we have to clean house. To do that, therefore, we have to do Steps Four through Nine.

Taking Step Three:

So let's say the Step Three prayer. The Big Book says that the language is optional so long as the idea is expressed, and that it is "very desirable" to say that prayer "with an understanding person".

God, I offer myself to Thee—to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!

A beautiful prayer! We're offering ourselves to God. We want certain things to happen to us—relief from the bondage of self, difficulties taken away—not for those things to benefit US, but so that those things will help us benefit OTHERS. This is the first time the Big Book really begins to say that we need to get out of our skin and to help others.

So that's it! That's Step Three.

We don't have to be really really really ready; we simply have to make a decision. The "really really really ready" part comes if we actually start to do some work—start Step Four.

Remember that I can make a decision to travel, but I won't get anywhere if I don't get in my car and drive or buy a plane ticket and get on the plane.

Hanging by a branch:

A man falls off a cliff, and manages to catch a little branch halfway down the cliff. It starts to come off its roots.

He starts to pray: "God, I've never prayed before, but please, please, help me."

A deep voice sounds out: "I'm here, my son."

"God, is that you?"

"Yes, my son."

"Oh, God, what do I do, what do I do?"

"Let go of the branch, my son."

"Pardon me?"

"Let go of the branch, my son."

There's a long silence, and then the man speaks: "Is there anyone else up there?"

Three Frogs:

Three frogs are sitting on a log. Two make a decision to jump off a log. Five minutes pass. How many frogs are left on the log?

The answer isn't one. Nor is the answer that the third frog would have jumped along with the other two. The answer is three. The frogs just made a *decision* to jump; they didn't actually do it.

The Flash Flood:

A man is sitting on his verandah in the middle of a plain, when a police cruiser comes screeching to a halt in front of him. "Get in, Frank," says the police officer, "there's going to be a flash flood, and it's going to go higher than your house!"

"No thanks," says Frank, "I've put my trust and reliance upon God." The cruiser drives off.

An hour later, the water has gone to the top of the first storey of the house. Frank is looking out the second-storey window, and a boat comes along side. "Get in, Frank," says the person piloting the boat, "it's going to get worse!"

"No thanks," says Frank, "I've put my trust and reliance upon God." The boat goes away.

An hour later, the water is over the roof, and Frank is hanging onto the television antenna. A helicopter comes by and lets down a ladder. "It's getting higher, climb on!"

"No thanks," says Frank, "I've put my trust and reliance upon God." The helicopter flies off.

Frank drowns, goes to heaven, and demands to see the Big Guy. "Where were you?" he asks angrily.

God says, "I sent a car, a boat, and a helicopter!"

The lottery:

A man kneels in his sparse bedroom and prays: "God, I'm going to be praying to you day and night until Saturday afternoon. I need to win the lottery. Not the million dollars, but just \$40,000.00. And it's not for me, but for the benefit of a particular charity that needs it right away. So I'm going to pray and pray."

Saturday afternoon comes. He's been praying for the whole week. "Just one more hour," he says, "just one more. Please, God, let me win just \$40,000.00."

The blue sky suddenly is completely clouded over. There's lots of thunder and lightning, but no rain. A shaft of sunlight streams onto his face. A deep and exasperated voice says, "Buy a ticket!"

We therefore don't have to wait to see if our will and our lives have ACTUALLY been turned over to God—we've only DECIDED to do that, but we haven't as yet done anything to accomplish that!

So please don't hang around waiting for something—just keep on doing the steps!

Remember the Big Book's discussion of Step Two: we are blocked off from our Higher Power deep down within us.

The Big Book constantly reminds us that "Faith without works is dead." We have to take action, and that action will be cleaning house—Steps Four through Nine.

Cleaning house will remove those things that block us from our Higher Power, and the promises of Step Nine will show us that by that time our will and our life will have been turned over to our Higher Power!

Questions:

Here are some questions:

- If you look at your frustrations and feelings about the past, do you see how they arose because things just didn't happen your way?
- Do you see yourself as the actor who wants to be the director/producer?
- Can you think of situations when you wanted things to go your way for the best of motives? How did you feel when they didn't go your way? And how do you feel now about those things? Are they settled now? Are you serene about them? Or do they still bother you in some way?
- Can you think of situations when you wanted things to go your way for motives which you consider to be self-centered? How did you feel when they didn't go your way? And how do you feel now about those things? Are they settled now? Are

My experience has been that there is no need to add to the Big Book's approach by bringing in concepts from the AA 12 & 12 (as even Joe and Charlie do) or from anywhere else. Many people have achieved recovery quickly and efficiently by doing the Step Four inventory the Big Book way. For more discussion, see page 36.

you serene about them? Or do they still bother you in some way?

- Can you see how wanting things to go your way is blocking you off from your Higher Power?
- Are you ready to make a decision to search for a Higher Power by cleaning house and thus unblocking you from your Higher Power? If you are, find an understanding person and say the Step Three Prayer!

Now let's rush on to Step Four!

On page 62, the Big Book says:

Sometimes they hurt us, seemingly without provocation, but we invariably find that at some time in the past we have made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt.

This is a sentence which can easily be misinterpreted as somehow saying that we have brought on or are responsible for our own misfortunes, but I know that's not the case. If I were abused as a child, no one can say (and certainly the Big Book wouldn't say) that I somehow deserved the abuse; but if I'm grown up now, and that abuse still hurts me, even if the abuser is dead, then I have indeed "sometime in the past made decisions based on self which later placed [me] in a position to be hurt"!

I think that's all the Big Book is saying. If I live my life believing that nothing good has happened to me, then I will live my life in unhappiness, and block myself off from my Higher Power, and continue to be a compulsive eater. If I can find a way to give up my wish to have life go my way, then I can finally live life as it should be lived!