

## Step Twelve

**Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to those still suffering, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.**

When we began our work on the Twelfth Step, we saw that our lives had changed in fundamental ways. The Steps of SRA had led us to a spiritual awakening. For most of us this awakening was gradual. It began with the admission that we were unable to heal ourselves or stop our addictive behavior with our individual will. We went to meetings and we slowly received phone numbers from other members. We called them and gradually felt their support and care in those calls. Having been isolated and self-reliant for so many years, this path of recovery often felt unnatural and challenging.

Still, we found a sponsor and started working the Steps. Many of us began to trust others in ways we never had before. With the help of others, we were guided to turn to a power greater than ourselves in order to heal. And then the miracle happened—we started to have hope that our lives could change. All of this was the foundation upon which our spiritual path and spiritual awakening deepened. As we kept coming back, it was like nourishing a newly planted seedling that would become a large strong tree with deep roots in the ground.

Becoming immersed in the program and working the Steps was a profound process. We were gradually moved out of ourselves and into the embrace of something much larger. However, the urge to be in control of our lives and the masters of our destinies still persisted. We couldn't entirely let go of our reliance on our own rational, thinking minds.

Lack of trust in a Higher Power lingered, driven largely by the traumas of our childhood—the general dysfunction, the emotional neglect, the verbal abuse or physical abuse many of us grew up with. However, the possibility of our addiction moving into remission gave us the willingness to step deeper into the program, the fellowship and finally the embrace of a Higher Power. We found that the heart of our spiritual awakening was an ongoing and growing relationship with God as we understood God. We experienced a gradual letting go of our own limited thinking and trusted that our Higher Power was guiding us, healing us and keeping us sober one day at a time.

Our spiritual awakening involved paradoxes. One was admitting we could not stay sober, and yet in making that admission we became sober. Another powerful paradox was that in order to keep what we had gained in our recovery we needed to “give it away.”

We first experienced “giving it away” when other members carried their message to us. They sat with us and listened to us. They didn’t judge us. They understood and cared for us, no matter our race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic status, level of ability or any other identity. Most of us had seldom experienced this kind of care, compassion and understanding. As a result, it sometimes felt foreign, unnatural or uncomfortable. One member recalls getting off the subway with her sponsor early in recovery. Her sponsor offered to walk her home. The member recalled, “I was taken aback. This took her a few blocks out of her way. Why would she do that for me?” She went on to explain, “It was a pivotal moment in my recovery. I realized that she gave me something without trying to get anything in return. I began to experience the true nature of the Twelfth Step. This started me on my own path of Twelfth Step service.”

Another paradox was that in order to have something to “give away,” we had to first focus on self-care. Practicing self-care seemed like the opposite of doing Twelfth Step work, but we found that the more we cared for ourselves, the more effective we were in being of service to others. By continuing to work our program and staying in touch with members who knew us and nurtured us, we were naturally able to help others. This was the nature and foundation of service—of “carrying the message.”

Most of us had begun some form of Twelfth Step work early in our recovery. We did simple things like showing up early for meetings. We introduced ourselves to newcomers and welcomed them. We shared our experience, strength and hope. Just attending meetings was probably one of the most important pieces of service we did. Also, we offered our number to others and received their calls. We listened to them. We remembered how important it was to be heard and we gave that same gift to our fellows.

Over time we volunteered for service positions in our meetings such as chairperson, secretary, treasurer, literature person, Intergroup or General Service Board Representative. Where isolation and disconnection kept us in our addiction, service was an important tool that connected us—to others, to ourselves, to our Higher Power. Also, volunteering for service positions helped us to show up at meetings.

As we showed up for these service commitments, we became aware that we were bringing positive changes into the world and our sense of self-worth improved. We found that one of the most powerful things that attracted others to recovery was the change that had taken place in us. When they saw the evidence of our healing and increasing sense of peace and experienced the attention and care we offered, they began to hope that recovery might work for them.

One of the results of working the Steps with a sponsor was that we began to sponsor other recovering addicts as the opportunity arose. Sponsoring others who needed our support helped us to stay in the “solution” ourselves. This freed us from dwelling in the “problem.” Our recovery expanded when we were actively helping others to stay sober and grow. Many of us found this to be a profound experience. As we guided others through the Steps, we extended the chain of recovery and healing that had come from those before us.

Sometimes when we encountered people who appeared to be suffering from sexual addiction, we were moved to reveal we were recovering sex addicts. We were careful to only do this form of Twelfth Step work when we were sure it would not cause harm to ourselves, to others, or break anyone else’s anonymity. By telling a still-suffering addict about ourselves—how it was when we were acting out, what brought us into “the rooms,” and how our lives began to transform in recovery—we gave them the potentially life-changing knowledge that help was available, that it was possible to stop acting out.

When we looked at the phrase “those still suffering,” we may have thought this referred to only the most dire cases. However, we remembered when we first came into recovery, we experienced suffering on many different levels, including emotional, spiritual and often physical. We were beaten and in pain and felt hopeless. Many of us were depressed and had thoughts about ending our lives. We also remembered sobriety did not automatically remove the challenges of living. In fact, many of us continued to suffer because facing our feelings, such as fear, shame, grief and resentment, without the pain killer of acting out was often extremely difficult. Like us, our fellow members in SRA needed help on a daily basis with their struggles. So, when the phone rang, we did our best to pick it up and help “those still suffering.”

The Twelfth Step also suggested we practice these principles in all our affairs. What are these principles? What does “in all our affairs” mean?

When we looked back at our progress in working the Steps we realized we had been developing principles throughout our recovery. We saw that many of our shortcomings had been healed or lessened. For example, some of us were extremely selfish, but in recovery we became more giving. This giving and generosity first developed with those in our fellowship. As our recovery deepened, this caring naturally expanded to our families, our friends and all our relationships. We became more generous, understanding, kind, empathetic and tolerant.

In our addiction we lived in a world of faulty self-reliance and destructive isolation. We only practiced “principles” when they served us. The Twelfth Step reminded us that the first eleven Steps were not about learning concepts of occasional usefulness. We were led to aspire to a life connected to others that was rich in living these values. We consistently practiced principles such as humility, courage, compassion, generosity, honesty, service, and taking responsibility for our actions and feelings. This brought us lives of greater integrity, deepened self-care and genuine care for others.

When we found ourselves in difficult or challenging situations—even when we were angry or in conflict with others—we were not given a pass on using these principles. This was when we put to use the strength of our spiritual recovery. We practiced these principles especially when others had fundamentally different views, beliefs or ways of living.

Like all aspects of our program, these principles were not rules but suggestions. They were not a set of rote duties to be performed. So how did we know if we were “practicing” these principles? This was where we appreciated what our spiritual awakening had brought us. We realized that by engaging in our daily spiritual practices and ongoing working of the Steps we had started to embody these principles, including humility, courage, compassion, generosity, honesty and service. Our recovery had taken us to a place where more and more we naturally behaved in ways that reflected “practicing these principles.” Still, there were situations that required us to stop and carefully think about how to respond. We turned to prayer and meditation, and also asked our sponsor or other members for support. Above all, our ongoing recovery allowed us to find the way to move forward using these principles.

The spiritual awakening that resulted from our Twelve Step journey continued to generate feelings of self-respect and peace in ways we had never imagined possible. Our experience of being alive was transformed.

Our relationship with our Higher Power kept growing and deepening. Our ability to discern the difference between our disease thinking and our healthy thinking grew. Our trust in ourselves continued to increase. Our perception of ourselves and of the world continued to undergo profound changes.

Over time, we saw that we were more caring and more loving. We were becoming more adept at setting boundaries and simultaneously more accepting of everything and everyone. We more readily allowed other people to follow their own path and accepted them for who they were. We were letting go of trying to control the world and people around us. We held ourselves accountable for our actions and did our best to show up. We were in the flow of life, practicing these principles in all our affairs.

We were experiencing the depth of God's healing. To our surprise we found ourselves becoming more spontaneous, more generous. We were finding joy in being alive. We were grateful for the abundance that surrounded us. We looked forward to being in the world and participating in life. This was the heart of our spiritual awakening and our Twelve Step journey.

This shift in our attitude and behavior led us to be of service to other addicts. We increasingly thought about those still suffering from this disease who might benefit from the solution we had found—and how to reach out to them. For some of us this meant stretching beyond our comfort zone and considering people and communities who had no, or limited, access to SRA recovery.

Finally, we realized that our journey through the Twelve Steps did not end as we “finished” Step Twelve. To maintain our sobriety and enhance our spiritual awakening, we continued to explore the Steps and delve deeper into their meaning and the possibilities they revealed. Most of us returned to Step One and continued working through all of the Steps once again.