

BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by Eye.nonymous - 13 Jul 2012 07:17

“AA is a simple program for complicated people.”

—One of many AA mottos

Everything necessary to work the 12 steps is found in the book Alcoholics Anonymous (this program has been effective for millions of alcoholics since the 1930’s, and it has also been effective for many other addictions—including lust addiction). However, when reading this book on one’s own, it’s easy to overlook important facts, to miss underlying messages, and to over-complicate the simple plan of action. Also, due to our subjectivity, we can miss how the problems and solutions described in this book apply to us—even though they very well may.

Therefore, I am trying an experiment. I don’t know how well it will work in this form, but I thought it might be worth a try. I will simply post the Big-Book, little by little, and let it speak for itself (mostly). I will also draw attention to the ideas one might otherwise miss reading it on one’s own, help show how the problems and solutions described in this book apply to us, and clarify whatever actions are called for. Much of what I write is based, if loosely so, on what I gained through Duvid Chaim’s 12-step phone groups. I am also likely to share from my own experience and my own thoughts.

I hope to cover the first seven chapters (plus two preliminary chapters) of Alcoholics Anonymous, which explains all twelve steps. They are as follows:

- Foreword
- The Doctor’s Opinion
- I. Bill’s Story
- II. There Is A Solution
- III. More About Alcoholism
- IV. We Agnostics
- V. How It Works
- VI. Into Action
- VII. Working With Others

I will greatly appreciate comments and questions about this thread as it develops.

--Elyah

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by Eye.nonymous - 23 Jul 2012 11:59

The physician who, at our request, gave us this letter, has been kind enough to enlarge upon his views in another statement which follows. In this statement he confirms what we who have suffered [sexaholic] torture must believe that the body of the [sexaholic] is quite as abnormal as his mind. It did not satisfy us to be told that we could not control our drinking just because we were maladjusted to life, that we were in full flight from reality, or were outright mental defectives.

***COMMENT: Sound familiar? ***

These things were true to some extent, in fact, to a considerable extent with some of us. But we are sure that our bodies were sickened as well. In our belief, any picture of the [sexaholic] which leaves out this physical factor is incomplete.

The doctor's theory that we have an allergy to alcohol interests us. As laymen, our opinion as to its soundness may, of course, mean little. But as ex-[sexaholics], we can say that his explanation makes good sense. It explains many things for which we cannot otherwise account.

***COMMENT: There is a physical component to this illness. There is something either biologically or neurologically different about the sexaholic which is not the same for other people--it causes us to have an abnormal reaction when exposed to lust. ***

Though we work out our solution on the spiritual as well as an altruistic plane, we favor [treatment] for the [sexaholic] who is very jittery or befogged. More often than not, it is imperative that a man's brain be cleared before he is approached, as he has then a better chance of understanding and accepting what we have to offer.

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Eye.nonymous - 24 Jul 2012 12:50

(BB pg. xxiii)

The doctor writes:

The subject presented in this book seems to me to be of paramount importance to those afflicted with [sexaholic] addiction.

I say this after many years' experience as Medical Director of one of the oldest hospitals in the country treating [sexaholic] and drug addiction.

There was, therefore, a sense of real satisfaction when I was asked to contribute a few words on a subject which is covered in such masterly detail in these pages.

We doctors have realized for a long time that some form of moral psychology was of urgent importance to [sexaholics], but its application presented difficulties beyond our conception. What with our ultra-modern standards, our scientific approach to everything, we are perhaps not well equipped to apply the powers of good that lie outside our synthetic knowledge.

About four years ago one of the leading contributors to this book came under our care in this hospital and while here he acquired some ideas which he put into practical application at once.

Later, he requested the privilege of being allowed to tell his story to other patients here and with some misgiving, we consented. The cases we have followed through have been most interesting; in fact, many of them are amazing. The unselfishness of these men as we have come to know them, the entire absence of profit motive, and their community spirit, is indeed inspiring to one who has labored long and wearily in this [sexaholic] field. They believe in themselves, and still more in the Power which pulls chronic [sexaholics] back from the gates of death.

***COMMENT: These are five characteristics of a man in recovery.

1. Unselfishness.
2. Absence of profit motive.
3. Community spirit.
4. Believe in themselves.
5. Believe in the Power etc.

Does this interest you? ***

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Eye.nonymous - 25 Jul 2012 11:57

Of course a [sexaholic] ought to be freed from his physical craving for [lust], and this often requires a definite hospital procedure, before psychological measures can be of maximum benefit.

*** COMMENT: I'll admit some of these paragraphs apply more directly to the alcoholic than to the sexaholic. But let's look for the similarities, not the differences. What does apply is that a sexaholic who is in the middle of a spree, or only soon afterwards, is not capable of thinking clearly and making a rational decision about recovery. ***

We believe, and so suggested a few years ago, that the action of alcohol on these chronic [sexaholics] is a manifestation of an allergy; that the phenomenon of craving is limited to this class and never occurs in the average temperate drinker. These allergic types can never safely use alcohol in any form at all; and once having FORMED THE HABIT and found they cannot break it, once having LOST THEIR SELF CONFIDENCE, their reliance upon things human, their problems pile up on them and become astonishingly difficult to solve.

*** COMMENT: Do you feel this craving? Are you able to stop, or are you out of control once you start? Another important point is that the program doesn't really deal with how we got here--whether it was by choice or from biological or environmental factors. It doesn't make a difference. What matters is--there's a way out; What are we going to do about it now? ***

Frothy emotional appeal seldom suffices. The message which can interest and hold these [sexaholic] people must have depth and weight. In nearly all cases, their ideals must be grounded in a power greater than themselves, if they are to recreate their lives.

If any feel that as psychiatrists directing a hospital for [sexaholics] we appear somewhat sentimental, let them stand with us a while on the firing line, see the tragedies, the despairing wives, the little children; let the solving of these problems become a part of their daily work, and even of their sleeping moments, and the most cynical will not wonder that we have accepted and encouraged this movement. We feel, after many years of experience, that we have found nothing which has contributed more to the rehabilitation of these men than the altruistic movement now growing up among them.

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Eye.nonymous - 26 Jul 2012 13:54

***COMMENT: This whole next paragraph is a key one. Besides that, on a technical note--when there's an important sentence (or paragraph) already underlined and a word within that sentence (or paragraph) is especially important, I'll write it in all caps. You may have noticed this above. ***

Men and women [turn to pornography and masturbation] essentially because they like the effect produced by [it]. The sensation is so elusive that, while they admit it is injurious, **THEY CANNOT AFTER A TIME DIFFERENTIATE THE TRUE FROM THE FALSE.** To them, their [sexaholic] life seems the only normal one. They are **RESTLESS, IRRITABLE and DISCONTENTED**, unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few [glances]—[glances] which they see others taking with impunity. After they have succumbed to the desire again, as so many do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the **WELL-KNOWN STAGES OF A SPREE**, emerging **REMORSEFUL**, with a firm **RESOLUTION** not to drink again. This is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery.

***COMMENT: It's time for the red onion, green onion analogy:

What's the difference between a red onion and a green onion? Just the outer skin; if you peel off the outer layer, they're both white underneath. The same is true about addicts. Some people

turn to sex, some to alcohol, drugs, chocolate cake, overtime, gambling, or just plain Web surfing. It's all just the outer layer, a superficial difference--the specific addiction is really just a symptom. If you peel off the outer layer, beneath it you'll find Restlessness, Irritability, and Discontent--the famous RID.

So far, does this resonate with you at all?

This RID is what fuels the addiction, no matter what the addiction. (And this is why the same program that helps alcoholics has also been so successful in treating so many other addictions). The addiction itself is really just a pain-killer; it makes us feel good (acting out actually hasn't been our problem, it has been our solution.)

What lies beneath the RID? Our EGO--we expect everything and everyone to meet our expectations and to act according to our wishes and our plans. But they don't. So when our ego comes into conflict with the world, the result is RID.

Do you ever feel this in your life?

Beneath our ego, however, is yet another layer. It's our true, G-dly selves. It's that part of us deep inside that wants to be accepting, loving, giving, and forgiving. It's that part of us that yearns to be helpful--to give rather than to take. We all have such a deep and lofty core and we have tapped into it in our lives, sometime more so and sometimes less so.

Can you remember such moments?

This program will give us tools to peel aware the outer layers and to activate this part of ourselves more regularly. ***

***ANOTHER COMMENT: The above paragraph described the stages of addiction, a vicious cycle:

1. Spree
2. Remorse
3. Resolution

Do you identify with this?

One problem here is the "resolution." We make a resolution--we promise ourselves never to act out ever again, but we don't actually change our actions--we don't actually do anything differently. So the cycle keeps repeating itself. ***

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by Eye.nonymous - 27 Jul 2012 07:25

On the other hand—and strange as this may seem to those who do not understand—once a psychic change has occurred, the very same person who seemed doomed, who had so many problems he despaired of ever solving them, suddenly finds himself easily able to control his desire for [lust], the only effort necessary being that required to follow a few simple rules.

***COMMENT: As we go through the Big Book, you will find lots of promises--results you will experience as a result of following this program of recovery. The above paragraph contains the first promise of the program: "Once a psychic change has occurred, the very same person who seemed doomed, who had so many problems he despaired of ever solving them, suddenly finds himself easily able to control his desire for [lust]." Does this interest you? If so, all you need to do is "follow a few simple rules," the steps. ***

Men have cried out to me in sincere and despairing appeal: "Doctor, I cannot go on like this! I have everything to live for! I must stop, but I cannot! You must help me!"

Faced with this problem, if a doctor is honest with himself, he must sometimes feel his own inadequacy. Although he gives all that is in him, it often is not enough. One feels that something more than human power is needed to produce the essential psychic change. Though the aggregate of recoveries resulting from psychiatric effort is considerable, we physicians must admit we have made little impression upon the problem as a whole. Many types do not respond to the ordinary psychological approach.

*** COMMENT: "Many types do not respond to the ordinary psychological approach." I would add that for the addict--and although many of us have tried very intensely--mussar (ethical writings), halacha, and even long discussions with highly respected rabbis, have also proven to be inadequate solutions to our problem. ***

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Eye.nonymous - 31 Jul 2012 10:27

(BB pg. xxv)

I do not hold with those who believe that [sexaholism] is entirely a problem of mental control. I have had many men who had, for example, worked a period of months on some problem or business deal which was to be settled on a certain date, favorably to them. They [acted out] a day or so prior to the date, and then the phenomenon of craving at once became paramount to all other interests so that the important appointment was not met. These men were not [acting out] to escape; they were [acting out] to overcome a craving beyond their mental control.

There are many situations which arise out of the phenomenon of craving which cause men to

make the supreme sacrifice rather than continue to fight.

The classification of [sexaholics] seems most difficult, and in much detail is outside the scope of this book. There are, of course, the psychopaths who are emotionally unstable. We are all familiar with this type. They are always "going on the wagon for keeps." They are over-remorseful and make many resolutions, but never a decision.

*** COMMENT: Resolution is just a plan. Decision includes action. One change we need to make is to PAUSE throughout the day when we feel lust or RID; we need to start being RESPONSIVE (response-able) rather than REACTIVE. ***

There is the type of man who is unwilling to admit that he cannot take [lust]. He plans various ways of [acting out]. He changes his [type of pictures or videos he watches] or his environment. There is the type who always believes that after being entirely free from [acting out] for a period of time he can [act out] without danger.

*** COMMENT: Does this resonate with you? ***

There is the manic-depressive type, who is, perhaps, the least understood by his friends, and about whom a whole chapter could be written.

*** COMMENT: Do you identify with this? ***

Then there are types entirely normal in every respect except in the effect [lust] has upon them. They are often able, intelligent, friendly people.

*** COMMENT: Does this sound familiar? ***

All these, and many others, have one symptom in common: they cannot start [lusting] without developing the phenomenon of craving. This phenomenon, as we have suggested, may be the manifestation of an allergy which differentiates these people, and sets them apart as a distinct entity. It has never been, by any treatment with which we are familiar, permanently eradicated. The only relief we have to suggest is entire abstinence.

*** COMMENT: "Phenomenon of craving." If we start, we can't stop. Also, what we need is "entire abstinence" from LUST, not from sex (a note for married folks). ***

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by mifatfait - 31 Jul 2012 13:15

Thanks, Elya. It's always been tough for me to learn from the big book since it's not directly talking about me. These paraphrases are great!!!!!!

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by Eye.nonymous - 01 Aug 2012 10:00

This immediately precipitates us into a seething caldron of debate. Much has been written pro and con, but among physicians, the general opinion seems to be that most chronic [sexaholics] are doomed.

What is the solution? Perhaps I can best answer this by relating an experience of two years ago.

About one year prior to this experience a man was brought in to be treated for chronic [sexaholism]. He had but partially recovered from [gonorrhea] and seemed to be a case of pathological mental deterioration. He had lost everything worthwhile in life and was only living, one might say, to [have sex]. He frankly admitted and believed that for him there was no hope. Following the elimination of [the more serious forms of acting out] there was found to be no [permanent injury]. He accepted the plan outlined in this book. One year later he called to see me, and I experienced a very strange sensation. I knew the man by name, and partly recognized his features, but there all resemblance ended. From a trembling, despairing, nervous wreck, had emerged a man brimming over with self-reliance and contentment. I talked with him for some time, but was not able to bring myself to feel that I had known him before. To me he was a stranger, and so he left me. More than three years have now passed with no return to alcohol.

*** COMMENT: "Contentment," this is our goal in recovery. Are you interested?" ***

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by JustKeepGoing - 01 Aug 2012 18:28

brimming over with self-reliance and contentment.

I thought the whole point was to NOT be self-reliant? Unless you meant reliant on himself to

cope with life as opposed to relying on his drug

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by Eye.nonymous - 02 Aug 2012 05:35

[JustKeepGoing wrote on 01 Aug 2012 18:28:](#)

brimming over with self-reliance and contentment.

I thought the whole point was to NOT be self-reliant? Unless you meant reliant on himself to cope with life as opposed to relying on his drug

Good question. I think through the program we learn to be more reliant on G-d. But I think the effect this has to other people is that we appear to be more self-reliant, or rather more self-confident, perhaps.

Also, it is a matter of how we USE our self-reliance. Do we try to exert our will on all the people and all the circumstances we encounter, or do we use our will to turn to Hashem and ask for His help.

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)

Posted by Eye.nonymous - 02 Aug 2012 05:46

When I need a mental uplift, I often think of another case brought in by a physician prominent in New York City. The patient had made his own diagnosis, and deciding his situation hopeless, had hidden in a deserted barn determined to die. He was rescued by a searching party, and, in desperate condition, brought to me. Following his physical rehabilitation, he had a talk with me in which he frankly stated he thought the treatment a waste of effort, unless I could assure him, which no one ever had, that in the future he would have the "will power" to resist the impulse to

[act out].

*** COMMENT: The key word here, the problem word, is "Will Power." We need to surrender the struggle to Hashem; we need to stop trying to do it on our own through our own efforts and our own strategies. ***

His [sexaholic] problem was so complex, and his depression so great, that we felt his only hope would be through what we then called "moral psychology," and we doubted if even that would have any effect.

*** COMMENT: This "moral psychology" will be explained more in-depth later on. For now I'll just say that it implies a personality change--a change in one's attitude towards life. This, too, cannot be accomplished solely through one's own efforts but rather through turning to one's Higher Power for help. ***

However, he did become "sold" on the ideas contained in this book. He has not [acted out] for more than three years. I see him now and then and he is as fine a specimen of manhood as one could wish to meet.

I earnestly advise every [sexaholic] to read this book through, and though perhaps he came to scoff, he may remain to pray.

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Eye.nonymous - 04 Aug 2012 19:04

Chapter One
BILL'S STORY
(BB pg 1)

***COMMENT: On the surface, some people find it hard to relate to Bill's story. What do I have in common with an alcoholic stock broker in the 1930's? The key in recovery, however, is to look for the similarities rather than the differences. See what was motivating Bill and how he was dealing with life's challenges rather than the specific details of his story. When we look for the differences we start setting ourselves APART FROM and then two sexaholics with nearly identical life experiences will fail to learn from each other because of the slight differences between them.

ANOTHER COMMENT: This program is not about STOPPING acting out. There's much more to it than that. It's about a new beginning. ***

War fever ran high in the New England town to which we new, young officers from Plattsburg were assigned, and we were flattered when the first citizens took us to their homes, making us

feel heroic. Here was love, applause, war; moments sublime with intervals hilarious. I was part of life at last, and in the midst of the excitement I discovered [lust]. I forgot the strong warnings and the prejudices of my people concerning [lust]. In time we sailed for "Over There." I was very lonely and again turned to [acting out].

*** COMMENT: Here we see two different things that lead to acting out--excitement and loneliness. ***

We landed in England. I visited Winchester [Synagogue]. Much moved, I wandered outside. My attention was caught by a doggerel on an old tombstone:

Here lies a Hampshire Grenadier
Who caught his death
[Through diseases venereal]
A good soldier is ne'er forgot
Whether he dieth by musket
Or by [activities immoral]."

*** COMMENT: Adapting that one was a bit of a stretch; not so great, but not too bad. ***

Ominous warning—which I failed to heed.

*** COMMENT: The warning was ignored. Have you received any warning signals along the way that went unheeded, or that only had a temporary effect? ***

Twenty-two, and a veteran of foreign wars, I went home at last. I fancied myself a leader, for had not the men of my battery given me a special token of appreciation? My talent for leadership, I imagined, would place me at the head of vast enterprises which I would manage with utmost assurance.

*** COMMENT: What is the underlying principle in this paragraph? (Feel free to take another look at it). Correct, it's EGO--a sure prescription for RID. Whatever your occupation may be, do you identify at all with this feeling of extreme superiority? ***

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Eye.nonymous - 05 Aug 2012 07:44

I took a night law course, and obtained employment as investigator for a surety company. The drive for success was on. I'd prove to the world I was important. My work took me about Wall Street and little by little I became interested in the market. Many people lost money—but some became very rich. Why not I? I studied economics and business as well as law. Potential [sexaholic] that I was, I nearly failed my law course. At one of the finals I was too [busy acting

out] to think or write. Though my [acting out] was not yet continuous, it disturbed my wife. We had long talks when I would still her forebodings by telling her that men of genius conceived their best projects when [lusting]; that the most majestic constructions of philosophic thought were so derived.

*** COMMENT: Again we see the ego at work, "I'd prove the world I was important." We also see some more warning signs ignored, "I nearly failed my law course," and, "It disturbed my wife." We also see an additional aspect of the disease--rationalizing the acting out, and even idealizing it, "Men of genius conceived their best projects when [lusting]." Do you identify with any of this? ***

By the time I had completed the course, I knew the law was not for me. The inviting maelstrom of Wall Street had me in its grip. Business and financial leaders were my heroes. Out of this alloy of [lusting] and speculation, I commenced to forge the weapon that one day would turn in its flight like a boomerang and all but cut me to ribbons. Living modestly, my wife and I saved \$1,000. It went into certain securities then cheap and rather unpopular. I rightly imagined that they would some day have a great rise. I failed to persuade my broker friends to send me out looking over factories and managements, but my wife and I decided to go anyway. I had developed a theory that most people lost money in stocks through ignorance of markets. I discovered many more reasons later on.

We gave up our positions and off we roared on a motorcycle, the sidecar stuffed with tent, blankets, change of clothes, and three huge volumes of a financial reference service. Our friends thought a lunacy commission should be appointed. Perhaps they were right. I had had some success at speculation, so we had a little money, but we once worked on a farm for a month to avoid drawing on our small capital. That was the last honest manual labor on my part for many a day. We covered the whole eastern United States in a year. At the end of it, my reports to Wall Street procured me a position there and the use of a large expense account. The exercise of an option brought in more money, leaving us with a profit of several thousand dollars for that year.

*** COMMENT: Yet another warning ignored, "Our friends thought a lunacy commission should be appointed." ***

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Eye.nonymous - 06 Aug 2012 06:13

For the next few years fortune threw money and applause my way. I had arrived. My judgment and ideas were followed by many to the tune of paper millions. The great boom of the late twenties was seething and swelling. [Lust] was taking an important and exhilarating part in my life. There was loud talk in the jazz places uptown. Everyone spent in thousands and chattered

in millions. Scoffers could scoff and be [darned]. I made a host of fair-weather friends.

***COMMENT: Ego again, "I had arrived." We also see that Bill's life is becoming synthetic--increasingly phony--void of any real meaning and purpose. Can you identify with this? ***

My [acting out] assumed more serious proportions, continuing all day and almost every night. The remonstrances of my friends terminated in a row and I became a lone wolf. There were many unhappy scenes in our sumptuous apartment. There had been no real infidelity, for loyalty to my wife, helped at times by extreme drunkenness, kept me out of those scrapes.

***COMMENT: Isolation is beginning, Bill has become "a lone wolf." Also, although everything looks good from the outside, the inside story is very different, "many unhappy scenes in our sumptuous apartment." Does this resonate with you at all? ***

In 1929 I contracted golf fever. We went at once to the country, my wife to applaud while I started out to overtake Walter Hagen. [Lust] caught up with me much faster than I came up behind Walter. I began to be jittery in the morning. Golf permitted [acting out] every day and every night. It was fun to carom around the exclusive course which had inspired such awe in me as a lad. I acquired the impeccable coat of tan one sees upon the well-to-do. The local banker watched me whirl fat checks in and out of his till with amused skepticism.

***COMMENT: Here we see Bill's wife as an enabler, "to applaud." ***

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