

. . .As the Result of These Steps. . .

He found that there are solid benefits in reworking all the Steps

JIM CAME into AA more than twenty years ago and bounced in and out for the next fourteen or fifteen years. He'd stay sober for six months sometimes, and then disappear for another round of booze and trouble.

In January 1971, he came back again--this time with a difference. He began to work the Twelve Steps. Shortly before that, Jim and his wife had been called to school and told that their youngest son, who was eight, was retarded. The boy was put in a special class, because he had difficulty learning and remembering.

"About that time," says Jim, "I began trying to live honestly and do what the Steps tell me to do. Within six months, my son was back in his regular class, and he was consistently making grades near the top of his class. As I changed and got to be healthier, my son recovered right along with me. My drinking and actions had made him sick, and as I got better, this was reflected in more health for him. As I look back, it was really me that was retarded,"

Some months ago, I had dinner at Jim's home. After dinner, we sat and talked. I asked how his son, who is now sixteen, was doing, and Jim replied, "He just got his report card, and the lowest grade on it was a B. Not only that, but he's been on the honor roll every grade period since he started high school. None of this would have happened if all I had done was quit drinking."

While there are probably limitless definitions of spiritual awakenings, Jim's experience remains spotlighted in my mind as an example of a *real* spiritual awakening. "As the result of these Steps," a human being starts to radiate God's healing power. The experience gives life to the sentence on page 77 in the Big Book: "Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us."

Sobriety without consistent work on the Steps misses the mark. On the other hand, if I work with the tools of the program gradually, I find that it gives me what I need, and this, in turn, becomes what I really want.

My experience during sobriety has shown with stunning frequency that I'm often a very poor judge of what's good for me. We sometimes hear that alcoholics, as a group, are smarter than other people. I don't know where that myth began, but I am sure it wasn't started by a member of Al-Anon. As I've stayed sober in AA, my self-will has again and again bruised and battered me while I frantically battled and schemed to get what I wanted, only to find it brought misery as its inevitable companion. However, the pain created by "self-will run riot" has never been wasted, because it has always provided a persuasive inducement for spiritual effort.

A tireless capacity to complicate my life led me into a long period of investigating all those attractive, advanced approaches that float about on the fringes of the AA Fellowship. They promise much but invariably deliver little, except occasional symptom relief and gratification of the feeling that I'm unique, that AA may be enough for others, but I'm special. With all of them, careful study and effort showed they have much less than meets the eye.

Health means wholeness--whether it's spiritual, mental, physical, or emotional. Nothing stands by itself, and the prescription for regaining or retaining wholeness is very simple and has nothing to do with special groups, special methods, or relentless study. The mind has extremely limited usefulness as a tool for experiencing reality.

Working and reworking the Twelve Steps provides experience, a spiritual experience such as Jim had, and our lives change. Reading won't do it. Talking won't do it. Thinking won't do it. Arguing and philosophizing won't do it. For that matter, just going to meetings won't do it.

Working the Twelve Steps *will*. It's outlined in simple prose in that part of Chapter Five that's read at the start of many meetings--"How It Works." And that *is* how it works, but the words sometimes become an automatic, unthinking litany that we salute but never get around to doing.

In his introduction to *The Perennial Philosophy*, Aldous Huxley wrote: "Unfortunately, familiarity with traditionally hallowed writing tends to breed, not indeed contempt, but something which, for practical purposes, is almost as bad--namely, a kind of reverential insensibility, a stupor of the spirit, an inward deafness to the meaning of sacred words."

Huxley might have been talking to you and me about the "stupor of the spirit" that often surrounds and makes mysterious precisely how we get well. Avoiding the first drink is only the first step in recovery. Again and again and again, I've seen AA members waste impressive amounts of time and money looking for answers for painful inner problems, never understanding that what they need is patiently waiting for them in the AA program.

There's no possible way to get by on the work I did in the Steps years ago. My answer is continuing work with *every* one of the Twelve Steps to maintain health and growth today. For the first sixteen years of sobriety, I suffered from the common misconception that we work the first nine Steps once and subsist on the last three for the rest of our lives. I'd never tried anything else, so probably could be forgiven my ignorance. Finally, I ran into the view that there are solid benefits in reworking *all* of the Steps. I began doing that and have experienced far greater rewards as a result.

It's all here. If we work the Steps, all of the Twelve Steps, on a continuing basis, we get what we need and what we really want. God's healing power, through the program, raises us out of the pit we've dug for ourselves. Gradually, often painfully, as we fight to remain ignorant, the program lifts us into the light where we can see, and breathe, and live as spiritually awakened human beings.

P. M.
Riverside, Illinois