

Recovery Group Big Book Study Part 1

(January 2018, VSB Website Resources Sub-Committee: The readings are from the AA '**Big Book**', 3rd Edition and/or the '**Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions**'. "D & R" mean discuss and reflect. Quotes from AA material have been updated to reflect alcohol, as written. OA only has permission to change the wording to "compulsive overeater" in OA Steps and OA Traditions. In one's private reading and writing, one can substitute the words "food" and "compulsive overeater" for "alcohol" and "alcoholism.")

Note: Taken from OA Online Big Book Study (<http://www.therecoverygroup.org/bigbookstories/1999/index.html>). The VSB Website Resources Sub-Committee verified this site is still up as of 01/12/2018.

Foreword to First Edition

Read the *Foreword to the First Edition* then respond to these questions:

1. How do you feel reading the Big Book will be useful to you in your recovery?
2. Have you ever thought of the BB as a spiritual tool?
3. Have you experienced a skid row in your mind?
4. When you read the words "the alcoholic is a very sick person," do any memories come back that help you identify with this statement?

Foreword to Second Edition

Read the *Foreword to the Second Edition* then respond to these questions:

5. Can you see their natural evolution of the Steps of the Program?
6. What did the phrase "dependence on God" mean to the founders?
7. What does it mean to you?
8. What does the concept of a "spiritual recovery" mean to you?

Recovery Group Big Book Study Part 1

Foreword to Third Edition

Read the *Foreword to the Third Edition* then respond to these questions:

9. What influence did AA have on women in the 1970s?
10. Describe how the basic principles of AA affected different lifestyles and nationalities.
11. When does recovery begin?

The Doctor's Opinion

Read *The Doctor's Opinion*, then respond to questions about this reading:

"The terms "spiritual experience" and "spiritual awakening" are used many times in this book which, upon careful reading, shows that the personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism has manifested itself among us in many different forms...

...Though it was not our intention to create such an impression, many alcoholics have nevertheless concluded that in order to recover they must acquire an immediate and overwhelming "God-consciousness" followed at once by a vast change in feeling and outlook...

...Most of our experiences are what psychologist William James calls the "educational variety" because they develop slowly over a period of time. BB, p. 569, 3rd edition [BB, p.567, 4th edition]

"Most emphatically we wish to say that any alcoholic capable of honestly facing his problems in the light of our experience can recover, provided he does not close his mind to all spiritual concepts. He can only be defeated by an attitude of intolerance or belligerent denial." BB, p.570, 3rd edition [BB, p. 568, 4th edition].

Recovery Group Big Book Study Part 1

12. Has being in a 12-step program changed your spirituality? If so, how?
13. What kind of miracles have you experienced in this program?
14. Please comment on any observations you've had related to the statement:
"He can only be defeated by an attitude of intolerance or belligerent denial."
BB, p.570, 3rd edition [BB, p. 568, 4th edition].

Bill's Story

Read *Bill's Story* then respond to questions about this reading:

"Renewing my resolve, I tried again. Some time passed, and confidence began to be replaced by cocksureness. I could laugh at the gin mills....In no time I was beating on the bar asking myself how it happened....The remorse, horror and hopelessness of the next morning are unforgettable. The courage to do battle was not there. My brain raced uncontrollably and there was a terrible sense of impending calamity." BB, pp. 5-6.

"My friend suggested what then seemed a novel idea. He said, '*Why don't you choose your own conception of God?*' That statement hit me hard. It melted the icy intellectual mountain in whose shadow I had lived and shivered many years. I stood in the sunlight at last." BB, p. 12.

"Most of us feel we need look no further for Utopia. We have it with us right here and now. Each day my friend's simple talk in our kitchen multiplies itself in a widening circle of peace on earth and good will to men." BB, p. 16.

15. Do you see similarities between Bill's story and your story?

Recovery Group Big Book Study Part 1

16. Did you have the experience of thinking you had reached a bottom only to find that you were still descending into your disease?
17. Bill's spiritual awakening seemed to start with him hearing one simple statement. Have you had any experiences with hearing something, as if for the first time, and having your whole world change in that instant? If so, please describe.
18. How does the statement, "Faith has to work twenty-four hours a day in and through us, or we perish.", BB, p. 16, apply to your life today?

The Doctor's Nightmare

Read *The Doctor's Nightmare* then respond to questions about this reading:

"During the next few years, I developed two distinct phobias. One was the fear of not sleeping, and the other was the fear of running out of liquor." BB, p.175.

"If my wife was planning to go out in the afternoon, I would get a large supply of liquor and smuggle it home and hide it in the coal bin, the clothes chute, over door jams, over beams in the cellar and in cracks in the cellar tile." BB, p.176.

"For the benefit of those experimentally inclined, I should mention the so-called beer experiment." BB, p.177.

"It never fails, if you go about it with half the zeal you have been in the habit of showing when you were getting another drink." BB, p.181.

19. What in Dr. Bob's story resonates with your own?

Recovery Group Big Book Study Part 1

20. Have you found that in addition to an addiction to food, that you get "high" from other behaviors that relate to compulsive overeating?
21. What does the phrase, "We're as sick as our secrets" mean to you?
22. What kinds of effort have you been willing to exert to satisfy your addiction? Are you willing to put the same energy into your recovery?

Chapter Two: There is a Solution

Read *There is a Solution* then respond to questions about this reading:

"...but everybody hopefully awaits the day when the sufferer will rouse himself from his lethargy and assert his power of will. The tragic truth is that if the man be a real alcoholic, the happy day may not arrive." BB, p. 23.

"But the ex-problem drinker who has found this solution, who is properly armed with facts about himself, can generally win the entire confidence of another alcoholic in a few hours. Until such an understanding is reached, little or nothing can be accomplished." BB, p.18.

"You may already have asked yourself why it is that all of us became so very ill from drinking....If you are an alcoholic who wants to get over it, you may already be asking -- 'What do I have to do?'" BB, p.20.

"The great fact is just this, and nothing less: That we have had deep and effective spiritual experiences which have revolutionized our whole attitude toward life, toward our fellows and toward God's universe. The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our Creator has entered into our hearts and lives in a way which is indeed miraculous. He has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do by ourselves." BB, p.25.

"Each individual, in the personal stories, describes in his own language and

Recovery Group Big Book Study Part 1

from his own point of view the way he established his relationship with God." BB, p.29.

23. How did you find out about OA?
24. What other "solutions" have you tried to stop eating compulsively?
25. Do you have hope that someday you will be able to eat like a normal person? If so, how do you deal with those feelings today?
26. Do you believe that compulsive overeating is a disease? If so, can you see a positive side to it?

Chapter Three: More About Alcoholism

Read *More About Alcoholism* then respond to questions about this reading:

"No person likes to think he is bodily and mentally different from his fellows... the idea that somehow, someday, he will control and enjoy his drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker." BB, p.30.

"Whatever the precise definition of the word may be, we call this plain insanity...with our sound reasoning there inevitably ran some insanelly trivial excuse for taking the first drink." BB, p.37.

"But the actual or potential alcoholic, with hardly an exception, will be *absolutely unable to stop drinking on the basis of self-knowledge.*" BB, p.39.

"...willpower and self-knowledge could not help in those strange mental blank spots..." BB, p.42.

"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." BB, p. 43.

Recovery Group Big Book Study Part 1

28. Do you have certain "telltale" signals when you're in danger of a slip? What tools do you use to protect your abstinence?
29. Has the obsession to eat like a normal person characterized much of your struggle with food? What have you done to prove (to yourself and/or others) that you could eat like a normal person?
30. Were you or are you ever aware of that struggle between the voice of reason and the insanity of your disease? What did it feel like when the insanity won out?
31. Alcoholism is often seen as different from food addiction (or compulsive overeating) because an alcoholic can put "the plug in the jug." Does your abstinence allow you that kind of clarity? If not, how do you deal with the gray areas?

Chapter Four: We Agnostics

Read *We Agnostics* then respond to questions about this reading:

"To be doomed to an alcoholic death or to live on a spiritual basis are not always easy alternatives to face." BB, p.44.

"Lack of power was our dilemma" BB, p. 45.

". . . even though it was impossible for any of us to fully define or comprehend that Power, which is God." BB, p. 46.

"Many of us have been so touchy that even casual reference to spiritual things made us bristle with antagonism." BB, p. 48.

"When many hundreds of people are able to say that the consciousness of the Presence of God is today the most important fact in their lives, they present a powerful reason why one should have faith." BB, p. 51.

35. In what ways have you failed to live your life "on a spiritual basis" before coming to this program?

Recovery Group Big Book Study Part 1

36. What doubts and prejudices did you have regarding the word, "God?"
37. What is your conception of God today?
38. What spiritual concepts have you accepted that were previously out of reach?

We Agnostics, continued

Respond to questions about this reading:

"To be doomed to an alcoholic death or to live on a spiritual basis are not always easy alternatives to face." BB, p. 44.

"This Power has in each case accomplished the miraculous, the humanly impossible." BB, p. 45.

". . . in the face of the total failure of their human resources. . ." BB, p. 50.

". . . we had to fearlessly face the proposition that either God is everything else He is nothing." BB, p. 53.

"We found the Great Reality deep down within us. In the last analysis it is only there that He may be found." BB, p. 55.

39. Do you believe that your Higher Power can accomplish the miraculous?
40. Have you been biased and unreasonable about the realm of the spirit?"
41. Have you been living in the faith that food could solve your problems?
42. Do you believe that the idea of God is within you?

Recovery Group Big Book Study Part 1

Chapter Five: How it Works

Read *How it Works* then respond to questions about this reading:

"Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally escapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born that way. They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty. Their chances are less than average. There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest." BB, p. 58.

43. Is there an easier, softer way to work this Program? Other than working the 12 Steps?
44. Will half measures avail us anything?
45. When it says that we decided to turn our will and our life over to God as we understood Him, just what does that mean to you? And what do you do when you turn your will and life over to God as you understand him?
46. "So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot. BB, p. 62. We compulsive overeaters "...must be rid of this selfishness." BB, p. 62. How is that possible?
47. We are now at Step Three. Explain what the Step Three prayer means to you. "God, I offer myself to Thee - to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!" BB, p. 63.

Recovery Group Big Book Study Part 1

How it Works, continued

Respond to questions about this additional quote:

“Therefore, we started upon a personal inventory. *This was step four.* A business which takes no regular inventory usually goes broke. Taking a commercial inventory is a fact finding and a fact-facing process. It is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade. One object is to disclose damaged or unsalable goods, to get rid of them promptly and without regret. If the owner of the business is to be successful, he cannot fool himself about values.” BB, p. 64.

48. What does it mean to you when it says "Our liquor", (food), "was but a symptom?" BB, p. 64.
49. "Resentment is the number one offender?" BB, p. 64. Why?
50. Why does the word fear touch "...about every aspect of our lives?" BB, p. 67.
51. What does it mean to you when it says, "In this book you read again and again the faith did for us what we could not do for ourselves." BB, pp. 70-71.

Chapter Six: Into Action

Read *Into Action* then respond to questions about this reading:

“Having made our personal inventory, what shall we do about it? We have been trying to get a new attitude, a new relationship with our Creator, and to discover the obstacles in our path. We have admitted certain defects; we have ascertained in a rough way what the trouble is; we have put our finger on the weak times in our personal inventory. Now these are about to be cast out. This requires action on our part, which, when completed, will mean that we have admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature

Recovery Group Big Book Study Part 1

of our defects. This brings us to *the Fifth Step* in our program of our recovery..." BB, p. 72.

52. How will we decide with whom we will do our Fifth Step? What qualities should this person have?
53. Why is it important to be totally honest when sharing our Fourth Step Inventory with another person?
54. Once we have completed our Fourth Step Inventory, why is it necessary to do our Fifth Step right away?
55. "We thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know Him better." BB, p. 75. What does this statement mean to you? What role does God play in our Fifth Step?

Into Action, continued

Respond to questions about these additional quotes:

"Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet for an hour, carefully reviewing what we have done. We thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know Him better. Taking this book down from our shelf we turn to the page which contains the twelve steps. Carefully reading the first five proposals we ask if we have omitted anything, for we are building an arch through which we shall walk a free man at last." BB, p. 75.

"Faith without works is dead." BB, p. 76.

"The spiritual life is not a theory. *We have to live it.*" BB, p. 83.

56. "Faith without works is dead." BB, p. 76. What does this statement mean to you?
57. There is a statement in this chapter which says, "...we would go to any lengths for victory over alcohol." BB, p. 76. How have you applied this statement in relation to the food?

Recovery Group Big Book Study Part 1

58. We are told that "The Promises" will be fulfilled after we have completed Step Nine. Which Promises have been fulfilled for you?
59. The Big Book stresses that we are careful never to pray for our own selfish ends but we may ask for ourselves if others will be helped. Why do you feel it is important for us not to pray only for ourselves?

Chapter Seven: Working with Others

Read *Into Action* then respond to questions about this reading:

"...nothing will so insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with alcoholics. It works when other activities fail." BB, p. 89.

"To watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a fellowship grow up around you, to have a host of friends- this is an experience you must not miss." BB, p. 89.

"...you may talk to him about the hopelessness of alcoholism because you offer a solution." BB, p. 92.

"The main thing is that he is willing to believe in a Power greater than himself and that he live by spiritual principles." BB, p. 93.

61. What first convinced you that you were one of us, that you were not alone?
62. Do you see how working with others benefits you, possibly even more than it benefits them?
63. Can you see where religious education and training alone may not be sufficient to bring about the necessary spiritual awakening?
64. Can you "...lay out the kit of spiritual tools..." BB, p. 95, using "everyday language to describe spiritual principles" BB, p. 93, ? Can you explain the process without reference to particular diets or food plans?

Recovery Group Big Book Study Part 1

Working with Others, continued

Respond to questions about this additional quote:

"Both you and the new man must walk day by day in the path of spiritual progress. If you persist, remarkable things will happen. When we look back, we realize that the things which came to us when we put ourselves in God's hands were better than anything we could have planned. Follow the dictates of a Higher Power and you will presently live in a new and wonderful world, no matter what your present circumstances." BB, p. 100.

65. Are you walking day by day in the path of spiritual progress?
66. What would your ideal sponsor be like? Your ideal sponsee?
67. How do you feel about people who don't seem to be able to get any continuous abstinence?

Please feel free to share any other thoughts you have about this chapter.

Chapter Eight: To Wives

Read *Into Action* then respond to questions about this reading:

The chapter "To Wives" was written in the early days of Alcoholics Anonymous when it was assumed that the alcoholic in the home was likely to be the husband. This presents an interesting twist for those studying the Big Book because the majority of us in Overeaters Anonymous are women. In fact, men were not initially allowed to join OA. Its members had voted to close OA to men due to the "delicate" nature of the talk at meetings. They were not allowed to join OA until mid-1962 when OA merged with another 12-step program that was then called Gluttons Anonymous.

When reading "To Wives", it may be helpful to not only substitute the word food for alcohol and compulsive eater for alcoholic, but also to substitute husbands or loved ones for wives in the text. As in all chapters in the Big Book,

Recovery Group Big Book Study Part 1

every sentence seems laden with meaning and insight into our disease and how it affects those around us. I read the Big Book quite often yet on every new reading, I find more bits of wisdom that had previously been hidden from me. It is outside the scope of this study group to offer a comprehensive look at everything within this chapter, so I hope I'll be forgiven for selecting just a few passages on which to base the questions to this assignment.

"Our loyalty and the desire that our husbands hold up their heads and be like other men have begotten all sorts of predicaments. We have been unselfish and self-sacrificing. We have told innumerable lies to protect our pride and our husband's reputations. We have prayed, we have begged, we have been patient. We have struck out viciously. We have run away. We have been hysterical. We have been terror stricken. We have sought sympathy. We have had retaliatory love affairs with other men." BB, p. 105.

"When drinking, they were strangers. Sometimes they were so inaccessible that it seemed as though a great wall had been built around them." BB, p.107.

"...but in nearly every instance the alcoholic only seems to be unloving and inconsiderate; it is usually because he is warped and sickened that he says and does these appalling things." BB, p.108.

"It may be slowing him up mentally and physically, but he does not see it. Sometimes he is a source of embarrassment to you and his friends." BB, p.109.

68. In what ways have our husbands (or wives) enabled our overeating? What efforts have they made to help us overcome it? Have we driven them away, either physically or emotionally, because of our disease?
69. Did we let them know what we were going through when we were into the food? Did they know of our struggles and our fears, or did we shut them out because of our own shame?
70. How did the way we felt on the inside differ from the way we presented ourselves on the outside to our loved ones? Did we take our anger out on them when it was really the eating and our weight that we were angry about?
71. Were the visible signs and symptoms of our disease seen by family members before we saw them ourselves? How so? Were they ashamed or embarrassed of us?

Recovery Group Big Book Study Part 1

To Wives, continued

Respond to questions about this additional reading:

When reading "To Wives" it may be helpful to not only substitute the word food for alcohol and compulsive eater for alcoholic but also to substitute husbands or loved ones for wives in the text. There are several threads of thought presented in the second half of this chapter and again I'll ask for understanding that it is outside the scope of this book study to look at and discuss all of them and that I had to pick and choose just a very few.

"Our next thought is that you should never tell him what he must do about his drinking. If he gets the idea that you are a nag or a killjoy, your chance of accomplishing anything useful may be zero." BB, p. 111.

"If he is lukewarm or thinks he is not an alcoholic, we suggest you leave him alone." BB, p. 113.

"Wait until repeated stumbling convinces him he must act, for the more you hurry him the longer his recovery may be delayed." BB, p. 113.

"Still another difficulty is that you may become jealous of the attention he bestows on other people, especially other alcoholics." BB, p. 119.

72. Did your husband (or wife) ever point out to you that you had a problem with overeating? How did you react to this? Did it help?
73. What measures did we take to prevent our loved ones from interfering with our eating? Did we use anger, guilt, or other manipulations to discourage them from mentioning our food habits or our weight?
74. As our own experience has taught us that no amount of nagging or pressure from our family brought us to recovery any quicker, are we able to use that same insight to increase our tolerance of their difficulties in life? Or do we assume that since we are addressing our obsessions that they should be working on theirs too?
75. How do we balance the OA slogan "abstinence is the most important thing in our lives" with the needs of our mates? Do we let them feel neglected as

Recovery Group Big Book Study Part 1

we focus on our recovery? Do we create situations which leave them feeling left out of our lives?

Chapter Nine: The Family Afterwards

Read *The Family Afterwards* then respond to questions about this reading:

"Cessation of drinking is but the first step away from a highly strained, abnormal condition." BB, p. 122.

" Though the old buildings will eventually be replaced by finer ones, the new structures will take years to complete." BB, p. 123.

" We grow by our willingness to face and rectify errors and convert them into assets. The alcoholic's past thus becomes the principle asset of the family and frequently it is almost the only one!" BB, p. 124.

" At the beginning of recovery a man will take, as a rule, one of two directions. He may either plunge into a frantic attempt to get on his feet in business, or he may be so enthralled by his new life that he talks or thinks of little else. In either case, certain family problems will arise. With these we have had experience galore. " BB, pp. 125-126.

"The family must realize that dad, though marvelously improved, is still convalescing." BB, p. 127.

77. Have you noticed your family going through adjustments as you become more and more well?
78. Has your family put up any resistance to your program of recovery?
79. Did you go through a phase of spiritual giddiness? How did that simmer down?
80. What kind of challenges have you and your family gone through that is related to your recovery?

Recovery Group Big Book Study Part 1

The Family Afterwards, continued

Respond to questions about this additional reading:

"...we aren't a glum lot. If newcomers could see no fun or joy in our existence, they wouldn't want it." BB, p. 132.

"So we think cheerfulness and laughter make for usefulness." BB, p. 132.

"We are sure God wants us to be happy, joyous and free." BB, p. 133.

"We have three little mottoes which are apropos. Here they are:

First things first

Live and let live

Easy does it." BB, p. 135.

81. Can you see how your disease affected your family?
82. Can you see how your recovery affects them?
83. Do you have special time set aside for play and fun with your family?
84. Do you understand that the best gift you can give others is a demonstration of living a healthy, spiritual life yourself?