STEP TWO

WE CAME TO BELIEVE THAT A POWER GREATER THAN OURSELVES COULD RESTORE US TO SANITY

Step one strips us of our illusions about addiction; Step two gives us hope for recovery. The Second Step tells us that what we found out about our addiction in the First Step is not the end of the story. The pain and insanity with which we have been living are unnecessary, says Step Two. They can be relieved and, in time, we will learn to live without them through working the Twelve Steps of Gamblers Anonymous.

The Second Step fills the void we feel when we've finished Step One. As we approach Step Two, we begin to consider that just maybe, there's a Power greater than ourselves that is capable of healing our hurt, calming our confusion and restoring our sanity. When we were new in the program, many of us were puzzled by this step's implication that we had been insane. From acknowledging our powerlessness to admitting our "insanity" seemed an awfully large leap. However, after being around the program for a while, we began to understand what this step was really about. We read the Basic Text and found that our insanity was defined there as "repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results." We could certainly relate to that. After all, how many times had we tried to get away with something we had never gotten away with before, each time telling ourselves, "It will be different this time?" Now, that's insane! As we live the principles of this step for many years, we discover how deep our insanity actually runs; we often find that the Basic Text definition just scratches the surface.

Some of us resisted this step because we thought it required us to be religious. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, in the GA program that requires a member to be religious. The idea that "anyone may join us, regardless of religion or lack of religion" is fiercely defended by our fellowship. Our members strive to be inclusive in this regard and do not tolerate anything that compromises the unconditional right of all addicts to develop their own individual understanding of a Power greater than themselves. This is a spiritual, not religious, program.
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The beauty of the Second Step is revealed when we begin to think about what our Higher Power can be. We are encouraged to choose a Power that is loving, caring, and most importantly able to restore us to sanity.

The Second Step does not say, "We came to believe in a Power greater than ourselves." It says, "We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." The emphasis is not on who or what this Power is, but on what this Power can do for us. The group itself certainly qualifies as a Power greater than us. So do the spiritual principles contained in the Twelve Steps. And, of course, so does the understanding any one of our individual members has of a Higher Power. As we stay clean and continue to work this step, we discover that no matter how long our addiction has gone on and how far our insanity has progressed, there's no limit to the ability of a Power greater than ourselves to restore our sanity.

HOPE

The hope we get from working Step Two replaces the desperation with which we came into the program. Every time we had followed what we'd thought would be a path out of our addiction - medicine, religion, or psychiatry, for instance - we found they only took us so far; none of these was sufficient for us. As we ran out of options and exhausted our resources, we wondered if we'd ever find a solution to our dilemma, if there was anything in the world that worked. In fact, we may have been slightly suspicious when we first came to G.A., wondering if this was just another method that would not work, or that would not work well enough for us to make a difference.

However, something remarkable occurred to us as we sat in our first few meetings. There were other addicts there who had gambled just as we had, addicts who were now clean. We believed in them. We knew we could trust them. They knew the places we'd been to in our addiction - not just the using hangouts, not just the geographic locations, but the hangouts of horror and despair our spirits had visited each time we'd gambled. The recovering addicts we met in GA knew those places as well as we did because they had been there themselves.
It was when we realized that these other members - addicts like ourselves - were staying clean and finding freedom that most of us first experienced the feeling of hope. We may have been standing with a group of members after a meeting. We may have been listening to someone share stories just like our own. Most of us can recall that moment, even years later - and that moment comes to all of us.

Our hope is renewed throughout our recovery. Each time something new is revealed to us about our disease, the pain of that realization is accompanied by a surge of hope. No matter how painful the process of demolishing our denial may be, something else is being restored in its place within us. Even if we don't feel like we believe in anything, we do believe in the program. We believe that we can be restored to sanity, even in the most hopeless times, even in our sickest areas. What do I have hope about today?

**INSANITY**

If we have any doubts about the need for a renewal of sanity in our lives, we're going to have trouble with this step. Reviewing our First Step should help us if we're having doubts. Now is the time to take a good look at our insanity:-

1. Did I believe I could control my gambling?
2. What were some of my experiences with this, and how were my efforts unsuccessful?
3. What things did I do that I can hardly believe I did when I look back at them?
4. Did I put myself in dangerous situations when gambling?
5. Did I behave in ways of which I'm ashamed?
6. What were those situations like?
7. Did I make insane decisions as a result of my addiction?
8. Did I quit jobs, leave friendships and other relationships, or give up on achieving other goals for no reasons other than that those things interfered with my gambling?
9. Did I ever physically injure myself or someone else in my addiction?
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Insanity is a loss of our perspective and our sense of proportion. For example, we may think that our personal problems are more important than anyone else's; in fact, we may not even be able to consider other people's needs at all. Small problems become major catastrophes. Our lives get out of balance. Some obvious examples of insane thinking are the belief that we can stay clean on our own, or the belief that gambling was our only problem and that everything is fine now just because we're clean. In GA, insanity is often described as the belief that we can take something outside ourselves - gambling, power, sex and food - to fix what's wrong inside ourselves: our feelings:

10 How have I overreacted or under-reacted to things?
11 How has my life been out of balance?
12 In what ways does my insanity tell me that things outside me can make me whole or solve all my problems?
   12.1 Drugs?
   12.2 Compulsive gambling, eating, or sex seeking?
   12.3 Something else?
13 Is part of my insanity the belief that the symptom of my addiction (gambling or some other manifestation) is my only problem?

If we've been clean for a while, we may find that a whole new level of denial is making it difficult to see the insanity in our lives. Just as we did in the beginning of our recovery, we need to become familiar with the ways in which we have been insane. Many of us have found that our understanding of insanity goes further than the definition of insanity in the Basic Text. We make the same mistakes over and over again, even when we're fully aware of what the results will be. Perhaps we're hurting so bad that we don't care about the consequences, or we figure that acting on an obsession will somehow be worth the price. When we've acted on an obsession, even though we knew what the results would be, what were we feeling and thinking beforehand? What made us go ahead?
COMING TO BELIEVE

The discussion above provides several reasons why we may have trouble with this step. There may be others. It's important for us to identify and overcome any barriers that could prevent us from coming to believe.

1. Do I have any fears about coming to believe? What are they?
2. Do I have any other barriers that make it difficult for me to believe? What are they?
3. What does the phrase "We came to believe …" mean to me?

As addicts, we're prone to wanting everything to happen instantly. But it's important to remember that Step Two is a process, not an event. Most of us don't just wake up one day and know that a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity. We gradually grow into this belief. Still, we don't have to just sit back and wait for our belief to grow on its own; we can help it along.

4. Have I ever believed in anything for which I didn't have tangible evidence? What was that experience like?
5. What experiences have I heard other recovering addicts' share about the process of coming to believe? Have I tried any of them in my life?
6. In what do I believe?
7. How has my belief grown since I've been in recovery?

A POWER GREATER THAN OURSELVES

Each one of us comes to recovery with a whole history of life experiences. That history will determine to a large degree the kind of understanding we develop of a Power greater than ourselves. In this step, we don't have to have a lot of specific ideas about the nature or identity of that Higher Power. That sort of understanding will come later. The kind of understanding of a Higher Power that's most important to find in the Second Step is an understanding that can help us. We're not concerned here with theological elegance or doctrinal adherence - we just want something that works.
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How powerful does a Power greater than ourselves have to be? The answer to that question is simple. Our addiction as a negative power was, without a doubt, greater that we were. Our addiction led us down a path of insanity and caused us to act differently that we wanted to behave. We need something to combat that, something at least as powerful as our addiction.

1 Do I have problems accepting that there is a Power or Powers greater than myself?
2 What are some things that are more powerful than I am?
3 Can a Power greater than myself help me stay clean? How?
4 Can a Power greater than I am help me recover? How?

Some of us may have a very clear idea about the nature of a Power greater than ourselves, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with that. In fact, Step Two is the point at which many of us begin to form our first practical ideas about a Power greater than ourselves, if we haven't already. Many addicts have found it helpful to identify what a Power greater than ourselves is not before identifying what it is. In addition, looking at what a Power greater than ourselves can do for us may help us begin to discover more about that Power.

There are many, many understandings of a Power greater than ourselves that we can develop. We can think of it as the power of spiritual principles, the power of the GA fellowship, "good orderly direction," or anything else of which we can conceive, as long as it is loving and caring and more powerful than we are. As a matter of fact, we don't have to have any understanding at all of a Power greater than ourselves to be able to use that Power to stay clean and seek recovery.

5 What evidence do I have that a Higher Power is working in my life?
6 What are the characteristics my Higher Power does not have?
7 What are the characteristics my Higher Power has?
RESTORATION TO SANITY

It works: How and Why defines the term "restoration" as "changing to a point where addiction and its accompanying insanity are not controlling our lives." We find that just as our insanity was evident in our loss of perspective and sense of proportion, so we can see sanity in our lives when we begin developing a perspective that allows us to make better decisions. We find that we have choices about how to act. We begin to have the maturity and wisdom to slow down and consider all aspects of a situation before acting. Naturally, our lives will change. Most of us have no trouble identifying the sanity in our lives when we compare our using with our early recovery, our early recovery with some time clean, and some time clean with long-term recovery. All of this is a process, and our need for a restoration to sanity will change over time.

When we're new in the program, being restored to sanity probably means not having to gamble anymore; when that happens, perhaps some of the insanity that is directly and obviously tied to our using will stop. We'll quit committing crimes to gamble. We'll cease putting ourselves in certain degrading situations that serve no purpose but our gambling. If we've been in recovery for some time, we may find that we have no trouble believing in the Power greater than ourselves that can help us stay clean, but we may not have considered what a restoration to sanity means to us beyond staying clean. As we grow in our recovery, it's very important that our idea of the meaning of "sanity" also grows.

1. What are some things I consider examples of sanity?
2. What changes in my thinking and behaviour are necessary for my restoration to sanity?
3. In what areas of my life do I need sanity now?
4. How is restoration a process?
5. How will working the rest of the steps help me in my restoration to sanity?
6. How has sanity already been restored to me in my recovery?

Some of us may have unrealistic expectations about being restored to sanity. We may think that we'll never get angry again or that, as soon as we start to work this step, we will behave perfectly all the time and have no more trouble with obsessions, emotional
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turmoil, or imbalance in our lives. This description may seem extreme, but if we find ourselves disappointed with our personal growth in recovery of the amount of time it takes to be "restored to sanity," we may recognize some of our beliefs in this description. Most of us have found that we gain the most serenity by letting go of any expectations we may have about how our recovery is progressing.

7  What expectations do I have about being restored to sanity? - Are they realistic or unrealistic?
8  Are my realistic expectations about how my recovery is progressing being met or not?
9  Do I understand that recovery happens over time, not overnight?
10 Finding ourselves able to act sanely, even once, in a situation with which we were never able to deal successfully before is evidence of sanity.
11 Have I had any experiences like that in my recovery? - What were they?

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

In the Second Step, we focus on open-mindedness, willingness, faith, trust, and humility.

1  Open-Mindedness

The principle of open-mindedness that we find in the Second Step arises from the understanding that we can't recover alone, that we need some kind of help. It continues with opening our minds to believing that help is possible for us. It doesn't matter whether we have any ideas of how this Power greater than ourselves is going to help, just that we believe it's possible.

1.1 Why is having a closed mind harmful to my recovery?
1.2 How am I demonstrating open-mindedness in my life today?
1.3 In what ways has my life changed since I've been in recovery?
1.4 Do I believe more change is possible?
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2 Willingness

Practicing the principle of willingness in the Second Step may being simply. At first we may just go to meetings and listen to other recovering addicts share about their experiences with this step. Then we may begin applying what we hear to our own recovery. Of course, we ask our sponsor to guide us.

2.1 What am I willing to do to be restored to sanity?
2.2 Is there something I am now willing to do that I was previously unwilling to do? If so, what is it?

3 Faith

We can't just sit back and wait to feel a sense of faith when working Step Two. We have to work at it. One of the suggestions that has worked for many of us is to "act as if" we had faith. This doesn't mean that we should be dishonest with ourselves. We don't need to lie to our sponsor or anyone else about where we are with this step. We're not doing this to sound good or look good. "Acting as if" simply means living as though we believe that what we hope for will happen. In the second Step, this would mean living as though we expect to be restored to sanity. There are a variety of ways this may work in our individual lives. Many members suggest that we can begin "acting as if" by going to meetings regularly and taking direction from our sponsor i.e. **fake it until you make it**.

3.1 What action have I been taking that demonstrates my faith?
3.2 How has my faith grown?
3.3 Have I been able to make plans, having faith that my addiction isn't going to get in the way?
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4  Trust

Practicing the principle of trust may require overcoming a sense of fear about the process of being restored to sanity. Even if we’ve been clean only a short time, we’ve probably already experienced some emotional pain as we’ve grown in recovery. We may be afraid that where will be more paid. In one sense, we’re right about this: There will be more pain. None of it, however, will be more that we can bear, and none of it has to be borne alone. If we can develop our sense of trust in the process of recovery and in a Power greater than ourselves, we can walk through the painful times in our recovery. We’ll know that what’s waiting on the other side will be more than just superficial happiness; it will be a fundamental transformation that will make our lives more satisfying on a deeper level.

4.1  What fears to I have that are getting in the way of my trust?
4.2  What do I need to do to let go of these fears?
4.3  What action am I taking that demonstrates my trust in the process of recovery and a Power greater than myself?

5  Humility

The principle of humility springs from our acknowledgement that there is a Power greater than ourselves. It's a tremendous struggle for most of us to stop relying on our own thinking and begin to ask for help, but when we do, we have begun to practice the principle of humility found in the Second Step.

5.1  Have I sought help from a Power greater than myself today? How?

5.2  Have I sought help from my sponsor, gone to meetings, and reached out to other recovering addicts?

5.2.1  What were the results?
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MOVING ON

As we get ready to go on to Step Three, we'll want to take a look as what we've gained by working Step Two. Writing about our understanding of each step as we prepare to move on helps us internalize the spiritual principles connected to it.

1  What action can I take that will help me along in the process of coming to believe?
2  What am I doing to work on overcoming any unrealistic expectations I may have about being restored to sanity?
3  What is my understanding of Step Two?
4  How has my prior knowledge and experience affected my work on this step?

As we move on to Step Three, a sense of hope is probably arising within our spirits. Even if we're not new in recovery, we've just reinforced our knowledge that recovery, growth, and change are not just possible but inevitable when we make the effort to work the steps.

We can see the possibility of relief from the particular brand of insanity in which we've most recently been gripped by our addiction. We've probably already begun to experience some freedom. We're beginning to be released from the blind pursuit of our insanity. We've explored our insanity and have started to trust a Power greater than ourselves to relieve us from having to continue on the same path.

We're beginning to be freed from our illusions. We no longer have to struggle to keep our addiction a secret or isolate ourselves to hide our insanity. We have seen how the program has worked for others, and we have discovered that it is beginning to work for us as well. Through our newfound faith, we achieve the willingness to move into action and work Step Three.