

Recovery From Alcoholism: The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and Eastern Spirituality

Interpreting the spiritual significance of AAs 12 step recovery program from the perspective of "New Thought" metaphysics.

Dr. Kenneth E. Hart School of Psychology
University of Leeds England
kenh@psychology.leeds.ac.uk

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Good afternoon. I'd like to thank the Society for the Study of Metaphysical Religion for giving me the opportunity to share my ideas with you today. The program lists the title of my talk as "*Recovery From Alcoholism: The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and Eastern Spirituality.*" The program also suggests that my talk will involve interpreting the spiritual significance of AAs 12 step recovery program from the perspective of "New Thought" metaphysics. The program is correct, I will be talking on this topic. But in addition, I'd like to talk about something else as well. I'd like to briefly touch on a bit of early history, which clearly shows that the pioneers of AA were very familiar with the New Thought understanding of metaphysics. In addition, I'd like to leave some time at the end of the session for an open discussion.

So, I'd like to divide the time we have into three parts. Part 1 will focus briefly on the historical points of contact between New Thought and AA during AAs embryonic stage of development. Much of what I say in Part one comes from a well researched book by Mel B. entitled, "New wine: the spiritual roots of the 12 step miracle," published by Hazelden. Part 2 will focus sequentially on each of the 12 steps of AA. For each step, I will first present the standard interpretation as described in the AA literature. Immediately following the AA interpretation, I will briefly present a second discussion that will attempt to reinterpret the step from the vantage point of New Thought. As part of the New Thought "spin" that I'll be putting on the steps, I have actually re-written the steps using the language and vocabulary of New Thought. In particular, I relied heavily on the vocabulary used by Emily Cady in her book "Lessons in Truth." Rather than keep you hanging in suspense, let me give you both of the punch lines at the opening. Here they are: 1).there is a very strong indication that the early AA movement acquired some of its ideas from New Thought teachings., and 2) the 12 steps of AA fit hand-in-glove with New Thought principles and practices.

Before launching into a discussion of the historical interface between New Thought and AA, I'd like offer you a preview of the 12 Steps of AA as I have re-written them from the perspective of New Thought.

Step 1: "*admitted that my carnal mind or human personality is limited, and that living from this part of my self has resulted in a life of bondage.*"

Step 2: came to believe that the personal revelation of the living Christ within my own being could make me abundant and prosperous."

Step 3: "made a decision to seek direct revelation of the Truth of my soul by moving away from personality and toward individuality."

Step 4: " I take stock of the imperfections of my lower self or false self."

Step 5: "I reveal to my higher self and another human being the exact nature of the imperfections of my smaller self."

Step 6: "I became willing to have God remove my belief in lack and limitation."

Step 7: "I humbly asked God to remove my poverty consciousness."

Step 8: "I made a list of all unhealed relationships and became willing to allow the Christ spirit express through me to health them all."

Step 9: "I allow the Christ spirit to express directly through me to heal my unhealed relationships wherever possible, except when to attempt to do so would injure them or others."

Step 10: I continued to take stock of my thinking, and immediately recognized wrong thinking or error consciousness."

Step 11: "I Sought to enter the silence and experience an inner revealing of the truth of my oneness with the Christ spirit which is who I am."

Step 12: "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, I carried the message of goodness to others, and practiced the Christ life in my daily affairs."

Now, for some rather interesting and obscure history on the spiritual roots of AA. Mel B, in his facinating book entitled, "New Wine: The spiritual roots of the 12-step miracle," (Hazelden, 1991) suggests that there is a very strong indication that the early AA movement acquired some of its ideas from New Thought metaphysical teachings. As documented by Charles Braden in his 1963 classic text Spirits in Rebellion (The Story of the Beginnings and Growth of New Thought and Kindred American Metaphysical Healing Movements, Univ. of Texas press), Horatio Dresser received his Ph.D. in Philosophy from Harvard in 1907, where he studied under Professor William James. For those of you who are not familiar with early AA literature or AA history, William James wrote an influential book entitled, "Varieties of Religious Experience." This book had a strong influence on the pioneers of AA and the book was prescribed as required reading prior to the publication of AA's Big Book in 1939. Indeed many AAs still read James's book even today. In any case, Horatio Dresser is considered one of the most highly trained persons in the early leadership of the New Thought movement, and served as one of its major interpreters. The influence of Dresser on the thinking and writing of William

James, and through James AA, is clearly visible in chapters 4 and 5 of James' classic book *Varieties of Religious Experience*. In these chapters, James quotes extensively from both Dresser and Ralph Waldo Trine, and describes his insights into the New Thought movement, which he classified as a religion of healthy-mindedness.

Bill Wilson the pioneer co-founder of AA clearly gives credit to William James's book, but it is unclear how strongly he was influenced by the New Thought section of the chapter on *The Religion of Healthy Mindedness*. If you have ever read the AA Big Book, you will find that portions of the Big Book are very reminiscent of New Thought as described by James. For example, both sources share a common conception of a pantheistic god who dwells "deep down within each of us" (quotation taken from the Big Book). Also, the terminology and phraseology of the two sources are similar. For example, some of the terminology and most of the ideas from the follow quote from James appears in the Big Book. Quoting now from page 94 of James' "*The Varieties of Religious Experience*" (quote) "The great central fact of the universe is the spirit of infinite life and power that is back of all is what I call God. I care not what term you may use, be it Kindly Light, Providence, the Over Soul, Omnipotence, or whatever term may be most convenient, so long as we are agreed in regard to the great central fact itself. God fills the universe alone, so that all is from Him and in Him, and there is nothing that is outside" (end quote). Those of you who are familiar with the Big Book will recall that the book uses the phrase "the great central fact." In addition, the Big Book describes "God" using New Thought language such as "Providence" "Spirit of the Universe" "Infinite Power and Love" "Creative Intelligence" "Great Reality" "Father of Light" etc. Also, in connection with the label or name given to God, James states, "I care not what term you may use." Clearly, this same idea shows up directly in the 3rd and 11th steps as "God as we understood Him."

AA conference-approved literature also shows the imprint of New Thought on AA. This literature suggests that Dr. Bob, the other co-founder of AA was exposed to New Thought. In the book entitled, "*Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*" it is noted that William James' book was a favorite of Dr. Bob's, as was Emmet Fox's "*Sermon on the Mount*."

Moreover, the chapter describing Dr. Bob's spiritual quest documents that Charles Fillmore's "*Teach Us to Pray*" was another favorite of Dr. Bob's. Also, that same chapter makes it clear that Dr. Bob was fond of mysticism, world religions and the metaphysical approach to religion.

In his book "*New Wine: The spiritual roots of the 12 step miracle*" Mel B suggests that Christian Science teachings may have influenced the very early evolution of AA and the formation of the 12 steps. The book documents that months before he met up with the Oxford Group, Bill Wilson had read and reread Mary Baker Eddy's "*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*" in a vain attempt to cure his alcoholism. At a still later time, Bill Wilson expressed the opinion that Mrs. Eddy had not given due credit for the initial help she had received from P. P. Quimby. Thus, it seems clear that the senior co-founder of AA was quite familiar with New Thought teachings.

According to Nell Wing, former personal secretary to Bill Wilson and retired AA Archivist, early AA members were strongly encouraged to read James Allen's book "As a Man Thinketh," Thomas Troward's "Edinburgh Lectures on Mental Science," and Emmet Fox's book "The Sermon on the Mount." Mel B. states that "there are some grounds for believing ... that the term "conscious contact," which appears in AAs 11th step may have emerged from the lectures of Divine Science minister Emmet Fox in New York City. Reverend Fox spoke often of "consciously contacting" God, and Bill Wilson and his wife Lois were in attendance frequently, as were other pioneer AA members. Published in 1934, Emmet Fox's book "The Sermon on the Mount" served as one of AAs leading reference guides until 1939 when the AA Big Book was published. Bill Wilson freely acknowledged the importance of Fox's book to early AA, but insisted that it was no longer needed after the publication of the Big Book. Nevertheless, The Sermon on the Mount is still a popular book in AA circles, and is even still offered for sale by many AA groups.

Now, I'd like to shift my attention to part 2 of the talk, which is devoted to a discussion of the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. But before I proceed, I think it is important to set the stage for you, and give you a little background on the steps and where they came from. Literature published by AA widely acknowledges that the 12 steps of AA have their roots in the principles or tenets of the Oxford Group Movement of the 1930s. To quote Bill Wilson himself, (quote) "the early AA got its ideas of self-examination, acknowledgment of character defects, restitution for harm done, and working with others straight from the Oxford Groups and directly from Sam Shoemaker, their former leader in America" (end quote) (AA comes of Age). It should also be noted that Dr. Shoemaker served as Bill Wilson's spiritual mentor. Though Sam Shoemaker, rector of Calvary Church in New York, was most directly responsible for the Oxford Group's influence on AA's founding, he was not the primary founder of the Oxford Group. As documented by Mel B. in his book "new wine: the spiritual roots of the 12-step miracle," Sam Shoemaker had a spectacular life changing conversion experience 1918, while meeting with Frank Buchman in China. The Oxford group movement, also known as the First Century Christian Fellowship, had no formal program, although there was considerable emphasis placed on what they called the Four Absolutes: absolute love, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute honesty. A 1934 article in the Atlantic Monthly a theologian identified the Oxford group as emphasizing the following six points: 1) men are sinners, 2) men can be changed, 3) confession is prerequisite to change, 4) the changed soul has direct access to God, 5) the age of miracles has returned, and 6) those who have been changed must change others. These 6 principles or tenets were accepted by the cofounders of AA, Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob, both of whom were loyal members of the Oxford Groups. Prior to the publication of the AA Big Book in 1939, AA consisted of a word of mouth adaptation of the Oxford Group principles. At the time, there was no AA fellowship per se. But rather, Oxford group members who were also alcoholics banded together to form what became known in Oxford Group circles as the "Drunk Squads." According to Bill Wilson, in the years immediately preceding the publication of the Big Book, these Drunk Squads had adapted the more general Oxford Group principles into the following six word of mouth steps: 1) we admitted that we were licked, that we were powerless over alcohol, 2) we made a moral inventory of our defects or sins, 3) we

confessed or shared our sins with another person in confidence, 4) we made restitution to all those we had harmed when still drinking, 5) we tried to help other alcoholics, with no thought of personal reward in money or prestige, and 6) we prayed to whatever God we thought there was for power to practice these precepts (AA comes of Age).

Before shifting gears to discuss the 12 steps of AA as we know them today, let me briefly summarize the major legacies of the Oxford Groups. In general, the Oxford Group had rediscovered some fundamental truths about spiritual change, and were successful at putting these truths into practice. For example, the Oxford Groups showed that, in order to find spiritual power and the ability to communicate it to others, it is necessary to face and release one's personality flaws such as pride, selfishness and resentment, all of which serve to block the flow of spiritual awareness into consciousness. In other words, in order to contact God or allow his presence to be known, one must achieve victory over one's self. In addition to the actual steps, other legacies literature which is still popular in AA circles. For example, many AA's pray and meditate with the help of a book entitled the "24 Hours a Day" meditation book. This book was written by Richmond Walker, an early Oxford Group member. In addition, Walker has written the book "God Calling," another popular meditation book that is still read by many AA's today.

Now, onto the steps. Before I continue I would like say that I will be using some AA jargon which may be foreign to some members of the audience. It would be helpful for me to know whether there is anyone here who is not familiar with the terms "Big Book" or "12 and 12." If you could please raise your hand if either of these terms doesn't ring a bell it would be helpful. Good, for these people, the Big Book is the nickname AA has given to its basic textbook which is entitled, "Alcoholics Anonymous." Just as Emily Cady's Lessons in Truth is the basic text of Unity, so the Big Book is the basic text of AA. The 12 and 12 is the nickname AA has given to its book of essays on the 12 steps and 12 traditions. The 12 and 12 was written by Bill Wilson, approximately 13 years after the publication of the Big Book. If anyone is wondering what the steps are, it would be helpful for you to know that the steps were actually lived as a way of life by the early pioneer members of AA. The directions necessary to emulate this way of life were written down and published in the Big Book in 1939. These directions, or steps are offered as a suggested program of action to those interested in overcoming the bondage of alcoholism. Here is what the early pioneers said they did:

Step 1. we admitted we were powerless over alcohol-that our lives had become unmanageable

Step 2. came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Step 3. made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of god as we understood Him

Step 4. made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves

Step 5. admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs

Step 6. were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

Step 7. humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings

Step 8. made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all

Step 9. made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others

Step 10. continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it

Step 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.

Step 12. having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

This is the planned program of spiritual recovery as described in the Big Book. Although its purpose is to help alcoholics become and stay abstinent, the program attends to much more than the mere imbibing of alcohol. In fact, only the first of the 12 steps even names alcohol. The rest of the steps are concerned with spiritual processes: knowledge of and relationship with God or a Higher Power, self searching, confession, openness to being changed, amends, prayer and meditation, seeking God's will, and carrying the message to others. According to Carl Jung, another contributor to the early formation of the steps, alcoholic drinking is seen as a reflection of the human need, gone wrong, for a spiritual life. In a famous letter to Bill Wilson, Jung wrote that the craving for alcohol is the equivalent, on a low level, of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, or union with God. Jung notes that in the word alcohol in Latin is *spiritus*, a word that describes the highest religious experience, as well as the most depraving poison. In solving the problem of alcoholism, Jung offered the formula *spiritus contra spiritum*. A figurative translation of this Latin formula is, "it takes the Spirit of God to overcome the harmful spirit of alcohol.

Abstinence, or not drinking, signals only that one has embarked on the spiritual path described in the 12 steps. This path, or way out, is a continuing journey to wholeness and serenity. Spiritual experience is not a by-product, but the means by which an alcoholic recovers. Many AA writings, in fact, question whether it is even possible to recover by nonspiritual means. In the AA understanding, the core of alcoholism, the deep root of alcoholic behavior lies in a flawed personality. A key passage in chapter 5 of the Big Book reads, "selfishness, self-centeredness, that we think, is the root of our troubles," and

AA members habitually use the vocabulary of flaws such as grandiosity, resentment, impatience, arrogant-defiance, dishonesty, contempt and self-pity. Practice of the 12 steps brings a recovery characterized by a replacement of flawed personality with character traits such as honesty, humility, patience and willing open-mindedness.

At this point, I'd like to put a magnifying glass up to each of the steps and provide a close-up view. For each of the 12 closeups, I will provide two interpretations. The first interpretation will, I hope, reflect the standard AA interpretation. The second interpretation will begin with a restatement of the step using the language of New Thought. This restatement will be followed by a short description and explanation of how the step might be interpreted from the perspective of New Thought.

Let me begin with step 1, which states "we admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable." This step involves recognizing the nature of the problem. According to chapter 4 in the Big Book the main problem is lack of power. (quote) "at a certain point in the drinking of every alcoholic, he passes into a state where the most powerful desire to stop drinking is of absolutely no avail...for reasons yet obscure, the alcoholic has lost the power of choice in drink. Our so-called will power becomes practically nonexistent. We are unable at certain times to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago. We are without defense against the first drink "(end quote). Step 1 includes a deep emotional recognition that one is in an impossible situation that involves being condemned to keep drinking until one is destroyed. Not surprisingly, Step 1 is associated with a profound sense of hopelessness which comes as a result of giving up the struggle to control one's drinking, and admitting defeat. Surrender is a term often used by AAs to describe the first step experience. In a state of surrender, the prideful ego is sufficiently crushed so as to free the person to seek alternative solutions and ask for help. Thus, in step 1 the person finally stops trying to get the wrong methods to bring the right results. Of course, changing old behaviors requires a change in thinking. In step 1 the person experiences a shift from a non-teachable state of stubborn resistance to a more teachable and receptive state of open-minded willingness.

From the perspective of New Thought, the first step might be reworded to read as follows, "admitted that my carnal mind or human personality is limited, and that living from this part of my self has resulted in a life of bondage." One possible reinterpretation of the first step suggests that the central problem of the alcoholic is that he has lived at the human plane of consciousness and because of this believed all that the mind of the flesh has told him. As a consequence, he has been overwhelmed with all manner of lack, limitation and suffering. Step 1, therefore has to do with gaining a deep experiential understanding of the limits of the mortal mind, and is reflected in the writings of Emily Cady who has stated in Lessons in Truth, that "sometime, somewhere, every human being must come to themselves, and become tired of eating husks." The first step experience also illustrates how bad results follow false thinking, and how God permits us through ignorance to drift into wrong thoughts, and so bring trouble on ourselves. We are not automatons, thus in the process of growth, God allows us to experience our limited human side to get a first hand knowledge of the problems of sickness, sorrow and poverty

of spirit that come from living in the selfish animal part of the self. The step one experience is also consistent with the suggestion that "the very circumstances in your life that seem heartbreaking evils will turn to joy before your very eyes if you will steadfastly refuse to see anything but God in them" (Lessons in Truth) because "to them that love God, all things work together for good" (Rom 8:28). The spirit of step 1 also reflects the divine law of supply and demand which holds that the demand must be made before the supply can come forth "ask, and ye shall receive." Thus, while there is already provided a lavish abundance or every human want, this infinite supply is useless unless there be demand for it. Finally, the first step appears to involve a cleansing of the mind of false beliefs which previously had brought direful effects. In New Thought, this type of cleansing is accomplished through the practice of denial. For the alcoholic at step one denial would involve repudiating beliefs about being more powerful than alcohol. In this connection, Lessons in Truth states that "the first step toward freeing ourselves from our troubles is to get rid of our erroneous beliefs about ourselves, ... beliefs that have made such sad havoc in our lives."

This brings us to step 2. According to Alcoholics Anonymous, step 2 reads as follows: "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." If step one is a recognition of the problem, than step 2 is a recognition of the solution. Because step 2 presents the still sick and suffering alcoholics with a potential solution, it is often referred to as the "hope step." The following quote from the chapter entitled "We Agnostics" in the Big Book describes the essence of the 2nd step (quote) "if a mere code of morals or a better philosophy of life were sufficient to overcome alcoholism, many of use would have recovered long ago. But we found that such codes and philosophies did not save us, no matter how much we tried. We could wish to be moral, we could wish to be philosophically comforted, in fact, we could will these things with all our might, but the needed power wasn't there. Our human resources, as marshalled by the will, were not sufficient: they failed utterly. Lack of power, that was our dilemma. We had to find a power by which we could live, and it had to be a Power greater than ourselves. Obviously, But where and how were we to find this Power? Well, that's exactly what this book is about. Its main objective is to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself which will solve your problem." (end quote). Latter, on page 47 of the chapter We Agnostics it states "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" (p. 47). On page 55 of the same chapter it states "deep down in every man, woman and child, is the fundamental idea of God. It may be obscured by calamity, by pomp, by worship of other things, but in some form or other it is there. For faith in a Power greater than ourselves, and miraculous demonstrations of that power in human lives, are facts as old as man himself" (p. 55). The Big Book continues, stating that "we finally say that faith in some kind of God was a part of our makeup, just as much as the feeling we have for a friend. Sometimes we had to search fearlessly, but He was there. He was as much a fact as we were. We found the Great Reality deep down within us. In the last analysis, it is only there that He may be found. If our testimony helps sweep away prejudice, enables you to

think honestly, encourages you to search diligently within yourself, then, if you wish, you can join us on the Broad Highway. With this attitude, you cannot fail. The consciousness of your belief is sure to come to you."

Step 2 states that we came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. The term "sanity" implies insanity. According to the Big Book insanity for the drinking alcoholic has little to do with legal definitions of accountability and responsibility, nor does it refer to the alcoholic's crazy behavior while intoxicated.

Rather, insanity is a term which AAs use to describe the delusional state of mind of the sober alcoholic immediately prior to taking their first drink. It has often been said that an alcoholic cannot drink on the truth, for the truth of the matter is that the alcoholic cannot drink any safety like a social drinker. In order to drink at all, the sober alcoholic must first deceive himself by tell himself a lie and then believing it to be true. Thus, insanity is the inability to see the truth, or the ability to mistake false beliefs as true. In the case of the alcoholic this manifests as the remarkably persistent belief that it is possible to drink socially. According to the Big Book, the mental state that precedes a relapse into drinking is the crux of the problem..

From the perspective of New Thought, step 2 might be reworded to read as follows: "came to believe that the personal revelation of the living Christ within my own being could make me abundant and prosperous." The theme of step 2 is expressed in Mark 9:23 "all things are possible to him that believeth," and Matthew 16:12 "if any man will come after me, let him deny himself." The object of the belief that Mark refers to is one's divine character, or one's individuality. The person at step 2 must also deny or disavow the claims of error consciousness that originate in the selfish animal part of himself. Thus, from the vantage point of New Thought, the alcoholic at step 2 comes to believe that people are actually spiritual beings, and that there is a Christ side to themselves that has been heretofore hidden from awareness. To quote Lessons in Truth, "man, who is at first living in the selfish animal part of himself, will grow up through various stages and by various processes to the divine or spiritual understanding wherein he knows that he is one with the Father, and wherein he is free from all suffering... somewhere on this journey the human consciousness, or intellect comes to a place where it gladly bows to its spiritual self and confesses that this spiritual self, its Christ, is highest and is Lord. Here and forever after, not with a sense of bondage, but with joyful freedom, the heart cries out "Jehovah reigneth" (Pslams 93:1). Everyone must sooner or later come to this point of experience." (end quote). In summary, a New Thought interpretation of step 2 suggests that the alcoholic somehow draws a distinction between the mind of the flesh, and the spiritual mind. Furthermore, the alcoholic recognizes that the carnal mind of the flesh is the root of his sorrow, trouble and sickness. Finally, the alcoholic develops faith that the universal mind of the spirit has the ability to still the carnal mind and breath in Peace and Health. Step 2 requires a faith that does not depend on physical facts or on the evidence of the five senses, because the type of faith that is required is born of intuition, or the spirit of truth, ever living at the center of our being.

As described in the Big Book, Step 3 involves making a decision. Specifically step 3 states that we "made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him." Step 3 asks the recovering alcoholic to develop sufficient willingness to let God direct their thinking and behavior. The third step decision involves a choice between two alternatives. The first choice is to return to drinking and stay stuck in the problem, and the second choice is to move toward the solution, and to seek to obtain power from a divine source. This choice is described on page 25 of the Big Book, (quote) "if you are as seriously alcoholic as we were, we believe there is no middle of the road solution. We were in a position where life has becoming impossible, and if we had passed into the region from which there is no return through human aid, we had but two alternatives. One was to go on to the bitter end, blotting out the consciousness of our intolerable situation as best we could, and the other to accept spiritual help " (end quote).

The Big Book suggests that the alcoholic will be willing to accept the third step in proportion to the extent to which he or she can be convinced that a life directed by self-will is destined to fail. (quote) "a life run on self will can hardly be a success. On that basis we are almost always in collision with something or somebody ... 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.... 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.... still the play does not suit him.... he becomes angry, indignant, self-pitying. What is his basic trouble? Is he not really a self-seeker ...? Is he not a victim of the delusion that he can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of the world if he only manages well? Our actor is self-centered -ego-centric as people like to call it nowadays.... Selfishness - self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles. Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate. Sometimes they hurt us, seemingly without provocation, but we invariably find that at some time in the past we made decisions based on our selfishness which later placed us in a position to be hurt.... So our troubles, we think are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so. Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must or it kills us! God makes the removal possible. And there often seems no way out 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. This is the how and why of the third step. 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.

When we sincerely took such a position, all sorts of remarkable things followed. We had a new Employer. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well. Established on such footing, we became less and less interested in ourselves, and our little plans and designs. More and more, we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life. As we felt new power flow in, as we

enjoyed peace of mind, as we discovered we could face life successfully, as we became conscious of His presence, we began to lose our fear of today, tomorrow or the hereafter. We were reborn" (end quote).

Often times, in working the 3rd step with a sponsor, the AA member will affirm out loud the 3rd step prayer on page 63 of the Big Book, which reads as follows: "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!"

From the viewpoint of New Thought, the wording of the third step might be changed to read as follows: "made a decision to seek direct revelation of the Truth of my soul by moving away from personality and toward individuality." Step three expresses a desire on the part of the alcoholic to open more widely the invisible channel ever connecting his awareness to the Christ within, coupled with the intuitive understanding that this indwelling Divinity will work out his own salvation from all his troubles. Step three is based, in part, on the law of mind action, which states that if we replace old thoughts and motives with new ones, the difference will transform our conditions. Thus, step 3 reveals a willingness to affirm Divine will and deny human will. As noted by Emily Cady "in proportion as one increases, the other must decrease." According to New Thought, by coming into harmony with divine will, the alcoholic will gain access to all the higher laws, and forces and powers available.

This brings us to the 4th and 5th steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. According to AA, the fourth step reads as follows "made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves" while the fifth step states that "we admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs." Generally speaking, the fifth step involves a confession of the moral inventory completed in the 4th step.

The 4th step is considered by many to be the first action step. Quoting again from the Big Book, "we launched out on a course of vigorous action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning, which many of us had never attempted, Though our (3rd step) decision was a vital and crucial step, it could have little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us (from God). Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions... Therefore, we started upon a personal inventory... a business which takes no regular inventory usually goes broke. Taking a commercial inventory is a fact-finding and fact-facing process. It is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade. One object is to disclose damaged or unsalable goods, to get rid of them promptly and without regret. If the owner of the business is to be successful, he cannot fool himself about values. We did exactly the same thing with our lives. We took stock honestly. First, we searched out the flaws in our make-up which caused our failure. Being convinced that self, manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us, we considered its common manifestation. (end quote).

Briefly stated, the personality trait of self-centeredness gives rise to feelings of resentment, anger, fear, guilt, shame and remorse. Thus, the 4th step inventory actually consists of 3 different inventories: one to analyze anger and resentment, one to analyze fears, and a third to analyze sex-related harm done to others. When doing inventory, the AA member is asked to ignore the wrongs others had done them and to look for places in which they had been selfish, dishonest, inconsiderate and self-seeking. When these faults are spotted, they are placed on paper, in black and white.

This brings us to the fifth step, and I'll quote again from the Big Book. (quote) "having made our personal inventory, what shall we do about it? we have been trying to get a new attitude, a new relationship with our Creator, and to discover the obstacles in our path. We have admitted certain defects; we have ascertained in a rough way what the trouble is; we have put our finger on the weak items in our personal inventory. Now these are about to be cast out. This requires action on our part, which, when completed, will mean that we have admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our defects... 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 may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now we begin to have a spiritual experience. The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will often come strongly. We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe" (end quote).

From the perspective of New Thought, steps 4 and 5 might be reworded as follows. For step 4, it might be suggested that "*I take stock of the imperfections of my lower self or false self.*" For step 5 it might be suggested that "*I reveal to my higher self and another human being the exact nature of the imperfections of my smaller self.*" According to Lessons in Truth, the personality flaws of the lower self are remarkably similar to the one's identified in the Big Book. To quote Emily Cady, "this intellectual man, carnal mind, or whatever you choose to call him is envious and jealous and fretful and sick because he is selfish. The human self seeks its own gratification at the expense, if need be, of someone else." The 4th and 5th steps are consistent with the Law of Mind Action, which states that "thoughts in mind produce after their kind." Thus, "we begin our journey toward true spiritual understanding by cutting off the branches of our selfishness." (Emily Cady).

This brings us to steps 6 & 7. According to Alcoholics Anonymous, Step 6 states that we "were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character," while step 7 states we "humbly asked him to remove our shortcomings." Step 6 is about becoming willing to let go of old familiar personality traits that stand in the way of fully experiencing the presence of God. The quality of humility required to carry out step 7 involves further ego-puncturing and attitude adjustment because it asks the human personality to place God first and to admit that "of myself I am nothing, the Father doeth the works." Step 7 also requires faith in the proposition that God can do for us what we

cannot do for ourselves. To quote the 12 & 12 "the seventh step is where we make the change in our attitude which permits us, with humility as our guide, to move out from ourselves toward others and toward God. The whole emphasis of step seven is on humility. It is really saying to us that we now ought to be willing to try humility in seeking the removal of our shortcomings, just as we did when we admitted that we were powerless over alcohol, and came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. If that degree of humility could enable use to find the grace by which such a deadly obsession could be banished, then there must be hope of the same result respecting any other problem we could possibly have" (end quote). On page 76 of the Big Book, the alcoholic at step 7 is given two questions to ponder. First, "are we now ready to let God remove from us all the things which we have admitted are objectionable? And second, "Can He now take them all - every one? If the alcoholic still clings to something he will not let go, he is instructed to pray to God to help him to become willing. After pondering these questions for a sufficient period of time so as to respond in the affirmative, the recovering alcoholic is asked to declare that he or she has acquired sufficient willingness to be emptied of traits such as selfishness, dishonesty and inconsiderateness. At this point, the alcoholic is encouraged to affirm, out loud if desired, the 7th step prayer (quote) " My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here to do your bidding. Amen" (end quote).

From the viewpoint of New Thought, the wording of step 6 might be changed to read as follows: "*I became willing to have God remove my belief in lack and limitation.*" Step 7 might be changed to state "*I humbly asked God to remove my poverty consciousness.*"

According to the New Thought restatements, Steps 6 and 7 are consistent with the recognition that God's will is always for the alcoholic's thinking to become the highest and best that it can be. In these steps, the alcoholic asks God to remove the obstacles inherent in the human personality that block him from experiencing prosperity and the life more abundant. The major obstacle to be removed is the belief in lack and limitation, also known as poverty consciousness. This speculative reinterpretation suggests that the human personality, with its limited and constricted thinking, can be disintegrated. This possibility is consistent with New Thought teachings as expressed by Emily Cady in Lessons in Truth. (quote) "when you have learned how to abandon yourself to infinite Spirit, and have seasons of doing this daily, you will be surprised at the marvelous change that will be wrought in you without any conscious effort on your own. It will search far below your conscious mind and root out things in your nature of which you have scarcely been conscious, simply because they have lain latent there, waiting for something to bring them out. It will work into your conscious light, and life, and love, and all good, perfectly filling all your lack while you just quietly wait and receive "(end quote). The essence of step 7 is also expressed by Emerson, who has stated that man is "by his nature as unconditioned, pure, as perfect and alone as the infinite. But he doesn't know it and the smokescreen of his own conditioning forever fogs him. Thus, in step 7, the person asks for grace to enter and remove the smokescreen of the animal mind. This brings us to steps 8 and 9 in the Big Book. In step 8, we "made a list of all persons we had harmed, and become willing to make amends to them all," and in step 9 we

"made direct amends to such people wherever possible except when to do so would injure them or others." Regarding steps 8 and 9, the Big Book states the following, (quote) "we need more action, without which we find that 'Faith without works is dead.' ... We have a list of all persons we have harmed and to whom we are willing to make amends. We made the list when we took our 4th step inventory.... Now we go out to our fellows and repair the damage done in the past. We attempt to sweep away the debris which has accumulated out of our effort to live on self-will and run the show ourselves. If we haven't the will to do this, we pray to God until it comes... 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 unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough. He is like the farmer who came up out of his cyclone cellar to find his home ruined. To his wife, he remarked, "Don't see anything the matter here, Ma. Ain't it grand the wind stopped blowing?... Yes, there is a long period of reconstruction ahead. We must take the lead. A remorseful mumbling that we are sorry won't fill the bill at all... So we clean house ... asking each morning in meditation that our Creator show us the way of patience, tolerance, kindness and love. The spiritual life is not a theory. We have to live it " (end quote). The Big Book suggests that the purpose of doing steps 8 and 9 is no different from the purpose of doing the other steps: and that is to "fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us" Without doing steps 8 and 9 our minds can oftentimes be dominated by guilt, remorse and fear based on the memory of things that happened in the past. Steps 8 and 9 then, serve to remove these blocks so that God can control our minds and work through us more effectively.

The Big Book also suggests that if we are painstaking about this phase of our spiritual unfoldment, we will be amazed before we are half way through. The reason for this amazement is that good things will begin to happen. These good things are referred to at the 9th step promises. Quoting from pages 83 and 84 of the Big Book, here they are: "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 " (end quote).

From the perspective of New Thought, steps 8 & 9 might be reworded as follows. The rewording for step 8 suggests that "I made a list of all unhealed relationships and became willing to allow the Christ spirit express through me to heal them all." Step 9 suggests that "I allow the Christ spirit to express directly through me to heal my unhealed relationships wherever possible, except when to attempt to do so would injure them or others." From the vantage point of New Thought, steps 8 and 9 a sincere desire to live

by the teachings of Jesus and to emulate his actions with regard to healing the sick. Because step 9 can be considered to represent love in action, or living the abundant life, it embodies the essential message of New Thought which is not so much a message of words but of works. With its requirement of forgiveness, step 9 also exemplifies the New Thought tendency toward applying one's spiritual beliefs to solving problems of daily living.

This brings us to the 10th step 10 of Alcoholics Anonymous. Step 10 states that we "continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it" In regards to the 10th step, the Big Book states the following (quote) "it is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. We are headed for trouble if we do, for alcohol is a subtle foe. We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all of our affairs. 'How can I best serve Thee -Thy will not mine be done.' These are thoughts which must go with us constantly. We can exercise our will power along this line all we wish. It is the proper use of the will. Much has already been said about receiving strength, inspiration, and direction from Him who has all knowledge and power. If we have carefully followed directions, we have begun to sense the flow of His Spirit into us. To some extent we have become God conscious. We have begun to develop this vital 6th sense. But we must go further, and that means more action" (end quote).

Close examination of the Big Book directions for working step 10 suggests that it involves a continuous practicing of steps 4 thru 9 on a daily basis. The Big Book tells the alcoholic to continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment and fear. These character flaws were previously identified in steps 4 and 5. If and when they are found, the book gives instruction to discuss them with another person, which is step 5. Then, the book instructs to ask God to remove them, which is steps 6 and 7, and if we have harmed anyone, we make amends instantly, which is step 9. So, step 10 is really a continuous updating of steps 4 thru 9 on a one-day-at-a-time basis.

If the 10th step is sincerely worked for a period of time, the alcoholic can expect to reap the fruits of the 10th step promises, which are listed on pages 84 and 85 of the Big Book. (quote) "we will have ceased fighting anything or anyone -even alcohol. For by now, sanity will have returned. We will seldom be interested in liquor. If tempted, we will recoil from it as from a hot flame. We will react sanely and normally, and we will find that this has happened automatically. We will see that our new attitude toward liquor has been given us without any thought or effort on our part. It just comes! That is the miracle of it. We are not fighting it, neither are we avoiding temptation. We feel as though we had been placed in a position of neutrality -safe and protected. We have not even sworn off. Instead, the problem has been removed. It does not exist for us. We are neither cocky nor are we afraid. That is our experience. That is how we react so long as we keep in fit spiritual condition" (end quote).

From the viewpoint of New Thought, one possible rewording for step ten would read as follows: "*I continued to take stock of my thinking, and immediately recognized wrong*

thinking or error consciousness." A New Thought perspective on step 10 involves vigilant scanning of thought processes for the purpose of denying wrong thinking and affirming right consciousness. Step 10 asks the alcoholic to rise in consciousness when needed so as to avoid being punished by his sins. The term sin refers, of course, to error consciousness, or thinking that is off the mark or off the beam as they say in AA. Because the step helps the alcoholic to uplift or change their thinking and keep it uplifted, it allows the person to "sin no more" one moment at a time. As Emmet Fox has noted, having a negative thought run across your consciousness is like having a hot burning ash land on the sleeve of your shirt. You can do nothing and let it burn a hole, or you can brush it off. In the present case, you can brush it off with a quick application of the 10th step.

This brings us to the 11th step of Alcoholics Anonymous. Step 11 states that we "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." As noted by Joe McQuainy in his book entitled "The Steps We Took," Step 11 is the culmination of all of the previous steps, and the other steps were taken so that the 11th step could be performed effectively. To quote McQuainy, "Step 1 had to be taken so we could take step 2 - because we couldn't see the solution until we understood the problem. These two steps gave us what we needed to make a decision. The decision was Step 3: to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. The decision was an important turning point. Next we had to carry out the 3rd step decision. There were certain things that blocked us from God, and we could not get on with turning our will and our lives over to the care of God until we removed those things that were blocking us. Therefore, we took the action steps: Steps 4,5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and then 10, which is the continuation of steps 4 thru 9. As a result of the actions of Steps 4 thru 10, we removed or had removed for us the things that were blocking us from God. Now we can finally carry out the decision we made in step 3 of turning our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. Through prayer and meditation, we can receive God's will for us and the power to carry it out. If we can do that, we will have carried out the decision that we made in step 3. Steps 3 and 11 are the pillars of the steps. We could say that the steps have two crucial points: the decision to turn over our will in step 3 and the receiving of God's will in step 11" (p. 135).

The 11th step prayer appears on page 99 of the 12 and 12. Some of you may recognize this prayer as the St. Francis prayer. "Lord, make me a channel of thy peace -that where there is hatred, I may bring love - that where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness - that where there is discord, I may bring harmony - that where there is error, I may bring truth - that where there is doubt, I may bring faith -that where there is despair, I may bring light -that where there is sadness, I may bring joy. Lord, grant that I may seek to comfort than to be comforted - to understand, than be understood - to love, than to be loved. For it is by self-forgetting that one finds. It is by forgiving that one is forgiven. It is by dying that one awakens to Eternal Life. Amen." (p. 99).

From the perspective of New Thought, the 10th step might be reworded as follows: "*I Sought to enter the silence and experience an inner revealing of the truth of my oneness*"

with the Christ spirit which is who I am." As I have restated it here, Step 11 is highly consistent with the New Thought belief that "we all have direct access to the Father in us, the central 'I' of our being and the great whole of life, love, wisdom, and power which is God." In step 11, the alcoholic seeks to be obedient to the "still small voice" of the indwelling presence, knowing that the more he learns to act from the voice, the stronger becomes his individuality. According to Emily Cady, "we can all learn how to turn the conscious mind toward Universal Mind or Spirit within us. We can, by practice, learn how to make this every-day topsy-turvy mind of the flesh be still and let the mind that is God think in us and through us." The importance of resting in the silence cannot be overemphasized. Once again, I quote a passage from Lessons in Truth, which states "you may be so busy with the doing, the outgoing of love to help others, that you find no time to go apart. But the command, or rather the invitation, is "come ye yourselves apart ... and rest awhile" (Mark 6:3). And it is the only way in which you will ever gain definite knowledge, true wisdom, newness of experience, steadiness of purpose, or power to meet the unknown, which must come in all daily life. Doing is secondary to being. When we are consciously the Truth, it will radiate from us and accomplish the works without our ever running to and fro" (end quote).

Whereas in the 3rd step, the alcoholic seeker made a decision to experience direct revelation of the Truth of his soul by moving away from personality and toward individuality," in the 11th step the alcoholic rests in his secret place and receives intuitive knowledge of his oneness with the Father. In this secret place lies the point of mystical union between the human mind and the Spirit in us, and "each man must for himself wait upon God for the inner illumination which is lasting and real. God alone can whisper the secret to each one separately" (Lessons In Truth). .

This brings us to the 12th and final step of the planned program of recovery developed by Alcoholics Anonymous. Step 12 states that "having had a spiritual awakening as the results of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs." Step 12 provides a guarantee, or promises alcoholics that if they take the first 11 steps, they will have a spiritual awakening. The Big Book provides a detailed and somewhat lengthy description of the meaning of the term "spiritual awakening." To quote the Big Book, "the terms 'spiritual experience' and 'spiritual awakening' are used many times in this book, which upon careful reading shows that the personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism has manifested itself among us in many different forms. Yet, it is true that our first printing gave many readers the impression that these personality changes or religious experiences must be in the nature of sudden and spectacular upheavals. Happily for everyone, this conclusion is erroneous. In the first few chapters a number of sudden revolutionary changes are described. Though it was not our intention to create such an impression, many alcoholics have nevertheless concluded that in order to recover they must acquire an immediate and overwhelming 'God-consciousness' followed at once by a vast change in feeling and outlook. Among our rapidly growing membership of thousands of alcoholics such transformations, though frequent, are by no means the rule. Most of our experiences are what the psychologist William James calls the 'educational variety' because they develop slowly over the period of time. Quite often friends of the new newcomer are aware of the

difference long before he is himself. He finally realizes that he has undergone a profound alteration in his reaction to life; that such a change could hardly have been brought about by himself alone. What often takes place in a few months could seldom have been accomplished by years of self-discipline. With few exceptions, our members find that they have tapped an unsuspected inner resource which they presently identify with their own conception of a Power greater than themselves. Most of us think this awareness of a Power greater than ourselves is the essence of spiritual experience. Our more religious members call it 'God-consciousness.' Most emphatically we wish to say that any alcoholic capable of honestly facing his problems in the light of our experience can recover, provided he does not close his mind to all spiritual concepts. He can only be defeated by an attitude of intolerance or belligerent denial. We find that one need have difficulty with the spirituality of the program. Willingness, honesty and open mindedness are the essentials of recovery. But these are indispensable" (end quote).

From the perspective of New Thought, the 12th step might be reworded as follows. "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, I carried the message of goodness to others, and practiced the Christ life in my daily affairs." In the present context, the term spiritual awakening is used to refer to the ineffable intuitive state of knowledge or awareness gained by direct inner revelation of the presence of God and our oneness with him. According to Emily Cady, spiritual awakenings are timed to occur "in that day when, more than riches and honor and power and selfish glory, you shall desire spiritual understanding; in that day will come to you the revelation of God in you, and you will be conscious of the indwelling Father, who is life and strength and power and peace. The present reinterpretation of the 12th step is also consistent with the suggestion that "in the onward growth, the time will come to every man when he will hear the divine voice within him saying, 'come up higher,' and he will pass beyond any merely selfish desires that are just for his own comfort's sake. He will desire good that he may have the more to give out, knowing that as good (or God) flows through him to others it will make him 'every whit whole' (John, 7:23)" Finally, the emphasis on service in the 12th step is reflected in a passage from Lessons in Truth which states that "there must be an equal conscious receiving from the Father and giving out to the world, a perfect equilibrium between the inflowing and the outgiving to keep perfect harmony. We must each learn how to wait renewedly upon God for the infilling, and then go and give out to every creature that which we have received, as Spirit leads us to give, either in preaching, teaching or silently living the Truth. That which fills us will radiate from us without effort right in the place in life where we stand" (Emily Cady).

This brings me the summary and conclusion of this talk on New Thought and the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. By way of summary, I will very quickly recap each of the translated steps. But first, let me conclude by saying that the 12 steps of AA fit hand-in-glove with New Thought principles and practices. Hopefully, more work will be conducted in the future to better integrate the areas. It is likely that continued attempts to map out areas of interface will prove useful to both New Thought and AA.

I'd like to thank the Society for the Study of Metaphysical Religion for inviting me to speak. Before closing, I'd like to quickly review the 12 adapted steps that were suggested as a New Thought program of recovery from alcoholism.

Step 1: "admitted that my carnal mind or human personality is limited, and that living from this part of my self has resulted in a life of bondage."

Step 2: came to believe that the personal revelation of the living Christ within my own being could make me abundant and prosperous."

Step 3: "made a decision to seek direct revelation of the Truth of my soul by moving away from personality and toward individuality."

Step 4: "I take stock of the imperfections of my lower self or false self."

Step 5: "I reveal to my higher self and another human being the exact nature of the imperfections of my smaller self."

Step 6: "I became willing to have God remove my belief in lack and limitation."

Step 7: "I humbly asked God to remove my poverty consciousness."

Step 8: "I made a list of all unhealed relationships and became willing to allow the Christ spirit express through me to health them all."

Step 9: "I allow the Christ spirit to express directly through me to heal my unhealed relationships wherever possible, except when to attempt to do so would injure them or others."

Step 10: I continued to take stock of my thinking, and immediately recognized wrong thinking or error consciousness."

Step 11: "I Sought to enter the silence and experience an inner revealing of the truth of my oneness with the Christ spirit which is who I am."

Step 12: "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, I carried the message of goodness to others, and practiced the Christ life in my daily affairs."

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