

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 - 13 Dec 2012 18:10

“I was much impressed with what you fellows said about [sexaholism], but I frankly did not believe it would be possible for me to [act out] again. I somewhat appreciated your ideas about the subtle insanity which precedes the first [lust hit], but I was confident it could not happen to me after what I had learned. I reasoned I was not so far advanced as most of you fellows, that I had been usually successful in licking my other personal problems, that I would therefore be successful where you men failed. I felt I had every right to be self-confident, that it would be only a matter of exercising my will power and keeping on guard.

***COMMENT: What stands out in the above paragraph? A huge dose of EGO. ***

“In this frame of mind, I went about my business and for a time all was well. I had no trouble refusing [lust], and began to wonder if I had not been making too hard work of a simple matter. One day I went to Washington to present some accounting evidence to a government bureau. I had been out of town before during this particular dry spell, so there was nothing new about that. Physically, I felt fine. Neither did I have any pressing problems or worries. My business came off well, I was pleased and knew my partners would be too. It was the end of a perfect day, not a cloud on the horizon.

***COMMENT: “Not a cloud on the horizon.” Feelings of Restlessness, Irritability, and Discontent are not only from when things go wrong; we also feel restless from success, when things are going well. ***

***COMMENT: This next paragraph couldn't be adapted easily to SA, so I left it in tact; look for the similarities, not the differences. ***

“I went to my hotel and leisurely dressed for dinner. As I crossed the threshold of the dining room, the thought came to mind it would be nice to have couple of cocktails with dinner. That was all. NOTHING MORE. I ordered a cocktail and my meal. Then I ordered another cocktail. After dinner I decided to take a walk. When I returned to the hotel it struck me a highball would be fine before going to bed, so I stepped into the bar and had one. I remember having several more that night and plenty next morning. I have a shadowy recollection of being in an airplane bound for New York, of finding a friendly taxicab driver at the landing field instead of my wife. The driver escorted me about for several days. I know little of where I went, or what I said and did. Then came the hospital with unbearable mental and physical suffering.

***COMMENT: Fred was struck with one of those “suddenly” moments, a silly notion of being in

control. There was no obvious RID, but lots of self-reliance. ***

“As soon as I regained my ability to think, I went carefully over that evening in Washington. Not only had I been off guard, I HAD MADE NO FIGHT WHATEVER against that first [lust hit]. This time I HAD NOT THOUGHT OF THE CONSEQUENCES AT ALL. I had commenced to drink as carelessly as though the cocktails were ginger ale. I now remembered what my [sexaholic] friends had told me, how they prophesied that if I had a [sexaholic] mind, the time and place would come—I would [act out] again. They had said that though I did raise a defense, it would one day give way before some trivial reason for [acting out]. Well, just that did happen and more, for what I had learned of [sexaholism] did not occur to me at all. I knew from that moment that I had an [sexaholic] mind. I saw that will power and self-knowledge would not help in those strange mental blank spots. I had never been able to understand people who said that a problem had them hopelessly defeated. I knew then. It was a crushing blow.

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

Posted by Eye.nonymous - 21 Dec 2012 12:42

[Fred's story continues:]

“Two of the members of [Sexaholics] Anonymous came to see me. They grinned, which I didn't like so much, and then asked me if I thought myself [sexaholic] and if I were really licked this time. I had to concede both propositions. They piled on me heaps of evidence to the effect that a [sexaholic] mentality, such as I had exhibited in Washington, was a hopeless condition. They cited cases out of their own experience by the dozen. This process snuffed out the last flicker of conviction that I could do the job myself.

***COMMENT: Fred has reached step 1, he has admitted that he is powerless. ***

“Then they outlined the spiritual answer and program of action which a hundred of them had followed successfully. Though I had been only a nominal [shul goer], their proposals were not, intellectually, hard to swallow. But the program of action, though entirely sensible, was pretty drastic. It meant I would have to throw several lifelong conceptions out of the window. That was not easy. But the moment I made up my mind to go through with the process, I had the curious feeling that my [sexaholic] condition was relieved, as in fact it proved to be.

***COMMENT: Fred has accepted A NEW DESIGN FOR LIVING. ***

“Quite as important was the discovery that spiritual principles would solve all my problems. I have since been brought into a way of living infinitely more satisfying and, I hope, more useful than the life I lived before. My old manner of life was by no means a bad one, but I would not exchange its best moments for the worst I have now. I would not go back to it even if I could.”

Fred’s story speaks for itself. We hope it strikes home to thousands like him. He had felt only the first nip of the wringer. Most [sexaholics] have to be pretty badly mangled before they really commence to solve their problems.

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Dov - 21 Dec 2012 20:12

Thanks again, great stuff!

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by nederman - 23 Dec 2012 16:56

[Eye.nonymous wrote:](#)

[Fred’s story continues:]

This process snuffed out the last flicker of conviction that I could do the job myself.

It's just hard to reconcile this with the Jewish concept of choice. I would just say that the person

described here despaired of ever beating the addiction by himself and got some help, which is a very good decision. However when we insist that all addicts take this same course of action we just stop searching for alternative solutions, then we claim that they do not exist.

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Dov - 23 Dec 2012 19:53

[nederman wrote:](#)

[Eye.nonymous wrote:](#)

[Fred's story continues:]

This process snuffed out the last flicker of conviction that I could do the job myself.

It's just hard to reconcile this with the Jewish concept of choice. I would just say that the person described here despaired of ever beating the addiction by himself and got some help, which is a very good decision. However when we insist that all addicts take this same course of action we just stop searching for alternative solutions, then we claim that they do not exist.
I could not agree more, nederman!

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Dov - 24 Dec 2012 08:58

Familiar defaults such as the drug for an addict, often retain a degree of trust that is very hard to dislodge. That's why addicts benefit so much from people sitting next to them at meetings, who acted out, sharing their own version of 'Fred's story'.

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

Posted by Dov - 25 Dec 2012 03:53

[/quote][nederman wrote](#):

[Eye.nonymous wrote](#):

[Fred's story continues:]

This process snuffed out the last flicker of conviction that I could do the job myself.

It's just hard to reconcile this with the Jewish concept of choice. I would just say that the person described here despaired of ever beating the addiction by himself and got some help, which is a very good decision. However when we insist that all addicts take this same course of action we just stop searching for alternative solutions, then we claim that they do not exist.

I could not agree with what you wrote more, nederman!

The saying, "Once an addict, always an addict," is along the same lines as the Fred story above, and I feel is badly misused by some as 'AA dogma'. In my experience it is just *advice*. In fact, I never say it to *anybody* because I do not believe it is a known fact. The old-timers I mentored with and my own experience taught me that saying it lacks humility, too. For how do we know if some addicts **do** actually get healed? We don't. And certainly many who are not addicts and just have a yetzer hora or a bad habit get healed (we hope). All we can assume is that for the present, we can recognize the self-assured rationalizations that have gotten us into trouble before as untrustworthy. Assuming we are healed has not worked well for us as an attitude. So not trusting that I am healed, is just a matter of humility and good sense. I do not know if it is true or not - and do not care.

For the poor fellow who tries to flex his muscle against his addiction and loses, it only proves he is not healed yet. Tomorrow he may be...but "el binoscho al tisho'en is what that's about. Chaza"I did not say it is **assur** - it's just advice. Unfortunately, many here have used the idea as

dogma and given 12 steps a religion status. That's too bad. I have tried to explain it's limitation as I see it.

Additionally, "Once an addict always an addict" is certainly **not** a thing to tell *every* guy who has a drinking/lusting problem - for *he may not be an addict at all!* He may just be a guy who has a yetzer hora - and that's not sick at all, but normal. But for the guy who sees that he tricks himself and ends up drinking/acting out in a cyclical pattern, Fred's story is a call to humility and sound advice, nothing more and nothing less.

As far as bechirah is concerned, the way the program I am familiar with *defines* an addict, is as a person who is sick - *not* normal. I see the Jewish concept of bechirah in **every** area of life as only relevant to normals. For some, there may be areas that bechirah as we understand it is suspended. A possible example of that in the RMB"M may be Par'oh, who was commanded by hashem with the mitzvah of freeing the Jews but did not, and eventually *could* not.

Generalizations such as this in Torah are common: "nashim dayton kalos" and "noshim dabraniyos" are examples of a Torah generalization - not *all* women are that way (the way many rishonim explain "kalos"), and that's fine. Similarly, it seems to me that plenty of frum Jews are good, yet do not learn Torah very much - for they are women. There are also many Jews who do not fast - because they are diabetics. And it seems that the addicts I know in recovery are sick people *in the area of lust or alcohol*. The point is not that they are 'patur' - the point is that they do not fit the mold we like to see - and hashem knows that. He did not write the Torah for crazy people. In those areas, it seems to some addicts that the rules of bechirah do not apply to them.

Now that would be tragic if that meant we assumed we were patur and could act out! But we do not.

Yet unfortunately, since this is an issur, the idea that a solution for a behavior that coincidentally is an issur comes from anything *but* Torah is very distasteful to some. Nu. I got over it and so did many other sober, frum guys.

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by nederman - 25 Dec 2012 05:00

Hi Dov,

As always we have some very deep differences, and that's okay. We have different experiences so we understand reality in different ways. I am glad that you found your peace.

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Eye.nonymous - 25 Dec 2012 11:18

Just a brief reminder:

[Eye.nonymous wrote:](#)

I just want to say that I would like to keep this thread extremely focused--mostly just the BB posts.

I would appreciate it if discussion on this thread is kept to a minimum.

If something here sparks off more than a brief comment, you can say, "This has really got me thinking" and make a link to your own thread and discuss the matter ad infinitum if you so desire.

Also, feel free to fill up people's PM folders to capacity.

I'm just a very focused kinda' guy, and this is a very focused kinda' thread.

Thank you for your understanding.

--Elyah

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Dov - 25 Dec 2012 23:46

Understood, thanks.

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Eye.nonymous - 28 Dec 2012 14:04

Many doctors and psychiatrists agree with our conclusions. One of these men, staff member of a world-renowned hospital, recently made this statement to some of us: "What you say about the general hopelessness of the average [sexaholic's] plight is, in my opinion, correct. As to two of you men, whose stories I have heard, there is no doubt in my mind that you were 100% hopeless, apart from Divine help. Had you offered yourselves as patients at this [treatment center], I would not have taken you, if I had been able to avoid it. People like you are too heartbreaking. Though not a religious person, I have profound respect for the spiritual approach in such cases as yours. For most cases, there is virtually no other solution."

Once more: The [sexaholic] at certain times has no effective mental defense against the first [lust]. Except in a few rare cases, neither he nor any other human being can provide such a defense. His defense must come from a higher Power.
...and now back to Eye.nonymous' regular 'programming'

***COMMENT: Everything we have read until now has been about step one. The next chapter,

"We Agnostics," begins step two.

In a step-work meeting I attend, we stopped here to do a first step exercise. This means that we took a written inventory of our addiction. It should reveal how our addiction developed, the addictive patterns operative in our lives, and how our disease progressed. Also, what was the turning point that got us into recovery, and how has life improved so far as a result? This written inventory is then shared with the group (we are limiting it to 5 minutes each, which we figure should be enough to cover the main points).

I invite you to do the same (and please do so within the next week). I recommend you post in your own personal thread and then provide a link in this thread. If you wish to go beyond that and tell it to someone, please send me a PM.

WARNING: Only share this inventory with another trustworthy friend in recovery. DO NOT SHARE THIS DISCLOSURE WITH YOUR SPOUSE, PARENTS, SIBLINGS, FRIENDS, ETC.

I would like to end with a section from the White Book which describes this public disclosure:

What is this public aspect of surrender? First, it is being able to acknowledge what we are. It takes some of us weeks or months of coming to meetings before we can realize it at depth and say from the inside, "I am a sexaholic." Others seem to freely acknowledge this immediately.

Next, we start talking honestly about ourselves; first, what we've done and thought in the lust, sex, and relationship area. Then, gradually, as more is revealed, we talk about our other defects. Typically, these are revealed progressively over time. It's as though we can't see the full extent of the power our sexaholism has over us without first making a start at sharing it in the fellowship. Then we begin to see and disclose more as we become part of the progressive honesty and self-disclosure of others.

A trust begins to develop as we see that nothing is being held against us and that others are just like we are — or worse off. Trust deepens as we become mutually vulnerable by leading with our weaknesses. Leading with our weaknesses becomes the point of identification and union with each other. And it seems someone's self-disclosure has to start it off. Someone takes the risk because he or she has to, the pain is so bad. This helps us pull away the curtain concealing

the truth of our own lives and encourages our own self-disclosure. The honesty of one encourages the honesty of others, as though we'd all been waiting for just such a fellowship where we could be on the outside what we really were on the inside all along.

All this takes time. We didn't get here in a day. But before we know it, there is shared honesty and mutual vulnerability. This is the breakthrough entrance into the Program that will open the way into the healing power of the Steps. And this is why there must be those in our meetings who are hurting or who have hurt badly enough to break through into true honesty and surrender. This lends power to the meeting, and the spiritual unity and effectiveness of the group are enhanced.

With an in-depth realization of what we really are and a willingness to reveal the truth about ourselves to other members, we can connect with recovery. When we begin telling it like it really is, and was, from the inside out, we become part of. The spiritual Connection begins hereby first disconnecting from what we did. And we disconnect from it by sending it away from us as we tell it. This is the point of breakthrough.

The essence of effective sharing is that we want to be done with our sexual and other wrongs and are sending them away. Mere catharsis or even honest self-disclosure misses the mark if that's all it is. The aim is to bring our diseased attitudes and misdeeds to the light of others and God to be done with them. When it comes from such an attitude, sharing becomes a liberating and life-giving experience.

This is why "telling all" is not taking the First Step. Such confession can be anything from boastful replay to anguished dumping or intellectual analysis. And even then, it's not really "all" and often is only surface material. In truth, we don't "take" the First Step; it takes us. It overtakes us. And if it hasn't yet, hopefully it will. The sickness and punishment sexaholism produces inside us keep pounding us until we're ready to give up, let go, and know we are powerless over lust."

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Eye.nonymous - 03 Jan 2013 12:04

How's the writing coming along?

--Elyah

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Dov - 10 Jan 2013 04:24

Hi Elyah! I will PM you something that is important re the above but you may feel is not for this
at all) Please let me know where it should go, if
anywhere. Thanks.

In the mean time, we are writing....

- Dov

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Re: BIG BOOK STUDY THREAD (or, The Twelve Steps Demystified)
Posted by Eye.nonymous - 11 Jan 2013 13:11

CHAPTER FOUR: WE AGNOSTICS

thread at all (or maybe for *any* thread!

***COMMENT: This chapter is about step two. ***

In the preceding chapters, you have learned something of [sexaholism]. We hope we have made clear the distinction between the [sexaholic] and the non-[sexaholic]. If, when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely, or if when [acting out], you have little control over the amount you take, you are probably [sexaholic]. If that be the case, you may be

suffering from an illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer.

***COMMENT: This is not just a physical disease; a physical solution won't help. ***

To one who feels he is an atheist or agnostic such an experience seems impossible, but to continue as he is means disaster especially if he is a [sexaholic] of the hopeless variety. To be doomed to a [sexaholic] death or to live on a spiritual basis—not always easy alternatives to face.

But it isn't so difficult. About half our original fellowship were of exactly that type. At first some of us tried to avoid the issue, hoping against hope we were not true [sexaholics]. But after a while we had to face the fact that we must find a spiritual basis of life—or else. Perhaps it is going to be that way with you. But cheer up, something like half of us thought we were atheists or agnostics. Our experience shows that you need not be disconcerted.

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