

Tenth Step

This step is often mistaken as direction to use other people for free therapy. Forcing other people to listen to me whine and complain about the sad state of my life, as I see it, or listen to me talk about my feelings is not the purpose of this step. The tenth step is a summary of steps three through nine. It is taking the same principles we applied to our past in the previous steps and using those principles to address our present.

Since people very often mistake this step as a remedy for undesirable feelings, I want to address “feelings” for just a minute. Feelings are just feelings, they are not reality. There is a difference between “intuition” and “feelings”. Intuitive ideas seem to be very dependable, where unexplainable feelings tend to be just the opposite. They’re almost like dreams...difficult to make sense of. They will pass as my environment changes.

The purpose of the tenth step is not to burn up the time of other people just because I’m obsessing about myself and feeling like crap because of it. But when I’m in situations where I cannot find direction or when I get overwhelmed or confused, the tenth step can be an effective tool. Principles are principles...they don’t change because of your feelings or emotions.

I’m going to take this quick opportunity to digress for just a moment.

Calling another self-centered alcoholic who doesn’t want to be self-centered and beginning with “I’m just calling to do a tenth step” is equivalent to saying to someone “If you don’t stop everything you’re doing to listen to me whine and cry, you’re going to have to feel guilty and I’m going to tell everyone that you’re working a crappy program”. It reminds me of the person who is preparing to tell you something and they start out with “I heard an old-timer say...”. It somehow implies that you have to believe me, this is undisputable. I’ll tell you something about old-timers in AA today. AA didn’t get in to the condition it is in because of the new people...they just got here. These old-timers, for years, have refused to stand up for the fundamental principles that AA was founded upon. It’s been this way for so long, that the only old-timers we are left with are people who can “just not drink” and be fine. That leaves those of us that have spiritual maladies to die long painful spiritual deaths, with no place to go. I’m obviously not impressed with the old-timers in AA. My apologies to anyone who might be offended...it is how I feel however. Thank God for the twelve traditions that allows us autonomy.

Back to the tenth step...the Big Book suggests that after we have done as thorough of a job as possible with steps three through nine, we can see a lot about ourselves and that this theory that self-centered fear, in its many forms, is my one and only character defect. We’ve accomplished a lot in reviewing our past and bringing willingness to clean it up. However, we’re still human and we’re still living our lives with our feet firmly planted on this earth. We’re still charged with “playing well with others”. If I don’t attempt to do the best I can to live in harmony amongst my fellows, my fellows will take actions to protect themselves from me...these actions will most likely make it very difficult for me to execute my primary purpose of “serving God by helping others”.

The Big Book suggests that as we grow from here, we continue to watch for resentment, fear, selfishness and dishonesty. It says “when these crop up”, not “if they crop up”.

This implies that these things will crop up, not that they might. We know from going through the steps that whenever a human being is disturbed, selfishness and fear are always present, sometimes to a small degree, sometimes to a large degree, but it is the common denominator. Resentment and dishonesty are simply forms of self-centered fear. We know that whenever self-centered fear is present, we will be disturbed to some degree. So for simplicity purposes, all we really have to ask ourselves is..."Am I disturbed?" If the answer is yes, then there are four things to do.

1. *We ask God, at once, to remove them.* In other words, take simple action to begin to change your perception from thinking about yourself and your desires to a perception of thinking about the Creator and Director of everything might want of you? I'm trying to pull in to my heart a perception of God, which is obviously absent...otherwise you wouldn't be disturbed.
2. *Discuss them with someone immediately...* Make sure the person you talk with is trying to live their lives by the same principles or the same spiritual flavor. Don't talk with a therapeutic type individual that will nudge you back towards victimhood and confrontation. We're trying to see your part in this, not anyone else's part, so we can decide what action to take to get you free of it. You'll notice this direction is in the same sentence as the next. The reason to discuss it with someone is to have that person help you see your part and help you with direction for cleaning up your part.
3. *...And make amends quickly if we've harmed anyone.* Clean up your part. If you and the person you talked with decide that there is an amends in order, take the action. If no amends is in order, but there is a behavior to change, change it. If there is an action to take to grow toward where you would like to be in the future, take that action.
4. *Then we resolutely turn our thoughts toward someone we can help.* You cannot stop your thinking, but you can re-direct it. If you keep obsessing about it, you will drive yourself crazy. The best way to change your thinking is to change your actions. Go find someone to help. Do some journaling. Do anything except sit around and think about it.

Love and tolerance of others is our code. Yes...we have a code.

Practiced soon and often, this tenth step will return sanity and save lives. "At once", "immediately", "quickly" and "resolutely" does not sound like "slow down, don't go too fast". How soon do you want to be free? At once? Immediately? Quickly? Resolutely? We are so fortunate to have such a simple tool at our fingertips. It works every time. It's free. There's an unlimited supply. There is no need to suffer. Life is meant to be enjoyed, not endured.

The promises of the tenth step are beautiful. Presuming the drink is no longer the problem, whenever we see the word alcohol, replace it with "self-centered fear" or "alcoholic crazy thinking" or something of that nature. Remember that self-centered fear or a lack of awareness of God in any given moment is the underlying cause and condition of everything that disturbs me. If this insanity is not addressed, it will lead me back to a drink or whatever substance or behavior I'm challenged with.

And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone-even *my alcoholic insanity* or in other words, the crap that goes on in my mind, when I'm thinking about myself. When I'm thinking about me, I like to think that I have a sign posted in my head that says "For Entertainment Purposes Only – Don't Try This At Home". My head is like a committee meeting that won't let me get a word in. However, when I'm thinking about you, provided I have no ulterior motive...my head is at peace. If I do have an ulterior motive, then I'm back to thinking about me again.

"For by this time sanity will have been returned". This is provided that I've done all four things suggested, in particular, focused my thoughts on anyone except me.

"We will seldom be interested in *crazy alcoholic thinking*. If tempted, we recoil from it as from a hot flame. We react sanely and normally, and we will find that this has happened automatically." *We will find that the more we practice this tenth step, the more it becomes second nature. Until we begin sharing the experience with others, we will barely even realize it has happened.*

We will see that our new attitude toward *what used to drive us crazy* 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 not cocky nor are we afraid. That is our experience. That is how we react so long as we keep in fit spiritual condition. *This requires consistency...it needs to be a way of life.*

It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. *The word "laurels" means "past achievements". This is not the time to sit back and admire myself in the mirror for all the good work I've done. Obviously, this is a place where a lot of people stop..beware..* 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 activities. "How can I best serve Thee-Thy will (not mine) be done." *In all spiritual writings that have stood the test of time, I believe that when we refer to the word "daily", we are not talking about the clock or the calendar. I do not believe that God cares about man's calendar...the Chinese don't even care about our calendar. I believe that what we are really talking about is "paradigms". Paradigm being defined as a set of assumptions, concepts, values and practices that constitute the way I view my current reality. Each time a new element is entered into my total awareness, my paradigm has changed. Every paradigm is a paradigm when I must carry the vision of God's will into all my activities.* 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. *My problem is not the fact that I have self-will and it's not the fact that I'm excessive when I find something I like. The problem is that I'm using my self-will improperly. It's like hammering nails with a screwdriver. I'm not getting the job done and the tool is getting ruined. However, when I use my self-will in the way it was designed to be used, to serve God and help others, not only can I get as excessive as I'd like, but the tool actually gets sharper...my ability to serve God and help others becomes*

more effective.

Much has already been said about receiving strength, inspiration and direction from Him who has all knowledge and power. *If God has all knowledge and all Power, that means that I have none and none...except that I have my self-will and my perceptions, both of which are given to me by the Creator and Director of everything. My self-will is limited and my perceptions are always changing. I cannot see things for what they are...I can only see things from where I am.* If we have carefully followed direction, *I thought these were suggestions? No...the program is suggested. Once you've decided to try the program, it is all direction from there...* we have begun to sense the flow of His Spirit into us. *We have begun to remove the things and ideas that were blocking us off from this awareness that we were born with.* To some extent we have become God-conscious. We have begun to develop this vital sixth sense. *This awareness comes into the heart and soul first...then and only then will I attempt to comprehend it intellectually.* But we must go further and that means more action. *More studying? No. More intellectualizing? No. More Action. Action is the key. If we take these actions, we will get the results. Thinking about taking the action is like thinking about eating food...I'm still going to starve.*