

July 1975

The Steps Are the Program

*Just as each of us is a totality,
and not a collection of related parts,
so each Step of the twelve
is connected to every other Step*

THE WORD "heal" means "make whole." The aim of AA is to help a shattered, fragmented human being find wholeness, direction, and freedom. This begins with release from our compulsion to drink and, through our use of the Twelve Steps, gradually moves into growing freedom from fear, depression, anxiety, and the overwhelming self-concern that characterized life before AA.

Ecologists hammer persistently at the theme that destroying the natural balance anywhere will have an effect, frequently adverse, somewhere else. Nothing stands alone. Our lives are not compartmentalized. Pollution in one segment of my life will poison another, seemingly unconnected area of my life. Failure to work *all* of the Steps will eventually create problems such as depression, anxiety, fear, hostility, boredom, and finally drunkenness.

While the scientific method has generated sweeping advances in technology, it has also created the trend toward fragmentation and re-

ductionism that continues today. Our ecological crisis is only one example of this unhappy legacy, which has resulted in a persistent inability to see the connection of one thing with another.

Dr. Barry Commoner, in his widely acclaimed book *The Closing Circle*, describes the problem this way: "There is indeed a specific fault in our system of science, and in the resultant understanding of the natural world. This fault is reductionism, the view that effective understanding of a complex system can be achieved by investigating the properties of its isolated parts." Commoner goes on to say: "[reductionism is] the dominant viewpoint of modern science as a whole. Reductionism tends to isolate scientific disciplines from each other, and all of them from the real world."

Commoner etches a disturbing picture of man's technology, which provides power without purpose, means but no meaning. Incapable of seeing the connection of one thing

with another, its hyperspecialization tries to solve problems without seeing either the real causes or the necessary solutions.

Loren Eiseley, the anthropologist who writes with a prophet's insight, carries the same unsettling message in *The Unexpected Universe*. Describing man's talent for creating difficulties for himself, Eiseley points out that each time science solves a problem, it creates two new ones. Like Commoner, he indicts reductionism and its accompanying fragmentation as the culprits.

In the 1950's, I worked on overseas construction jobs in Thule, Greenland, and Point Barrow, Alaska. I got to know some of the Eskimos in Thule and Barrow and spent some time studying their cultures. Like all nonliterate groups, they originally saw everything as a unity. Their families, friends, and work, the animals, the land, the sea, and God as they understood Him were all One. To the degree that they have been influenced by our tech-

nology and culture, that sense of unity has been shattered, and problems similar to ours have been created. As their culture fragmented, they became fragmented. Like many peoples in transition between two cultures, the Barrow Eskimos seemed to adopt the worst aspects of both.

During those years, my AA came primarily from the Big Book. Many times, I've seen in Chapter Five: "Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program ..." Is recovery simply not drinking? Not at all. Those early AAs, who understood so well the need for thoroughness, wrote on page 82: "We feel a man is unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough." With precise clarity, these same sober drunks defined our objective on page 77: "Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us."

In AA, we find some conven-

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tional wisdom that has flourished through the years, but, on examination, is seen to have absolutely no connection with the program. "There are no musts," for example. Despite the frequency of phrases in the Big Book such as "If we are planning to stop drinking there *must* be no reservation of any kind" and "We *must* not shrink at anything," we hear AAs declare there are no musts at all. In my experience, "There are no musts" only for those members who never bothered to find out what the program is really about.

Each Step of the twelve is connected to every other Step, and they work as a unity. With deafening consistency, we hear that these are "suggested" Steps. Again, nowhere do we read this in the Big Book. "Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery" (page 59). Totally different. What's suggested is a program of Twelve Steps. Used honestly and thoroughly, they provide precise results.

Certainly, it's my privilege to use part of them, none of them, or all of them. Regardless of my approach, I'm still a member of this Fellow-

ship. Tradition Three guarantees this. It seems to me that considerable confusion arises on this point, however. I don't have to do anything to be a member of AA. On the other hand, to follow the program and get the results it guarantees, there are a number of things I *must* do.

It's my right to use six of the Steps, three of them, or none at all, but what I have then is something other than the AA program. At that point, what I have is my own invention. It's a product of my own arrogant stupidity and my unwillingness, once again, to pay attention and follow directions. It's the kind of blindness T. S. Eliot must have meant when he observed, "Many people think they're emancipated when, in reality, they're only unbuttoned."

A fragmented program will leave me fragmented. Using part of the prescription produces inadequate results. "Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program . . ." My life is a totality, and long ago it became obvious that it can't be compartmentalized. Dishonesty in one area creates problems in another area. Healing in one segment provides better health in another section. It *is* all connected. Each Step blends with another in an integrated, comprehensive program designed to transform you and me into human beings capable of willingly and joyously doing God's will.

One of the worst bits of advice I ever got was to work the first nine Steps *once* and then try to subsist on the last three for the rest of my life. That is simply another form of fragmentation. Redoing every one of the Steps provides results I never experienced with the other method. The demands of the program are simple, precise, and specific. The guarantees are equally precise and specific. Viewing each of us as a totality, rather than a collection of slightly related parts, the program speaks to our conditions wherever we are in sobriety. The Steps enable us to move from where we are within ourselves toward the place we belong.

Loren Eiseley once wrote of a Brazilian fish with a two-lensed eye. The upper lens examines the world of sunlight and air, while the lower inspects the watery depths in which the fish swims. Said Eiseley: "Now the fish, we might say, looks simultaneously into two worlds of reality, though what he makes of this divided knowledge we do not know. In the case of man, although there are degrees of seeing, we can observe that the individual has always possessed the ability to see beyond naked reality into some other dimension, some place outside the realm of what might be called 'facts.' "

Seeing my life with the "two-lensed eye" created by persistent work with the Steps, I can be at ease in the swiftly changing society where I make my living, because part of my vision is focused on the timeless

world opened to me by AA's eternal truths. AA works, but it does *not* work on my terms. A fragmented, "individual" program is destined to bring only partial recovery and leave me as bewildered and lost as my Eskimo friends in Point Barrow.

On the other hand, with lives grounded in eternal principles, "We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace.... Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively

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know how to handle situations that used to baffle us" (pages 83 and 84 in the Big Book). What happens outside me is far less important than what's happening inside. My being *does* attract my life; repeated work with each of the Twelve Steps generates changes within me that are reflected in improvements around me. Simple, but not always easy, the AA program gives me everything needed to become what I should be. Finally, there is no you or me or them. Everything *is* connected to everything else, and the salvation of each of us is linked with the salvation of all of us.

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