

**The Twelve Steps¹
as Applied to**
The Step Group Form[©]

Why would anyone want to Work the Twelve Steps?

Some people can see they have problems that are beyond their control. They can see that they might profit from working on themselves. Others would rather deny that they have problems that are too much for them.

*People deal too much with the negative,
with what is wrong....Why not try and see
positive things, to just touch those things
and make them bloom*

---Thich Nhat Hanh

To recognize that we have a problem that is beyond our control is the primary hurdle for everyone to clear before entering the path of the Twelve Steps. That life is beyond our control is the first step on this road to freedom. As long as we harbor any denial of this at all, a fulfilling and peaceful existence will remain beyond our personal grasp.

Most human beings imagine the perfect life as one in which they have no difficulties. They tend to look at problems as a curse, or bad luck. This whole predisposition toward viewing problems as unwanted, undeserved, or unneeded gives birth to a huge source of dissatisfaction.

The reality of life is that life is problems. The areas in which we do well and have very little difficulty are those areas which offer us very little opportunity in the way of growth. It is the areas where our problems are the greatest, that growth is possible in its fullest raiment. The more balanced we become spiritually, the more we recognize that problems are a necessary and inevitable part of life.

Human problems fall into two categories. The first, are problems that life itself presents. They are simply opportunities to work through.

The second category is the kind of problems we make for ourselves.

Not knowing who we really are, which is our primal identity, leaves us with very little understanding of the nature of reality. In this state, we can be persuaded by all sorts of erroneous points of view which have no basis in reality.

Our point of view comes off *emulating* reality to us, but this reality and the problems contained in it happen mostly in our imagination and our thinking. When we are caught up in this kind of reality, it prejudices us and our ability to look at the circumstances of our life objectively. We tend to see what we expect to see.

Problems that show up when our perception is distorted seem like they deserve our attention. If we could just be free of this compelling disposition, we would not have to deal with problems that only exist in our head.

Life itself presents us with its own set of problems. They have the ability to advance us and make an enormous contribution to us and those around us. If we spend most of our time

¹The Twelve Steps are first listed in *Alcoholics Anonymous*, first edition, p. 71 & 72.

dealing with the other kind of problems that exist only in our head, we drive ourselves deeply into dissatisfaction. This makes a fertile ground for unhappiness and depression. If we look further than the surface we shall see a growing contempt within accompanied by greedy expectations.

In order to move forward through the problems that life presents in a positive way, we need to begin by acknowledging that there is the possibility that life extends out beyond our current point of view. Accepting that problems are inherent and appropriate to our life, we develop the ability to recognize and move beyond whatever limited ideas we are perhaps stuck with and stand in the way.

We can become free of the powerful hold of the problems we make for our self by doing a complete self-survey of our life and character. This does not mean that life itself will then be free of problems. We can be free, however, of the kind of useless problems that we make for our selves.

The Step Group Form defines a simple daily writing practice that is concise. It is a clear look at our past with a study of our current point of view. When we become willing to face our point of view as something we have made up and as an old habit, life can begin to change. Healing can begin. For some of us, we are surprised to find the type of problems we create our self makes up most of our difficulties.

To begin this road of personal reclamation, we need to consider three primary questions:

- What is the real problem?
- If I have a problem, how will the Twelve Steps solve it?
- Why would I need to embark upon a self survey as a path to freedom?

If we want to become straight we must first let ourselves be crooked

This line from the Tao Te Ching really speaks to the beginning of The Step Group Form.

We did not want or intend to give up our old *personality* when we came to the Twelve Steps.

We just wanted to be free of all of the trouble we were having.

Unsuccessful recovery stems from the idea that having merely noticed a behavior as a problem, now by a simple decision, we can will it away. This is fairly common thinking early on. We have yet to discover that some of our behavior is out of our personal control. The ability to function appropriately has been gone for some time.

The suppression or denial of a habitual behavior *is* a problem. That it is a habit compounds the problem. We are talking about a dependence upon something. We may have a vividly obvious problem behavior, or we may be the type of person who does not appear to have a problem in the world. In either type of personality, we could have problems that are beyond our control.

It is reasonable to ask why one would embark on the journey of the Twelve Steps, let alone take on a thorough self-survey. Too many people experience a limited perception of the solution to their problems. This idea grows because the problem inherent in our point of view has not yet been adequately explored.

People think the source of their problems is outside of themselves. If we just remove the apparent source, all would be well.

We look for help outside of our own resources. Most people who seek either professional help or self help, think that if they get more information, and work harder at it that somehow the problem is going to subside.

It is baffling indeed when we realize that we are dealing with a seemingly simple behavior that repeats itself even when we do not want it to. Sometimes we try to handle it by what is termed "white knuckling it." People think they are doing it all themselves and they are just fine. "White knuckling" is usually an old habit by the time one finds the Twelve Steps. After all, we have been told all our lives that we ought to be able to do things on our own.

Herein lies the trap. “White knuckling it” may not be uncomfortable or painful at all to the conscious mind. This lack of conscious pain can lull us into a dangerous complacency. If we are living at a particular level of pain anyhow we may not notice the pain. “White knuckling” may not add any appreciable pain or discomfort. When we live in this particular state of being we don’t even see any warning signs.

We carry the greatest source of difficulty around within us, and not outside of ourselves at all. Even if we bar the doors and tape up the cracks, problems seem to show up in life anyhow. Even if we moved to Timbuktu, our old problems would emerge again and plague us because we bring them with us wherever we go. This happens over and over again because we have not addressed the origin of the problem itself.

We may not often have an overview and the objectivity to look at our lives and see the common thread that weaves itself out through it’s circumstances. Certainly we may not be able to see this clearly.

If we are currently managing or keeping our heads above water by sheer will power, it is reasonable to ask, why one would embark on this journey of the Twelve Steps. It is reasonable to ask, why would anyone embark upon the Twelve Steps and a thorough self-survey.

People think that dancing as fast as they can is the only option available. They think that by exerting enormous amounts of effort by barely keeping their head above water, is the most they can expect in life.

You may be able to with great effort keep your head above water for even extended periods of time. But if you are like many of us, and find that after periods of exerted effort, you sink below the waves and fall back into unwanted circumstances, there is a solution. If this is the case with you, then the Twelve Steps definitely deserve your consideration as a genuine way out.

In the beginning, it is difficult to see how the Twelve Steps relate to our problems. There

are many who think that the behavior is the entire problem. If they stop drinking, for example, then the problem will be eradicated. In fact, this notion that the behavior *is* the problem, is so strong that it, in itself, causes another problem.

If we were able to simply concentrate on the behavior and eliminate it, there would be no need for the Twelve Steps. If the behavior was, indeed, the whole problem, then simple abstinence would eradicate it. If the person has quit drinking, they may feel they have eradicated the problem. In that case, they will never address the causes of their drinking problem.

The real problem is far more fundamental than restraint. By simply acknowledging the problem we have at least partially conceded that we have come upon *something* that we are unable to control or manage. That is the first step. But there is a tendency to want to somehow be free of the behavior and all of its trouble, without thoroughly addressing the underlying cause.

Behavior is not the root of the problem. Certain behaviors surely make problems, but the primary problem stems from something more fundamental than the behavior.

Any apparent problem behavior is the tip of the iceberg. “Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions.”²

The behavior is the part that shows. The root of the problem lies within our point of view. At the root of our point of view resides

- *our primal identity usually overlaid by our false or manufactured personality*
- *a workable or unworkable implicit philosophy of life (which is where the Twelve Steps come in)*
- *ideas and evidence about others and the world we perceive*

² *Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 76, first edition.

Any behavior we are having difficulty with needs to be viewed as a symptom of the problem, but not the problem in its entirety. One could say that behind every unnecessary problem is a problem point of view.

It is our point of view that designs our life. Following directly behind it comes our temperament, our attitude and all sorts of justified behavior. If we look closely we shall find that how we think is behind each one of our behaviors. If we work the Twelve Steps we shall find that it is our thinking that we have little control over.

Our habitual point of view goes unnoticed as it continues to be the engine that drives our *personality* and our life style. Furthermore, unless studied in depth, it is viewed as advantageous. It is hardly noticed. Even after people have disowned us, we have been thrown out of our job, or have lost our family, our sanity, or *everything* because of our behavior, our point of view remains unchecked. We tenaciously identify with it as if it were who we really are.

Human beings do not have a point of view that never worked in some way for them. The root of "personality" is in the two Latin words *per sone*, which mean "that which the sound comes through." Point of view encompasses the entire personality.

The personality can be viewed as one answer we have found to an unanswered question. What is the question? Before the question can even be formulated we must examine the ideas under which our personality has been operating.

Although there are many paths to successful living, the Step Group Form as a form of thorough self-survey is a clear and relatively simple way to break out of the stranglehold that our point of view has on us. If followed as we suggest, it can lead to an advanced state of awareness and consciousness about the human condition. This awareness affords us enormous freedom.

This is not a new religion. It begins with a simple daily writing practice that is a clear

set of guidelines for the 4th Step in the Twelve-step process.

Having a period of brief or extended abstinence from a problem behavior some people like to say that the particular behavior quit working for them. For example, a person who has quit drinking likes to say that alcohol stopped working for them.

The problem behavior can always recur unless we find and eliminate the original source of our difficulty

To say that alcohol has stopped working is misleading. Although alcohol may have caused great difficulty, if it was used once as a solution to a problem, it is a possible solution again. It is a mistake to think it has stopped working without a successful resolution to the problem itself. If drinking actually stopped working, there would no longer be a problem. It would disappear.

It is a common human response to find a solution to conflict. The behaviors we have found to work in the past were at one time thought to put us at an advantage. On some level we considered them an effective solution.

In our example, alcohol was the solution. People do not have behaviors that have not been considered reasonable solutions. These old perceptions will surely return as solutions as soon as the old difficulties again press themselves sufficiently into our life. It is merely a matter of time.

The origin of the problem has had many years of so called "working." Abstinence does not stop it from working. There are countless stories that say even after a protracted period of total abstinence, the behavior can return with full force and knock us off our feet.

Drinking doesn't stop working as a solution until the original cause of the problem has been arrested. Without a successful resolution of the basic problem itself, which is inherent in our *point of view*, one can almost surely expect to fall back into the answers offered by our old ideas.

It isn't the alcohol or a behavior that is "...cunning, baffling and powerful!"³ It is the point of view that is cunning and powerful.

We must examine the ideas under which we have been operating

It is because of our point of view that we ever found the behavior to be of value. Indeed, for our erroneous identity, the behavior is still a workable answer. If we didn't have this identity, perhaps the problem behavior would not be a solution for us any longer. If we could be free of this limited identity, then we could also live free of the ensuing behaviors.

Being free of the point of view is the freedom we have found in working the Twelve Steps using the Step Group Form. There is nothing that we can tell you that is going to convince you that a high level of motivation in thoroughly embarking upon the Twelve Steps is a life and death matter. Nor are we going to convince you that you are in the same boat as the rest of us. We know that the experience you now have offers you no conception of what we are talking about. We know this because we all remember what we experienced before we undertook these steps.

Those of us who have been able to sustain sufficient motivation and commitment are still here to happily say that integrating the Twelve Steps as a way of life has been essential to all the joy and freedom we have ever found.

Learning to live the Twelve Steps takes care of one of the three problems we mentioned, that of finding a workable philosophy of life. Learning to live the Twelve Steps is undertaking a new way of life. The Step Group Form of working the Twelve Steps can be a vital pathway to finding your real identity and establishing a new point of view.

The most appropriate identity is being who you really are. When operating from your real identity your point of view about others and life works in a positive way. Problems that seemed so real, fall away. The results of the

work can effectively enable you to ask and answer your own life's questions.

Through this work life itself becomes the most productive solution to all problems. It's a wonderful possibility, one that is not granted many people. It all begins with a decision to begin the Twelve Steps with the help of your Creator, or if you wish, a power that is greater than you.

This decision is a commitment that you make to your self. It is a commitment that you make for you, by you and between you and your Creator. We will all be here to walk with you. We are all in this together. If this sounds good to you, welcome to Step One.



Please Note

Our commitment is that no one find the Twelve Steps, walk away and die. They can find the life-transforming miracle they are looking for through the beauty of the Twelve Steps. This is the principle the International Step Foundation stands upon as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) public educational charity.

We serve two categories of people: those in 12-Step programs wishing a clearer understanding of the Twelve Steps as an enhancement to their 12-Step program, and those people sincerely interested in changing their life and altering their current course of existence. For both groups we offer clear and understandable input and suggestions for embracing the Twelve Steps as a way of life.

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³ *Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 70, 71, first edition