

Slender Steps to Sanity:

Twelve Step Biblical Notes of Hope
by a Compulsive Overeater

by OAStepper

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Introduction

Recovery's inherently personal path paradoxically requires company; the Twelve Steps can't be walked alone. Come with me.

Nobody speaks for Overeaters Anonymous. I certainly don't. I've not been in these rooms long enough to do anything but sit back and learn. Yet as I've blogged, including drafts of these devotionals, you've been kind enough to encourage my sharing them. I'm honored to offer them, hoping they may do for you what other OA members have done for me – sharing recovery, inspiring leapfrog realizations.

If anything I say doesn't ring true for you, find your own truth. I learn as much from those with whom I disagree as from those whose words I wish I'd said. I have tried to remain true to the message of the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*. I would suggest if you find I have not, seeking your own consistent truth certainly is the better course.

The Twelve Step programs work for people of all beliefs. Find the higher power consistent with your own search. Mine is God of the Christian faith. I attended two United Methodist schools of higher education. While I learned of him in school, as church staff in three churches, and as a volunteer in others, I felt him move from my head to my heart through walking the Steps. Scripture suggestions from the Bible accompany these notes of hope.

Recovery requires company. Find an Overeaters Anonymous group through the website, www.oa.org, or join

an online group like www.TheRecoveryGroup.org. Find a sponsor, and read OA approved literature.

I welcome your comments and an opportunity to visit with you. My blog is www.oastepper.blogspot.com. My email address is oastepper@gmail.com.

I wish you peace, serenity, recovery, and joy.

OAS stepper

The Twelve Steps of Overeaters Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over food – that our lives had become unmanageable.
 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.
 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
 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.
 10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we 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.
 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.
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How It Was

Hello. I'm OAStepper, a compulsive overeater, gratefully abstinent. When speaking in writing or orally, we in Overeaters Anonymous tell what it was like, what happened, and what's happening now. Short answers: Whoa! Wow! Whee!!!! I could close, but what about the rest of the book?

My life had become unmanageable before I found Overeaters Anonymous and abstinence on December 17, 2006. I was powerless over food, computer games, procrastination, resentment, piles and piles of stuff to get around to, and hate. For my wedding in 1974, I reduced from about 210 to 165. No other program or effort ever brought me that close to an acceptable weight. By the beginning of 1977 my weight had climbed back to 180. Pregnancy and life changes grabbed hold and took flight. After that year I never again saw less than 200 on scales until I walked through the doors of Overeaters Anonymous.

From October 1996 through November 1997, my "hell year," family medical and emotional crises brought me to my knees. I seriously examined the possibility I might not live if I didn't reform. Shocked, I began to seek healing. I consulted various programs and professionals for help directed to stress relief, both physical and mental. Taking a blood thinner by the end of the year necessitated regular checkups, and of course you can't go into a doctor's office without being weighed. Obviously I tried softening the edges of my pain with food, for in the spring of 1998 the doctor's scales yelled my weight in big bold numbers: 300. Whoa!

That scared me enough to let some of what I eventually would recognize as “tools of recovery” work, and I got about 35 pounds off, probably more, but I maintained a 35 pound loss for years, never getting (much) above 265. Yet I never got below 235, despite the best intentions and plenty of time to get ready for a formal wedding as the mother of the groom, among many other motivations and goals.

I sought professional help a third time, attempting to sort through my psychoses (my term, not a clinical diagnosis). Something this time was prodding and piercing my protective wall. The gift from my counselor of the second edition of the book *Overeaters Anonymous* finally cracked through it. I read the whole book, thought it would be something I would look into after the holidays, and plowed ahead. Until December 17, 2006.

Driving to Sunday school where I’d taught the same class more than 20 years, I stopped at a convenience store. The routine, both Sundays and weekdays, varied only in the name over the door of the dispenser of sweet gooey treats. Sundays included cappuccino with the sweet roll. Back in the car, I addressed God aloud, a custom sometimes embarrassing when I think I’m alone but I’m not. “This is stupid.” So, I threw it out, yes? No. I ate it all. But, had I known it would be the last, I would have held out for an apple fritter from AM Donuts and Croissants, not a greasy old convenience store sweet roll.

That afternoon I Googled Overeaters Anonymous, found the website at www.aa.org as well as The Recovery Group, www.therecoverygoup.org. I joined the Newcomers’ loop in TRG, found a wonderful food buddy a thousand miles away as well as other supportive OA members, one even half a world away. With them I started my recovery. I had taken my last thoughtless bite.

Who starts weight loss a week and a day before Christmas? God. I began reporting my food daily, reading,

learning, growing (and shrinking) through Christmas. After one Christmas celebration with my extended family, I returned home where husband had been ill more than a month. His family would gather on Christmas Day. On December 24, I fell in my kitchen, injuring my left rotator cuff. Badly. I knew what I'd done because part of my hell year included severing the right rotator cuff in one fell swoop, that time not by falling but by sheer stress. I hurt, but husband was in no shape to help. I could have driven to the emergency room, or gotten family members to help me, but I didn't. I toughed it out, even finishing my baking. Christmas Day I got through the meal not eating anything I didn't think through first.

I could have gone to the doctor on Tuesday the 26th but, scheduled to leave the country on the 27th, I feared the doctor would say I couldn't go. I declined to give him the opportunity. My husband remained sick enough he passed up the pre-paid trip to London, and I went with my son and daughter-in-law. On the plane, separated from them and in a window seat, my getting in and out was excruciating.

Sharing the kids' first European adventure dulled my pain. Always mindful of Internet cafes, I emailed my OA buddies, reporting I'd allowed myself bread pudding, which even then I expected would make my trigger food list, counting as victory declining to return for seconds. My husband and I had a favorite London cafe where the kids needed to experience tea and scones, and those, too, were laid out for the email team.

Back home, the scales reported I'd gone through Christmas and a week in London with no change in my weight. Victory!

I established my membership with a face-to-face group of Overeaters Anonymous and a year later became the group's Intergroup representative.

I've worked through the Steps all the way, and I'm on my third time through, leisurely, working with the bunch of people I'm sponsoring. I've had three sponsors, one in Israel, and a second in my state though about a five-hour drive from home, and a third in an adjacent state but a long way away. They've all helped me as have the people I sponsor, my local face-to-face group, my friends from TRG, and my friends on my blog, www.OAS stepper.blogspot.com. I readily tell people I'm in OA, and it's delightful to have people not recognize me. The scales now start with a 1 instead of that awful 3. I used to wear a size 28 and now I'm wearing a 12. I lack another 40 pounds or so, but the weight isn't the big deal. The big deal is, I have a life, a life that's large and marvelous, awesome! I'm pushing my comfort levels, discovering the talents I've worked to hide, perhaps hoping to avoid overshadowing other people. I've been told for years, "I can't believe you do all the things you do." That has embarrassed me tremendously. Now – finally – I'm DOING what they thought I was doing before, and I welcome the comment. I can't believe it, either. And I'm not. God is. Thank GOD!

Step One

We admitted we were
powerless over food – that
our lives had become
unmanageable.

Getting Started

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." – Matthew 19:26 (NIV)

Have you given up on weight loss? I had. Then I found the path. I hope to assist you in your search for it.

Mrs. Kinnon lived across the street, down at the end of the block when I was growing up. She firmly believed in cleaning out her whole house before leaving for any trip – down to the drawers – so nobody would come in and find *anything* out of order. She had whiskers that stabbed little girls when she hugged them, and she did and they did. And every single Monday she started a diet. She'd ended it by Tuesday, or maybe even Monday evening, but the next Monday, she started a diet. Again.

I started dieting when I was thirteen, and Mother took me to Dr. Brooks to get a prescription for weight control pills. I didn't know I was fat until then, though after that I remembered Mother had been suggesting I cut down what I ate. From that day until December 2006, something in the neighborhood of forty-six years, I was on a diet. Probably like people watching Mrs. Kinnon, most of those days observers couldn't tell it, but I was. Or I was feeling guilty, one or the other. Forty-six years, one day at a time, is 16,808 days, give or take a day because of leap years. If I was following the diet a seventh of the time, like Mrs. Kinnon, I felt righteous about 2,400 days. I felt guilty and miserable something like 14,400 days.

Since December 17th, 2006, I've felt guilty about my food darned close to zero days, though I haven't had perfect abstinence from overeating since then. But the guilt, the burden, the shame is gone. It's time you, too, lay aside your guilt, shame, and burden and rely on Jesus' words, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." Those 46 years I believed the words because Jesus said them. I didn't live them until I walked into the rooms of Overeaters Anonymous. I walked through the digital door on the Internet. You may already be frequenting a group with physical doors. Perhaps your door is this book or your telephone book. Maybe it's several of them.

What's today? Write down the date. You can find the kind of peace, that level of freedom from guilt and shame I encountered December 17th. His burden really is easy, his yoke light. I know, because I finally got it from my head to my heart. With God's help, I'll walk you through learning how to move it from your head to your heart as well, no matter where you start.

Slimming Steps

Write down the date. Relax. Make yourself a sign and put it on your mirror – or make it into your computer wallpaper. Put it where you'll see it. Write, "Jesus promises a light burden and an easy yoke. I want to find them."

Icy Fire

Fear consumes
with icy fire,
tendrils vapors
clutching souls
with absolute zero.
Glacial fear creeps,
a smoldering floe
encasing mummified
embers glowing dimmer
by half-lives.

Have You Reached Rock Bottom?

They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. – II Thessalonians 2:10(b)-12 (NIV)

A young child, after a while, will proclaim, “I can do it myself!” We continue to claim that long after we’re young, long past the sweet confidence of mastery a first grader may possess. Weight loss is one of those things we do “all by ourselves” even when we join diet and calorie clubs or have a buddy to support us. We may, of course, pray. But we tend to pray for willpower, for weight loss, for specifics. Even when we ask for help, we want to do it ourselves, make the rules we follow – or at least choose them. More often than not, though, we choose to ignore them, to cheat on them, to overlook them for good cause – or bad cause – or just because.

I did. I tried for years and years and years to do it myself. Let’s list the ways:

- ☒ I had the diet pills the family doctor gave me at 13
 - ☒ Most weigh and pay organizations you could name, some multiple times
 - ☒ Some weigh and pay organizations you may not have heard of, the price prohibitive for many people
 - ☒ Carb blockers
-

- ☒ Amphetamines (Back when they were discouraged but still legal I drove 150 miles and back to get a bottle of pills for 30 days. When I ran out and realized I was physically needing them, I had the sense not to go back to get the next month's supply.)
- ☒ A metal pin at an acupuncture point on my ear, with instructions to massage it when wanting to eat
- ☒ Graphs and charts projecting how much I'd lose by what date
- ☒ Three or four Internet programs
- ☒ A diet from a women's magazine
- ☒ Counting calories
- ☒ Counting carbs
- ☒ Counseling (3 times, years at a time)
- ☒ Hypnotism
- ☒ Motivational tapes
- ☒ New Year's resolutions
- ☒ Goals for certain major events
- ☒ Diet books
- ☒ Cookbooks with reduced calories/fat/carbs/sugar
- ☒ Books, directed at weight loss, organization, codependency, relationships, misogynists, self-esteem, and anything else marginally relative
- ☒ Partners in person and on the Internet
- ☒ Fasting one day each week
- ☒ Beginning to write a book about how with a partner I attained a total weight loss of 500 pounds, knowing I lacked well over a hundred of those before publication, and
- ☒ Giving myself shots in the stomach twice daily with a medication approved for diabetics, which I was not, but not approved for weight control

For probably five years I saw a doctor monthly who used all his powers of persuasion and prescription to help me. Using the carbohydrate blockers and appetite suppressants

he urged on me, I reached the point in my insanity I'd use the carb blockers *because* I intended to eat bad stuff.

I cannot do it myself with all the help I can recruit.

Consider the scripture at the beginning of this section. It's not a pleasant passage! Why would Paul talk of God's sending a delusion so all will be condemned? I don't know the future, but I do know the present. There's a literal hell on earth to which we're condemned when, as compulsive overeaters, we persist in insisting we can manage for ourselves.

In light of my history, and – I'm guessing – your own, consider this: Maybe it's necessary for us to absolutely reach the rock bottom of despair before we can let go and let God assume control. Defeat on my own cleared the path to finding the spiritual means to absolutely conquer the weight I've carried psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually most of fifty years. As long as I remained stubbornly independent, God could not give me the amazing peace I've found. But for God's sending me a powerful delusion so that I believed the lie and found myself condemned, I could not have reached the point of accepting gratefully the amazing act of love!

Praise God, the bottom is there so the top can be found!

Slimming Steps

What have you tried, sure you could do it on your own? Make your own list. Answer the question, "Where's my rock bottom?"

Powerless

I've tried, really tried,
yet to sooth the savage beast
eludes me. Why? Tell me why!
Others can! So why should
this craving mock me, shame me,
crush my soul? Others stroll
from the beast, a whimpering kitten
in their lives though they've indulged
with the rest of us, partied just as hard.
Am I so weak, so deficient?
Where's my will-power?
I'm sick to death of this addiction,
ready to give up.

You say there's hope just because
I give up? That I'm sick but it need not be
to death? So tell me. I'm ready to hear you.

Woe is Me!

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? – Romans 7:21-24 (NIV)

I'm an intelligent person, a successful professional, a competent leader, a resourceful individual. I can do most things I set out to do. Why, then, can I not control my eating? Like Paul, I do what I don't want to do, have full intentions of doing exactly what I know is not only right but best for me. I understand the rules when it comes to eating as well as I do all the other areas of my life where I function rather well. **So what's wrong with me?**

Others are able to decide to lose weight and do it. I'm not. Sure, it's hard for most who feel the need to lose, but it's not *impossible*! For me, obviously, it is. I know that because I really tried hard – time after time – for all those years. And I was a miserable failure at it.

There is a reason – one that sounds preposterous at first – but when you finally accept it, not just in your head but in your heart, it's absolutely liberating! The reason is that for a compulsive overeater like me, it's not a personality flaw; it's a physical illness. I'm as much allergic to sugar and similar carbohydrates as other people are to nuts or bee stings or alfalfa. I cannot tolerate the carbohydrates I crave. When I give into the craving, I'm like an alcoholic driven to

madness by the overwhelming need for alcohol, or the drug addict for the drug. Sugar is my drug of choice. When I give in to the craving, I give in head over heels, a snowball barreling for the edge of a precipice.

You know, in some ways the problem for a compulsive eater can be even more difficult than the alcoholic's. Why? Two reasons.

- ✠ An alcoholic can avoid drinking alcohol forever, once the physical craving is past. Unless the compulsive eater has unending intravenous feeding, though, eating food remains necessary.
- ✠ An alcoholic is often an angry person, angry at the world and mad at the face in the mirror. Venting anger at other people while socially dangerous at least does vent, extruding the venom. A food addict tends to be a person who follows the rules, who turns to food because it's proper – unlike alcohol which, at least for many of us from the Bible Belt, was always suspect. Our rage is just as real as the alcoholic's, but instead of expressing our anger, we deny it, stuff it inside, and tamp it down with food.

Woe is me!

But wait. There's hope. Thanks be to God.

Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. – Romans 7:25 (NIV)

Slimming Steps

Write down the ways you've hidden your eating from others. Have you stashed food in secret? Stolen it? Gone from one restaurant or store to another so you don't buy so much the clerk thinks badly of you? Have you eaten from the garbage pail or spoiled food? Do you clean the plates into yourself when you clear the table? Do you buy a dozen donuts so it looks like you're taking them to the office then eat the evidence before you arrive? What behaviors make you feel like a hopeless sinner?

Quintet for One

Loneliness echoes
through crowded rooms, seeking out
me, the insecure.

Moving to a town
of closed cliques is an empty
chasm of edges.

Who am I? I lack
definition, mirroring back
what I think you want.

Lonely is married
year after year to one who
knows nothing of me.

I don't know your name.
Can it be you hurt me less
being so formless?

Embarrassment, Humiliation, Shame

When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not! – I Corinthians 11:20-22 (NIV)

I don't know about the parties, evidently during the Communion dinner, but I certainly know the kind of eating behavior being described. I've lived it far too many times, year after year. Then I've stuffed more food down to kill the sting of the embarrassment, humiliation and shame.

Why I believed I could stand beside the cake or cookies and not take a plate, just sneak an unnoticed crumb or seventy as I visited, I have no idea! Stopping at a trash can beside the highway or at a service station to empty the car of evidence instead of throwing it in my own dumpster didn't change the food I'd consumed, just the evidence that might have linked it to me.

Does God look down on us for our bingeing? I don't think so. I believe he's bitterly sorrowed, but his love doesn't turn to scorn, he doesn't give up on us. He continues to love us and longs for us to turn from our folly and find out there really is a sane way of life, one so deceptively simple we cannot find it with much searching. We can only find it by giving up.

We have precisely one moment in time, and it is the present. Yesterday and the days, months, years, and decades before haunt us, but we can't grasp them, can't change one iota of our behavior – or the results. Tomorrow is a wisp of air out of reach, always one day from our grasp. We can act today in ways that benefit tomorrow, that make tomorrow more pleasant, but we cannot effect any change in tomorrow. The revision is only possible today, right now. Not five minutes ago, not an hour into the future. Right now.

What are you eating right now? If you are eating, is it something you'll approve of from the vantage point of the future? If not, are you willing to put it down? Are you able to eat appropriately this moment? Can you continue to do that the rest of today, moment by moment? Today is all you have. But you have today!

Slimming Steps

Write down everything you eat today. Be honest. If you have a friend with whom you can share the journey to slimness, are you willing to tell that person honestly and completely what you eat today? Will you do that, one day at a time?

This Lonely Choice

In a crowd or with one or a few
I remain solo, apart, alone.
My best friend is my loneliness
for with myself I don't have to talk
or remember that name I forget.
I know I'm alive when I ache.

Live enough years with an ache,
you grow numb and feel few
ups or downs. Life is gray. You forget
how to laugh or to cry. Alone
with stranger or spouse, small talk
falters toward loneliness.

I cling to despair and to loneliness,
to the comfort of knowing the ache.
I don't want to remember to talk
when the words breaking silence are few.
I'm accustomed to feeling alone;
short-lived joy I might never forget.

Never knowing, you need not forget.
It's safer to falter in loneliness.
It's not frightful to suffer alone
when long habit has softened the ache.
The times of regret now are few,
and to dream of escape is mere talk.

And yet, I've begun now to talk.
How unlikely am I to forget?
The rewards of old patterns are few
and the profligate cost is my loneliness.
Can I really survive with the ache
when I perceive myself one alone?

Solitude's pleasure from being alone
is a fib, just ingenuous talk
when you know what it is by the ache
that you'll never again just forget.
The comfort once settled in loneliness
perishes. Remnants and shards, just a few.

I can't regress to a lifetime alone, can't forget
my thought, my talk of ubiquitous loneliness.
Friendships may ache – but give me a few.

I Give Up

Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes?’”

...

Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” – II Samuel 12:7-9a, 13a (NIV) [Read II Samuel 12:1-13a]

“I give up.” Not many months ago I would have told you those words reflected defeat. Now I know they bring freedom, victory, peace, serenity, joy, and sanity. Blessed sanity. And weight loss is an exciting byproduct of sanity! But first, surrender is necessary – and *oh* so positive!!!

Consider David when finally confronted with the question, “What have you *done*?” David knew God. He had been chosen by God to be king over Israel. Together they had confronted the world, and David knew what it was to depend of God’s guidance.

He forgot.

He was king, and he decided he could make decisions and run things. He did a lousy job of it. He and Bathsheba bore the consequences of their actions in the loss of the child of their misconduct. David repented completely, but, having faced his failure, accepted with it the aftermath. Don’t you

suspect he had many sleepless nights during his misconduct? Don't you know he would have expected God to be as kind to him as he was to Uriah the Hittite? I cannot accept the idea God zapped the child for the parents' acts. The consequences David experienced were dire, but they were out in the open, not the fear of the unknown, and now he could move forward, no longer relying on his decision-making abilities but again turning to God.

My life was unmanageable. My misdeeds weren't as dramatic as David's, but they abounded, and they haunted me. I was intelligent, educated, a natural leader. For what reason would I expect not to be able to do what other people were doing? Like eating sanely. Like gaining the respect of those closest to me. Like living a meaningful life, not just existing, an automaton drearily plodding through the assigned tasks. Why could I not love and be loved? What was wrong with me?

What I hated most was for someone to say, "I don't know how you do all the things you do." I felt so fake, so bogus. I wasted hours every day, avoiding doing what needed to be done, then rushed through the tasks when deadlines loomed and facing the job at hand was easier than facing myself, a failure once again.

My life was out of control, both in eating and in every other area. I had to have help. I needed sanity.

This morning I experienced a wave of the old madness. Nothing major was wrong, though I could name minor inconveniences. Suddenly, with no more justification than that, the old insanity washed over me, a longing that for a long time had daily sent me to the donut shop. I didn't fall prey today but rejoiced in the wake-up call. Again, I accept my insanity, I accept my inability to control my own life and even what I put in my mouth. I give up. And I thank God for his willingness to pick up the responsibility.

Slimming Steps

How do you feel the insanity? Write about what you've tried to manage and cannot.

Willpower

I tried, tried for years to achieve
though I felt like I'd balanced on rope
not tied, just stretched over a chasm,
way off the edge of a cliff.
I juggled responsibilities while playful
innocents moved the rope, tripped
me, kept me off balance.
I saw nothing, blinded by masks
I hid behind, as misplaced as my life.

From the cliff, though, came a kind voice
of hope, news help awaited nearby
if I only gave up my efforts to manage,
reached for solid rock by stretching my
hand, asking for help, and trusting.

Step Two

Came to believe
that a Power greater than
ourselves could restore us
to sanity.

So Who Is God?

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" – Exodus 3:13-14 (NIV)

Have you ever met a celebrity? Once I ate beside a U.S. Senator. He had no intention of engaging in conversation, of acknowledging people around him other than demanding the oversight of his not having received a slice of pie be rectified, and immediately! I made a nametag for another senator and misspelled her name, much to her disgust and my chagrin.

George W. Bush was different. In his gratitude for the meeting background work I'd done, setting up the room, etc., he kissed my cheek. A couple of weeks later I stood in a coliseum full of people listening to him. As he walked past me, leaving through the crowd, he recognized me, calling me by my title. Then he said he wanted Laura to meet me, having some aides bring her forward.

When people step out of the newspapers and off the TV screens into your life, they're real. Some such experiences please; others disgust. But the person on TV or in newsprint never stops being real after the experience.

I've always known God through the Bible, stained glass windows, works of old masters, and sermons. I studied New Testament Greek so I could read the original text. I'd taught Sunday school, and instructed the teachers, and I'd even

preached twice. I brought to the rooms of recovery a thorough understanding of the Bible, from historical, theological, and archaeological aspects.

Then God stepped off the pages and into my life. He'll never be the same. He is. He is real. He is vital, caring, present, understanding, compassionate, accepting. He is love – love I've never before known from any source.

However, now that I've met God, who is Love, I find love all around me.

In the past, I believed God performed miracles. I found myself entranced by stories of my own great-grandfather's faith great enough to heal people. And mules. But as strong as my belief in God's awesome power had been, the power became real and personal for me on December 17, 2006.

That's when I knew he not only had performed miracles in the past but that he could and would accept my burdens and relieve me of the insanity of my life. That's the day I stopped turning to food for comfort, for I met Comfort himself.

Slimming Steps

Who is your God? How well do you know him? Can he meet the needs that drive you crazy? What kind of God do you want? What do you want him to do for you? Write it out. God can climb out of the box you may have found him in and into your life.



A Modicum of Faith

Newborn as Shiloh roiled, Sam modeled wisdom, grace —
an unpretentious man. To Arkansas then on
they trekked. They built a church and scattered seed, a place
in Texas dawned a home, a farm from faith and brawn.

Sam served and sowed from youth through eighty years of love,
attuned to all of life, revered for prayers he spoke.
His unobtrusive faith invoked response above
the ken of prouder men while healing hurting folk.

Sam melded foot and severed toe, stanching blood with words
and healed a distant mule by speaking through a phone.
Example etched in children trust that undergirds,
and evenings he would sing, a radiant baritone.

A simple righteous man, a man I never knew —
Pacific battles raged as Sam progressed in peace,
a saint. And now Sam's grandson's daughter finds it true
that mountain-moving faith exists and shall not cease.

Is God Everything or Nothing?

[Servants of God are]... known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything. – II Corinthians 6:9-10 (NV) [Read II Corinthians 6:3-10]

The old hymn says, “I surrender all.” Have you thought about the meaning? A dictionary might tell you surrender is a verb meaning to relinquish possession or control, to give up or abandon. What does it mean on the battlefield?

Surrender can either be conditional or unconditional. Capitulating to God means the latter, unequivocally. Normally a belligerent will agree to yield completely only if utterly incapable of continuing. A white flag or raising empty and open hands above the head triggers set procedures of acceptance under United States Army policy.

- ☞ Silence (they cannot plan an escape)
- ☞ Search (for weapons, maps, orders, etc.)
- ☞ Secure (tie up or guard)
- ☞ Safeguard (from dangers)
- ☞ Separate (to facilitate control)

To surrender is to open yourself to humiliation, no longer having a voice in decisions about your life. It means we’re no longer in charge.

Would you surrender to God? I thought I did when I was twelve and joined the church. When I was nine I decided to be a missionary, proclaiming that intention into the next

decade. I got an advanced degree in Christian education, worked as church staff in three places, wrote United Methodist and Baptist curriculum materials. I thought I'd surrendered to God. But that was the media God, the one I got third hand. Only when I really knew him could I reach the point of actually yielding control to him, and that gladly.

The Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, describes this as a dilemma faced by addicts, whether to alcohol, food, or other behavior:

[W]e had to fearlessly face the proposition that either God is everything or else He is nothing. God either is, or He isn't. What was our choice to be? (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 53)

Until the understanding that came through working the Steps, I had no real relationship with God. So for me God was really nothing, or at least not everything. When I got to know him, he was everything, and surrender came naturally.

Slimming Steps

Is God everything or nothing to you? What personal experiences have you had with him? Write about it.

Limits

God is everything
or nothing.

Nothing? God
can't be nothing.

Nothing can be
so complex,
so real
and come from
nothing.

God is everything
so he's in charge.

Of everything.
What does that
leave for me?

Nothing.
Except
everything.

Who's Your Daddy?

Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another? – Malachi 2:10 (NIV)

Jesus called God “Abba,” roughly the equivalent of “Daddy.” That’s all well and good. It can call to mind the loving relationship of a caring parent, the support system we not only long for but desperately need our whole life through. Like a loving parent, God cares for us individually, feels protective of us but allows us to make decisions – including mistakes – necessary for growth. God stands ready and willing to have a personal relationship with us but knows the perils of a controlling parent-child relationship and avoids that. God is not a puppeteer, pulling our strings, but a director guiding our drama if we choose to take the cues. He’s a parent providing the support and directions necessary for development, and a suzerain.

The term suzerain today defies easy understanding, for no such legal relationship exists in modern jurisprudence. The closest description might be that the suzerain is the sovereign of a protectorate. In medieval times, the feudal lord stood in a suzerain-like role; more recently, the company store/town fulfilled somewhat the same function. Both those examples fail, though, for they have such a negative connotation. We see the vassal as downtrodden, a pawn on the board of the callous feudal lord. The company town or store earned by example the reputation for taking advantage of the employee’s family, keeping them impoverished and at the company’s mercy. The suzerain relationship existed in

the ancient world, and the covenant between God and Israel was such an unbalanced relationship, not a partnership between equals. Unlike the feudal lord or company store, though, the ancient suzerain's role was the kind protector, graciously seeing to the needs of his people.

What if the protector doesn't protect but acts like the stereotypical lord or company store? What if the daddy instead of being Jesus' daddy commits acts of violence – physical or mental, psychological or emotional – to the child? Surely this cannot be a picture of God, our Father.

Intellectually, we know this to be true. What of your inner child, though? Is "Father" a term of comfort or the harbinger of fear? What do the terms of the church mean to you? Are they barriers between you and God, or a bridge? When you understand the emotions words cause, you can discard the unhelpful verbiage and find God in the truth remaining.

Slimming Steps

Write freely about these words. What emotions do you feel? What comes to mind? Don't look for the church's definition. Look at your heart's understanding and your inner child's reaction.

Power greater than ourselves

Power

God

Supreme Being

Creative Intelligence

Spirit of the Universe

Realm of Spirit

All Powerful

Guiding

Creation

Presence of God

Bridge of Reason
New Land
Reason
God of Reason
Great Reality
Broad Highway
Presence of Infinite Power
Presence of Infinite Love
Maker

The listed words are capitalized in Chapter 4 of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, "We Agnostics."

to my sponsor's god

you didn't do bad
last night i told you thanks
for a lousy day and you
didn't get mad
i asked you to keep me clean
just today and somehow i am
i asked you to stop my dumb
mouth at the boss
he grinned when i left
said i'd done good
so thanks for a not bad day
can you do it again
i'd be much obliged

Who Are You To Ask?

The LORD said to Job:

“Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him?
Let him who accuses God answer him!”

Then Job answered the LORD:

“I am unworthy – how can I reply to you?
I put my hand over my mouth.

I spoke once, but I have no answer —
twice, but I will say no more.”

Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm:

“Brace yourself like a man;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me.

“Would you discredit my justice?
Would you condemn me to justify yourself?

Do you have an arm like God’s,
and can your voice thunder like his? – Job 40:1-9 (NIV)

Job had to be shaking in his sandals. Don’t you know he hated that he ever got into the conversation? Don’t you know he treasured it the rest of his life and forever?

In the movie *On the Waterfront* Marlon Brando’s character says, “I could have been a contender, I could have been somebody, instead of a bum which is what I am.”

Self-confidence is good. We’ve been told that often enough. Many of us who suffer as compulsive overeaters believe it not from the actual experience of self-confidence – we’ve sought it all our lives, most often unsuccessfully. But as a goal, it’s the Holy Grail! If we could just be as sure of

ourselves as we're sure other people are sure of themselves.... If we just had self-confidence, we'd be fine. We could be contenders. We would win, for sure!

But I, at least, found self-confidence a fleeting illusion, a whimsy intimation of materiality but wispy and so ephemeral my fingers scattered its particles, slicing through it. Self-confidence was a ghost of birthdays past, and a phantom of birthdays to come. Today? Self-confidence was nothing, nada, zip, zilch, absent.

We tremble at the possibility of God's actually speaking to us, at his believing in us enough to throw a crumb to us. We believe in our hearts we could be contenders if only... but the if-only's get in our way and trip us so we never move into the presence of God.

Who am I to address God? I am God's creation. I am his child. I am his dearly beloved. I'm okay, 'cause God doesn't make junk. And he's ready and willing to talk to me.

And to you. Look at Matthew 7:7. Ask. Seek. Knock. Just like that teacher you were afraid of, God really welcomes a response. So talk to him.

Slimming Steps

What do you want to know? Write a letter to God, asking all the questions you can think of. Tell him how you feel. He can take it. Pour out your anger or your joy, your curiosity or your awe. Talk to God like you're writing a letter to your favorite aunt or best friend.

A Kids' Meal God

[B]ut when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. – I Corinthians 13:10-12 (NIV)

My friend Karen is a writer, editor, publicist, a worker with words. Mid-thirties and a mother herself, she's made a discovery. The mother she knew as a breadwinner, disciplinarian, and homemaker writes as well! Karen has seen how even the childhood discipline – copying words and definitions from the dictionary – and certainly the books they shared were tools in skillful hands developing potential with an oh-so-gentle touch.

I've recently come to an understanding of my own mother. A talented, intelligent woman, except for brief periods in protected environments, she had lived with her parents or with her husband for thirty years before I was born. That birth marked a turning point and found her far from home with an infant and a four-year-old, alone while my father traveled from Monday morning until Friday evening. Two years later, another baby arrived. She is and was a good mother, but, overwhelmed and insecure, she passed on to me not only her talents and intellect but self-doubt.

In 1952 J. B. Phillips' classic book *Your God is Too Small* was published. It's been reprinted, the latest being 2004. I read it in the early '70s, and I particularly remember a

passage about whether or not God understands radar. Maybe today the question is microchips or nuclear fission or how to program a DVD recorder. The answer – no matter what the question – is “of course.” But that’s not the question *or* the answer. The question is *What is your understanding of God?* Like Karen, do you assume you’re the first to write poems, that the concept would be foreign to your parent? Is the God of your understanding the one you met in Sunday school, sitting on a rug at the teacher’s feet? Just how big *is* your God?

In restaurants, given the choice of regular-sized, child-sized, or bigger-than-you-should-be-able-to-eat-sized meals, all too often we compulsive overeaters have chosen the third option. Twice. Maybe the smaller portion meal makes more sense for us. What if the option wasn’t food, though? If you’re stuck with a child-sized God because you never looked at him again after you learned everything you needed to know about him – it’s time to opt for huge.

Slimming Steps

Consider the prayers of Tevye, the Jewish lead character in *Fiddler on the Roof*. He asks impertinent questions, such as, “Dear God. Was that necessary? Did you have to make him lame just before the Sabbath? That wasn’t nice. It’s enough you pick on me. Bless me with five daughters, a life of poverty, that’s all right. But what have you got against my horse?” If you were as blunt as Tevye, what would you say to God? What would he answer back to you? Write it down.

Good Affliction, Lesson Learned

It was good for me to be afflicted
so that I might learn your decrees.

The law from your mouth is more precious to me
than thousands of pieces of silver and gold. – Psalm
119:71-72 (NIV)

At an OA meeting a friend made an interesting comment. It wasn't original, but I'd never heard it – it might as well have been. "You hear often, 'Thank GOD for OA!' Yet, we could say with the same earnestness, 'Thank OA for God!'"

Blasphemous? No. Really, it's not! It's like thanking the person who introduced you to your spouse. Not that I needed an introduction to God, *exactly*. Maybe an apt comparison would be an artist's painting a picture so realistic it shows what you never saw in the subject painted, though you're intimately familiar with it. Or...or what? It's the situs of the knowledge. My head is, was, and will continue to be full of the knowledge of God, of the scriptures, of history, theology – of religion. The difference is transmigration from status as an acquaintance to that of a friendship. That's it! I thank OA for allowing me to discover God as my friend, mentor, caretaker, and constant presence. Thanks, OA!

What, then, of the despair that brought me to OA? To have softened enough to facilitate receptiveness, I first had to reach the point of insanity. When I arrived at these doors I had given up, admitted I stood trampled by life, overcome

by the obsessions for food, computer games, anything to dull the pain. Pain brought me to OA. Agonizing, excruciating, endemic pain. But without the pain, I could never have reached the point I thought a bunch of addicts – either alcoholics or food addicts – could have anything to teach me about ANYTHING, but especially about God! I'd studied New Testament Greek, earned degrees from two church colleges, taught Sunday school, taught teachers how to teach Sunday school, preached, and been on the staff in three churches. What could addicts tell me about God? Nothing!

But oh, what they *could* do about leading *me* to learn about God! Wow.

The Big Book *Alcoholics Anonymous* "Appendix II" speaks of two kinds of spiritual awareness – the sudden transformation and the slow revelation. I didn't have a Paul-on-the-road-to-Damascus confrontation, not recently, not ever. I almost felt like the Ethiopian meeting Philip, though. I was reading the right stuff, just didn't know who it was they were talking about, not really. (Acts 9 and 8.)

God existed in my head. Through the fellowship of OA and the wisdom of speakers and writers on recovery, he's firmly and permanently moved down from the mental processes to the center of my being, to my essence. That's natural, of course I see now. God *is* my essence.

And I appreciate the intermediary who made the introductions. Thank OA for God!

Slimming Steps

Is your God a God of the head or of the heart? How do you relate to him? How would you like to relate to him?

The Search

When I was just a young man
and lived in Bethlehem
I craved a setting bold, grand,
alive – Jerusalem!

I left the town of David;
the city wasn't far.
I thought the Temple splendid,
the town a grand bazaar.

I thought "How true to my luck"
that soon as I had gone
from east there came a show such
as few had come upon.

And then King Herod's army
was marched into the town.
They wrote a bloody history
by cutting children down.

*It's power, glory, mystery,
to soar above the heights,
to be a part of history
that I've sought all my life.*

Jerusalem was central
to those of Israel
but life was uneventful,
its glory old and pale.

Now boats and men from far lands
sailed into Antioch.
And those who walked in its sands
would know what's new, what's hot.

I left the Holy City
one year at Pentecost
with pilgrims hot and gritty,
yet happier than most.

They spoke of dead men rising,
of ghosts that came on wind.
I mused about my missing
encountering their friend.

*It's power, glory, mystery,
to soar above the heights,
to be a part of history
that I've sought all my life.*

Well, Antioch was booming
but not so much as Rome.
I soon found myself fuming
to make that city home.

I left the sandy seashore
and sailed for Seven Hills.
This time I knew I was sure
and Rome my thoughts did fill.

Some on the boat were sailing
to Cypress and to Crete.
The tale that they were telling
seemed strange, beyond belief.

A ranting man from Tarsus
spoke of a group of Jews,
said one had come to reach us,
no matter what our views.

*It's power, glory, mystery,
to soar above the heights,
to be a part of history
that I've sought all my life.*

And now I am an old man,
a denizen of Rome,
I earn what little I can
but still my mind does roam.

My work is guarding prisoners
and one's a man I've known.
We once were fellow travelers,
for Paul has come to Rome.

The ranting now makes more sense,
but maybe it's just me.
He speaks of love, repentance,
of peace that makes men free.

It seems that I was looking
for what I failed to see,
that miracles were breaking;
that history called to me.

*It's power, glory, mystery,
to soar above the heights,
that God's brought into history.
God's sought me all my life.*

Step Three

Made a decision
to turn our will and
our lives over to the
care of God as we
understood Him.

When Is a Decision More than That?

As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked. “Only God is truly good. But to answer your question, you know the commandments: ‘You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.’”

“Teacher,” the man replied, “I’ve obeyed all these commandments since I was young.”

Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. “There is still one thing you haven’t done,” he told him. “Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” – Mark 10:17-22 (NLT)

Are you a good citizen? When did you last commit a felony? A misdemeanor? An act of moral turpitude? If you did one out-of-character act in your youth you may still be wracked with guilt over it. A serious act of misconduct would probably result in terminal remorse. So. You’re a good Christian, right?

The answer is yes! You’re a good person, a person who believes in Christ, a good Christian. Right? Right!

Do you feel like it? Probably not. Even if you avoid murder, refrain from adultery, steer clear of taking anybody

else's stuff, even to the extent of taking back what you accidentally carry off – if like the rich young ruler you have dutifully obeyed the commandments since your youth, you may still know something's lacking. "What must I do?" is your earnest prayer.

Don't assume because of Jesus' answer voluntary poverty is the solution. Don't suppose the rich cannot find the comfort of the Kingdom of God. Look deeper at what's happening. Jesus knew the man standing before him, knew his Achilles heel. The man's wealth was more important to him than the peace and joy he sought. He was willing to follow Jesus but on his own terms, not Jesus'. He couldn't relinquish all. He could only relinquish most.

How much control can you relinquish? Don't ask God to be your assistant. Don't seek God as an equal partner. Don't buy into the "God is my co-pilot" crowd. Make yourself God's assistant, his employee, *his* co-pilot.

Slimming Steps

If you had a conversation with God and asked him what you had to do to find the peace of heart that can take the place of comfort food in your life, what answer would you fear most? What word would make you tremble if God suggested it had to go? Your reputation? Your intelligence? Educational status? Financial security? What would you not be willing to give up to be slim?

Like a Little Child?

Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." – Matthew 19:13-14 (NIV)

Walking with a toddler's fist wrapped around your finger brings comfort even when the act of bending far enough for it to happen shoots pains through your back.

Fingers the size of macaroni cling tight for a while, but a shiny bauble in cement, a slug inching along the path, or a sunray brimming with dust mites may loosen the fingers as the child, unconscious of the disconnect, wanders toward the prize.

It's easy for our rigatoni fingers to resemble the macaroni ones. We seek God's hand for protection and guidance, for the security that comes from trust. This is especially true when danger presents itself, or fear or despair claims us. Yet our attention drifts away easily at the slightest distraction.

Jesus said the kingdom of heaven – peace, serenity, joy, heaven on earth – belongs to those such as the children. Is a short attention span and easy distractibility sufficient for credentials?

Not really. What we need to reach for – besides God's hand – is the trust and confidence a child places in the adult. When the trust relationship has been established, the child's reaction to "come on" is simple obedience. The questions

“Where?” “Why?” and “How?” never occur. Instead, all will be okay as long as the child is with the adult. Safety abounds “there” without the need to know where “there” is.

We don’t need to understand more than just that we’re going to depend on God like a child would rely on a trustworthy adult. Then we can expect God not only to lead us where we need to go, but to kindly and gently pull us back in that direction each time baubles and slugs pull us off the path he’s set.

Slimming Steps

Describe a child you know. How can your being like that child help you to turn your will and your life over to God’s guidance and direction?

Speaking of distractions, you’re keeping a food record daily, aren’t you?

Beginning

“Love yourself.”

Easy advice?

An infant does.

How natural, how right.

“Love yourself as you are.”

Damaged goods.

Ugly surface.

Gruesome inside.

“If you don’t love yourself fat
you won’t love yourself thin.”

How about pride? Will haughty do?

“Love yourself.”

Others love me. Others hold me high.

“Love yourself.”

I love what I’ve done, what I’ve given,
what I am.

“Love yourself as you are.”

The Master said to
become as a little child.

I love myself.

Lord, let it be true.

I am young.

I am new.

I can learn.

Leave It and Walk Away

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed him. – Mark 1:16-18 (NIV)

The fifth chapter of Luke tells a longer story, about fishing all night fruitlessly, the nets teeming with fish. The result was the same, though. Luke does note they pulled their boats up on the shore, then they left it all, following a stranger.

By the time we get here to OA, God’s far from a stranger for most of us. We’ve heard about him all our lives, even committed our lives to him, often before puberty. We’ve claimed his providence, asked his blessings on our endeavors, and wailed to him of our failings – his, we think. Do we know him well enough, though, to accept his invitation to leave it all and walk with him? Don’t the “stranger – danger” warnings flare in our minds?

How comfortable are you in the passenger seat? Two men drove 400 miles to Galveston, the childhood home of the passenger. He’d made the trip – his pilgrimage – many times, developing habitual stops along the way, taking the same route religiously with a set place to stop for pie, favorite service stations, and absolutely avoiding being “in” Houston. But he’d asked the other man to drive! Going, they entered the city of Houston to the chagrin of the Galvestonian. Returning, they didn’t take the Interstate off the island! All plans for evacuating Galveston in the event of hurricanes start with getting the people across the causeway bridge

since a ferry and a remote toll bridge constitute the other exits. In all his years living and visiting the island, the passenger had left the island by the southern route only once. Despite his nonexistent comfort level, they safely arrived back at the starting point.

Get into the passenger seat with God behind the steering wheel. Do you trust him enough to be comfortable? Are you willing to let him select the route? If he wants to rid you of extra pounds by taking away the cravings so you can eat those things on the “ought to” list instead of the “must have for comfort” list, is that okay? If he wants you to talk to strangers, do you trust him? If he goes south when you expect the northern route, what will you do?

Slimming Steps

Get in the passenger seat. Write about the journey with God driving. How do you feel about it? What's your comfort level?

Triage

Can the patient be saved?

Depends on what you mean.

Her immortal soul?

Oh, yeah.

These martyrs have it made.

She's lived in hell through a marriage with a lout. Nothing post mortem could phase her.

Pshaw. You know that's not what I mean.

Physically? She's not too far gone, lots of stress injuries even to muscles and ligaments not from exertion but from, well – stress.

Come on. Quit being cute. I'm serious.

I'm serious, too. The levity's a cover for my spirit rupturing when I see the psychic pain.

I know. Can she be saved?

Yeah. She's reached the bottom.
She's ready to give up using all
her substantial resources trying
to hold it all together, to make
a life for the kids he taunts,
to build her self-respect that's
atrophied under his onslaughts,
to grow against his attempts
to espalier her like a bonsai tree.

And reaching the bottom is good?

Oh, essential. Now she can let go
reach up, admit she can't,
and God's there, waiting for
the slightest hint of her invitation
to come in and fix it all.

So she'll live.

Oh, more than live. Now she'll
thrive, she'll fly, soaring to
heights of talent and energy and
success she'd buried so deep and
so long she'd thought they never even
existed when they're who she is.
Yes, now finally – she'll **live!**

Spiritual, Not Religious

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness....

“You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?” – Matthew 23:27-28, 33 (NIV) [Read Matthew 23:2-33.]

The history of the Christian church isn’t pretty. Consider the Crusades, the Inquisition, witch burnings, the immoral lives of the clergy including the papacy, war in our own lifetimes between protestants and Catholics in Ireland – these merely scratch the surface. Still, I am and will continue to be a member of the great organization that is the Body of Christ. I believe in the church, but oh, so much more I believe in the God and the Christ whose story and essence has been handed down through the centuries by organized religion.

Looking at the Big Book chapter “We Agnostics” I’m certainly NOT drawn by the title. On the other hand, the truth inherent in the words of the chapter changed my life. They brought the great principles of the Christian faith to me more clearly and more personally than sixty years of study, church membership, and teaching parishioners from kindergartners to nonagenarians. OA pulled the information from my head and planted it firmly in my heart.

Having faced the question of whether God is everything or nothing, the Big Book moves toward the logical explanation that God is not nothing.

But we believed in life – of course we did. We could not prove life in the sense that you can prove a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, yet, there it was. Could we still say the whole thing was nothing but a mass of electrons, created out of nothing, meaning nothing, whirling on to a destiny of nothingness? Of course we couldn't. The electrons themselves seemed more intelligent than that. At least, so the chemist said.

...

Actually we were fooling ourselves, for deep down in every man, woman, and child, is the fundamental idea of God. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, pages 54-55)

Is God everything, or is he nothing? The question seems simple. But is it? If God is everything – the easy answer for Christians to voice – then NOTHING can stand between you and God. Not your stubborn pride, not your ambition, not your husband, wife, father, son, mother, sister, brother or daughter. Patriotism has a huge role to play, but allegiance to country cannot come between you and your God. The church is called the bride of Christ in the Bible. But where does it fit when it comes to your relationship with God? Not at the top priority slot! The **MOST IMPORTANT THING IN YOUR LIFE MUST** be a **closer relationship with God!**

I'm a United Methodist. I've agreed to sponsor other United Methodists, a Seventh Day Adventist, a Buddhist, a Jew, Catholics, members of the Church of Christ, and several others. One had a problem on her resentment list with a doctrine of her church. The old me would have debated theology with her. The OA me was stymied. I prayed about it, then went to bed listening to a tape of AA speaker Mark H. "The minute I put God in a box, I can't know any more nor will I experience any more about him." He

continued, “Please lay aside what you think you know.” He quoted God as telling him, “Why do you keep telling people you understand me? Who do you think you are?”

We are commanded, “You shall have no gods before me.” That includes organized religion. The church has a role, but that place is not higher than your being open to what God tells you.

Slimming Steps

What is your relationship with the church? Can you listen to God for firsthand knowledge and not rely on the church to give it to you secondhand? What is the role of the church after you have established and continue to maintain your relationship with God?

That said, don't ignore the church as a source of guidance and wisdom. Go to the source. The scripture's there for a purpose. Like those who figure they can do Twelve Step programs without the instruction manual *Alcoholics Anonymous*, relying on what you feel or what other people tell you may – and probably will – cause you to fall short. Is your own agenda so loud you really can't hear God's voice? Is the message you're receiving consistent with the God Jesus spoke of?

A Patient, Understanding God

Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised – look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew – a bowlful of water.

Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew." That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew. – Judges 6:36-40 (NIV)

We know the story of Gideon's fleece. Do you remember, though, earlier in the chapter he'd already asked God for a sign and gotten one – a burnt offering on a rock set on fire with a rod? (And that's not Bible-talk for a match.)

Did you ever want God to do something real, something tangible, so you knew for sure? Like going to a haunted house and leaving disappointed we didn't get scared – we crave the different, the unexplainable. If you've wanted something like that from God, did it happen?

I doubt that it did. However, there's one case where it might well have happened – when you *needed* God to show you his presence. God's not a parlor-game trickster. He doesn't perform on command like a trained dog.

Instead, he's caring, compassionate, and involved with his children. Many years ago I was faced with two choices. One I had hoped mightily for and wanted badly to choose, but I'd committed to the other and could not do both. Choosing my favorite was legal, but it meant going back on my word. I went to a prayer chapel, knelt, and talked to God, not curious about whether he'd let me play Gideon but really needing his guidance. He gave it, emphatically and quickly. (I know I didn't manipulate the answer, for it wasn't my preference.) When you need God, he's there, time and time again. You can trust him.

Look at Jesus' miracles. When requests for wondrous acts were made out of curiosity or wrong motives, he declined. When people exhibited faith and made the first move, wonders happened. They still do.

Do you trust him? With your choices? With your decision? With your life?

Slimming Steps

When have you felt the presence of God? Have you asked him to prove something? Have you asked him for guidance? Tell what happened.

Spewed from God's Mouth.

To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

“These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 3:14(b)-22 (NIV)

I live in a small city, a tad larger than 100,000. I go to a comfortable church, not in the ritziest part of town, but respectable. And many of the congregants do come from posh sections. Maybe a dozen blocks away is a poor area, not destitute, but obviously struggling. We serve them, have outreach projects. We have a lot in common with Laodicea. Probably your church does, too.

What about you? What about me? Does God want us to buy gold from him refined in the fire, to buy white clothes to

wear? What? In winter? I don't look good in white. I might spill stuff on it.

I bet you've prayed for God to help you lose weight. Right? I certainly have. What did you want to happen when you prayed? That he would remove the offensive pounds, that he would pull you to his comforting hug when travails and tribulations drove you to the food for solace? That he would make the excess calories you consumed evaporate? Or did you pray for him to give you the courage day after day after day to eat the right foods, to plan what you would eat and eat what you planned, to truly rely on God for comfort and consolation rather than putting your faith in the food?

Are you willing to ask God to take away your difficulties, to release you from your self? What would that mean? Honesty. Openness. Facing the blackness of your soul and forgiving yourself. Facing those you've wronged and seeking their forgiveness. That's what it means for God to take away your difficulties, to release you from yourself, from your self.

Is God everything, or is God nothing? What? You don't like those choices? If God is everything, we have no say-so. We don't decide our goals, our actions, who we like, who we hate. We don't run our lives. If God is nothing??? No. God is not nothing. What's the other choice? Can't I just be good, ask God's advice, let him in on the decision-making?

No. Halfway doesn't count. In or out. Hot or cold. Or get spewed from God's mouth.

The Third Step prayer is... Wait a minute. I won't do what the Big Book does and give you the prayer then the disclaimer. The warning from page 63 of *Alcoholics Anonymous* says:

We thought well before taking this step making sure we were ready; that we could at last abandon ourselves utterly to Him.

Okay. The Third Step prayer says:

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! (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 63)

Slimming Steps

Don't pray the Third Step prayer lightly. Think about it. If you're ready to pray it, you might want to do it with another person or in a church.

Bondage Gone

Bring me riches
Oh my god, I
Need good things.
Don't let me lose
Another game, and
Grant me peace,
Every day.

Guide me,
Only you I
Need, in your will
Each single day.

The God Kit

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” – Matthew 7:7-8 (NIV)

God, how can I turn my will and my life over to you?

How, God?

Mama said when Sis drowned, just four years old,
you needed her more than we did.

Uncle Jess said that tsunami was your doing,
an “Act of God” he called it.

Preacher says you sent Jackie to Hell
'cause he messed up and shot himself
to keep from going to prison.

I can't do that Third Step thing, God!

That makes sense.

Who said that? Where are you?

Who were you talking to?

I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob
– and David, Peter, Paul,
Martin Luther, Mother Teresa....

Holy Shit! I mean Jesus Christ!

That too, in a circular kind of way.

Great God Almighty!

That works. I am who I am.

Wow! That's what you told Moses –
with a burning bush.
Why don't I get a burning bush?

You started this conversation.
I didn't need to get your attention.

Oh.
Yeah.
But you told him take off his shoes,
the Holy Ground bit.

You're not wearing shoes.
And the cultural meaning is gone, too.
These days I'd be more likely to
ask for clothes that cover.
But that's beside the point.

What point?

Like I said, you started the conversation.
I think the language is
"Made a decision to turn our will
and our lives over to the care of God
as we understood Him."

Oh. Yeah. I guess I was pretty smart aleck.
So, are you going to zap me?

Certainly not.
At least it's real, not just rote recitation.
You got my attention with your passion.
You care.
That means something.

Why did you need a four-year-old, then?

I need all my children,
but that doesn't mean I reach out and
pluck them from lives and families.

I would have chosen she have a long life,
that she experience more of the give and take
of being human.

But she died.
She died.

I know, and I felt your pain,
your parents',
I gave you all the comfort you could accept.

You could have closed the gate.

I'm not a puppeteer.
People have free will.
I watch, but I don't meddle.
I watch and sigh and hurt
and wait for an invitation in.

Oh. And my griping was enough invitation?

Oh, yes. Anything real.
Anything thought and felt.

I'm honored.

Actually, I'm honored.
A real communication honors me.

Even gritching?

Even gritching.
So, what kind of God would you trust?

Oh, never mind. I can trust you.

You expect me to believe that?
You're not sure.

I've got to think about this.

There you go again.

What do you mean?

You don't find me by thinking.
You find me by knowing me,
by talking with me,
by walking with me.
Get out of your head and into your heart.

Okay. I'm talking with you.
I can't believe it, but I'm talking with you.

So, what kind of God would you trust?

One who knocks Jerry off his high horse
and loves me.

Would you really trust that kind of God?

I guess not, I'd be afraid Jerry would start praying.

So, you want a God who loves you, what else?

How about one who makes me not react
when Jerry pushes my buttons.

That's doable.

Well, obviously I need a God with a sense of humor.
You're certainly that.

Yes. All the somber faces and resignation sadden me.

Well, I don't want you making me
do things like handing out pamphlets on street corners.

What else?

I'd like explanations with orders.
And respect my intelligence.
Don't treat me like a child.

Speaking of orders,
it sounds like you're doing that

rather than describing the God you want.

I don't want a God who sends people to Hell.

Tell me where the Bible says that's what I do.

Preacher says so.

Go to the source.

What else?

Lead me gently. Don't push.

I'm not a puppeteer.

Did you get pissed off at that Gideon guy,
not being able to figure out what you were telling him,
asking for proof? Three times!

Honest communication doesn't anger me.

Sorry. Anger you. It's not my usual vocabulary.

I know.

What else?

Wise a.... Smart aleck.

Good choice.

Patient.

Understanding.

Forgiving.

Okay. What else?

Can I save some wishes for later?

Do I have to do it right now?

I'll be here.

How many choices do I get?

Are you kind of like a buffet line?

I can pick and choose and

come back and get more or something different?

Maybe a buffet line is a poor analogy
for a compulsive eater.
How about a toolbox?

Yeah.

Can you take away my bingeing in buffet lines?

Yes.

But guiding you away from that eating establishment
could come into play as well.

I guess I need a God who gives abstinence
and wipes out my cravings.
No more buffets.

I didn't say that.
One day at a time.

One day at a time.
Every day?

I'll be here.

Slimming Steps

So. What kind of God would you trust enough to turn over
you life and your will?

Step Four

Came to believe that a
Power greater than
ourselves could restore us
to sanity.

List my tears, God!

All day long they twist my words;
they are always plotting to harm me.
They conspire, they lurk,
they watch my steps,
eager to take my life.
On no account let them escape;
in your anger, O God, bring down the nations.
Record my lament;
list my tears on your scroll —
are they not in your record? – Psalm 56:5-8 (NIV)

The big “THEY.” How huge a word that is. Resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die. For the compulsive overeater, that poison has many names, among them sugar, corn chips, pizza, cola, and mashed potatoes lathered with gravy.

What is resentment? The word “resent” comes from the Latin root *sentire* meaning “to feel” with the prefix “re” meaning again. Feel what? Anger. Anger? What am I angry *about*, you may ask. Probably the real question is, “What are you *not* angry about.” Perhaps you grew up believing nice people didn’t feel anger, that good children don’t have bad thoughts. It’s time to rethink that old idea.

We do get angry, and over the slightest things. In the middle of preparing a meal, we’re interrupted when our child comes in, needing us to do something simple. We love the child, it’s appropriate we’re asked to help, but the interruption is, well, interrupting. The child’s business takes precedence

over ours. Maybe in the larger sense we even see it's proper that way, but it doesn't stop the fact we felt resentment.

Most resentments aren't that small. The ones we remember and re-remember – the angry moments we live time and time again – are far from small. It can be from decades ago when you were that child needing help and your mother would not have stopped, would have scolded you for asking. It can be a terrible wrong, a crime, committed against you. Until you take them out and look at them, the resentments remain. And as they remain, you deal with them. For compulsive eaters, dealing with most problems implies numbing the pain with food.

The psalmist resented. "All day long they twist my words; they are always plotting to harm me. They conspire, they lurk, they watch my steps, eager to take my life."

What do you resent?

Slimming Steps

Who is your "THEY?" Why do you resent them? Take a piece of paper, and along the left side of the page write all names that come to mind of people you resent or feel icky when you think of them, skipping a line between each. Add ideas (you can't date until you're 16, respect your father, etc.) and institutions (the church always just wants money, the bank won't leave me alone.)

Go back and briefly describe why you resent that person, idea, or institution.

Why Me, God?

Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. He asked the LORD, “Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, ‘Give us meat to eat!’ I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now – if I have found favor in your eyes – and do not let me face my own ruin.” – Numbers 11:10-15 (NIV)

Two extremes typify our reaction to discord, tension, and tragedy in our lives. One is this response of Moses, mad at the inconvenience, blaming God for dumping on him rather than resolving to put one foot in front of the other and, in God’s peace, walk through the mess, discovering in the process who he is and the talents God has bestowed on him.

The other extreme is to accept responsibility for all ills and trouble in our lives, blaming ourselves because of a past indiscretion or a general feeling of blameworthiness. “I tell myself it’s because I stole the man’s wallet twenty years ago. When I got cancer I knew that was why.”

Neither is healthy. Both express anger misdirected. Both cause us, compulsive overeaters, to turn to food. So what can we do?

Look at the problem realistically. Turn to God and ask him – not in a blaming way but praying for guidance, for stamina, for God’s presence to walk through the current problem. And look at the past problem in the same light. What have you done in the past that actually may have affected the present? How can you understand the whole situation so you can address it rationally and in God’s power? The twelfth chapter of Numbers tells an interesting story of Moses’ siblings’ feeling him blameworthy. That wasn’t their place. The issue between Moses and God had long passed. It was not their inventory to take. Are you demanding answers or running around looking for a scapegoat? Don’t take inventories for others. Take your own.

Slimming Steps

Look at the resentments you listed in “List my tears, God!” and the reasons for your anger. Beside each, look within yourself and examine what you might have done – or definitely did – that could have caused the situation or worsened it. Write it down, being completely honest with yourself.

Like a Mighty Wind

The wind adopts personas,
props, attributes as roles require —
A breeze docile, gentle,
serene, soothing troubled water.
A whirling dervish prodding, probing,
disrobing treasures, divulging faults.
A gale grabbing grit, hurling
dirt, sandblasting paint chips, debris, trash,
scouring to naked essence.
Blustering gusts portend
long-sought showers,
the gift of life, breaking
heat that bakes the soul.
The Pentecostal wind
adopts personas, grace disguised.

Mirror, Mirror – Don't Look at ME!

Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does. – James 1:23-25 (NIV)

The Fourth Step takes courage. Looking in the mirror, either a physical reflection or a self-examination of our lives, sends rampant shivers for compulsive overeaters. We tend to be harsh on ourselves, but certainly not exclusively. We're angry at everyone and everything, convinced the whole world is in collusion against us and always has been. Is it any wonder so many of us waltz through the first three steps, only to pause and start again? 123-oops-123-oops-123.

For some of us, our Fourth Step list of resentments spews out easily. Others stutter through and end with a short list. Ask those low resentment folks about fears or anger or people who have wronged them, though, and sometimes they, too, spew hurts.

Once the resentment list is made, the second part – writing why we resent that person – is easy. We could write pages about why this person, idea, or institution has earned our contempt. Moderation, though, marks the best course.

Limit the pages to a pittance – less than 20 words for each resentment.

How our Fourth Step revelations emerge depends on our various ideas about life. We're so similar in many ways. We're low in self-esteem, though some express that by demanding attention and respect while others deny they possess the human dignity for anybody to do anything for us. We feel we've been treated like doormats, some angrily trying to trip the next offender and others desperately trying to lie flat and still to facilitate the abuse. Still, as we work through Step Four, we find ourselves face to face with ourselves.

What we face are our hurts, our wounds. What is wounded can be our self-esteem, our security, our ambitions, our personal relations, or our sex relations. For some of us, though, these tags feel wrong. None fit exactly. Fear? Oh, yes. That one fits. And fear can be described with the other words. Fear is our self-esteem threatened, our security lessened, our ambitions inhibited, our relations hindered. But how, exactly? Let's look at the words and what they mean.

- 📁 **Self-esteem:** confidence, dignity, morale, self-assurance, self-respect, self-satisfaction, worth
- 📁 **Security:** peace of mind, feeling of safety, stability, certainty, happiness, confidence
- 📁 **Ambitions:** aspirations, desires, dreams, goals, hopes, wishes
- 📁 **Personal/Sex relations:** dealings, communications, relationships, connections, contact, interaction

Finally, we face the real issue. Just how did all this happen through us? What did we do? We've focused always on the wrongs to us, which may have been horrendous. But we can't change the persons we resent. We can abandon ideas or institutions, but we continue to live with ourselves. Compulsive eaters know guilt and shame all too well. Some of it we've imposed on ourselves.

Some, though, we've earned, and it's time to pry out the details so we can be healed. Do you know how you contributed? Maybe. If you don't, one way I've found helpful in leading people through this Step is to ask them to step into the shoes of the resented person. Then they write about themselves from the other point of view. In the end, we see the whole picture, probably for the first time.

Is that awful? Maybe. Temporarily. But it's awe-full as well. It's a source of wonder, of release, of finally letting go. The Big Book says:

This is the how and the why of it. First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. He is the Principal; we are His agents. He is the Father, and we are His children. Most good ideas are simple, and this concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 62)

Another very helpful tool in identifying how we've acted is called a "turnabout." It's another way of phrasing the questions. For each resentment consider the questions in The Turnabout Table.

As for the woman caught in adultery and brought before Jesus, our accusers drift away. Knowing all our frailties and faults, God loves us. He doesn't condemn you. Don't condemn yourself. Walk triumphantly through the arch to freedom.

The Turnabout Table

1. WHERE WAS I SELFISH? Selfish in this context is not the negative monster we fear as a label. What did I want from this person, institution, or principle? How did I feel deprived or hurt? Write what you wanted or needed in the situation.

2. WHERE WAS I SELF-SEEKING? What behavior did I do to get what I wanted?

3. WHERE WAS I DISHONEST? List all kinds of lies:

- Direct lies: Not telling the truth, a bold-faced lie.
- Lies of Omission: What did I need to say to this person so they knew how I honestly felt about them and the situation? Was I wrongfully silent?
- Lies to Self: What were you telling yourself that wasn't true?

- ✘ I'm not good enough.
- ✘ I'm stupid.
- ✘ I'm not smart enough.
- ✘ I'm unworthy.
- ✘ I'm _____

4. WHERE WAS I FEARFUL?

- Fear of losing what I have.
- Fear of not getting what I want.
- Other peoples' opinions.
- Fear of not getting financial support.

Slimming Steps

Look at your Fourth Step. Do those parts you haven't tried yet. Consider revising those you played down. When you've finished, write what you've learned about yourself.

You are who you are, and you are a loved and valuable child of God. Love yourself.

Incredulous Love

I love you.
You know I didn't always –
hated, loathed, despised –
never ever expected love
to enter in.
I can't dispute
you deserve the wrath.
I let you sabotage my life
to shambles yet clung
to you as my only hope –
such a dope I was – and you.
Your ugly face remains the same
but changed expansively
to something fair,
near radiant at times.
We've blossomed, you and I,
my mirror image.
I stand before you, humble,
calm, amazed to love you.

We Fear Fear Itself

My heart falters,
fear makes me tremble;
the twilight I longed for
has become a horror to me. – Isaiah 21:4 (NIV)

What are you afraid of? Oh, let me count a few of my triggers. Fear. Failure. Embarrassment. Humiliation. A strap showing. A runner in my hose. (More explicitly, people *knowing* there's a runner.) Falling on my face in the middle of the street. Again. Calling somebody the wrong name. Making a fool of myself. Forgetting something important, like the time I was the scheduled speaker and forgot to show up. That's been ten, fifteen years ago, but the fear and humiliation and shame remain. We fear fear and the familiar paralysis it spawns.

Step Four directs us to list our fears, and a fearsome task that is! The Big Book says of fear:

This short word somehow touches about every aspect of our lives. It is an evil and corroding thread; the fabric of our existence was shot through with it. It set in motion trains of circumstances which brought us misfortune we felt we didn't deserve. But did not we, ourselves, set the ball rolling? Sometimes we think fear ought to be classed with stealing. It seems to cause more trouble. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, pages 67-68)

Stealing? Maybe. I haven't dealt with that one like I have with fear. It's not as crushingly familiar. Why should fear and stealing have *anything* in common? That one doesn't compute. At the same time, though, deep in the recesses of

my mind, I know there's truth in the statement. So why? What have I done to deserve this fear? Stealing is wrong! Is fearing a crime? A sin?

How many times does the Bible say, "Fear not"? More than a hundred times. That's a command, in the imperative mood as far as verb analysis is concerned. In other words, it's an order. I'd love to obey that order – if only I could.

Perhaps there is a better way – we think so. For we are now on a different basis; the basis of trusting and relying upon God. We trust Infinite God rather than our finite selves.... Just to the extent that we do as we think He would have us, and humbly rely on Him, does He enable us to match calamity with serenity. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 68)

So, if we turn our lives and our wills over to God, we really will not fear? What a deal!

Slimming Steps

List your fears. Then describe what life would be if the fears were removed. How is fearing like stealing from yourself?. Why do you have this fear? Where/when did it begin? Where and how did trusting and relying on yourself fail you and cause the fear? What self-seeking actions did you take that made it happen or made the situation worse? What resulted? How did it affect you in the future? What could we or should we have done instead?

He's Being Mean to Me, Mommy!

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. – Genesis 37:3-4 (NIV)

We compulsive overeaters tend to be harsh on ourselves, but certainly not exclusively. We're mad at the world, and we've taken it and taken it and taken it for years. We want to scream with the character in the movie *Network* "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore."

Our self-esteem, security, pocketbooks, ambitions, and personal relationships (including sex) – these are the "injuries" set out in the Big Book for inclusion on the grudge list. The words are too mild, too commonplace, to carry the impact of how shattering the events on the resentment list may be for us.

Family relationships are tough for they are so important to us from the beginning, and they tend to continue through the years. And they're so instrumental in who we are and what made us that way. How do you sort out your Fourth Step inventory for a lifetime of interactions?

Many problems with relationships play out primarily at home. Obvious examples include sibling rivalries and a parent's favorite child, but Narcissistic Personality Disorder,

said to affect perhaps one person in a hundred, leads to many families having a person believing the world revolves around them and lacking empathy to recognize anyone else has needs at all. In those and other families, codependent relationships exist where people have difficulty knowing what they feel, making decisions, receiving recognition, and accepting help. Then there's the fact compulsive overeating is a family disease, and when we begin to find recovery sometimes others in the family resent the change and try to pull us back to "normal." Certainly all these patterns create a real challenge as we work through Step Four and the ones following.

Family issues present a unique challenge, a steep slope, but not an insurmountable one, and when we do begin to heal, recovery happens in the family group as well. The systematic approach to listing resentments, fears, and hurts – then analyzing them – helps deflect the turmoil of emotions in this area. Another aid comes in looking beyond just the Step to the greater goal.

Joseph certainly had reason for resentment against his brothers' causing him physical imprisonment. Our figurative prison binds us just as much. Like Joseph we learn to move past fear, resentment, and hurt to freedom and life.

Slimming Steps

You're not your brother's keeper. You're his brother. Or sister. What difficult relationships do you have in your family? What would your life look like if these problems were solved?

Step Five

Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Fear Facing

I sought the LORD, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears. – Psalm 54:4

A compulsive overeater has courageously given me permission to print her fear inventory from Step Five. Using a process described in an AA talk by Clint H, she has broken the fears down to the primal source:



I listed everything I could think of that caused me to be afraid.

- ☞ I'm afraid of my husband's being mad.
- ☞ I'm afraid of stopping doing things just because my husband will be mad.
- ☞ I'm afraid of my husband's controlling me.
- ☞ I'm afraid I'll put my very best out before the world in the best possible venue and it will be ignored.
- ☞ I'm afraid I'll succeed so much I don't know how to deal with it.
- ☞ I'm afraid I'll fall off the "water wagon" and gain all the weight I've surrendered and more.
- ☞ I'm afraid I'll be so successful I won't be able to tolerate my husband and his attitude and his eating.
- ☞ I'm afraid I'll be exposed. I'm not sure what that means.
- ☞ I'm afraid I'll be in the vise between what a nice girl does and what the emerging me needs/wants.

☞ I'm afraid I'll die of boredom.

Then I used each of those fears to start a column taking it to the lowest, most primitive fear.

☞ I'm afraid of my husband's being mad.

☞ If my husband's mad, what happens?

☞ He belittles me.

☞ If he belittles me I lose my confidence.

☞ If I lose my confidence I need affirmation from someone.

☞ The only one I can get affirmation from is my husband.

☞ If I make my husband mad, I'm a little child with nobody to guide me, care for me, and protect me.

☞ If my husband's mad I'm on my own.

☞ If I'm on my own I am responsible for guiding me, caring for me, and protecting me.

☞ If I'm on my own I have to rely on God or me and I might not rely on God.

☞ If my husband is mad I'm alone.

Now to the second fear....

☞ I'm afraid of stopping doing things just because my husband will be mad.

☞ If I stop doing what makes my husband mad, I'm being who he thinks I should be.

☞ If I stop doing what makes my husband mad, I'm nothing but his robot.

☞ If I stop making my husband mad, I'm nothing.

The pattern's getting pretty clear...

☞ I'm afraid of my husband's controlling me.

☞ If my husband doesn't control me I'm alone.

Moving to other issues....

☞ I'm afraid I'll put my very best out before the world in the best possible venue and it will be ignored.

☞ I'm afraid I'm nothing.

And the opposite....

☞ I'm afraid I'll succeed so much I don't know how to deal with it.

☞ If I succeed I'll have crushed my husband and I won't be a nice girl and I'll be alone.

☞ I'm afraid I'll fall off the "water wagon" and gain all the weight I've surrendered and more.

☞ I won't be any better than my husband who lost weight and is gaining now.

☞ But I won't be alone. I'll just be nothing.

☞ I'm afraid I'll be so successful I won't be able to tolerate my husband and his attitude and his eating.

☞ I won't be a nice girl and I'll be nothing and alone.

☞ I'm afraid I'll be exposed. I'm not sure what that means.

☞ Obviously it means nothing and alone.

"I'm afraid I'll be in the vise between what a nice girl does and what I need and/or want" and "I'm afraid I'll die of boredom" seem pretty clear as well. My fears are **I'll be nothing** and **I'll be alone**.

Now I need to meditate and ask God to remove my fears. I ask God to remove my fears (nothing and alone) and to tell me what he wants me to be... *to direct my attention to what he wants me to **be**.*

Observations made by AA speaker Clint H, the source of this exercise, are these:

☞ Fear is volitional. Self-reliance leads to fear.

☞ My fears are always a lie, my ego's way of keeping me in familiar territory.

I'm not good at meditation. I will become good at it, if I can get me out of God's way for it to happen. This one went well.

I'm not sure I *feel* free of fear, but feelings lie, especially when I've spent so many years trying not to feel. I accept that the fears have been removed and that will become obvious in the days to come. The words as to what God wants me to be were "receptive" and "aware." The receptive goes with "nothing" and "aware" goes with alone. I think.



Slimming Steps

What are you afraid of?

Where Two or Three Are Gathered

“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” – Matthew 18:19-20 (NIV)

Did you realize a Step Five discussion is an OA meeting? “Meetings are gatherings of two or more compulsive overeaters who come together to share their personal experience, and the strength and hope OA has given them.” (Overeaters Anonymous brochure *Tools of Recovery*) Certainly two compulsive overeaters meet, but a third presence is required.

The instructions for Step Five describe a gathering of three, not two. God is there. Some place a chair representing the presence of God.

Certainly we’re always in the presence of God, but only about 30 times does the Bible actually mention his presence— from Moses’ meal with his father-in-law described in Exodus 18 through the New Testament letters’ rejoicing at God’s presence in the various churches and John in The Revelation anticipating justice dispensed in the presence of the Lamb. Luke records Gabriel’s announcement of the impending birth of Christ as saying he stood in God’s presence to give the news.

So, just who’s in the chair? What is God like? Here’s a partial list of descriptive phrases:

- ✦ God is the giver of every good and perfect gift and doesn't change like shifting shadows. (James 1:17)
- ✦ God is the creator of everything.
- ✦ God made us in his image, (Genesis 1:27) so we find a kinship in him, something that makes it easier for us to know about him.
- ✦ God has made what may be known about him plain to us including his eternal power and divine nature. (Romans 1:29-30)
- ✦ God is fair (just.) (Deuteronomy 32:4)
- ✦ God's omnipotent, can do anything at all.
- ✦ God's omnipresent, everywhere.
- ✦ God's omniscient, knowing everything, every time. He remembers the future as well as the past and present.
- ✦ God is worthy (having worth, having merit).
- ✦ God's righteous.
- ✦ God is truth.
- ✦ God is holy.
- ✦ God's gracious. That's the same root word as grace, the undeserved love he freely gives us.

This God sits with us through the Fifth Step discussions. Many of these words (righteous, holy, gracious) point back to God for the definitions. God defies definition, but despite that he's present with us, hearing our deepest secrets, the take-it-to-the-grave disgraces that he already knew anyway. And he no more condemns us than the OA member sitting in front of us. Thank God!

Slimming Steps

What reactions would the kind of God described above have to a compulsive overeater like you?

God's Here

Yes, I know, it's not just you and me,
God's here, too. Somehow
he doesn't bother me as much as you.
That's weird. I understand. But still...
I want you to like me. I guess I start
at the beginning? I used to take Bubba's
candy and toy cars. The kindergarten teacher
caught me scratching tables.
In second grade I hit a little girl.
What? You want more? Oh. Just different.
The exact nature of our wrongs?
I'm scared all the time. I'm always into me,
not you, not him, not God. I hide my head
in mindless games, an ostrich in the sand,
and hurry to anything that promises oblivion
when, unprepared, I fall face-flat to floor.
Simple things I didn't do haunt me
so I wreck a friendship when she can't recall
my wrong, just knows I avoid her. I lie and cheat
to duck the blame, defame a saint to feel
less odious, to blunt the pain. It's who I am,
the best I've managed yet, abjectly miserable.
So there, you see, I thank you for your time
and kindness to me. I know you hate me now.
You what? How could you love me at all,
much less more? Yes, I feel your love. And God's.

Confession Is Good for the Soul

Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save,
nor his ear too dull to hear.

But your iniquities have separated
you from your God;
your sins have hidden his face from you,
so that he will not hear....

The way of peace they do not know;
there is no justice in their paths.
They have turned them into crooked roads;
no one who walks in them will know peace.

So justice is far from us,
and righteousness does not reach us.
We look for light, but all is darkness;
for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows....

“As for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD.
“My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in
your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the
mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their
descendants from this time on and forever,” says the
LORD. – Isaiah 59:1-2, 8-9, 21 (NIV)

We've heard it forever: confession is good for the soul.
Why? Often criminals confess, and by the time they get to
trial they're in an all-out effort to set aside that confession.
They don't seem to think it benefits their soul or any part of
them.

We each know, instinctively, the truth of beneficial results from admitting our wrong. Renounced confessions as often as not result from the lawyer's choice rather than the defendant's. Perhaps, though, the defendant already has the benefit of the release inherent in confession and now wants that additional plus of avoiding punishment under the judicial system.

For OA members though, the punishment usually already happened. We're far harsher in meting out vengeance to ourselves than any impartial tribunal and certainly more so than a loving God offering grace for the asking.

The Fifth Step brings release and relief, instead of the judgment we expect instead of the judgment we expect from the other person and already feel from the God we've cringed from or avoided because of our perceived unworthiness. Instead of condemnation we find confirmation of our humanity, of our membership in a community with the common history of trying to eat our way out of shame. The result of confession is not vilification but – surprise – *validation!*

We come out of the experience with God's words written in our hearts: "My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever." – Isaiah 59:21(b) (NIV)

Slimming Steps

What does forgiveness feel like? How does it feel to learn you are part of a group and accepted?

The Exact Nature of Our Wrongs

“Teach me, and I will be quiet;
show me where I have been wrong.
How painful are honest words!
But what do your arguments prove?
Do you mean to correct what I say,
and treat the words of a despairing man as wind?...
“But now be so kind as to look at me.
Would I lie to your face?
Relent, do not be unjust;
reconsider, for my integrity is at stake.
Is there any wickedness on my lips?
Can my mouth not discern malice?” – Job 6:24-26, 28-30 (NIV)

Beyond the value of telling your darkest secrets to somebody else and finding that person doesn't recoil from you, the other human in the room for your Fifth Step serves a very real purpose. The aim of the Step is *not* to recount every transgression from your first memory to your present anger at the invasiveness of the Step. Instead, it's an opportunity for an outside opinion, for another person's input.

Have you seen an image of your home from a satellite? Have you stood high enough above a familiar place to see it from a different perspective? The familiar scene is recognizable, but probably you see aspects never before obvious to you.

Beyond simply the novelty of the Step Five event, new insights can be gained from the experience. Your sponsor (or other companion) has that overview on your life, developed by hearing your summary of those issues bothering you. The character trait we see as procrastination another may recognize as fear, even panic, at the task avoided.

The woman who led me to Twelve Step recovery asked me various times of my feelings, my reactions, my thoughts about happenings and situations. Soon she stopped me immediately when I began a sentence, responding to a question about *my* feelings with the name of the dominant person in my life, the object of my codependency. Once she began calling my attention to the habit, it became exceedingly clear to me, yet for years I'm sure it existed without a hint of it in my conscious mind.

The Big Book sets out two reasons for the Fifth Step, reasons that the "solitary self-appraisal" of Step Four is insufficient. First, if we skip Step Five, we're likely to return to the behavior that drove us into the program. In addition, it's likely we won't learn enough humility, fearlessness, and honesty until we reveal our deepest, darkest secrets to someone else. We're actors, accustomed to putting on a "game face" for the world while disguising our anger and insecurity. We're good at rationalization, and after a while we find ourselves explaining the equivocation to someone else, listening to ourselves as we do, and actually believing what our ears hear *us* say.

The best way out – in this and in so much of life – is through.

We pocket our pride and go to it, illuminating every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past. Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness

of our Creator.... We feel we are on the Broad Highway walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 75)

Slimming Steps

What are your deepest darkest secrets? What have you never told another human being and fully, until now, intended to take with you to the grave? Can you see a benefit of telling someone else? How would you feel if you no longer had such a burden to carry?

Can you generalize your character defects? What do you do over and over? If you have done your Fifth Step, what did you learn about yourself?

Unashamed

Ought to, should, what will people think?
I tried, earnestly, doggedly, determined
for years on end, and even when I caught most
of the oughts, did lots of the shoulds,
played the role to please the crowds,
shame dogged me, hounded me, howled
my deficits though only I could hear.
Then I admitted insanity and found Power
to change me, to accept me, to stand
here before you and continue my life,
but changed, unashamed.

It's Not Over Until It's Over

"Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."

The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.
Selah – Psalm 46:10-11 (NIV)

The second part of the Fifth Step is for only two of the three participants in the first part: you and God:

Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet for an hour, carefully reviewing what we have done. We thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know Him better. Taking this book down from our shelf we turn to the page which contains the twelve steps. Carefully reading the first five proposals we ask if we have omitted anything, for we are building an arch through which we shall walk a free man at last. Is our work solid so far? Are the stones properly in place? Have we skimmed on the cement put into the foundation? Have we tried to make mortar without sand?
(Alcoholics Anonymous, page 75)

The explicit instructions include:

- Find a place where we can be quiet for an hour.
 - Review the Fifth Step conversation.
 - Thank God for better knowledge of him.
 - Open the Big Book to Page 57 and read Steps One through Five.
 - Consider whether we have omitted any part of any of these directions.
-

- ☑ Ask four questions:
 - ✓ Is our work solid?
 - ✓ Are the stones in place?
 - ✓ Have we skimped on the cement?
 - ✓ Did we try to make mortar without sand?

Is our work solid? That's an easy question. What of the other three? What do they mean?

The first hint appears in Bill's Story on page 12 where, talking of his conversation with Ebby, he says:

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. (Alcoholics Anonymous, page 12)

The willingness that is Step One is the foundation on which the building is begun. On page 47 the cornerstone is identified:

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. (Alcoholics Anonymous, page 47)

The analogy is to building an arch and is first mentioned on page 62, which also identifies the Step Three decision as the keystone of the arch:

First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. He is the Principal; we are His agents. He is the Father, and we are His children. Most Good ideas are simple, and this concept was the keystone of the new and

triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom.

(*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 62)

The “powerful cement” binding the materials is said to be partially “the feeling of having shared in a common peril.” (Page 17)

This passage, at the end of Step Five on page 75, says:

Carefully reading the first five proposals we ask if we have omitted anything, for we are building an arch through which we shall walk a free man at last. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 75)

As we complete each Step, the arch grows in size as well as strength of structure. The arch concept, while ancient, is intricate. Arches are made of wedge-shaped blocks set with their narrow side toward the opening so that they lock together. The topmost block, called the keystone, when locked into place insures the arch cannot collapse under any amount of weight. From the Coliseum of ancient Rome to the Parisian Arc de Triomphe to New York City’s Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Arch at Grand Army Plaza, arches memorialize triumphant marches. Perhaps Bill W. wrote remembering the arches in and around Winchester Cathedral, the site of his own first spiritual experience. Whatever the image leading to the metaphor, thousands of Twelve Steppers over the decades certainly have passed through this triumphal arch to freedom.

Slimming Steps

What Steps have you taken? What lessons have you learned on your march this far? What do you think the question about making mortar without sand means?

Naturally

I roar, a lion incensed
you deign to cross me.
I scurry, a trembling mouse,
as you approach.
Like a wood rat I claim
your bauble for its sparkle.
It's natural.
For an animal.
I want to be more.
I need to be more.
I need a new nature, God.

Step Six

Were entirely ready to have
God remove all these
defects of character.

Ready to Let God

Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, “A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Sea. It is already in Hazazon Tamar”.... Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah.

All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD.... This is what the LORD says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s.... You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.’ “

As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. – II Chronicles 20:2-3, 13, 15b, 17, 22 (NIV) [Read II Chronicles 20:1-30.]

Step Six says we were entirely ready to let God remove our defects of character. It feels a lot like Step Three revisited. Maybe revisiting Three is a good idea after Four and Five. We’ve discovered how deeply entrenched our character defects are by Step Six. We figure we’ve already asked for relief from our weaknesses, many of us for years and years. We’ve earnestly prayed, “God, give me the power to resist...” and “God, help me stop....” We’ve had mixed results. The same outcome we got in dieting for years and years and years. The same success we had from the resolutions to do anything right. The same failures, time after

time. Why hasn't God helped us when we asked? We already admitted way back at Step One we were powerless and couldn't do this.

There's a shorthand version of the first three Steps: I can't. God can. I'll let him.

But we *don't* let him. We're still asking *him* to help *us*. And therein lies the problem. Look at the story of Jehoshaphat on hearing of the coming threat from Moab and Ammon. He cried to God for help, bemoaning. He reminded God they would turn to him in the event of famine or plague. He blamed God for not letting Israel defeat Moab and Ammon earlier. He griped that now Israel didn't have the power to defeat the armies advancing. In all his protestations, he overlooked the obvious. "This is God's fight, not yours, King." Jehoshaphat sent out what we'd now call a praise team. And God won.

I can't. God can. I'll let him. That doesn't say, "I'll recruit God as my assistant." It says, "I surrender. Here I am, God, reporting for duty. I stand here, cowed by my character defects lined up here before us. Can I hang onto your coattails and watch you wipe them out?"

Slimming Steps

Write what it would be like to be an actor in God's play, not the director of your own. Describe how you've tried to live by self-propulsion. How have you been self-centered in your relationship with God?

What Does Willingness Mean?

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." ...

But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Genesis 22:1-3, 11-12 (NIV) [Read Genesis 22:1-12]

I hate some of the Old Testament stories. When my children were day-care age, I "interviewed" a church day care as to their curriculum. I mentioned Noah's ark, and the woman said, oh, they used that story all the time. I told her that wasn't a picture of God as I knew him, someone who gets mad and destroys humanity to just start over. She didn't understand, but I put my kids there anyway, lacking a more suitable alternative. The story of Abraham's going to the mountain to sacrifice Isaac is equally abhorrent.

Still, for adults, what a lesson it teaches! We need to be entirely ready to have God remove our character defects. What does entirely ready mean? It means absolute trust. When it looks like God's careening down the wrong path with

your life, it means you resist the urge to grab the wheel. It means whatever is most precious to you – your reputation, your wealth, your family, your career, your abstinence, anything! – will not stand in the way of your blind obedience to God's will. He has no obligation to show you the whys. He doesn't have some "splaning to do" as Ricky often told Lucy in the TV show *I Love Lucy*. Faith. Trust.

There are activities meant to build group cohesiveness involving blindfolded people falling backwards, then being gently passed from hands to hands. Could you do it calmly? Could you do it at all? If you knew God's hands were there to catch you, would the answer be closer to yes – or further away? How real is your God? Is he such a spirit, a wisp, so disassociated with the physical, you couldn't trust him physically?

Isn't it easier to trust him physically than mentally or spiritually?

Slimming Steps

Write about it. How well do you trust God? How ready are you to have him remove defects of character that are an integral part of you? How can you cope? How could you decline?

Opposite of Fat is Understanding?

Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. – Isaiah 6:10 (KJV)

My drug of choice historically has been sugar. I'm every bit as addicted to sweet rolls, brownies, and bread pudding as anyone is to rum, vodka or Coors. The effect comes close to being the same, too. Food addiction causes a person to break out in fat and bad knees while alcoholics end up with DWI's and cirrhosis, but both dull the spirit. Each presents a means by which life's pains, rages – and joys – burrow unseen, unobserved and undetected, but for the inner turmoil caused by the suppression. "Restless, irritable and discontent," Dr. Silkwood called it. "[W]hile they admit it is injurious, they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false." The restlessness continues "unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking" their drug of choice. (quotations from *Alcoholics Anonymous*, pages xxviii-xxix)

When I'm detoxed from sugar, I'm a different person. I worked with a counselor in both conditions. At the beginning, when she asked how I felt about a subject, the first word out of my mouth was my husband's name. I recognized no feelings, no opinions, no ideals, no interests of my own. Instead, serving the whims of the master of the house had

become my world. To make some kind of room for me, I found it necessary to stake out a spot by forcing a space for me – filling it all with my massive body. Only when I managed to break the addictions – to food and to him – was I able to allow myself the luxury of recovery. My heart truly had been made fat, as Isaiah understood. My eyes were shut, my ears heavy, and my sight, hearing, and above all my understanding all remained buried under the mounds of fat.

In Step Six we become wholly ready for God to remove our defects of character. Can it be one of your defects of character is worshipping another god, whether that god might be a person you feel the need to please or even a self-image you feel the need to retain?

Slimming Steps

If you move past the list of character defects named in describing Step Four, do you find false gods? What unconventional defects of character do you have?

Pardon My Asking, Lord

Lord, did you hesitate, waffle or pause
before touching the crusted and unseeing eyes?
Did the odor distract from your virtuous cause,
did the man disappear amid lice and the flies?

How did you feel when the leprous came
calling "Unclean!" as the Hebrews required?
Were you repulsed by the old and the lame
reeking with filth and with feculence mired?

Probably not. I guess perfected love
overlooks filth, can set foulness aside.
Love in its essence would tower above
bias, see vile folk beatified.

Perfect I'm not. But you told me to be
and your life is my model, your spirit my goal.
Lord, hear my prayer. Give me grace, set me free
to bypass my hang-ups, to love every soul.

Let me shake any hand when a tender is made,
hold the patient with AIDS in a heartfelt embrace.
Inmates and homeless I would greet unafraid,
passing to others the strength of your grace.

A Human Doing

Trust in the LORD and do good;
 dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
Delight yourself in the LORD
 and he will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD;
 trust in him and he will do this:
He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn,
 the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.
Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;
 do not fret when men succeed in their ways,
 when they carry out their wicked schemes. – Psalm
 37:3-7 (NIV) [Read Psalm 37.]

I came across the phrase “a human doing” as opposed to a human being. Neat! And right to the point. Too often we’re so busy *doing* we forget to remember to ask God who he would have us *be*. “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him” is a Herculean task in the December days of rush and purchase, cook, eat, wrap, eat, run back out for the forgotten present, eat, trek back for wrapping paper, watch the weather, eat, we need to leave now or we’ll not get there. Holidays, birthdays, and special occasions are even tougher times for many compulsive eaters, whose solace in food has been denied them, perhaps by the miracle of its being removed. Others rely on their commitment to another person to follow a food plan despite the additional pressures and temptations.

Add to the omnipresence of our trigger foods the reunions and time spent with the people with whom we

interacted to become the mixed-up-crazy individual who first walked through the doors of OA. What a formula for disaster!

We're reminded, at times, "Jesus is the reason for the season." Yet there's another reminder for compulsive eaters necessary on such stress-filled days, joyous though they may be. That is that God can and will remove the burden of stress. All we have to do is let go and let him take it. Sometimes it's a bit more complicated, since we've held on so tightly and for so long we have no idea what we're holding – so enter Steps Four, Five, and Six. But simply the willingness to let God take "our difficulties" whether we understand or not will lead to peace and serenity, a state of being (not doing) exquisitely more beneficial to us – and to those around us – than anything we can become as a human doing. On this day it's good to stop, think, and pray.

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! (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 63)

Slimming Steps

Are you a human doing or a human being today?

Christmas Eve

Why write a Christmas poem?
After two thousand years
the subject's saturated,
glorious songs by
Handel, Wesley, the bigs.
Besides, why me? I've
decked no tree these last few years.
Writing checks passes for giving
and keeps me out of malls.
It's Christmas Eve – I sit
with my computer. But earlier
I went to church, sang carols,
felt "in." And I care.
In a grinchy kind of way.
I'm thankful. For computer
peaceful nights, for people
I care enough to write
checks to. For an account
that doesn't cringe.
For God's love, as much tonight
as last night, last month, a week from
Tuesday. I'm glad earlier years
torn between competing parents
have passed, dissipated, ended.
I'm glad for hope for peace on
earth for me, for others, for
people who let go and let God
grant us glory. For the Word
that's God who gives us words.
For Grace. Thanks, God.

Perfect Help

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. – Matthew 5:43-48 (NIV)

Is God everything, or is he nothing? We wrestled with this in Step Three, and now it comes home to rest. Our character defects served us well – until they didn’t serve us well. Maybe greed *is* bad. Okay. I’ll hope for a mere million-dollar lottery win, not the mega-jackpot. Perhaps rage *is* bad. Can we settle for getting a little pissed off?

Step Six says, “Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character” but we’d rather read it as “Decided we ought to be better people.” Of course we also reserve the right to define “better.” It’s like running a fever two days before the trip of a lifetime. You know you should go to the doctor, but what if she tells you not to go on the trip? You’ll have to tell Harry if you go to the doctor, and he might make you stay home. Surely an aspirin will fix it. Why go to extremes? It’s just a little fever. Okay. Maybe it’s a lot, but aspirin will bring it down to just a little.

Doing the prudent thing, the *right* thing, the only course of action that actually frees you from the insanity you

recognized in Step One, in every area of your life – Wow! That's tough.

A wise old man I once worked for would sit in his chair as I described complex legal cases I needed to be able to present to a jury. I could talk about details and in's and out's for an hour. When I stopped, he gave me a single point as my focal point, the cornerstone for the whole case. Even in a hopeless quagmire of a situation, though, he would tell me, "Sometimes the best way out is through." In Step Six our focal point is God as we understand him, God who is everything, and God to whom I'm willing to turn over my life and my will.

God wants me to have perfect peace. He is a perfect God, and he doesn't let me stop short with good-enough peace. The best way out is through, and on the other side, what a treat! Thank God!

Slimming Steps

What would perfect removal of your character defects look like? Can you honestly say you are completely ready for God to completely remove them? Page 76 of *Alcoholics Anonymous* says, "If we still cling to something we will not let go, we will ask God to help us be willing."

Step Seven

Humbly asked Him to
remove our shortcomings.

Fat Cows, Skinny Cows

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile, when out of the river there came up seven cows, fat and sleek, and they grazed among the reeds. After them, seven other cows came up – scrawny and very ugly and lean. I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt. The lean, ugly cows ate up the seven fat cows that came up first. But even after they ate them, no one could tell that they had done so; they looked just as ugly as before. Then I woke up.” – Genesis 41:17-21 (NIV)

Pharaoh dreamed of fourteen cows, seven fat and sleek and seven slender – gaunt. Now, Genesis calls the lean cows ugly and the fat ones sleek. And Peter Paul Rubens painted “Rubenesque” women, admiring their lovely plump figures. I was Rubenesque a hundred pounds ago, and I’ll take this me, thank you.

Pharaoh’s lean cows ate the fat ones and remained lean. The sages of Egypt couldn’t figure out the dream. They were stumped. Why were cows eating cows, why didn’t consuming a fat cow make the skinny one fat? It simply didn’t make sense, and they couldn’t devise any scenario in which it did.

The sages hadn’t been to diet and calorie/weight and pay organizations. They hadn’t starved themselves to get rid of “sleekness.” Nor did they have the benefit of OA and the Twelve Steps. If they had, they might have realized similar mysteries. You can live on so few calories you damage your health, and the weight stubbornly stays in place. But with a

spiritual approach to the Steps, you can eat full, satisfying meals, and amazingly, the pounds slough off.

So, how do you get there? By surrendering. By turning off the analytical mind telling you the whole idea is absurd. By simply doing what you're told to do, whether it makes a whit of sense or not. By delving into your past to learn who you are and to find your strengths while admitting and accepting your past and the weaknesses that plagued you then. By letting God guide, and following his lead without questioning.

When I was young, Daddy would say, "When I say jump, you better jump and you can ask how high on the way up." That kind of obedience of our heavenly father can turn fat cows into slender ones and miserable cows into happy people. Promise.

Slimming Steps

Are you analytical? Is it possibly a character defect?
Remember, all character defects have a good side as well.
How can you turn your will and your actions over to God?

Fire Sale

Discontinued
habit
cheap
worn thin
useful for
avoidance
wasting time
numbing life.
May cause
wasted hours
days
months
lifetimes.
Benefits
retired
fired
escapists.
Discontinued
habit
available.
Bargain.
Free.
Except for life lost.

Well! Are You Proud of Yourself NOW?

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load. – Galatians 6:2-5 (NIV)

It's a familiar question, "Well! Are you proud of yourself now?" Actually, the expected answer seems usually to be "No." But does it have to be? Just what does pride in self mean?

Pride certainly runs with an obnoxious crowd, including vanity, conceit, vainglory, arrogance, and egotism. Yet at times it chums up with self-esteem. We compulsive overeaters, whose constant companion has been low self-esteem, can't very easily see that combination as bad. Still, just what does the word pride really mean? Perhaps pride is deep pleasure or satisfaction from your own achievements, or maybe it means the consciousness of one's own dignity, as in swallowing pride.

Les Carter, author of *Enough About You, Let's Talk About Me*, observes:

Humility is the opposite of pride because it reflects a lack of self-preoccupation, a willingness to serve, an acknowledgment that we are limited in our ability to control other people

and circumstances, and an understanding that we cannot demand favored treatment.

Humility we know about as we work Step Seven, “Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.” Does this mean we have to approach Step Seven without the remnants of self-esteem we may have preserved? Do we give up our dignity in this step? Do we have to believe we have no worth, no merit?

No! We do not give up our dignity, for we are God’s children, and how dignified is that! We have worth, we have merit. And we have self-esteem. But pride in ourselves? No, we don’t have pride in ourselves by any of the definitions, for the best option for that is a feeling of esteem or deep satisfaction derived from our own achievements. Hey, look back up there at Step One! We admitted we were powerless over food, and that our lives had become unmanageable. That means we realized we have nothing to be proud of, for we can’t pull ourselves out of this muck.

But pride? Oh, yes. We’ve got pride. We have the shield of Abraham, the fear of Isaac, the mighty one of Jacob. With the writer of Psalm 47, we see ourselves as the pride of Jacob, for whom God chose our inheritance and to whom he gives his love.

When you’re asked, “Are you proud of yourself now?” answer with awe and honor, “I’m proud of God who made me what I am now!”

Slimming Steps

What does humility mean to you?

Neither Life nor Death!

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. – Romans 8:38-39 (NIV)

Neither life nor death will separate me from God's love. I know. I've loved this passage for a long time, I've used it for theological arguments where mine is a minority position, I've rested in the firm conviction of salvation. My life or my death, it's in God's hands.

It doesn't say that! There's no limitation saying "Neither my life nor my death nor [lots of other stuff] will separate me from God's love!" What about the death of other people, those close to us we rue, regret, or blame on God, or those of our enemies, on whom we wish a quicker one? What about other peoples' lives?

Consider the passage in the Big Book about our directing the play.

Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show; is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in his own way. If his arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as he wished, the show would be great. Everybody, including himself, would be pleased. Life would be wonderful. In trying to make these arrangements our actor may sometimes be quite virtuous. He may be kind, considerate, patient, generous; even modest and self-sacrificing. On the other hand, he may be mean,

egotistical, selfish and dishonest. But, as with most humans, he is more likely to have varied traits.

What usually happens? The show doesn't come off very well. He begins to think life doesn't treat him right. He decides to exert himself more. He becomes, on the next occasion, still more demanding or gracious, as the case may be. Still the play does not suit him. Admitting he may be somewhat at fault, he is sure that other people are more to blame. He becomes angry, indignant, self-pitying. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 60-61)

I knew I tried to direct little things, when I occasionally thought about this passage – one act plays, or just scenes. What of epic dramas, though? That never occurred to me, but I'm absolutely guilty of that one, perhaps even more than the mini-plays. I know best when people should bow out – die – or when God/Fate/Chance is too cruel in ripping a person out of the play too soon. Foolish me. I'm wrong.

My parents have lost their dignity and quality of life. After sixty-seven years of marriage and ninety plus years, enough is enough. Let us remember them as they were! That's not my decision. It's God's, and he doesn't need my input.

I know a lot of compulsive overeaters consider suicide. While I never have, murder has crossed my mind, and wishing people dead has dwelt there. No more, with God's help. I'll leave that in his hands. God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference! Amen, so be it!

Slimming Steps

How do you direct life's plays?

The Purpose of Pride

"I cried like a swift or thrush,
I moaned like a mourning dove.
My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens.
I am troubled; O Lord, come to my aid!"
But what can I say?
He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this.
I will walk humbly all my years
because of this anguish of my soul.
Lord, by such things men live;
and my spirit finds life in them too.
You restored me to health
and let me live.
Surely it was for my benefit
that I suffered such anguish.
In your love you kept me
from the pit of destruction;
you have put all my sins
behind your back. – Isaiah 38:14-17 (NIV)

Is pride listed as a character defect you're asking God to remove? Most of us would answer in the affirmative. Our "difficulties" developed for very specific reasons, each of them serving a purpose in our efforts to live in the midst of the wreckage of life. What, then, was the purpose of pride? Oh, a most elevated one – in fact, a high one. Pride sufficed as the guiding power by which we attempted to bring order to our lives. We sought to overcome overeating because of pride, to set aside our doubts and fears and forge ahead to avoid embarrassment, which says really, to build our pride.

So long as we lacked the necessary relationship with God and the desperation to turn away from our self-help attempts, pride often served as our higher power!

We got by with it, somehow, though certainly not well. Like Isaiah, we found ourselves surveying the results and proclaiming, "I am troubled, Lord. Come to my aid." Now, at Step Seven, we find that means turning away from pride, for we cannot serve two masters. We come understanding – at least vaguely – what we're giving up. It can for some be easy in that we've sensed the power before us, but even with that understanding – can we relinquish our pride?

Yes. That's the nature of Step Seven. We come humbly asking God to remove even this defect of character. And, in an odd twist, that action – asking humbly to surrender the power – defines humility itself.

Slimming Steps

How did pride lead to the high points of your life before recovery? Did it contribute to the lows as well? Are you willing to find true humility by turning your pride over to God?

What God Cannot Do

With what shall I come before the LORD
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God. – Micah 6:6-8 (NIV)

God tells us what we ask we'll receive, to seek expecting to find, and that doors will be opened when we knock. What's our part in that? The asking, seeking, and knocking. Yes, he could freely give, could set out all good things for easy finding, and leave the doors open, but he abstains. He leaves us with the blessed – and cursed – gift of our free will. He doesn't pull our strings.

God can – and will – remove our character defects. What he cannot do is to fill the vacuum. When God removes our dishonesty, a chasm gapes in our conduct. What do we do to keep from falling in the hole? We practice honesty. To fill the gap left from our procrastination? Practice diligence, moving ahead, orderly progress. To replace selfishness, try doing small kindnesses for people around you. Substitute a good habit for a bad one. A habit is a behavior we have engaged in so often it has become an involuntary response.

God's part is loosening the hold the involuntary response has on your life, removing it unless you hold on. Your part is keeping the void filled as God removes the trash.

Steps Four and Five are action steps. Six and Seven are tools of change. It doesn't happen overnight, though sometimes the removal is sudden. But the new habit takes a while to plant, water, and grow. "They" say repeating good habits for a month solidifies them. Give it a try.

What *does* the Lord require of you? To act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with him. What a delightful change!

Slimming Steps

What behaviors do you plan to practice as God removes your character defects? Name five actions you can take for each bad behavior you're walking away from.

If you walk it works

If you do as we say
walk our simple path
bedevilments dissolve
abundance transpires
lives evolve to radiance
as the fifth dimension
of existence homesteads
in your heart and home

Step Eight

Made a list of all persons
we had harmed and
became willing to make
amends to them all.

Worth as Much as the Dog?

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. – I Timothy 5:8 (NIV)

Our lives are changed, and we're ready to go make amends to the world. Maybe we've already begun to make amends at home, even unknowingly, with changed lives. Still, it makes sense, as we look at those people to whom we owe amends, to consider the family.

I heard a sad description of a family situation once. A dog lover spoke, which gave the words even more poignancy: "You know, John treats Spot better than he does Mary and the kids – and sometimes Spot up and bites him!" I know another situation where the dogs are considered an adult couple's "kids" and even called that – but her husband's mother gets treated like dirt, ignored, and insulted. Do you treat the animals in your household better than the people? Or, lacking pets, do you treat family members like animals?

Love and respect may be easier to feel for others in recovery than for people with whom we've shared major chunks of our lives. How do you learn to love a husband, a wife, a parent, a child? You learn by facing your fears, by looking at how your character defects have made your family who they are. Has your temper angered others so they lashed out at you? Did your lying or cheating create insecurity and fear in family members? Has your selfishness resulted in jealousy leading to retaliation?

Our illness may cause us to isolate, but it's not a solitary illness – we come from families of sick people and create other sick people by our own actions. Fortunately recovery acts in the same way. Our recovery enables that of those we interact with. As you grow stronger, pay attention to what's happening around you. Perhaps the difference isn't just your better understanding of your family member but your changes enabling healing in the other.

Living amends means just that: living your amends. The instructions for Step Nine describe the issue. We of OA substitute in our mind for “alcoholic,” “compulsive eater” and for “sobriety,” “abstinence.”

The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring his way through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept the home in turmoil. We feel a man is unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough.
(Alcoholics Anonymous, page 82)

Look around. Are you seeing normalcy and “nothing wrong” with destruction all about? You're the tornado. Clean up your mess by thoughtful living and loving your loved ones more than your best friend – no matter how many legs the friend has.

Slender Steps

Pretend to be your spouse, child, sibling or parents. Describe how the compulsive eater in your life (meaning you!) has treated you.

Life in the Hospital

There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. – Romans 3:22(b)-24 (NIV)

The disagreement doesn't matter, not these fifteen years later. I could tell you, though, exactly what we argued about and again prove my position right. The man I disagreed with made no sense, didn't even seem to comprehend my precise and articulate reasoning. He continued to insist on his asinine reading of the rules, a reading that would harm my sons. I've seldom been so incensed.

I knew his wife better than I knew him. I respected her mind and her ability to stand face to face with me and counter argument for argument. As I steamed through the next few days, I learned more about my adversary. His education matched neither mine nor his wife's. He had not been trained in analysis, nor in any academic skills past high school. He worked with his hands, leaving cognitive skills to others who might be interested. His argument didn't make sense but, through his reasoning, it was the best logic he could put forward.

I was still right on the argument, but the wind had sloughed out of my sails. It didn't matter. Since he was the one in the decision-making position, his interpretation stood. My sons survived. So did I, my lesson learned. It's not fun to compete on an uneven playing field.

You're about to make amends to other sick people, quite possibly people who haven't had the benefit of walking through eight Steps of recovery. You may still have issues with these people, recall confrontations of your own, fifteen years past, when you know you were right. It doesn't matter. We're all sinners here, all sick people. You're making amends in the confines of the hospital, healing yourself by reaching out to them, cleaning your own side of the street.

When you accept that the other person involved may have been, like you, doing the best they could at the time and under the circumstances, reaching out to them with the peace offering may become much easier to do.

Paul recognized a universal truth. He wrote the church at Rome, people he had not met but a congregation he admired. He told them their faith was being reported worldwide. Yet speaking to these people he had no hesitation in calling them – and himself – sinners. Truly they and we could be described as “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” He went further, though, and proclaimed these sinners sharing the hospital of sick people with him to be “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

Slimming Steps

What do you know of the people on your amends list that describes their suffering and makes it easier for you to realize they were doing the best they could in their interactions with you?



Purposeful Forgetting

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. – Philippians 3:12-16 (NIV)

To “resent” is to feel again. We feel again the insult, the shame, the anger, the guilt, the humiliation when we indulge in resentment. We relive and thus re-feel events from yesterday or decades ago, and instead of dulling in time, often the emotional level increases with the replaying.

We’re selective, though, in our re-feeling. As we discovered in Step Four, we don’t remember the whole sequence of events. Instead we purposefully forget our part. We lay aside how our behavior may have set in motion the other party’s action. Sometimes they actually didn’t act at all. They did nothing, and because we had the understanding, never expressed outside our own mind, they *should* have done something or said something or been something, we resent. Again, and again, and again. They never ever were even bothered by the event, since they never knew what was expected of them or that their not doing it hurt us. Then years later, we plot revenge against them for the imagined injury,

when the only injury ever suffered is – not was – self-inflicted. It's time, then, to remedy the pain we feel repeatedly. To do this we have to practice purposeful forgetting once more, this time forgetting the wrong.

But how can we forget a wrong? Not all of the resentments sprang from imagined injuries. Instead, the action of the other caused very real pain, pain the person inflicting it on us understood so very well and simply ignored. Surely we can never forget it!

Perhaps not. Have you ever been challenged *not* to think about the tip of your nose? Go ahead. Sit there. Time yourself for a minute and don't think of the tip of your nose. Of course there's no need even to try. It's impossible. You can, though, contemplate the coffee mug in front of you for a minute. And, when you finish that process, if you're asked if during that time you thought about the tip of your nose, probably you'd answer in the negative.

We don't have to dwell on wrongs done us – like we have for all the time since the occurrence. Instead, we can think of the good things about the person, the beneficial effect that may have come from the wrong itself if perhaps we became stronger through the process.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. – Philippians 4:8 (ASV)

You've been wanting to get even with the person you resented for so very long. Do it. While you should remember not to foolishly allow yourself to be injured again, you can – and should – purposefully forget the resentment, and you'll be even – even ahead.

Slimming Steps

For the resentments on your list that still bother you, what can you think of when these resurface? How can you practice purposeful forgetting?



Shadows

Gossamer wraiths
of ancient wrongs hover,
sometimes distant,
others riding
my shoulders,
no real weight, just that of the woes
of the world. They drive
away serenity, rouse self-pity,
entwine my thoughts,
build fear to bonfires.
They shudder, though,
when inventory and a sponsor's
perspective bring out the light
and make them disappear.





What's the Harm?

Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it – I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while – yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. – II Corinthians 7:8-10 (NIV)

We think of the phrase, “First, do no harm” regarding doctors, but it applies to Step Nine as well: “would injure them or others.” We need to know what harm or injury is. Some things harm does not mean – amends we might be tempted to make but should not – are:

-  Approaching people we have passively resented without taking action on the feelings.
-  Repeating amends to people to whom we have already fully made amends, even if they chose not to acknowledge our action.

Knowing what harm is may be exceedingly easy in some situations. We know full well we've harmed people if:

-  We stole from them.
-  Our carelessness/negligence/reckless conduct caused them monetary loss.
-  We have lied to them.
-  We assaulted them.

Between the extremes, though, decisions need to be made. For that, you need a sponsor. Please don't set out to

do your amends on your own without having discussed them with a sponsor. In barging ahead you may actually do more harm, necessitating another round of amends. That's not your intent, is it? Some relationships require the tact and perspective of another. Repairing others seems so impossible, a second opinion helps direct you in ways meaningful to you and to your recovery.

Some of the people we hurt have died, but their part in our lives looms so large, amends compel themselves on us if we are to find recovery. In these situations, a sponsor can help with ideas. Standing in a cemetery talking to a grave may seem silly and useless. It's true, the person no longer is there, and talking to the tombstone has no effect – except it does. The effect it has is on you.

My friend Terrie asked me to come visit her halfway across the country. We had met on the Internet and became fast friends, a bond solidified by her twice making the 4000 mile round trip to my home. She passed away before her 49th birthday without my having gone. I didn't even consider this in making amends. Then another person suggested meeting each other in Terrie's city. I felt drawn there yet apprehensive, restless, discontent, not really knowing the reasons. Finally, talking to a trusted friend in recovery, I told of Terrie and my coming trip, sobbing. I knew then the trip would be an amend. I didn't visit the cemetery, just the city. But I fed the birds there, for they will forever remind me of Terrie.

Soon afterwards I sat at the edge of a pond, meditating. I thought how Terrie had stood at my kitchen window naming the birds she saw – names I'd never heard of! After that I saw birds – noticed them – everywhere. I knew they'd been there before, without my seeing. The message I gleaned from the meditation was that God is like the birds, always around whether I notice him or not. His flying creatures reminded me of his presence in the stressful times for which

I'd paused at the water's edge to prepare. Both Terrie and God accompanied me on the odyssey of the next few weeks.

Amends didn't come easy to me, not because of reluctance in making them but because my disease is one of isolation and self-deprecation, I knew few I had harmed. As I grow in the program, though, I grow in my understanding that amends, while they benefit that other person, are absolutely necessary to mend our own broken hearts. Sometimes that's where a great deal of the real harm lies.

Slimming Steps

Have you behaved in harmful ways toward others, ways you might have missed in your inventory? Have you been stingy, irresponsible, impatient, attentive to one family member while neglecting others, narcissistic, seeing yourself as the center of the universe? Harm can be physical, spiritual, mental, or emotional. How have you hurt people? What does your sponsor say about these behaviors?

Beginning of the End of Isolation

I never sat in the company of revelers,
never made merry with them;
I sat alone because your hand was on me
and you had filled me with indignation.

Why is my pain unending
and my wound grievous and incurable?
Will you be to me like a deceptive brook,
like a spring that fails?

Therefore this is what the LORD says:

“If you repent, I will restore you
that you may serve me;
if you utter worthy, not worthless, words,
you will be my spokesman.
Let this people turn to you,
but you must not turn to them. – Jeremiah 15:17-19
(NIV)

Have you ever been lonely? Isn't a better question, "When have you ever *not* been lonely?" Compulsive overeating is a disease of isolation, and boy, have we been good at isolation!

We welcomed being alone, for then we could get to the food without watching other people stare or having to share with them. We isolated from shame over how we looked, from anger at the people who had wronged us and didn't understand us. We lived lives of solitary desperation. But it's

over. We've reached the beginning of the end of isolation. The road started with admitting we were powerless over food and other insanity-causing behaviors embedded in our psyche and continued with the realization God could restore sanity if we turned management of ourselves over to him.

The door began to swing open as we inventoried our fears, resentments, and hurts then widened as we admitted the nature of our defects. After the decision Steps of Six and Seven, we've reached out now with Steps Eight and Nine to those around us. This is a tough move, not only because they're people we've hurt and perhaps who have hurt us, but merely because they're people! We're more comfortable if others stay away. Or at least we were. Now, though, the impediments have been removed, and slowly, shyly, we reach out, first perhaps to other compulsive eaters, but then to the people who are family and friends.

I believed just a year ago I had no friends. Oh, I knew I did have people close to me, but I actually described them as "they believe I'm their friend, but I don't have any." I didn't know it went both ways! Now, finally, my eyes have been opened to see how totally reciprocal the relationship is with so many people. And the group continues to grow!

I began isolating in 1956. For half a century, I closed out the rest of humanity. How sad. But how delightful to move beyond that isolation to a world welcoming me with open arms. Hello, world! I'm *here!*

Slimming Steps

Has your disease of compulsive overeating been one of isolation? What's happening as you look around now?

Step Nine

Made direct amends to
such people wherever
possible, except when
to do so would injure
them or others.

Retribution

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me....
Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;
you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.
Cleans me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. – Psalm
51:1-3, 6-7 (NIV) [Read Psalms 51.]

We compulsive eaters certainly understand the despair, the misery and hopelessness inherent in the psalmist's cry. We've cried it as well. "God help me!" In my case, the prayer that resulted in God's taking away my compulsive eating was simply talking aloud to God as I've done for years, saying, "This is **stupid!**" Whatever the cry, whatever the circumstances of our sin, whether we know its nature or just have the vague notion that God doesn't hear us, we know the sentiment. That's what sin is, you know. Separation from God. And he didn't separate himself. We caused the rift.

My misdoings aren't exciting, just devastating to my own sanity. I once considered a friend of mine, how he must feel about a situation that resulted in legal proceedings. The resulting poem follows this Note of Hope.

The regrets, whether for legal felonies or “mere” acts of moral turpitude obvious only from the inside, result in intolerable distance between us and God. What can we do to fix it? The psalmist suggested scrubbing with hyssop. What’s that? It was used in biblical times for cleansing – the temple, and people with leprosy – among other uses. The hyssop branch lifted to Jesus on the cross carried vinegar for thirst. Scrubbing with hyssop or antibacterial disinfectant or lye or any other cleanser won’t fix sin, no matter how much we may want a solution.

It’s not the cleansing with hyssop that makes us clean, nor can washing make us whiter than snow. It’s the willingness to be cleansed, the acceptance of the washing done by God. Once that acquiescence happens, then God can create a clean heart in us and renew – or create – a steadfast spirit in us.

At that point, with joy and a willing spirit, we are able to move on to Step Twelve, to teach others in our situation, other “transgressors,” God’s way and turn other compulsive eaters to God, and the joy will be passed on and on and on. Thank God!

Slimming Steps

How contrite are you? Have you received God’s assurance of your acceptance? Are you passing on your joy and peace?

Retribution, The Sonnet

I wish to God I could unknot the mesh
that is my life, to rectify the sin
constraining howls within my soul, confess
the blackness haunting me from depths within.
Would that the soul who huddles from the ghost
of my misdeeds could grasp the peace I've lost,
could find a haven, knowing countless hosts
of demons foist repayment of all cost.
For justice through a system made by man
is travesty compared to that by guilt
repaid. And bitter might-have-beens will pan
society's responses 'til they wilt.
So lock the doors, confine this worthless soul
for even full release won't make me whole.

As We Forgive Those

Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors. – Matthew 6:12
(NIV)

Emmet Fox, an author who significantly influenced Bill W, called this clause of the Lord's Prayer a "trip clause" placed strategically.

He has so contrived it that once our attention has been drawn to this matter, we are inevitably obliged either to forgive our enemies in sincerity and truth, or never again to repeat that prayer. (Emmet Fox, *The Lord's Prayer: An Interpretation*, 1932)

The process of forgiveness frees the other person, but at least as important is the fact it sets us free as well. Fox describes resentment as an attachment and compares holding a grudge to holding a prisoner. Certainly the one detained cannot freely leave – but neither can the person holding him. Breaking the resentment we harbor severs our attachment. The detachment comes through forgiveness. Of course that sounds easy, but we've existed with these bonds for many years; it *can't* be easy to change the status quo!

What outcome do you expect from forgiveness? Will you become bosom buddies with your former nemesis? Will you be forced to socialize and converse frequently? No. Severing is severing. Detachment is detachment. You break the ties that bind. You become willing to be distanced from the person, and it happens. Can you become friends? It could happen. Stranger than that has already occurred in your

recovery quite probably! But do you need to become buddies? Absolutely not.

So what is your relationship with this person to become? Jesus told us that, too.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” – Matthew 5:43-48 (NIV)

Love your enemy. Pray for your nemesis. Be perfect. Yikes! Love them like God sending rain and sun. Greet them. Okay. God sends rain and sun for everybody. If everybody benefits from the way I live, including the problem person, that’s okay. I guess. And greet them. Just be civil? I can do that. I might prefer the silent treatment, but hey, if I say hello and nod at them, it could drive them crazy! Oops. Wrong motivation. But I can be civil.

That last part, though. Be perfect. I’ve tried that. I can’t do it. But II Corinthians 12:9 (NIV) says, “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” Okay. I tried before but it was the old me trying, not the me after the Steps. I can try this. *Star Wars* grabs me. Like Yoda says, “Do or do not.... There is no try.” Okay, God. In your grace, I’ll forgive my enemies perfectly.

Emmet Fox says it’s all in the willingness. He says you get alone, become quiet through leading yourself into meditation by reading the Bible or repeating a prayer, then say:

I fully and freely forgive X (mentioning the name of the offender); I loose him and let him go. I cast the burden aside. He is free now, and I am free too. The Truth of Christ has set us both free. I thank God. (*Around the Year with Emmet Fox: A Book of Daily Readings*, Emmet Fox, p. 48)

He says let it ride then, it's done and finished. We don't go back and re-forgive the same offense. Whenever we think about it again, we're supposed to bless the person and dismiss the thought. Do, or do not. There is no try.

Slimming Steps

Are you willing? Is your willingness to forgive in order? Maybe first we have to pray for willingness, but the freedom we know we'll get as we fully and completely forgive is well worth the peace. We've already sensed that, have tasted the sweetness. Yes. We're willing.

Make a list of the people and events you need to forgive. Write it down. When you can be alone for a while, pray the prayer for each person you're willing to forgive. Then pray for the willingness to forgive any others.

About that Birthright I Stole...

When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, "We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."

In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. He thought, "If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape."

...

He also instructed the second, the third and all the others who followed the herds: "You are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. And be sure to say, 'Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.'" For he thought, "I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me." So Jacob's gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp....

But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. – Genesis 32:6-8, 19-21, 33:4 (NIV)

A stupid act in our youth can set the entire tenor of our lives. Jacob didn't plot against his brother to steal their father's blessing; he followed his mother's directions. And there's a bargain on Pacific beach property in Arizona.

Sure, it was Rebekah who hatched the plot, who cooked the goats, who showed Jacob how to feel hairy to his blind

father's touch. But Isaac, a grown man, knew his actions were deceitful. His mother's invitation to let the curse rest on her couldn't really change the nature of the actions. Jacob could justify his deceit and theft, but justifications don't change anything – except the perception of the person taking part. We explain our actions and listen to what we say, and after a while we can actually believe the words coming out of our mouths convey the truth. Almost, at least. That is almost believe, not almost truth. Patti O, One of my favorite Alcoholics Anonymous speakers, says, "Rationalization, justification, and denial. When I'm explaining it to you, I'm hearing it, and when I'm hearing it, I'm believing it."

But two times Jacob took what rightfully was Esau's. The second came with his mother's help, securing the dying man's blessing. The first, Jacob did with no external prodding. He had what his brother wanted and, using his intellect, took advantage of him, persuading his twin to sell his birthright for a single meal of stew. Jacob carried the guilt, though Rebekah had amends to make as well.

And Jacob knew it. He approached his brother fourteen years later with fear and trepidation, still trying to hide, to send others in his place, to placate his brother rather than standing tall and accepting Esau's righteous indignation.

He made amends. They were far from perfect, but Jacob did approach Esau, offering restitution for the theft. And like Jacob, as we go to so many of the people to whom we owe amends, we gain not only peace of mind but the reestablishment of family. We become willing to make amends and come face to face with our fear. God takes care of the rest.

Slimming Steps

What amend most causes you to fear the process? How would you feel if you were the person harmed by the action you took? You can find the courage to take this Step.

Remind yourself you decided to go to any length to find a spiritual experience. Ask God for strength and direction to do the right thing no matter what the consequences might be. Remember, even if you may lose your job or reputation or face jail, you are willing.

You must not shrink at anything.

Harbinger

He did that on purpose.
Unrepentant. How dare he?
I used to put up with that,
but not now, not in recovery,
not when I'm trying,
working so hard.
Shut up, mind. Of course
it's resentment.
He did it on purpose, though.
What do you mean I can't afford it?
He did it. He meant to be mean.
Hurt me more? Sure. He's not hurt.
I am. A slippery slope? Hush.
Oh, all right. I'll fix him
so he can't hurt me.
I'll forgive him.

Seventy and Seven

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." – Matthew 18:21-22 (NIV)

We live in the now. Today is the only day we have. While the Big Book at Step Eleven tells us to *think* about the next 24 hours and to *consider* our plan for the day, we can't control even that far ahead, though we can prepare for the scheduled and anticipated events. We can, however, choose not to approach the day with a negative attitude, spreading proclamations of protestation. Or we can take the high road and approach the day with affirmative actions, which lead to positive creative acceptance.

Affirmative actions. Why "actions" rather than "thinking?" Because I've done enough thinking, enough acting on my mental calculations. That doesn't work. Affirmative action moves it down a foot, from the head to the heart. Faith itself is an action, the act of moving to the point where we're uncomfortable. I've been living at the edge of my comfort zone for a while now, and to me it seems all too often I'm on the other side of the line. But that's where I want to stay, for that's where I grow.

What does positive creative acceptance do for me today? I'll meet with a group of people this afternoon. The last few meetings have been tense, disagreement rampant where it seldom surfaced before. I have a marble I got at an

OA meeting last month in another city, and it represents a resentment. I had thought I would bring it to the meeting as a reminder. I've been sleeping with it, praying when I find it during the night for a particular person to have everything I want for myself. At this point I'm free of the resentments, but that doesn't mean we'll suddenly agree at the meeting. Despite the fact the marble fell between the headboard and the wall last night and I forgot to dig it out and bring it, I'll have it in spirit. And I've thought about that hour of the twenty-four.

I will approach the meeting with humility which comes from surrender, from allowing myself to be taught. I know some people hurt me again and again, at home, at work, in any group where I work closely with others. We've all been hurt by people we love, by institutions we trusted, by ideas embedded in us from childhood. We can identify the hurt through Steps Four and Five, clean our side of the street by Six through Nine, and we can forgive and cleanse ourselves of resentment. But we still have to interact with some of these people.

God is present in the world with, in, and through people. We live in the now, and if we fail, if we move to past hurts, we find ourselves stuck in negative energy. Living in the now requires our action. Now. The past resentments are gone. I don't have to develop new ones. I do that by not striking back. I will not put myself in a position to be a problem to other people. No, that doesn't mean I let them do what they want to do if that's inconsistent with truth and progress as I understand it. But it will not be personal to me. Differing with my ideas will not be perceived as an attack on me. The other has his own work to do, as I have mine. For me, it will center on the issues.

There is no need for me to assess the motives of other people. Living, for me, will not be a matter of just getting through another day – or another meeting. It's up to me to

live in the now, to stay in the positive. I will move out of ego deflation. It's up to me to be happy, to be humble, to be faithful. We can substitute "compulsive overeaters" for alcoholics.

Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us! God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without His aid. Many of us had moral and philosophical convictions galore, but we could not live up to them even though we would have liked to. Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We had to have God's help. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 62.)

We get out of the negative – out of building new resentments no matter how short-lived they may be – by doing good positive actions, not just thinking. We surrender, gaining humility by allowing ourselves to be taught, and we practice the faith of moving to the uncomfortable place of accepting God in the person before us.

Slimming Steps

What resentments have you recently formed? What could you have done to keep from forming them? What tense situations do you face in the next twenty-four hours? Are you willing to practice humility and faith?

Dignity

She is clothed with strength and dignity;
she can laugh at the days to come.

She speaks with wisdom,
and faithful instruction is on her tongue.

She watches over the affairs of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Her children arise and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:

“Many women do noble things,
but you surpass them all.”– Proverbs 31:25-29 (NIV)

Step Nine is a step of dignity, not groveling. The reception we receive cannot change the courage inherent in our act of making amends. When we openly and honestly attempt to clean our side of the street to the best of our ability, the reaction has nothing to do with our act. If rebuffed, the valor of our offer remains undimmed, the honesty unsoiled. Acceptance or rejection has no effect on our amends. We walk away with pride and confidence. Perhaps, with the passage of time, the person who refuses to accept our kindness will become healthy enough to accept it.

What benefit comes from unaccepted amends? Huge ones. Amends benefit *us*. Even when we cannot find a person to whom amends are due, becoming completely willing to take that action should the opportunity arise brings healing. Some people we harmed have died. Whether we go to the grave or write a letter and burn it or just tell another person what we would have said to the person had we been able, the amends mend our hearts.

When our amends are made, we become clothed with strength and dignity and the weight of coming days laid out before us vanishes. We laugh at the freedom suddenly granted us. We speak with wisdom, and having made our amends are able to guide compulsive overeaters following us on the path to make their own. Our household benefits even before any effort at making amends, simply because we live the joy we have found, passing that to others in the family. Procrastination, which really is chronic low-intensity fear, fades away with the other apprehensions. Our behavior, like a contagious disease, quickly infects those around us with honesty, industry, and smiles. "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all."

Slimming Steps

Describe how the process of preparing to make amends and then doing them has benefited you and your family.

Step Ten

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

No Inventory but Yours

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." – Luke 10:38-42 (NIV)

"Mama! He hit me!"

"Make him stop it! He's ruining my dress."

"She filed for a divorce and wants me to pay for it!"

"He must have cheated to get that job. It should be mine!"

What the other person did wrong seems very plain to us. The resentment list in the Fourth Step is a breeze. Even when we get to the Tenth Step, though, writing the inventory of the other person comes far easier than seeing our faults and shortcomings. How do we come to the point of seeing first our contributions, dismissing the car swerving into our lane or the look we know means the person wishes us ill? (You may read "food" for "alcohol.")

Love and tolerance of others is our code.

And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone – even alcohol. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 84.)

So the Big Book explains our state of mind at Step Ten. *¡Ojalá que sí!* The Spanish phrase lacks a proper English translation, but “Oh that it were so!” approaches it. How, then, does it become true? The habit of Step Ten as a way of life gradually – glacially perhaps – incorporates the truth into our beings.

When suddenly we find ourselves “restless, irritable, and discontent,” time out! Step aside (physically or just mentally) and sort through the familiar questions.

What am I feeling?

Why am I upset?

What part of my being is affected – personal relations, self-esteem, security, ambitions, sex relations?

What’s my part of it?

What amends do I need to make?

Find another OA to talk to, either your sponsor or another, and work through the issue, then go on with your life, having ceased fighting anything or anybody, including food.

Slimming Steps

Have you taken anybody else’s inventory today? Do you need to take yours? How carefully do you follow Step Ten daily?

Taking Stock

Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. – Deuteronomy 8:2-3 (NIV)

Like the Hebrews, we compulsive overeaters would gripe about manna from heaven, but we'd gripe because there was too little, and we couldn't stash it away for "tomorrow." Besides, according to the best information available, it wasn't sweet enough for my taste.

What do you gripe about? Don't limit this to words coming from your mouth; what do you feel cheated about? What are your grudges?

And your thankfulness? What brings your heart joy? What (or who) makes your life easier? Name your blessings.

"They" say Heaven is like floating around on a cloud playing a harp, a life devoid of deadlines, responsibilities, worries, and hurts. Peaceful? For how many days would you like to engage in that bliss? Depending on the complexity of the harp and how long it takes to master that, I could make maybe six months, tops, more like one, really. Thirty days. Thirty months? Years? Decades? Millennia? OUCH!

Stress. Trouble. Adversity. Complications. Aggravation. Friction. Enigma. Impediment. Burden. Are these such bad

words? A constant stream of them can be maddening, but a constant diet of manna and quail would get pretty darned tiring as well. Okay, okay. I'm sitting here with a computer, with all my needs met, with the money and ability to get most tangible things I might want. I can minimize the benefit of a life of ease. But isn't it all relative? I don't have the money a professional football player gets for a game. I can't sign multi-million dollar contracts for my acting, singing, or even my excellent writing skills. (Insert winking emoticon here.) I have much more than many, but much less than others.

In John 14:27, Jesus says he leaves us peace, he gives us peace. He doesn't give us what the world gives us, but instead leaves us with the ability to claim untroubled hearts. How do we get the peace, claim the untroubled hearts? Look to the Steps.

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us – sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 83-84)

Slimming Steps

What are your wants? List them without thinking of the next two questions.

What are your blessings?

What are your needs?

The Glass Ceiling

In recovery the ceiling
has nothing to do with race
gender ethnicity

In recovery it's up to you
but try as you may
you can't break through

In recovery the ceiling's
named so all have heard
fourth dimension of existence

In recovery it's found
unexpectedly accidentally
when least expected

In recovery surrender's
never negative
never bad

In surrender the higher power
assumes control bringing us
to true recovery
to existence's essence

My Truth, Not Hers!

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. – Matthew 18:1-4 (NIV)

I made a mistake. I promptly admitted it when called to my attention. She'd asked what could be done to stop such mistakes, and I reminded her I'd already asked for help in that area. The response back lacked a direct offer for help (one I would have had difficulty drumming up the humility to accept anyway) but gave suggestions for getting assistance. No rancor or recrimination came enclosed with the advice. Still, I sit here, chastised. I admitted my fault. The advice is sound. So why do I resent it so?

Forty years ago a teacher asked me to talk to my sister about being a disruption. I decided to quit my leadership role in the extracurricular activity he led, walked home to get the record book, and trudged back, a trip of less than half a mile total. He was not there when I returned, and I never resigned. I could bicker with my sister all I chose, could call her bossy and fight with her. An outsider had no such right!

Resentment. We inventory it, work through it, and find it right back there, smeared in our face. We've worked the Steps. We know how to release the poison from our system. But can't I indulge it just a little longer?

Become as a little child. I'm like a child. I'm self-centered, egotistical, fiercely independent, wanting to do it myself!! Become as a little child. Jesus didn't want a childish temper-tantrum. So how do we get back to the kingdom of heaven, that oneness with God we accomplished through the first nine Steps? Become as a little child. Whoever humbles himself....

God, grant me the humility to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen. So be it.

Slimming Steps

How does a child's approach to life resemble the alignment with God we achieve through working the steps?

A Permanent Response to Temporary Problems

In the 19th chapter of I Kings, Elijah, afraid, ran from the king's evil intentions. He wanted to live enough to flee danger, but after walking a day alone, the desire to live that had sent him on the trip had vanished, and he prayed for his own death. He went to sleep, but an angel woke him, fed him, and led him into his life's work.

I've never considered suicide. Homicide? Yes. I've protected myself from succumbing to my anger by drafting a book showing my preferred method of committing murder, knowing that would be found if anybody looked into my motives and thoughts after the contemplated death. Still, I know many in this program who have contemplated suicide rather than homicide as a way out.

I went to the funeral of a talented personable 26-year-old professional who took her own life. She worked redirecting troubled teens, kids I work with on a less personal basis. Sometimes, knowing a youngster is on suicide watch, I tell them they are loved, that suicide is a very permanent solution to temporary concerns and problems. I don't know if I've ever had any effect on them. I doubt the woman who died ever heard me say that to the kids, but another who's heard me often later wished the conversation might have taken place. I regretted the lack, too, though I certainly don't expect she could have been stopped by my words. I feel

compelled to write here, though, should the reader need the reassurance.

The neat part about OA is the people. No, not *the* neat part; an important neat part of OA is people like me and people like you, a family, a home. If you walk into the rooms of OA, you are loved there. And, through that experience, you can find you are loved by many others as well. Through the love of others, you can grow to love yourself. You are loved. I love you. God loves you. Please, please, let OA people love you.

The last three verses of Romans 8:

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. – Romans 8:37-39 (NIV)

Remember. You are loved.

Slimming Steps

Who cares about you? Don't dismiss the question. The answer is people do care. Name them.

What would you like to be? List adjectives, then list accomplishments.

Consider the promises set out on pages 83-84 of the Big Book and copied on page 167 of this book.

How would you feel if these promises were true in your life?

In Your Face

You don't know what it's like,
can't conceive my pain, my shame.
I'm a grievance to my folk,
an anathema in my job,
a worthless piece of shit
even I've no use for.
Let me die.

What? You can't know that.
Look at you, peace in your face.
How could you know I feel that,
did that, think like that?

You can't know what it's like,
can't conceive my pain, my shame
for I never whispered of it.
You did that too? You felt this way?
You can't know what it's like.
But you do.

Dealing with Anger

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!”

His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.” – John 2:13-17 (NIV)

Perhaps, like me, you’ve spent your life suppressing your anger, stuffing it down with food, being the “good child.” In finding out who we are, we discover the damage done with this kind of behavior, not only to ourselves but to those around us who we believed ourselves to be protecting from our anger. Instead, it has seeped into every aspect of our behavior, coloring our lives, destroying our quality of life.

Les Carter in his book *Enough About You, Let’s Talk About Me*, observes, “Sometimes people will ask: ‘Do I have a right to be angry?’ With assertiveness, however, the question becomes, ‘Do I have the responsibility to be angry?’”

It’s not necessarily a question of deciding whether or not to be angry. Even as we hid it from ourselves, we were angry much of our lives. The issue is what to do with the anger. What are the options open to us – the *healthy* options?

- Distance yourself from people hurting you.
-

- ☛ Explain calmly and compassionately how the events cause you distress.
- ☛ Don't assume truth in words about you. Listen, evaluate, and accept proper criticism, but reject manipulative and hurtful comments made in spite or from weakness.
- ☛ Remove yourself from people and events you're not prepared to handle.
- ☛ Call your sponsor or another OA member.
- ☛ Pray for serenity, for courage, and for wisdom.
- ☛ Pray for the person hurting you.

We have a right to live our lives honestly and free from hurtful false accusations. We have the right to happiness, not only the pursuit of it.

Slimming Steps

Who makes you angry? What triggers behavior in you less worthy than what you want to exhibit? What are you going to do about it?



Igor Ego

“Surely you know how it has been from of old,
ever since man was placed on the earth,
that the mirth of the wicked is brief,
the joy of the godless lasts but a moment.
Though his pride reaches to the heavens
and his head touches the clouds,
he will perish forever, like his own dung;
those who have seen him will say, ‘Where is he?’” –
Job 20:4-7 (NIV)

We admitted we were powerless over food, believed God could remove the insanity, decided to turn our lives and will over, inventoried, admitted, became willing, asked for defects to be removed, listed and made amends. We’re through.

We’re not through.

A friend of mine wrote, “After 2½ months of abstinence I had just a bite of candy, one of those bite sized candy bars, and afterwards went many days. I pushed the recurring thought, ‘I can control this sugar’ from my mind repeatedly. Well, soon I found I was bingeing on sugar. So I started over. I now have six days of abstinence. My boundary with sugar is no sugar at all.”

I know exactly how she feels. I quit computer games cold turkey, turned the compulsion over to God, and realized the immense relief and new time formerly spent wallowing in Spider Sol, Sudoku, Yubotu, the game of the moment. Months later, my computer having crashed and the reformatted drive having virtually nothing but an Internet

connection, I opened a game. Shortly after I got a new computer, loaded it with programs and my projects, had plenty to do. And weeks passed again. But then, itty-bit by sneak-a-peek, I let insidious games sneak in as a way to “think about” the project at hand. And itty-bit by sneak-a-peek, they robbed me of my time.

Ego had surfaced. Igor the Ego. The monstrous Igor Ego. God, save me from my character defects. Again. Bill Wilson in a speech said, “Ego deflation at depth is today a cornerstone principle” of the Twelve Step program. Igor, prepare for deflation.

We overeaters have ego problems. They may or may not show from the outside to the causal observer. We can be (and often are) egomaniacs with inferiority complexes, but ego reigns before we come into recovery. And even when we rid ourselves of the parts of ego that come out as resentment, fear, wounded pride, and rage, ego springs back again. “I can handle this.” “I don’t need to be *that* strict.” “Oh, for goodness sake, I’ve been good. I *deserve* this!”

Ego deflation happens when we attain a new adjustment, a new infusion of humility and empathy. That takes restructuring over the long haul, not the quick fix we hope for when we come into the program. We need to build up the self that is the seat of God in our lives, to recognize we do deserve the very best – and stop selling out for a piece of candy, a round of Sudoku, or a bite of birthday cake. We are still addicts, despite having worked the Steps. But God willing and our keeping out of the way, we’re addicts in recovery.

Slender Steps

What can you do today to fine tune your relationship with God? How has ego wiggled back into your life?

Wake-Up Call

Let me in!
I didn't mean to,
I slipped out of the rooms
and the door slammed shut.
Please, please, I didn't mean to
stop, didn't intend to take it back,
to wrest control away, to myself.
It's cold out here!
I'm scared. The fears
are back, the terror,
the loneliness.
The good-old-days aren't here.
I know. I left them in the rooms.
Please, please let me in.
I didn't mean to go back out.
What's that buzz? What's coming?
Oh. OH! Okay.
Thank God!
God, I offer myself to Thee
to build with me and do with me....
But please, please hold on tight.

Step Eleven

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.

Send Leanness among the Fat

Therefore will the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory there shall be kindled a burning like the burning of fire. – Isaiah 10:16 (ASV)

God will send leanness among his fat ones, and under his glory kindle a burning like that of fire. A prediction of OA? Probably not. But what an image!

We read in the forewords to *Alcoholics Anonymous* of the amazing growth of AA in the early years, half never drinking again, another quarter becoming non-drinkers in time. This doesn't happen in the OA abstinence I know. Still, for me and countless others, the recovery found in OA is well worth all the misery before, if that misery enabled the surrender to such glorious recovery.

I write with cold air around me, the thermostat set lower than my real comfort level, but I'm wrapped in warm clothing and an afghan. Outside cold reigns supreme, unchecked. My discomfort seems greater this year, but the knowledge it's caused in large part by a change in my metabolism and the lack of the blubber padding me for so many years makes tolerating the chill even enjoyable.

Inside me God's glory has kindled a burning like the burning of fire. John Wesley, founder of Methodism, told of his conversion experience:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter to nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart

through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. –
(John Wesley's *Journal*, May 24, 1738)

Strangely warmed, indeed. My heart's on fire with joy that God's in charge now, that my life finally has meaning and depth I could not have imagined before my "conversion experience" December 17, 2006.

In God's good plan, he sent leanness among his fat ones, including me! Thanks, God!

Slimming Steps

We tell of stories, what it was like, what happened, and what it's like now. Lest we forget, tell me. What was it like for you, what changed, what's it like now?

Past Possible

We'd settle for freedom from addiction
when we come – it's all we hoped for,
past what we'd fancied, for dreams had gone.
Yet this gift of grace blossoms, grows,
we chance to let hope bud once more,
find a full-blown plant before we know,
watch it spread, enfolding all around,
passing to our loves, our friends unbid,
expanding to sing harmony with sun and moon,
higher than soul can hope or mind hide.

Meditation

Meditate.

Wait. I hesitate,
I can vacillate, translate, inflate,
celebrate, masticate, conjugate...

But meditate?

When I wake my mind skates
straight to figure eights. I cannot sate
the breakneck gait.

Meditate?

It's some mistake.

Wait. Intake breath, deflate.
Thoughts abate, calm, sedate.

God awaits.







Relate.















First Things First

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ... But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” – Matthew 6:25, 33 (NIV)

We came to Overeaters Anonymous to lose weight. Somewhere along the way, the goal became a side effect. The side effect we expected – or dreaded perhaps – on first reading the Steps, that of a closer relationship with God, has become the of-all-and-be-all, the only goal. And we need only the one all-encompassing goal.

At Step Eleven, we’re in this for the long haul, the rest of our lives. The Big Book instructions at this point are simple – some might even say simplistic. We’re told:

-  on awakening think about the twenty-four hours ahead
 -  consider plans for the day
 -  ask God to direct your thinking
 -  that it be divorced from self-pity
 -  without dishonest or self-seeking motives
 -  we may face indecision
-

-  ask God for inspiration, an intuitive thought or a decision
-  relax and take it easy
-  don't struggle
-  conclude the period of meditation with a prayer
-  that we be shown all through the day what our next step is to be
-  that we be given whatever we need to take care of such problems
-  ask especially for freedom from self-will
-  make no request for ourselves only, though we may ask for ourselves if others will be helped
-  if circumstances warrant, we ask our spouses or friends to join us in morning meditation
-  we attend to any requirements of our religious denomination
-  we sometimes select and memorize a few set prayers which emphasize the program
-  through the day, pause when agitated or doubtful and ask for the right thought or action
-  humbly say to ourselves many times each day "Thy will be done."
-  let God discipline us in this simple way

I used to frequent a pharmacy with a crewel embroidery motto on the counter: "Eat a live frog the first thing in the morning. Nothing worse will happen all day." You know, that's the way we compulsive eaters once lived our lives. If not for breakfast (when others might be looking) at least as soon as we were safely anonymous in our car we stuffed something

horrendous down our throats. And sure enough, nothing got worse all day long. Nothing got better, either.

Now we have a new guidebook. First things first. Seek first the kingdom of God and everything you ever needed and lots you couldn't dream of wanting will be given to you, in good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over. Amen and amen!

Slimming Steps

Have you tried the Eleventh Step morning routine as outlined in the Big Book? Will you do it the next seven days?

The Perfect Me

For years I strove
to pick and choose
the prime tidbits of me,
to add your traits I coveted,
to pick and choose and rate.
I scrubbed, patched, tossed
and found habits, ways and bents,
molding, twisting, forcing joints
where pieces didn't fit.
While others may have praised
the work, I always looked and cringed;
while others said they loved the mix,
I saw scrapheaped used parts.
Then God came with an artist's hand
and used my trash to mold
a new creation, what I'd dreamed of,
for he approached with love.

Your Father's Good Pleasure

And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. – Luke 12:29-32 (KJV)

“The Father’s good pleasure.” Isn’t that neat? Fear not! How great is that? God knows we think about food and drink obsessively. He knows we desperately want to be able to control how much and what kinds we stuff into our bodies. He knows our illness, that our willpower – so strong in so many aspects – vanishes with craving-creating foods laid out before us. He knows we need control and can’t beg, borrow or steal the discipline we need. It’s not for sale at any price and it’s as rare as the everybody-must-have widget on December 24.

So what does he say? Don’t look for it. Don’t worry. Fear not! First, last, and always seek the kingdom of God, that special place where his presence is omnipotent, omniscient, and obvious. Walk in the garden with God. Relax. Let go. Forget the world, forget the deadlines, forget the donuts and fudge by the office coffeepot. Charles Austin Miles (1868-1946) captured it:

I come to the garden alone
While the dew is still on the roses
And the voice I hear falling on my ear
The Son of God discloses.

And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.

You can't buy this peace. You'll never attain it by working for it. You don't earn it by being good and following all the rules. It's GRACE! It's divine love and protection granted freely by God. It's a favor for coming to the party! "For it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Wow!

Slimming Steps

When have you experienced God's grace?

The Greatest Possession

Cling to the thought that, in God's hands, the dark past is the greatest possession you have – the key to life and happiness for others. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 124)

Humiliation, shame, rage —
hurling dung on the hopes of family,
treacherous dealing with friends,
debauchery, self-contempt.
My pain, my agony, my hopelessness.
Talk about magic, about being born again.
How deep is God's grace to go so far
in rescuing me as to give such scum value,
but even more, to make it priceless.

Conscious of God

For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

“He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth.” – I Peter 2:19-22 (NIV)

The Eleventh Step requires we improve our “conscious contact” with God. Peter wrote it is commendable if, because of consciousness of God, we bear up under unjust suffering. As we looked at our past in Step Four many of us found situations in which we actually had no fault in the initial event, though our dealing with it later may and usually did cause greater or at least longer suffering.

We’re not guaranteed life from this point on, free of the injustices of life – accidents, illness, and catastrophic events. What is the benefit of this way of life then?

Conscious is an adjective. Its meanings* include:

- ✓ Having an awareness of one’s environment and one’s own existence, sensations, and thoughts.
- ✓ Subjectively known or felt: *conscious remorse*.

* The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004.

- ✓ Intentionally conceived or done; deliberate: *a conscious insult; made a conscious effort to speak more clearly.*
- ✓ Inwardly attentive or sensible; mindful: *was increasingly conscious of being watched.*
- ✓ Especially aware of or preoccupied with. Often used in combination: *a cost-conscious approach to further development; a health-conscious diet.*

How do the definitions assist in understanding the kind of contact we should have with God? An awareness of God's presence like we'd know the sun is in our eyes? Or perhaps like the car in the rear-view mirror? Subjectively known or felt like the new knowledge of a coming long-anticipated birth? Or like a nagging pain we're careful not to stir up by turning the wrong direction? Mindful, meaning apprehensive? Or meaning the accepting love of a loyal spouse undergirding us? Preoccupied. Not of this world? Present in daily life in body only?

Maybe all of these descriptions fit at different times. I tend to think the driving analogy fits best, the requirement for a driver to know all kinds of things all the time. Sometimes, though, the knowledge comes to the forefront, and we have to cultivate the level of consciousness so that when we walk past a treat our unconscious hands – and mouth – we don't ignore wisdom and plan but, instead, consume it. We have to learn to recognize the feeling of restlessness and discontent often means a decision looms just under the edge of awareness. We live a coexistence with God, yielding daily – and moment by moment – the control to him.

Then we may suffer, but we only suffer the initial injury and don't compound it with our self-will, following the rabbit trails, and building resentments while yielding to fear.

Jesus left us the example. If sin is separation from God, we follow Jesus' steps by staying the course with God who

then will control our mouth and our actions so we do not practice deceit in word, thought, or deed. One day at a time.

Slimming Steps

Describe how well you succeed in maintaining conscious thought of God throughout your day. How could you improve?

Sought and Found

I found him! I win!
Clever, how hidden
he was, out in the open
where I thought I'd looked
but like those puzzles
when words are secluded
in random letters in
plain sight but darned near
impossible to spot!
You told me I wasn't looking
for the God of my childhood
or that of the TV preacher
but could make up my own
and sure enough
when I knew what
I wanted to find
there he was,
waiting for me,
rooting for me.

Redefining Rest

Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;

but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint. – Isaiah 40:28-31 (NIV)

My daughter-in-law and I chatted on the Internet. “Sundays are supposed to be a day of rest, but for me they’re sometimes the most productive!” she said.

I didn’t think about my answer – until I read it and saw the wisdom: “Having work done is restful, even when you’re tired.”

Sloth, one of the deadly sins, was once our constant companion along with the food. For me, sloth’s cohort procrastination, also known as chronic low-intensity fear, tagged along. My procrastination wore many faces, but two dominated: Making lists of things to do and playing computer games. I even wrote computer macros to make the list-making more effective and impressive. With the touch of a

key combination I could stamp the date an item took its place on the list and, in the next column of the table, a place sat blank waiting for the completion date. With another macro I changed the type in a cell to the same letters but with a strikethrough. It worked fine. I didn't. Instead, I whiled away countless hours on Sudoku, Spider Sol, Tetris, Yubotu – anything I could justify as “thinking through an issue” or “rewarding my completion of a task.” Yet it seemed the games took far more time than the paltry little task being noted.

I still occasionally make the lists, but they're simple lists, and instead of dramatically marking the accomplishments, I simply delete the item finished, being actually rewarded by a shrinking list and the diminished chronic low-intensity fear praying for games of distraction.

Work needs no rewards. Work *is* the reward, once we've stopped trying to prove we can be perfect or at least convince others we can be while “knowing” at a terrified depth of intuition we're really worthless. When we start the day with “Your will be done” or “God, let me walk with you” then truly we can – and do – soar on wings like eagles, run without wearying, and walk without fainting. Having work done is restful, even when you're tired.

Slimming Steps

What is your experience with procrastination, fear, and sloth?
How does Step Eleven make the day better in these areas?

Step Twelve

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.

Thorns in the Garden

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

...

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." – Mark 10:35-37, 41-45 (NIV)

The email conversation involved a mutual friend's insisting on her own way in meetings and writing scathing attacks on those who questioned her right to decide all matters in issue. "And this part bothers me. Never got it that she could be so threatened. As we've mentioned before, she has a fine life of her own. Why would she be jealous???"

Why, indeed? Why did James and John (and in another gospel their mother) want favored treatment when they already were among the top tier, two who went when the select of the select were chosen to accompany the Christ. Greed raises its ugly head in such diverse situations! With

our friend, financial security, wide recognition and influence in her chosen field, and success after success, might seem to be sufficient from the outside – or, in recovery, from the inside. Many of us in the rooms weren't always so quick to recognize our blessings either. We spent our lives craving more whether we had much or little, grappling up the ladder of success, more than willing to knock off competitors and companions to clear more room for ourselves at the top.

Our friend thrives on attention, craves it, demands it. Any room becomes filled with her presence from her entry (late and dramatic) to her exit, breathless to reach the next center stage. She's earned a permanent perch on my resentment list. I pray her off and she swoops back again.

The Big Book tells us to do our own inventory, not that of any other person:

Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened? Though a situation had not been entirely our fault, we tried to disregard the other person involved entirely. Where were we to blame? The inventory was ours, not the other man's. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 67)

Sometimes, though, looking at another's motivation can be a matter of finding not fault but forgiveness. If a person grew up in an abusive home, in poverty, or separated too early from the nurturing adults, or if later in life adversity seems to hone in on them for target practice, they may develop problems like those leading us to Overeaters Anonymous. Whatever the recovery needed, the person is sick, and we must see them as a prospect for recovery. Our message helps not just alcoholics and compulsive eaters but about a hundred other identified classifications of problems. We have a message of hope to spread. It doesn't have to be to strangers. If we simply love the people who seem frequently to be the thorns in our lives, we're working the

Twelfth Step just as surely as when we visit with a newcomer in a meeting. The message of hope is for everyone, no matter how obnoxious. You just might bring greater peace and serenity to your own life as well as the other's.

Slimming Steps

Who are the thorns in your life? Pray they have all the hope, peace, serenity, joy, self-esteem, success, and recognition you want for your own life. And love them off your resentment list as many times as it takes.

My Soul Mate

I love you more easily than myself,
feel for you, ache for you, as you walk
into these rooms. Your pain, fear, desperation
confound my heart with memories —
no, far too calm a word.
Residual angst, assonance,
antiphony. You and I are one
sharing imaginings, madness, this stage.
You are the frightened child within me
I've fought so long to accept and love.
I love you more easily than myself
and, loving you, love me.

The Lesson of Balaam's Donkey

Then the angel of the LORD moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat her with his staff. Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?"

Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now."

...

Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown. – Numbers 22:26-29, 31 (NIV) [Read Numbers 22.]

"They" say in writing children's stories not to use anthropomorphic characters in books and stories. We who grew up with Winnie the Pooh and Beatrix Potter's books find this a little sad. It still feels like Peter Rabbit and Eeyore have something to teach us. I guess "they" would have told the author of Numbers not to speak of Balaam's donkey. If "they" did, I'm glad they were ignored.

The story and words of Balaam take three chapters, Numbers 22 through 24, but the delightful story of Balaam's donkey takes only a few verses. Obviously Balaam trusted and followed God; Balaam made his living by divination for

fees, cursing or blessing events and people according to God's instruction. The journey with Balak's agents began with God's blessing but a limiting instruction to wait for divine direction. Had Balaam actually been open to that guidance, we'd never have met his mode of transportation, though.

What happened to change Balaam's focus, to shift his attention from God, is never stated. However, evidently he'd been promised opulence and traveled with esteemed companions. Often when we're recognized we make the mistake of believing it to be for our own abilities, even knowing full well we're powerless on our own, that our progress and abilities come through turning our lives over to God. A gentleman I see most weeks just asked if I'd been losing weight. Yep. Over a hundred pounds since he's known me, more than fifty in the last year. He commented that it takes a lot of work, real will power. I disagreed and told him with OA, it's easy, the compulsion's been taken away.

The Twelfth Step gets scary. What do we have to offer others? How can we guide? WHAT? You want ME to be your sponsor? We tremble. Why? Because we forget those divine directions. We forget we don't have to sponsor, we just have to pass on God's words.

Balaam didn't listen, didn't see an angel blocking the path. The donkey did. The donkey stopped short, refusing to go even when Balaam beat him. Three times. Balaam threatened to kill the donkey for embarrassing him. And the donkey spoke. "What's going on? We've been together a while, don't you trust me? Look around!" Well, not quite, but just the speaking is the point.

And the point of my speaking to you through this text is to say don't worry about being a sponsor. Just look around, be aware of God's presence, and be a spokesman for him. That's all. That's all? That's POWERFUL!

And after all, if you don't do it, God can use the nearest donkey, kitten, or goldfish. Relax. You're in God's hands.

Slimming Steps

Think about times you've heard somebody speak, either in an OA meeting, on an email, reading the Big Book, or even a novel, and known that God directed you to that statement at that time. Write about the times you think of. Then write about times God's had you say something you had no idea would mean anything to the person you were talking to and it did.

The Circle

We stand hand in hand,
ready to practice principles
outside the rooms, in life,
in all our affairs. Hand in hand,
we transfer strength,
receiving, giving, sharing,
endowed with power of the whole
to buoy us, to carry us,
until we once more return to
the rooms, full circle.



Bread upon the Waters

Cast your bread upon the waters,
for after many days you will find it again.
Give portions to seven, yes to eight,
for you do not know what disaster may come upon the
land. – Ecclesiastes 11:1-2 (NIV)

An odd book, Ecclesiastes often leaves room for interpretation and confusion. Is the advice to cast your bread on waters suggesting generosity yields return in kind, or would it feel right to a financial adviser suggesting diversified holdings?

I think it resembles the directive attributed to Anne Herbert, “Practice random acts of kindness and senseless acts of beauty.” At least I hope that’s what it means. We compulsive overeaters have hoarded food for years, protected it so we could eat it in secret later. We looked at a plate in a restaurant and wondered if that was all we got for the price. We gulped down the first helping so we could reach for the second and third. Sharing those things important to us seems unnatural. Now we can watch the platter empty with a sense of relief in potential irritants being removed.

And our world has grown beyond the food, beyond making sure our own needs are met. The bread we cast on the waters quite often is service, taking the time and effort to walk the Steps with another. We share our experience, strength, and hope, finding it refreshed in the very act of sharing, then finding the serendipitous joy of blessings beyond our wildest dreams, of being “rocketed into the fourth dimension.”

In another way, service acts as a diversification of investment as well. We recover and sometimes even unwittingly share that betterment with our close friends and family. Then their recovery blesses us with peace, hope, and love. We watch with the pride of parents as those we sponsor move to understandings enriching our own and those of many others as recovery spreads.

As we cast our bread on waters, it comes back to us enhanced. We find the truth in Jesus' words, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." – Luke 6:38 (NIV)

When disaster comes on the land and our character defects crop up, anger and resentments build, food once again beckons us to find comfort in isolation and indulgence, then the true bread, the service we have done, returns to us and we truly find serenity to accept what we cannot change, courage to change what we can, and true wisdom, leading us to know the difference and to guide our steps, thoughts, and growth.

Slimming Steps

What led you to recovery? What ways do you practice casting your bread on waters? What can you do today to spread the message you have received?



Without Honor

Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offense at him.

But Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor."

And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith. – Matthew 13:54-58 (NIV)

Addictions run in families. It would seem recovery should be as well. Why, then, does it so often happen that those closest to us are blind to the recovery, to the changes, to the new way of life?

The logical place for a Twelfth Step is often in our own home or family. Yet the message falls on deaf ears. These very people who more than most should be able to see our transformation may find themselves so threatened by it, so unaccustomed to the different responses to the same old stimuli that they resent us all the more for recovery, longing sentimentally for the old, sick, version of us.

The mother who ate with us, teaching us to stuff down feelings with food, continues to urge food on us, pshaw-ing our protestations, telling us we've lost too much already, we don't look healthy. How can we convince family members to come join us?

We don't. We can either live the program, quietly and without offering opinion or advice, so they may choose to come, or we can make it possible for others to work with our family members, perhaps while we reach out to someone more receptive to our message.

It's not a comfortable position. Jesus didn't like it, either. Besides the reception in Nazareth, he felt the same way about Israel as a whole.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" – Luke 13:34 (NIV)

While we can't help but be sad, it's really none of our business. We gave that concern up. It's God's now, and our duty is not to tell him how to do his job, just to report for duty each morning, tell him we're ready to go to work, and take our Twelfth Step wherever he leads us. Perhaps he'll send us to our friend's house – and our friend to ours. Thanks be to God!

Slimming Steps

How are you doing in turning over the agenda to God? Did you come up with this conclusion to the concern over your own family and friends before reaching the end? Why not?



Go!

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." – Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV)

We come into Overeaters Anonymous doubting, isolating, scared, apart. We remain socializing, confident in God's presence with us, still doubting perhaps but a part. How different! We know the steps are actually a circle, that the Twelfth Step sends us out to work with another as they tenuously venture into the First Step. We know as well we'll never finish the steps. Not only are Ten, Eleven and Twelve lifetime Steps, we'll find need again to confront our powerlessness over something else, or, if we falter in program, again over food. We continue to understand God better and on a deeper level, to again decide to ask his control over our lives, to inventory, admit, recognize and relinquish character defects, to make amends. We're in for the long haul, delighted to be hooked to the plow.

Where does the road lead? Look at tenuous commitments we remember thousands of years later. God called Moses to the burning bush, asked him to confront Pharaoh. Moses said, "Who? ME?? Those guys hate me, Pharaoh

and the Israelites!" God gave him the staff, an evidence of God's presence with him.

Moses still argued, "They won't believe you're with me. I don't even know your name." God said, "I am. Tell them 'I am' sent you."

Unconvinced, Moses countered, "I can't talk well, send somebody else." An angry God offered Aaron to speak for Moses who spoke for God, gave Moses the rod to throw down before Pharaoh, and stood by his choice.

Isaiah confronted a similar call in the Temple. Peter moved from the trembling fearful man who denied even knowing Jesus to the leader of a movement changing the world.

Yes, they're ancient examples. Consider another, a shy woman afraid of public speaking, preferring instead the life of a wife, mother and librarian. When her husband decided to seek public office, she gave her blessing with the caveat she should never have to speak in public. He agreed. The first time he ran for office, he was defeated, and she continued within her comfort zone. The second? He was elected Governor of Texas. Tenuously, she occasionally would speak to women's groups, then the arena grew and grew. Eventually her comfort level strengthened to gargantuan proportions, and Laura Bush found herself a national spokeswoman for literacy as well as an informal ambassador to all of Africa.

When God controls your will and your life, where will you end up? Many experience apprehension, fear of being sent to the mission field. It can happen. Or you may find yourself like the third member of Alcoholics Anonymous, running for office. Perhaps, like Laura Bush, you'll find yourself speaking in public – a situation more frightening to many than any other activity short of (and for some including) death. Can you do it? Yes. You can. And, like the disciples even after the resurrection, you'll still have your fears and doubts. But it's

not you there, outside your comfort zone, but God, working through you. God doesn't just tell us "GO!" any more than he did the apostles. He also says, "I'll be with you always."

Our book is meant to be suggestive only. We realize we know only a little. God will constantly disclose more to you and to us. Ask Him in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the man who is still sick. The answers will come, if your own house is in order. But obviously you cannot transmit something you haven't got. See to it that your relationship with Him is right, and great events will come to pass for you and countless others. This is the Great Fact for us.

Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. Admit your faults to Him and to your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny. May God bless you and keep you – until then. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 164.)

Slimming Steps

In what direction do you feel God guiding you? How can you be of service?

To Speak for God

Dear Lord of life, my hope, my joy —
I see your path for me.
You ask that I be your envoy
To set your people free.

You call for me to teach and lead
The high, the low, the poor,
To show the path that you've decreed
For those I stand before.

But like the prophets called of old
To speak your holy word,
I bow my head; I can't be bold.
They'd laugh. I'd feel absurd.

Isaiah spoke the words I mean,
"My lips are too impure."
I'm low, I'm dumb, I am not clean.
How can I serve you, Sir?

You cleansed his lips with fiery coal.
You answered Moses' fear.
You made the shy apostles bold.
Send me. Your grace I'll share.
