

Article

Finding God through the Spirituality of the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

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Abstract: The 12 Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous has provided relief for individuals recovering from alcoholism for over 75 years. The key to the recovery process is a spiritual experience as the result of practicing the daily discipline of the 12 Steps, a process which evokes a psychic change sufficient to recover from this disease. Although a relatively new spiritual discipline, the 12 Step program is built upon a foundation of much older and more traditional paths to God including devotion, understanding, service and meditation. Recent research provides insights into the 12 Step program. Specifically, the path of recovery is highlighted by the reduction of resentment and the promotion of forgiveness which are key factors of recovery.

Keywords: 12 Steps; spirituality; God; addiction recovery

1. Introduction

The 12 Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous, developed in the mid-1930s, provides a spiritual path for individuals struggling with addiction. A current estimate of worldwide membership in Alcoholics Anonymous is approximately two million (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, [1], p. xxiii). Although this spiritual discipline is less than one hundred years old, the 12 Steps program follows the same spiritual paths that have been utilized in established religions throughout the world.

Chopra [2] elaborated upon traditional paths to God from a multi-faith perspective which include devotion, understanding, service and meditation. In addition, these four paths to God seem to be valid and universal regardless of one's religious orientation. Pastoral counselors and mental health

professionals may be familiar with a way that runs parallel to those traditional paths, and also integrates and unifies them, merging them into a spiritual thoroughfare or a sacred highway of recovery. Specifically, by utilizing the 12 Step program a member in recovery learns not only to navigate through the treacherous waters of addictive substances and associated behaviors, but also manages to sail in the serene seas of spirituality. This article provides an overview of the 12 Steps and the process that guides the person who chronically misuses alcohol onto the road to recovery—a course which ultimately leads to God.

2. Four Traditional Paths to God

Chopra [2] indicated that each of these four routes involve a lifetime journey. Although distinctively different, each path is designed toward attaining a transformation into a higher reality. The first of these, the path of devotion, is the way of the heart and often begins with a feeling of joy. The direction of this path leads into an inner journey through worship, awe and wonder that goes far beyond mere attendance at religious services. This path involves a spiritual lifestyle that is wondrous and fully alive, vibrant and enthusiastically spiritual and mystical. The great advantage of this pathway is the resulting emotional delight as God touches the heart. Moments of bliss and intense gratitude are common, but so are the times of emotional turbulence—a process found in most relationships. An ideal devotee of this path might resemble Rumi, the 13th-century Persian poet, and Sufi mystic.

The second path is the way of understanding. Followers of this track are often set into motion with a flash of insight, or a sudden realization with profound effects. This process opens the mind to explore the great questions of life, of existence and of purpose, as well as how to approach life in general. The devotee of the path of understanding avoids arid mental techniques and procedures of application, but nevertheless maintains a steady passionate drive forward when seeking and relating to God. Although Chopra [2] believed that this was the narrowest of all of the paths, the necessary requirements include a mental acumen sufficiently skillful to see through illusions and avoid common intellectual pitfalls. While devotees of this path will not only study scripture academically, the important aspect is that the person lives a life based on faith and understanding. It is a life, lived passionately with a conscious contact with God which is nourished by spiritual reading and revelation. Attributes necessary for this path include a strong intellect, an intensely focused passion and an unflinching curiosity. The Kierkegaardian concepts of ‘single-mindedness’ and ‘purity of heart’ seem to drive toward the ideal of the way of understanding.

The third path, the way of service, starts with an act of humility. This pathway involves taking action, of performing charitable works for others and the giving of time selflessly. This is a humble way of life which asks for nothing in return for personal action. However, such a process involves discernment regarding what actions bring will bring God closer. The service provider often experiences delight in the process of giving. An ideal model for this path includes the concept that who one is and what one does are one in the same, and might resemble the actions of Francis of Assisi.

The fourth and final traditional path is the way of meditation. This passageway commences with an experience of being and includes the path of consciousness. Practice of this path includes mindfulness and a growing sense of personal awareness. Devotees of this method often report being brought out of an inner void—an emptiness that seems to bring the person into a moment of creation. It should be

noted that this process does not resort to the use of mood or mind-altering substance to attain such a level of expanded consciousness. Chopra [2] described consciousness as the womb of creation since everything that an individual thinks, says or does, begins there. Chopra [2] offered the example of Julian of Norwich as a model for this path; emphasizing that meditation was the most solitary of all of the paths—a form of self-communion that is practiced in silence. This mystical process is reflected in the Christian classic *The Cloud of Unknowing* [3].

Overall, these four paths have been used for countless generations as universal ways to reach a higher reality, as each person takes the inner journey of one's own choosing and becomes transformed in the process. However, a divergent fifth path has been utilized with the hopes of attaining a higher reality which includes the use of mood and mind-altering substances that modify a person's perception of reality. Unfortunately, many individuals have resorted to the use of these substances in order to attain feelings which provide comfort and pleasure. The user of the substances often pays a heavy price which includes addiction and a path which leads to self-destruction.

3. Spiritual Misdirection

Clinebell [4] believed that alcoholism was a misguided and futile egotistical endeavor to satisfy deep spiritual needs. Kurtz [5] viewed alcoholism as a misinterpretation of spiritual needs as drinking produced a god-like euphoria. Jellinek [6] declared that alcohol provided a spiritual shortcut for those struggling with alcohol misuse. Bill W., the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, supported the same idea with his statement that an "alcoholic" is a fellow who tries to get his religion out of a bottle, when what he really wants is unity within himself, unity with God (*The Tidings*, [7], p. 17). On the day that the co-founders of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) met Bill Wilson mentioned to Bob Smith that "You, a drinking alcoholic are not god, as I a drinking alcoholic was not God. And I am not God even now as a sober alcoholic" ([5], p. 35).

However, this idea connecting the effects of abusive drinking and spiritual misdirection is not a recent realization as much information has been documented by numerous sources since ancient times [8]. In short, the result of consuming alcohol and drugs produces not only pleasant feelings, but also a reduction of discomfort. So powerful are these substances that the effects of were often deified and incorporated into religious rituals by various civilizations including the Babylonians, Sumerians, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans.

AA co-founder, Bill W. suggested a path to recovery as he wrote, "First of all we had to quit playing God" ([1], p. 62). The process of recovery begins with the first step of the AA program by admitting that the misuser of alcohol is not all powerful, and that such a short-term reprieve can never provide the sought-after bliss. Physical and emotional pain compels the alcohol misuser to acknowledge the serious nature of the illness, which begins to counter the seductive delusion offered by alcohol. Although the mental obsession, deludes the person into the belief that such a pattern of drinking is normal, the alcohol misuser continues to drink in an attempt to deaden the emotional pain [1]. The misuser gradually realizes that the magical elixir which produced such incredible feelings no longer is effective, as the pleasure is short-lived as the pain grows in intensity and duration. The misuse of alcohol tumbles down into a psychological abyss and "hits bottom", ultimately feeling betrayed by alcohol [9]. The process of "bottoming out" involves an unconditional surrender, an

understanding which acknowledges that alcohol has failed to solve life's problems and more importantly it has failed to produce the same level of euphoria that was once offered to the misuser of alcohol.

4. Alcoholism as Idolatry

May [10] indicated that addiction was idolatry and has become the sacred disease of our time. Furthermore, addicted persons have displaced their desire for God when obsessing over a substance, or activity. Addiction, in all of its forms today, has become a 'jealous god', demanding that the addicted person sacrifice all that is held dear, even life itself. As such, addiction is the god of both pleasure and pain. Furthermore, May [10] specified that addictions enslave the addicted person to "specific behaviors, things, or people. These objects of attachment then become preoccupations and obsessions; they come to rule our lives" ([10], p. 3). These mental obsessions seem to stoke the emotions to a fever pitch, tantalizing the appetites and evoke sensations of craving.

In his 1961 correspondence with AA Co-founder Bill W., Carl Jung described the sensation of craving for alcohol as "equivalent, on a low level, of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in the medieval language: the union with God...You see, 'alcohol' in Latin is 'spiritus' and you use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as for the most depraving poison. The helpful formula is: *spiritus contra spiritum*" ([11], pp. 280–81).

As such, when the individual consumes alcohol an internal process unfolds which seems to satisfy spiritual yearnings. The euphoric exhilaration becomes a cheap substitute for spiritual sustenance. Thus, the misuse of alcohol experiences a pleasurable, albeit passing, fancy rather than having a spiritual relationship with God. Jung indicated that a vital spiritual experience was the solution to the alcohol problem ([1], p. 27). Specifically, after having a spiritual experience the desire to continue drinking alcohol ceases.

5. Commonalties among All Addictions

Although addiction is frequently associated with the misuse of certain substances such as alcohol or drugs, there are also "process addictions" which focus on specific behaviors and activities. Some of the latter category may involve food, sex, gambling and work, but within the past few decades others have emerged such as compulsive shopping, hoarding behavior and various offshoots involving the Internet [12]. While the etiology of each addiction varies according to a diverse array of theories, some common factors include heredity, environment, stress, learning and behavioral frequency [13]. However, the common factor among addictions involves the pursuit of a promising pleasure—specifically, if that pleasure results in mood elevation mood.

The process of addiction is insidious, rarely staying within one individual, but proliferating within the family. Carnes [14] indicated that addictions reach into "the most fundamental human processes" ([14], p. 8). Furthermore, once an addiction becomes established, the creative energies become destructive, demoralizing and compulsive in nature. Healthy boundaries among family members are destroyed as a result of a faulty belief system, delusional thought patterns and behaviors designed to minimize pain ([14], p. 29). Carnes [14] warned of multiple addictions which infiltrate and perpetuate within the family system evolving into family illness.

6. Internal Effects of Addictions

An ancient proverb often circulated around AA meetings is as follows: “A man takes a drink, the drink takes a drink, the drink takes the man.” The significance of this adage seems to have taken on a deeper meaning in the writings of Goleman [15] which elaborated upon the spiritual and psychological effects associated with destructive emotions, such as jealousy, envy and low self-esteem coupled with a display of overconfidence. These characteristics, among others, are often associated with the negative emotional states found in the addictions. In addition, Goleman [15] described a process of perceptual distortion which creates a chasm between what is perceived as opposed to how things are in reality.

Excessive attachment, as it occurs in addiction, not only impairs the addicted person’s ability to perceive reality accurately, but also prevents the addicted person from living a balanced life. The addicted person is not only unable to distinguish between the pleasant and unpleasant aspects of life, but is grossly insensitive to the addiction-related consequences which impact others. This point is emphasized by Dr. Silkworth’s observation that such people are “restless, irritable and discontented” and “cannot after a time differentiate the truth from the false” ([1], p. xxviii). Thoughts, feelings and behaviors seem to run in extremes as the addicted person gravitates toward pleasurable events which promise immediate gratification or offer a momentary reprieve from boredom, loneliness or pain. The emotional momentum gathers as the addicted person ignores personal responsibilities and obligations in an attempt to escape, avoid or withdraw from the unpleasantness of life. Additional emotions, such as anger, fear and resentment, compound these issues [1].

Goleman [15] cited five destructive emotions which include:

- (1) Hatred—wishing to destroy the happiness in others or to inflict suffering;
- (2) Desire—being overly attached to pleasure while clinging to the personal perception of things;
- (3) Confusion—or ignorance as a mental state which obscures wisdom and knowledge; specifically with regard to what should be shunned in order to achieve happiness and avoid suffering;
- (4) Pride—a feeling of superiority accompanied with an inflated sense of self which blinds the individual to personal defects; and
- (5) Jealousy—the inability to rejoice in the happiness of others.

Addictions cultivate the aforementioned destructive emotions until they overpower the alcohol misuser, forcing the admission of personal powerlessness and the unmanageability of life [1]. After the person quits drinking, the focus must center on getting rid of selfishness and self-centeredness which is “the root of our troubles” ([1], p. 62.) In order to counter the internal effects of addictions through a 12 Step program, the newcomer must learn to curb impulses, redirect self-centered thoughts and transform destructive emotions. In order to bring about this change, Silkworth ([1], p. xxix) indicated that “unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of...recovery.” Furthermore, Silkworth emphasized that “something more than human power is needed to produce the essential psychic change” ([1], p. xxix). Furthermore, alcoholism is “an illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer” ([1], p. 44).

It should be noted that the 12 Step program has been adapted to serve the recovery needs of individuals who suffer from various other addictions, including drugs, gambling, food, and other conditions as well.

7. Building a Spiritual Foundation in Steps 1, 2, and 3

Misuse of alcohol affects the person physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally and socially. The 12 Step program offers procedures, which enable the person to recover in all of these areas. The essence of the first three steps must be grasped for the spiritual process of recovery to begin. In short, this occurs when one in recovery helps another by encouraging the newcomer to stop drinking. As a result of the first three steps, not only is alcohol dislodged from the center of the person's life, but the newcomer displays a willingness to have God reside within the center.

Although the socio-historical and cultural context of the 12 Step program stems from the Oxford Group and the spirituality reflects Christian heritage, it should be noted that the religious affiliation of Alcoholics Anonymous members includes Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Hindus, Moslems, and Buddhists ([1], p. xx). Similarly, as stated in the Foreword to Third Edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous* ([1], p. xxii), "The basic principles of the A.A. program, it appears, hold good for individuals with many different lifestyles, just as the program has brought recovery to those of many different nationalities."

Before elaborating on how the first three steps provide a spiritual foundation for recovery, these steps should be mentioned ([1], p. 59).

- (1) We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
- (2) Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- (3) Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

In taking Step 1, the addicted person acknowledges that life has become unmanageable and that the power of choice has been lost in a specific activity, be it drinking or by consuming mood and mind-altering substances. Although self-acceptance may begin with the willingness to surrender by taking Step 1, the process requires a readiness to place oneself onto a spiritual conveyer belt—a process which moves one eventually onto the path of change and ultimate transformation. For most individuals in recovery Step 2 is a gradual process of trust in coming to believe that a power-greater-than-oneself could restore the person to a sane lifestyle. Initially, an admission occurs with the realization that addiction has guided the person onto a path of self-destruction. The three-fold process offered is as follows:

- "One must come"—specifically to meetings;
- "One must come to"—meaning that the person becomes aware that a change is possible; and
- "One must come to believe"—namely by seeing the changes that have occurred in the lives of others in recovery and coming to the personal realization that it is available for the newcomer.

The importance of the fellowship is crucial in Step 2. Specifically, the newcomer begins to identify with the testimony of others who have recovered. The process of identification includes relating to patterns of thoughts, emotional reactions and out of control behaviors as members of the fellowships share their "experience, strength and hope" ([1], p. xxii). Step 2 involves a belief that the newcomer's path to recovery will be the same as those with greater lengths of sobriety.

After the establishment of a foundation of trust in Step 2 the newcomer turns to God for guidance in Step 3 and waits for the intuitive knowledge that God provides ([16], p. 103). Step 3 involves a letting

go of one's life and one's will and to allow a "Higher Power", the AA term for God, to release the self-imposed bonds and move in the direction of freedom. The three-fold procedure, simplified into three words becomes: think, pray, act. In doing so, the newcomer thinks about the pain that is avoided in sobriety and recalls with gratitude the positive changes that have occurred through abstinence. The process continues with frequent prayer along with a willingness to continue in recovery by taking the appropriate action ([16], p. 107). Through repetition the newcomer learns to counter the initial impulse to react emotionally and return to the addiction. After practicing Step 1 the level of awareness continues to grow and progress through the remaining steps. However, Step 3 is a pivoting point as of turning the will over to a Higher Power ([16], p. 101). The decision to trust God hinges upon the development of a new concept, a God of one's own understanding [1].

The process of trust begins with the selection of a person's own conception of God. However, in order to make this choice there must be a willingness on the part of the individual to believe in the possibility of a Power greater than oneself ([1], p. 14).

These first three steps require that person seeking recovery include three essentials; humility, acceptance and a surrender to God. The process includes the understanding that the person is in the grip of a progressive and incurable disease. Furthermore, the person accepts the fact that despite all of the efforts to change, the individual is completely powerless over the addiction without the aid of a Higher Power. The understanding of this process helps to move the person from the pre-contemplative stage to the contemplative and finally to the action stage of change.

8. Transformation through the Action Steps

Steps 4 through 12 have been referred to as the 'action steps' by members of the AA fellowship [17]. These steps are listed below:

- (4) Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
- (5) Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
- (6) Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
- (7) Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
- (8) Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
- (9) Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
- (10) Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
- (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.
- (12) Having had a spiritual awakening as these result of the steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs" ([1], pp. 59–60).

The "action" refers to the regimen of daily maintenance provided by an AA sponsor. A sponsor is an AA member who has completed the steps. Daily guidance for the newcomer is available through a sponsor, a person who has had a spiritual experience as the result of the 12 Steps [18]. Sponsors provide guidance to the newcomer by assisting in practical application of the 12 Steps, along with

guidance in prayers designed to overcome fear, anger and resentment. Sponsors assist the newcomer in preparing a 4th Step inventory of fears, resentments and harms done to others.

The 5th Step involves the sharing of one's defects of character with another person, a process which promotes self-knowledge and acceptance [17]. Step 5 is crucial in promoting change which enables the possibility of recovery to occur [18]. AA cofounder Bill W. offered a summary of the process: "All true communication must be founded on mutual need. We saw that each sponsor would have to admit humbly his own needs as clearly as those of his prospect" ([19], p. 165). Step 6 includes a willingness to get rid of personal shortcomings and Step 7 requires asking God to remove them [20]. Step 6 begins the removal of old destructive habits and the associated dramatic mood swings ([16], p. 217). In addition, Step 6 allows for changes in one's current identity and self-image as one becomes open to added growth and recovery ([16], p. 216).

Each step of the AA program advances the newcomer toward the essential spiritual experience [21]. However, before God enters fully, personal selfishness must be removed—a process that occurs in the action steps which includes the Steps 4 through 12. The newcomer is able to straighten and realign mental and emotional processes in Steps 4, 5, 6 and 7. Personal relationships are mended in Steps 8, 9 and 10. In Step 8 a list of people that one has harmed is examined and used as a guide to make amends to others [17]. Amends are made to those individuals in Step 9 either by a personal apology or restitution in what was damaged, destroyed or stolen. However, it is essential in the making of amends that no one is harmed in the process. The purpose of Step 8 is to get rid of personal guilt which burdens the psyche and promotes stress which prompts one to seek relief through alcohol. Self-forgiveness must be addressed in this step. Quite often one must ask God for the grace to do this. One essential key is to ask God to forgive all on the list *through* the person in recovery. This process is reflected through the statement that God is doing for the individual what he could not do for himself/herself.

The key aspect in Steps Eight and Nine involve atonement, reconciliation and forgiveness. Lyons, Deane, Caputi, and Kelly [22] reported that the forgiveness of self by God and others were associated with 12 Step spiritual beliefs. In addition, the lack of forgiveness was a good predictor of early dropout from a drug treatment program. Similarly, Robinson, Krentzman, Webb and Brower [23] found that reductions in drinking and subsequent suffering were associated with change regarding several spiritual dimensions including the ability to forgive oneself, private religious practices, forgiveness of others and finding a purpose in life. In a related study, Robinson, Cranford, Webb, and Brower [24], reported that changes in spirituality appear to be important in recovery. Specifically, these include the perception of a closer with to God such as the reception of strength, comfort, love and peacefulness.

Steps 10, 11 and 12 act as a reminder that one must continually grow spiritually or one will revert back to old habits; ways of thinking, behaving and to do so will lead one to death. In examining the impact of spiritual growth after inpatient alcohol treatment, Sterling, Weinstein, Losardo, Raively, Hill, Petrone, and Gottheil [25] reported that non-relapsers maintained spiritual growth. However, those returning to the use of alcohol decreased in measures of spirituality. Wachholtz and Pargament [26] suggested that the use of spiritual techniques such as meditation may result in more positive emotional affect, less anxiety and greater pain tolerance.

Ongoing transformation of the person in recovery occurs as the result of the final three steps. Changes in motivation are evident, prompting the individual to help others who suffer from the same disease. Such actions are based upon humility and are guided from within by a Higher Power. This

process is summarized by the AA co-founder: “We, recovered alcoholics, are not so much brothers in virtue as we are brothers in our defects, and in our common strivings to overcome them” ([19], p. 167). The same spiritual tenet is echoed in another 12 Step program: “It is weakness, not strength that binds us to each other and to a Higher Power, and somehow gives us an ability to do what we cannot do alone.” ([27], p. 5).

9. Spiritual Experience

The immediate results of the spiritual awakening are a peaceful mind and an emotional serenity, both of which are essential to maintain sobriety.

It must be emphasized that the spiritual experience is only the initial spark that enables one to attain conscious contact with God and it is essential for the person in recovery to keep the fire burning by perfecting and enlarging one’s spiritual life through work and self sacrifice ([1], p. 15).

However, after the spiritual experience has been received then the person must continue to grow spiritually and pass on the message of recovery to others. Failure to grow spiritually not only nullifies the effects of the spiritual awakening but also prompts the mental obsession to return which clears the path for a return to drinking. This is emphatically stated in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* [1]: “We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition” ([1], p. 85). Furthermore, Bill W. emphasized the need of a spiritual solution to counter alcoholism. He concluded: “...we have had deep and effective spiritual experiences which have revolutionized our whole attitude toward life, toward our fellows and toward God’s universe...He [God] has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do by ourselves” ([1], p. 25).

In addition, this same thought was shared by Jung ([1], p. 27) who believed that the solution to the problem of alcoholism was a spiritual experience which prompted immense emotional displacements. These emotional rearrangements cause the person to abandon old ideas, and attitudes that once guided behavior only to be replaced with a new set of motives.

Waters [28] mentioned that an addiction begins when the inborn desire for God becomes diverted into specific things. Furthermore, addiction becomes a habitual behavior which not only limits one’s desire for an ultimate transformation, but also replaces it. The addicted person has become attached to specific substances and/or specific behaviors which offer only a cheap passing substitute—a process that recurs with each dereliction.

10. Utilizing the Steps for Psychological and Spiritual Changes

The 12 Step program emphasizes three points; awareness, acceptance and action [16]. Although the process of awareness begins with Step One, the process deepens through self-acceptance and by taking specific actions as directed through Steps Four through Ten.

Both Chapman [29] and Sandoz [30] concluded that the spiritual experience of the 12 Step program enables those who struggle with alcohol addiction to attain recovery physically, mentally and spiritually. Bowen [31] reported dysfunctional family dynamics associated with addictions. As such, the misuse of alcohol seeks the approval of family members at the expense of one’s own self-determination. This process maintains the person’s emotional dependence upon others. Brown [32] noted the relationship

between continued alcohol misuse with emotional dependence and the lack of development into an autonomous, independent person. However, Sandoz [33] reported the completion of Steps 4, 5, 8 and 9 with higher levels of differentiation of self. Specifically, evidence of spiritual growth is the sign of the recovery process. Furthermore, Sandoz [34] found a relationship between completion of Steps 4, 5, 8 and 9 with those claiming to have a spiritual experience. One interesting finding of the study included that the spiritual experience was not related to religious denomination, regular attendance at church, although the average length of daily prayer exceeded 20 min.

Similarly, Sandoz [35] offered a scenario regarding how a member of Alcoholics Anonymous would utilize the steps to avoid emotional issue related to relapse. This situation would begin with the acknowledgement of a problem which would lead to the person to use Step Four to examine the emotional issue of anger, resentment or fear, to pray for the removal of the emotion, to share the information with one's sponsor as in Step Five and to address the person and made direct amends if harm is done to another which completes Step Eight and Nine. In a matter of minutes the emotional issue which previously would lead the person to return to drinking is avoided.

The steps of Alcoholics Anonymous promote correctives in thoughts, emotions and behaviors. Frequent use of the 12 Steps counters the selfishness and self-centeredness associated with alcoholism ([1], p. 62). The 12 Steps help the person in recovery to rely upon God rather than to rely upon self will and upon one's character defects. Although by utilizing Steps 1, 2 and 3 the person decides to place God as the director of one's life, it is not until the person takes action in the remaining steps, that relationships are healed and normalized with others.

There is a saying often heard in AA meetings: "AA's 12 Step program may not open the gates of heaven to let the alcoholic in, but it will open the gates of hell to let the alcoholic out."

11. Conclusions

Recovery from addictions involves a daily walk on a path based upon the 12 Steps. The 12 Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous offers a daily disciplined trek in spirituality which includes the traditional paths to God as devotion, understanding, service and meditation. In addition, the process of recovery based upon the 12 Steps is a lifetime journey. Such a journey involves living a life based upon solid spiritual principles which promote ego deflation and the continued reduction of self-centeredness. As such, the person in recovery seeks conscious contact with the God of one's own understanding. Such conscious contact with this "Higher Power" not only assists in overcoming temptations and urges to return to drinking, but also to assist the person to be "of maximum service to God and to the people about us" ([1], p. 77). Evidence of such service to others and prayerful devotional path is seen in the gratitude and joy of the person recovering alcohol addiction. The delight and happiness of being set free from alcohol bondage is seen in AA meetings on a daily basis throughout the world. Journeying through the 12 Steps promotes understanding as the recovering person not only gains self-knowledge but also a profound understanding of who the person is in relation to God. The paths of devotion and understanding merge prompting the individual into the service of helping others who suffer from the same disease. However, the ability to continue along those three paths depends upon daily meditation. But there is a caveat that the recovering person must remember: "We are not cured of

alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent upon the maintenance of our spiritual condition.” ([1], p. 85).

On the path of recovery the person must walk a fine line on a daily basis. Such a path includes a conscious awareness that alcoholism as a disease is fatal. However, the person has been granted the gift of a “new consciousness” ([17], p. 107) which AA members refer to as “God-consciousness” ([1], p. 568).

Addiction, as a dreaded disease, is immensely powerful. However, the remedy which provides relief for such a disease includes a 12 Step program. Such a route to recovery includes the four traditional paths to God.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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