

STEP TWELVE

Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to nicotine users, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The theme of the Twelfth Step is our newly found way of life -- the freedom, joy and serenity we have discovered through the awakening of our spirit. The power of the Twelfth Step is that it provides a guide for living the rest of our lives. There are three components to this Step. The first is the "spiritual awakening." This refers, of course to where we have been in the past and what has happened to us. The second and third arts -- to "carry this message" and "practice these principles" -- are the guides for living and for our future.

If we look back over the course of the previous Steps, it is clear that we are seeing a process of spiritual awakening. There has been slow growth and change. Recognizing the unmanageability, which our addiction to nicotine spread over our lives, and learning to admit powerlessness did not happen without effort. It took work.

Beginning to believe in the notion of a Higher Power and starting to "Let Go and Let God" was not easy for many of us. We struggled, resisted and fought. But gradually, we managed to peel off another layer of the onion, and we got through Steps Two and Three. We continued to evolve, grow, and become aware.

The process continued. Gradually, step by step, we fought our way out of our deep slumber. Through what surely was the greatest struggle of our lives, we awakened to an altered sense of ourselves and our lives.

For many, the change included an awareness of the significance that we are on this planet, we are alive, and there is joy and happiness to be had, today, here and now.

We awakened from that time of slow suicide by nicotine use, when our spirits were drowned in a vast ocean of self-loathing, smashed by endless waves of craving, fear, and failure. We managed to find a way to get up on top of the waves and ride them and have fun, instead of letting them crash over us

and pound us into the sand. We found a surfboard. We found a Higher Power. We found strength to save us from ourselves. We managed gradually to tap an inner resource of our own belief system, our own imagination, and our own faith -- a God as we understood God. That God was someone, something, anyone, anything greater than we were.

We began to understand that the dis-ease we felt as nicotine addicts -- the destructive self-consciousness, the inadequacies, the depression, the false bravado bravado, the irrational aggressiveness, and of the grim self-loathing -- all grew out of a core sense of loneliness and fear. We thought we could do it by ourselves. We were alone and tried to ease the pain through nicotine.

Eventually, we were able to recognize the insanity caused by our self-imposed isolation and then we allowed ourselves to find a companion we called a Higher Power.

We learned to work at keeping in contact with our soul, with our Higher Power. We found an ability to remain serene despite the ups and downs. We discovered that we could ride to the waves.

With that discovery, life became and remains a series of small miracles and increments of wonder. We became less likely to wallow in self-pity or to brood an afternoon of our life away if we acknowledged, accepted, and welcomed our own spiritual existence by finding the peace to ride on our planet's journey, every moment has its own reward. Every moment becomes sacred and enriches us because we learn to live today, here and now. Every raindrop that falls, every breath we breathe, every mountain we climb, and every wind which howls are all equally significant because we experience them. They exist, and when we exist as part of them, we are not alone. When we are not alone, we need to not kill ourselves with nicotine.

This is what we mean when we talk about a spiritual awakening. This is what has happened through the process of the Steps.

Nonetheless, we remain addicts. And when we begin to experience the joys of being free from using nicotine, we run the risk of thinking once again that we can control things. That is the risk of being an addict. As the suffering of our nicotine past recedes, the temptations that got us in trouble return. This brings us to the latter parts of the Twelfth Step -- the action plan for continuing to live free from nicotine.

We have learned the best way to keep our madness from resuming control of our lives is by sharing our new gift of life with those who are still suffering. We call it "carrying the message." We do this in two ways; we give away the gift we have received through sharing, and we let our lives be examples for others.

The way we carry the message to those who are still using nicotine is by sharing our experience, strength, and hope with them. It is simple and it is safe. We know of the miracle in our own lives, and we can share it with persons still suffering. Nevertheless, in sharing we need to be vigilant, remembering that what we share is *our* experience -- and no one else's.

We share our strength through honesty and humbleness. Moreover, we share the joy we have found through tapping into a new source for positive energy and the happiness we find in surrendering to something greater than ourselves -- to a Higher Power.

As we share the gift of our own miracles, each act done in gratitude, no matter how small the separate undertaking may seem, has its own lessons and rewards for us. We give away what we have received and thereby get even more. We, who have been at the depths of despair and agony, learn as we help to lift others from that dreadful place. Our own joy increases as we see others being helped by what we have learned for ourselves. There is joy for us in helping a newcomer through just one craving for nicotine, since, as we know all so well, every single craving can be deadly.

What we actually do to help the nicotine user through a craving may be very simple and may not entail more than talking for a couple of minutes, or giving a hug or a squeeze on the hand. We know the pain because we have experienced it. Our joy in helping is not diminished by the simplicity of the undertaking because we understand its importance.

Through helping others, we learn compassion, patience, and tolerance. These wondrous gifts help us accept ourselves and reaffirm our own worth and growth. Our own simple, honest message of our recovery from nicotine addiction is powerful beyond belief. By attending meetings and making ourselves visible and available, we provide the greatest service possible. The more we participate and the more we are active, the better we can and do carry the message. We are not out to seek converts.

We show the way by example. This is the third part of Step Twelve. We practice the principles of recovery -- the principles we have learned through the process of the Twelve Steps -- and we practice them in all of our affairs. These principles include acceptance, surrender, humbleness, tolerance, patience, willingness, openness, love, hope, faith, trust, and joy.

These are the principles that rescued us from the loneliness and fear. They become ongoing principles of enjoying freedom, joy, and serenity in our everyday lives.

In addition, when we practice these principles in all our affairs, we do a superb job of carrying the message. Others who knew us before cannot help but notice the changes in us as we move forward in recovery. We carry the message by being in our own recovery all the time.

What started as a desperate focus on quitting the use of nicotine now blossoms and grows into a freedom to live. With awe and humility, we learn to enjoy the most precious gifts of all -- the acceptance of our own humanness and the awareness that we are not alone.

Like life itself, the Steps are a process and a cycle. We live the Steps by practicing their positive principles in all our affairs. Step Twelve is not the end. It is the rest of life. It is freedom, joy and serenity.

Welcome To Nicotine Anonymous

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