

STEP ELEVEN

*Sought through prayer and meditation
to improve our conscious contact with God,
as we understood God,
praying only for knowledge of God's will for us
and the power to carry that out.*

Step Eleven is about spiritual awareness. For many of us, our addiction to marijuana came as we sought a greater reality, or even a mystical experience through the drug. For some, our early “highs” were almost spiritual in nature, seeming to take us beyond ourselves and into a state of expanded consciousness. As we progressed in our addiction and turned more often to the drug as an escape from ordinary reality, it lost its ability to satisfy our needs. Instead of helping us feel better, it started to make us feel worse.

Many addicts feel an aching emptiness within — a hole deep inside ourselves — which we tried to plug by using marijuana. Some people describe this hole as “God-shaped,” since the only way we can truly fill it is to open ourselves to the presence of a Higher Power. By continuing to live the Steps and practice spiritual principles, we remove the barriers in our lives that have kept us from building a relationship with a Higher Power. We can now focus on nurturing and improving that relationship. When we regularly seek such expansion through prayer and meditation, rather than marijuana use, we find that we are increasingly fulfilled; the experience grows more powerful, more real, and more beneficial. We seek, and we find. It seems that the old

saying is true: "For each step we take towards God, God takes a thousand steps towards us."

Many of us came to Marijuana Anonymous with little or no relationship to a Higher Power, and without any idea of how to create that contact or build that relationship as the Eleventh Step suggests we do. Some of us are atheists or agnostics, alienated from God by past experiences with religion, or by those who used their beliefs in self-serving ways.

In recovery, we begin to develop a relationship with a Higher Power, or renew one that we once had. We come to believe in a God of our own individual understanding, a Higher Power that will help us in all phases of our lives. Some of us believed that dependence meant restrictiveness. However, many of us have found that dependence on a Higher Power means freedom of choice and freedom to grow as individuals. Many of us had to let go of the old ideas we had about a judgmental, punishing God. We came to believe in a loving, compassionate Presence; a kind, accepting Mother/Father/Friend; a powerful guide and teacher; a supporting strength. If we have negative associations with the terms "God" or "Higher Power," we are free to use whatever word or words are acceptable to us. Each of us is free to form our own conceptions of a Higher Power, whatever that might be.

This Step is one that we do not have to wait to work. The principles and practices of Step Eleven are helpful to use in connection with any of the other Steps. Prayer and meditation are a real source of power and strength in living our program.

Step Eleven is an "action" Step. It asks us to seek contact with God, as we understand God, through the

activities of prayer and meditation. The more we are able to do this, the more regularly we seek this help and contact, the more open we are to receive support and guidance in our lives.

The Eleventh Step suggests that we ask in prayer not to have our desires fulfilled, or our wills empowered, but to receive the sure guidance of a deeper wisdom than our own. The operative word in Step Eleven is “only.” We need to keep in mind that we pray only for knowledge of God’s will for us and the power to carry that out. We don’t go to our Higher Power with a shopping list, nor do we demand specific results. As we manage to surrender to this guidance through daily practice, we find our lives taking new and clearer direction. We take action, trusting in God’s results even though what happens to us may not be what we desired or envisioned for ourselves. We let go.

Self-will and fear had imposed the perception of limits in our lives. But a growing faith and understanding of a Higher Power opens up limitless and new possibilities. Faith provides us with the motivation to surrender to God’s will. We are, in truth, under the care of God. As we loosen our grip on the reins of our lives, we find we are being led, slowly and certainly, in the right direction — towards home.

Many of us have trouble distinguishing between God’s will and self-will. On many occasions we have unfairly attributed a situation in our lives to being God’s will, and have used this as an excuse for ceasing to take action. On the other hand, many of us have impulsively taken action to avoid facing life on life’s terms. We have learned that being in accordance with God’s will may simply entail practicing the spiritual principles of MA,

rather than our own character defects. Those defects represent our will and not God's.

There are many ways to pray and meditate. With this in mind, we must remember that all of us are free to choose a power of our own understanding, and then to interact with it in our own way. Although organized religion is rarely spoken about (and never endorsed) in meetings, many of us have returned to our religious heritage or sought out new religious experiences. We need to stay open-minded and in action, even though spiritual practices may make us uncomfortable. We need to persevere and continually search for our own personal path.

Prayer can be as simple as repeating something we have memorized; there are many prayers available to us. Saying these prayers consciously — being aware of what we are saying, staying present with the words — is a moving and powerful experience. Asking for God's help with our pain and for guidance with our difficulties is another useful and comforting form of prayer. We grow to trust God more. We believe our prayers are answered, though not necessarily in our way or in our time. They are answered in God's way and in God's time, in the way that is best for us.

When we have difficulty exercising faith, many of us find that gratitude can open the door. The practice of gratitude is perhaps the most moving and powerful way in which we can cultivate a conscious contact with a Higher Power. We pray and meditate to achieve this contact, and we regularly give thanks for those blessings that we have, both great and small — for health, sight, and hearing, if we have them; for friends, work, and sunshine; for rain, children, and flowers; for recovery itself. With gratitude,

we can share our happiness and increase our sense of joy, peace, and security. We bask in the certainty that we *are* loved. In time, prayer becomes as much a part of our daily lives as the air we breathe.

It has been said that prayer is talking to God and meditation is listening to God. There are many forms of meditation. We encourage each other to find the form that works for us. There are classes, tapes, videos, and books on the subject. Some come from learned philosophers or religions, some from the medical community. There are sitting meditations, walking meditations, singing or chanting meditations, and dancing meditations. Most forms involve techniques of focusing and quieting the mind, which can make it easier to forge a conscious contact with God. Some of us meditate by repeating, slowly and silently, a phrase such as "Let go and let God." We concentrate upon staying with the words. When our minds wander, as they invariably do, we can gently and lovingly bring them back into focus. Another method is to sit quietly and notice our breathing: in and out, in and out. When we become aware of wandering thoughts, we refocus ourselves *with kindness* upon the breath and its movement. A great reward of our meditation is that we come to respond more gently when our attention strays. We cultivate a more loving relationship with ourselves, others, and our Higher Power. We start to replace criticism with acceptance and forgiveness.

By the time we have reached this Step, we are feeling peace and serenity, which replaced pain, fear, and desperation as the motivating forces in our lives. We are seeking a conscious contact with our God. As we grow spiritually, we can't help but notice that old selfish attitudes

and character defects have undergone drastic changes. Our desires change with time and a consistent effort to live by spiritual principles. We come to learn that our “first instincts” are often bad indicators of the proper path. We find that if we give top priority to spiritual growth, it is less likely that self-will and character defects will pull us down.

Unfortunately, we almost all go through times during which we simply cannot, or will not, pray or meditate (for whatever reason). They are usually quite short in duration, and we do not criticize ourselves for such lapses when they happen. We simply resume as soon as we can. We are human; we are not perfect. We adhere to the twelve-step concept of spiritual progress, not perfection. The principle of willingness in this Step is manifested through discipline, which is needed to develop a new way of life and healthy relationships.

We often think of a Higher Power as Love, and indeed our Second Tradition refers to “a loving God.” Loneliness, isolation, and a retreat from love often characterized our lives before recovery. As we actively seek contact with our own Higher Power, we find that loneliness subsides, and that isolation gives way to a feeling of companionship. We seek the loving help that is always available to us. This step brings us the knowledge that we need never be alone, and the feeling of certainty that comes with being loved unconditionally. As a result of this step, we begin to experience contentment, serenity, and fulfillment.

Through prayer and meditation, we are brought over and over again into contact with a loving Presence. We sense the healing force of God in our lives. As a result of this contact, we begin to know that we are loved

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unconditionally, and we grow in our capacity to love ourselves and others unconditionally. As we grow in love and understanding, we gain an ability to reach out beyond ourselves. Step Eleven gives us the emotional sobriety to practice the principles of our program in all aspects of our lives. We can be of help and service to our fellow humans. We are equipped for Step Twelve.