

STEP ELEVEN

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.

Our lives have been spent creating distance between ourselves and the peace inside us. We have crafted clouds of smokey fog between ourselves and our Higher Power to the degree that we no longer can see our Higher Power. Step Eleven is what we do to clean up the fog and see ourselves and our relationship to God in a clear and serene light. It strengthens the connection between us and our Higher Power. Breaking the Step down into smaller components may help in examining its importance.

"Sought through prayer and meditation . . ."

Each person is free to come to his/her own understanding of what prayer means. Prayer is viewed by some as a "heightened perception of intuition." Others see it as talking with their higher self, or talking to God. Some people already established a form of prayer before they got into the program. These people perhaps didn't have a program initiating contact with a Higher Power. Others find it difficult, if not impossible, to pray. The important thing is to do whatever we need to strengthen the bond between ourselves and a power greater than ourselves. People who have difficulty praying can also ask for help from fellow Nicotine Anonymous members. A sponsor can be especially helpful at this stage by sharing experience, strength, and hope.

There are no correct or incorrect prayers, ways of praying, or places to pray -- but it is crucial that we sincerely ask our Higher Power's will and guidance. Whatever works, works, and is not to be judged by others. Some people only feel they are praying if they are on their knees, humbling themselves before their Higher Power. Others pray while they work, jog, or drive their cars. It proved useful to begin our day with some kind of prayer, asking God for guidance and to direct our thinking and actions towards God's ends. At night, before going to sleep, we take some time to

mentally list all the things we have to be thankful for today -- one more day of being nicotine-free, our health, friends, loved ones, jobs, homes, etc. We can reflect on the changes that have occurred in our lives since we stopped using nicotine and started letting go of egotistical, self-willed attachments.

In the past, many of us prayed to God only to ask for specific things or results. Now we ask ourselves, "How can I request a specific outcome when I ultimately cannot always know what is good for me or someone else?" Acceptance, not control, is the key. As long as we ask for specifics, we are not letting go and letting God. By adopting an open attitude and listening to our Higher Power we are given far more than we ever dreamed. Instead of asking for what we want and what we think we need, we focus on offering ourselves to our Higher Power ready to perform actions as spiritually guided.

As with prayer, meditation techniques vary widely and each person can find his/her own way. Meditation leads us to become still, open, and receptive. It helps us go inside ourselves, to be quiet, and to empty ourselves so our Higher Power can come in and fill us up. Sitting peacefully in front of a candle can help to produce a state of inner calm and single-mindedness. So can sitting alone on an isolated beach, under a tree in the mountains, or in a chair at a kitchen table. One way to begin to meditate is to simply sit still and focus on our breath as it moves in and out. Let the diaphragm do the work -- just observe what happens. Another tool some people use is to visualize God in the heart. Let God expand and take over the body, the room, and the world.

". . . to improve our conscious contact with God . . ."

Whatever we do for our Eleventh Step, it is most important that we do something. This Step is an action Step. While many of us start by doing Step Eleven for a few minutes a day, we find through experience that it is possible to have a connection with our Higher Power at all moments of the day and the night. While this is very difficult, it is possible. Many find that the more contact they have with their Higher Power, the more serene they become.

Some individuals have discovered useful tools for gaining a more constant contact with a Power greater than oneself, and here are a few:

- Ask your Higher Power for help when making decisions.
- Perform every action as though it were a gift to God.
- Come up with an image of a Higher Power (i.e. candle flame, ocean) and imagine that image as much as possible.
- Think of ourselves as a tool in the hands of God.
- Repeat program slogans to ourselves.
- Think of ourselves as a cell in the body of our Higher Power, or a star in the body of the universe.

"... as we understood Him ..."

We are guided to find, know, and understand a God/Higher Power that works for us. There are no rules for this. A Higher Power can be an inner voice, nature, other people, or a rock. The program can work only if we are free to explore our individual paths and realize the experience of a Higher Power we need for today.

It is useful to remember that finding an understanding of a Higher Power is a process, not an event. We have our whole lives to search for this Power, for meaning, for answers. There is no hurry. Today is enough. Our Higher Power helps us to find what we need, and helps us to do what we need to do.

"... Praying only for knowledge of his will for us ..."

How do we know what our Higher Power's will is for us? Sometimes it can be easier to think about what our Higher Power's will is *not*. It is not our Higher Power's will for us to continue using nicotine. Using nicotine drew us away from our Higher Power. Quitting the use of nicotine began to move us closer to our Higher Power.

If we concentrate on praying for and performing God's will, our own petty desires and egotistical wants start to diminish. We become more serene and flow with our own essential nature. We find that the fruits of our actions are God's concern and not ours. We become more involved with action and less concerned with results. Life is easier when we get our egos out of the way and firmly establish our minds and hearts in our Higher Power.

". . . and the power to carry that out . . ."

The last thing the Eleventh Step suggests is that we pray for the power to carry out God's will. Some see this power as willingness, strength, acceptance, courage, and commitment. Others put all these things together and call it faith. Faith does not mean stupidity or blindness. Faith means to accept with open eyes and loving hearts the life that lies before us, knowing we will be taken care of and we will get what we need. Some say that *faith* is our relationship with God. It takes faith to let go and let God. Once we get rid of old habits, desires, and attachments, we may feel a need to attach to something else. Step Eleven suggests we attach to our Higher Power and nurture our faith to do our Higher Power's will.

No one is perfect. But if our motivations are clear, unselfish, and directed toward our Higher Power, our Eleventh Step will lead us to deep and lasting serenity.

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