

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.

As we reflected on our journey through the first ten steps, many of us saw that our healing went far beyond keeping us sober. We witnessed growth and transformation in ways that we could never have imagined. This led us to believe that moving into Step Eleven would take us even further.

When we launched into Step Eleven, we asked ourselves in what ways Step Eleven differed from Step Three. "Aren't they both asking us to do God's will?" It was pointed out to us that they were in fact fundamentally different. In Step Three we made the decision to turn our will and our lives over to God's love and care, to trust that as we entered Steps Four through Ten, we would be cared for on that rigorous journey of self-reflection and healing. Step Eleven, however, specifically asked us to seek God's will. It asked us to do this by improving our conscious contact through prayer and meditation as a daily practice. It asked us to delve deeper into our relationship with our Higher Power.

We were reminded by others as we began developing a connection to a Higher Power that we had to spend time and effort participating in any relationship. It didn't work if we went to a friend asking for help saying, "You fix these problems of mine while I take care of more important things." Our relationship with God was no different. Prayer and meditation were two ways we now actively contributed to our relationship with God; and we were simply seeking "to improve" this. We were not seeking the perfect spiritual connection or spiritual feeling when we prayed or meditated. Few of our personal relationships were perfectly harmonious or filled with "heavenly bliss." So, we didn't look for that as our goal with our Higher Power. Regardless of our understanding of a Higher Power we simply looked to make a deeper connection.

The words, "to improve," reminded us that many of us had already started praying and meditating long before we got to Step Eleven. We had found that when we practiced things in our lives, those things improved. In this Step, we followed the age-old path of practicing—that meant praying and meditating on a regular basis. Others of us had avoided prayer or meditation up until this Step, but here in Step Eleven we were challenged with the words "conscious contact" and what that would look like.

As to meditation, some of us had not yet begun. We may have wanted to engage in meditation but did not know how to begin or what to do next. Or we may have felt an emotional or spiritual barrier which kept us in avoidance. So, we went to our sponsors or other program members and sought their guidance. No matter where we began, we always remembered our goal was to move forward from wherever we were rather than to arrive at some destination of perfection.

It was suggested to us that we look for a quiet place and consistent time in the day to sit with ourselves, our emotions, our concerns, our prayers, our gratitude—to allow all of this to be held within the caring presence of our Higher Power. Having a place that was familiar, welcoming, personal, or even sacred, as well as a regular time, gave us the support we needed. This helped us to overcome a very normal yet self-defeating tendency to allow our practice—our effort at building a relationship with God—to be washed away like a stick in

the river by the momentum of the day. The pull of email, media or routine responsibilities often diverted us from our spiritual practice and the healing home offered in the steps.

But we still had questions. What is meditation? What's the purpose? What's supposed to happen? When we started to ask these questions, we realized that they had many answers. Most commonly we heard—be still, be quiet, let go of the chatter in our minds and listen for the “still, small voice within.”

We also heard particular suggestions such as to simply focus on our breathing, one breath at a time.

Other members chose a spiritual word or phrase to focus on for a day or week to find what that experience would bring.

Some of us read a paragraph or section of a spiritual book before sitting, using the insights of others as a starting point.

One member wrote down what came to her during her meditations—such as thoughts, feelings or ideas—and then after a month reviewed what she had written.

In addition to the experience of other members, there were many other sources that could help us find a meditation practice. A simple search on the internet yielded a host of opportunities.

A common thread seemed to be seeking and opening ourselves to God's wisdom, love and grace. A member was heard saying, “I simply make myself vulnerable in a safe, peaceful place so I can hear and feel things that I wouldn't otherwise hear or feel.”

Of course, all of our meditations were not entirely peaceful and without inner distractions, but we were strongly encouraged not to let that stop us. Perhaps we only had peace in brief moments of our meditations. But when we continued meditating, we found that something was happening outside of our own rational thinking. We were indeed improving our contact with our Higher Power. This in turn encouraged us to stay with the process in the same way we engaged with all of our step work.

In addition to meditation, Step Eleven asked us to improve our conscious contact with God through prayer. Our experiences and attitudes toward prayer varied. Even before recovery, some of us had a healthy prayer life. Others of us prayed constantly, even desperately, to a God who was as toxic as our illness. Here we had to redefine both our God and our prayer life. Some of us prayed for the first time in many years, or in some cases the first time ever, with the Serenity Prayer during meetings. Early in recovery some of our prayers were in response to our compulsions. One member's sponsor passed on the simple prayers: “I can't stop, I can't stop, please help me, God”; and when triggered by someone, “God, may no harm come to this person from me.”

When in pain, in grief, feeling lost, or at an emotional bottom, we have also found prayer to be very powerful. It reflected our journey through the First and the Second Step. We reached out to our Higher Power and admitted that we needed help. It had become evident we could not think our way out of the despair from our addiction. In this place of

unknowing, many of us have repeatedly encountered the loving care of a Higher Power through prayer.

In this reaching out we often used our own words to express our needs, our fears, our hurts, our questions and our gratitude. We prayed for acceptance, a change of attitude and willingness. For some it grew to be like a conversation with a caring friend. Others read or memorized formal prayers. In this regard, our respective spiritual traditions and practices could be helpful. Many have made their own prayers or adopted the prayers of other members.

Whether formal or unstructured, we've also found support for prayer or connection with a Higher Power in settings we experienced as peaceful. For instance, one member's sponsor asked her to visit a spiritual place every day, even for just a minute or two, as part of her daily program. Her sponsor clarified the suggestion: "It's not important whether the place is a grove of trees, a meditation hall or a place of worship. The point is to seek a consistent and comforting setting where you can return to your Higher Power daily."

Some of us have recognized that having specific times for prayer, such as upon awakening and at bedtime, gave order to our spiritual lives. One member begins the day with the Third Step prayer, another with a simple, "Please keep me sober today." Another begins a morning practice with, "God, grant me the serenity to accept that I am a sex addict. Grant me the serenity to accept that I can't stay sexually sober. Grant me the serenity to accept that only You can keep me sexually sober. And grant me the serenity to accept that You *are* keeping me sexually sober."

At the close of the day, the purposes of our prayer was simple: to recognize and express gratitude for the gifts and even miracles that had occurred that day. We also prayed for help with any challenging situations that lingered. Blanketed with peace and gratitude, our sleep was blessed.

Members have connected with their Higher Power through writing as well. The format in some meetings was for members to spend ten minutes writing a letter to their Higher Power, then an additional ten minutes writing a return letter from their Higher Power. When reading these letters during sharing, members often found their Higher Power's response surprising, insightful and powerful.

We also considered the suggestion of "Praying only for knowledge of God's will for us." The word "only" gave many of us great pause. "Only?" we asked. "What about the things we wanted? Does the word 'only' mean that we have to follow a strict narrow path, that our lives will become very limited?"

This question was answered from the results of the work we had done in the previous Ten Steps. When we took an inventory of all the significant changes that had taken place since coming into recovery it became evident that our lives had not become smaller but actually much larger. Many of the Promises of Sexual Recovery Anonymous were now present in our lives. In fact, for most of us, the positive changes were beyond anything we could have foreseen.

We were still alive. Was this not God's will for us? We were sober. We had experienced great healing. Much of our shame had been lifted. Our self-esteem and self-worth had grown. We

felt more comfortable in our bodies. Our behavior had improved with loved ones, friends and others, and we felt good about that. Many of our character defects had been removed or their power greatly reduced. We could see that God wanted this for us and we also saw how big our lives had become. This was in stark contrast to our previous experience when our existence had been very small and headed for even less. We were told, “God had not taken us this far only to make a turn and have our lives get smaller.”

When we looked at the word “only” from this perspective it took on new meaning—one of expansiveness. We had trusted God to this point and now we were asked to trust that “only” would lead us to even greater growth in our lives. In seeking only knowledge of God’s will for us we were led to a deeper presence of God’s love and care. We saw this when we reflected on our recovery journey. At first, we thought that being honest, open and loving were simply difficult challenges. However, as our recovery progressed, we realized that meeting these challenges expanded our self-worth, our ability to live in the world, to contribute to others and to know that we were part of a deeper spiritual solution.

Yet there remained the challenge of *how* to determine God’s will for us in our daily lives. Previously, we had tried to find our way using self-will, but over and over, we were defeated by the same frustration and helplessness of our recycled thinking. We found that, once again, turning to our sponsors or other members was critical. The perspective of someone who knew us well—was extremely helpful. With this support we considered what actions, behaviors or intentions occurred to us. Were they healthy and loving? Did they bring us peace? Serenity? Did they make us more useful to others? Did they bring understanding and caring into the world, especially to those closest to us?

The phrase “the power to carry that out,” to align ourselves with God’s will, was also extremely important. Here we reminded ourselves of our ongoing relationship with our Higher Power and how, with each new day, God gave us the power to stay sober. We experienced this power through repeatedly receiving support from others. We saw that walking the walk with our Higher Power on a daily basis healed us in ways we could never have imagined. Over time, this experience deepened our trust that the “power to carry it out” was being given to us. We realized we now had power because we were immersed in God’s power. One member put it this way: “If God can keep me sober, God can do anything.”

With the daily practice of prayer and meditation we found ourselves increasingly *wanting* God’s will. More and more we believed that we would be taken care of doing God’s will. It was a path to well-being, greater joy, and a sense of peace that was beyond anything we had ever had before. It was a path to abundant love, acceptance, guidance, hope, connections to others and much, much more. God’s will offered all we needed—to live, love, feel, and forgive—ourselves and others. We found Truth in the quiet space of our connection.

The Eleventh Step gave us the ability to be here in the present moment with ourselves and with our fellow travelers. We were able to live one-day-at-a-time, taking care of ourselves and being in harmony with those who were close to us. Through our Higher Power the healing was immense, the possibilities endless. We found ourselves increasingly ready to be of service and commenced working Step Twelve—to carry the message to those still suffering, and practice these principles in all our affairs.