

*Tony A.'s
Gift to*



brought to you from a place of love,

by our group The ACoA Experience, Strength & Hope - WEB0673

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WE USE THE STEPS; WE USE THE MEETINGS; WE USE THE TELEPHONE WE SHARE OUR EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH AND HOPE WITH EACH OTHER. THIS IS THE ACTION AND WORK THAT HEAL US:

RESTRUCTURE OUR SICK THINKING ONE DAY AT A TIME. (BRB P.590)

Welcome to The ACoA Experience – Tony A’s Gift group, we will work the 12 Steps of Recovery once offered by Tony A. to all AdultChildren.

For this step work we suggest you:

- get a copy of the book or eBook: The Laundry List: The ACoA (Adult Children of Alcoholics) Experience (available on Amazon);
- highlight the parts of the reading that speaks the most to you;
- have a special notebook to write down your step’s reflections;
- find someone you can trust like a fellow traveler(s), a sponsor and/or a therapist, a chat will be open for this group specifically in our Intergroup 754 – Fearless Souls – Adult Children In Recovery feel free to join us <https://www.facebook.com/groups/adultchildreninrecovery>

above all be gentle, kind and loving towards yourself and others every step of the way in this recovery/healing process.



“WHY 12 NEW STEPS FOR ACOA”

Presented by Tony A., the founder of the ACoA Movement at the ACoA 7th Annual National Convention – Orlando, Florida on the 25th February 1991. Available on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/54TIPbCa-Ak>

Transcribed by a loving trusted servant of ACA in 2021.

[7:30 am start] Good morning everybody! Thanks for getting up. As I walked in here with a young lady, I mentioned the fact that at this particular hour of my life, I feel that this hour is just about as important to me, and to ACoA, as the hour that I first read the laundry list. I look out in the room and it's about the same amount of people that were in the room when I first read the laundry list.

Yesterday, I went into my personal story, my AA and Al-Anon and ACoA experience. And today what I'd like to discuss is 12 new steps for Adult Children of Alcoholics - why they were written, who they were written for, and why I feel that the AA steps should be replaced. Needless to say, this subject is not without some controversy. And I have already been faced with that controversy. And, if I had listened to controversy at the beginning, ACoA would have never started. Because if you look at the superstructure, or the structure of the 12-step room, Alcoholics Anonymous is truly their parent. And Al-Anon is, in many essences or many areas, the mother. And so along comes the movement, which is the children. And if you look at it, the alcoholic comes into Alcoholics Anonymous and they get sober, we get sober, I got sober – and I was told that all I had to do was to stay sober, and I had a successful day. And the Al-Anon person comes in, they're told to attend meetings, take the focus off their husband or wife, put the focus on themselves, learn how to detach and they'd be okay. And this is terrific. And then all of a sudden, the ACoA movement starts and these two parents have to look at what they did to the children. And needless to say, it makes them very nervous.

As an AA member, I was living in ... before I became an alcoholic, a recovering alcoholic, I lived in bars. I was never home. So, my three children were brought up, and I was never with them. So, all of a sudden, I joined Alcoholics Anonymous. I got sober. I went out to help others. I went to a meeting every night. And as my daughter said, I was running

around helping strangers, and meanwhile, I had abandoned my family just as much through AA as I had in bars. As far as my children were concerned, the only difference was I was now mouthing some slogans that they didn't understand, was talking about a Higher Power that they had never heard from me before, whenever I had happened to stop by at home. So as an ACoA what I did was: I again abandoned my children, on an almost deeper level.

When I came into Alcoholics Anonymous, I was presented with twelve steps. And these twelve steps taught me I had to clean up my act, make amends, admit to God, myself and another human being the exact nature of my wrongs, and go out and proselytize. Go out and present the Alcoholics Anonymous program to others, in order to help them. And I believe all of that basically is a wonderful, wonderful tool for recovering alcoholics. I think that basically the AA steps not only are not appropriate for adult children of alcoholics, I believe that the AA steps drive ACoA's crazy. And now I would like to launch into this discussion.

I'm very good at, incidentally, at telling my story. I'm not so hot at this. I feel like I'm sort of giving a lecture, and I'm beginning to sound like an authority figure. And authority figures, as I say, scare the hell out of me. So, I'm beginning to scare myself. So, if I sound too authoritarian, raise your hand, and I'll try and stop.

STEP 1 - (TIME 5.05)

So, I'd like to - first of all, I'd like to go through these ACoA steps. First of all, in AA, I'll start off with the AA step. "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and our lives had become unmanageable." Well, as a two-year-old or a three-year-old, I really wasn't powerless over alcohol. I mean, I wasn't drinking it, it had no particular effect on me physically, except for the fact that my mother drank it all the 9 months that I was in the womb, which means I didn't work out to be a total fetal-alcohol-syndrome baby. Anyway, the step I've offered is "We admitted that we were powerless over the effects of living with alcoholism, and that our lives had become unmanageable." Now what are the effects of living with alcoholism? I believe that's the laundry list I wrote in '78, which I will now read.

These are the effects of having being born within an alcoholic/ dysfunctional family:

1. We became isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.
2. We became approval seekers and lost our identity in the process.
3. We are frightened by angry people and any personal criticism.
4. We either become alcoholics, marry them or both, or find another compulsive personality such as a workaholic to fulfill our sick abandonment needs.
5. We live life from the viewpoint of victims and we are attracted by that weakness in our love and friendship relationships.
6. We have an overdeveloped sense of responsibility and it is easier for us to be concerned with others rather than ourselves; this enables us not to look too closely at our own faults, etc.
7. We get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others.
8. We became addicted to excitement.
9. We confuse love and pity and tend to "love" people we can "pity" and "rescue."
10. We have "stuffed" our feelings from our traumatic childhoods and have lost the ability to feel or express our feelings because it hurts so much (Denial).
11. We judge ourselves harshly and have a very low sense of self-esteem.
12. We are dependent personalities who are terrified of abandonment and will do anything to hold on to a relationship in order not to experience painful abandonment feelings, which we received from living with sick people who were never there emotionally for us.
13. Alcoholism is a family disease; and we became para-alcoholics and took on the characteristics of that disease even though we did not pick up the drink.
14. Para-alcoholics are reactors rather than actors.

Now those are the effects, that's my personality profile. That's what happened to me, as a victim being brought up in an angry, abusive atmosphere. Sexually abused – overtly/ covertly, emotionally abused, verbally abused, physically abused. And that is what happened to people, children brought up in that kind of an atmosphere. Many of us became post-traumatic stress disorder victims: frozen feelings. Frozen feelings are some of the effects of having been brought up in this kind of a home. Anyway, also anger, of course, which is mentioned in here, guilt, shame. But the basic effect of having been brought up in that kind of an atmosphere is fear. I feel that I am a fear-based person. Just about everything I've ever done has been based on fear. So anyway, I believe I've covered the 1st Step.

READING SUGGESTIONS:

- Book: The Laundry List: The ACoA Experience:
 - Chapter 4: The Recovery Process - Our Common Behavior: Another Look at The Laundry List;
 - Chapter 5: Getting Started with Recovery – Working the ACoA Steps of recovery: Step 1.
- Book: Big Red Book: Chapter 1 – page 3 to 20

STEP 1 - REFLECTIONS:

1. I will now identify the personality traits I developed within, while growing up in an alcoholic/ dysfunctional family, scoring which one of them from 1 to 10.
2. Am I willing to admit that as a child I was powerless over the effects of living with alcoholism, that there was nothing I, as a child, could have done to “fix” or “save” my family of origin? And while trying to do so, how has my own life become unmanageable?
3. Am I willing to admit that I am powerless over other people, places and circumstances? Am I able to recognize that the power I could use to create the life I need/want fades away when I try to control what's on the outside? Am I willing to surrender other people, places and circumstances to their own Higher Power?

From the laundry list traits described above the effects of living with this dysfunction I choose 3 traits that stand out in my life today and explain how this make my life unmanageable. Some of these effects can also be complex PTSD, PTSD, frozen feelings, anger, guilt, shame and fear, etc...

On this next 3 questions I will be as specific as I can.

4. Is there any other part of my life that is currently unmanageable? What or who am I still trying to control/save?
5. What might recovery from this unmanageability look like?
6. Am I willing to commit myself to recovery from this unmanageable part of my life?

STEP 2 - (TIME 8.49)

The 2nd step of Alcoholics Anonymous reads: "We have come to believe that a power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity." When Bill Wilson was asked what he meant by "to restore us to sanity," he said: "If I don't pick up the first drink, I'm restored to sanity." I agree with that. I think that is certainly valid for members of Alcoholics Anonymous. But, for me as a member of Adult Children of Alcoholics, when I looked at this step, I skipped it. First of all, as an AA member, I looked at it and said: "Geez, if you take away my insanity, there's no Tony." My whole life, I mean, I was insane person and I kind of liked it. You know before, I was up and down, did crazy things, and seemed to function at a pretty high level financially. I made a lot of money.

Anyway, when I, how do I put it? When I helped get the ACoA movement started, one of the members came to me and said that the group had a discussion, and they asked me to write new steps for ACoA, which I did in 1979. Either in '78 or '79, I wrote 12 steps for Adult Children of Alcoholics, and some of these are included in these new steps which I'm offering now. The steps, at that time I wrote them, and a new member came into ACoA movement who was a psychiatrist; and, what I asked him to do was to edit the steps for me so I could make it a "we" steps, rather than just "me". He did, and the steps were in a lot of psychiatric jargon and did not get too popular. They still use them in some places in Brooklyn. I hear some places in California.

But anyway, if you look at the 2nd Step for an ACoA: "We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity" – that's the AA step. Restoration means to be given back something that I once had. If you look that up in the dictionary, that's what it says. As an ACoA, as a child being brought up in a crazy alcoholic abusive family, there was no sanity. So, there was nothing for me to be restored to.

When I looked at this step from the ACoA basis, what they were saying was that basically I would have to go back to the insanity of my family. That was all I had to be restored to.

So, the step I am offering for ACoA is " We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could bring us clarity." Clarity means clearness of vision, being able to see clearly. And there is one dictionary I looked up, and it said it can also mean "freedom from guilt and freedom from shame." So, it struck me that clarity is a far better condition for me to be restored to, than to a sanity I never experienced as a child.

READING SUGGESTIONS:

- Book: The Laundry List: The ACoA Experience:
 - Chapter 2 (entirely).
 - Chapter 5: Getting Started with Recovery – Working the ACoA Steps of recovery: Step 2.
- Book: Big Red Book: Chapter 6 – page 81 to 90

STEP 2 - REFLECTIONS:

1. Do I believe or am I willing to believe that a power greater than myself can restore me to clarity? (Restore me to the frequency of love instead of fear)
2. Do I believe that I can be restored to clarity, to my true essence which is Love?
3. Give an example of an area in my life in which I had no healthy models or examples to guide me growing up?
4. When did I discover what “healthy” was in this area?
5. How did I feel when I found this out?
6. How did I incorporate this healthy model?
7. How has a Higher Power evolved in my time in recovery?
8. Is my Higher Power the “Inner Loving Parent” I need today? If not, what can I change (thinking patterns, etc...)?
9. What needs to change in my idea of a Loving Higher Power to bring clarity of vision, to create freedom from the guilt, shame or fear, etc...?

STEP 3 - (TIME 11.51)

Now we come to a one of the tougher problems - the 3rd step of Alcoholics Anonymous says: "We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood It." Now one of the basic problems for me, as an ACoA, is the trust issue. I'd like to read something here that I got in a very, very spiritual book. This has to do with the spiritual beginnings of children, who are hopefully all of us on a spiritual path. This is the statement: "Spiritual meanings progress in self-consciousness when the child transfers its ideas of omnipotence from its parents to God. The entire spiritual experience of such a child depends largely on whether fear or love has dominated the parent-child relationship."

Now, if that's the case, which I believe it is, in the home I was brought up in, and the homes we all were brought up in, fear was the dominant feeling in that family. And, compared to love, it was the dominant emotion that most of us were brought up in. That being the case, it means to me that, on a feeling level, I cannot go any higher in trusting a Higher Power, than I can trust my parents - on a feeling level. And what were my parents? In my particular case: sometimes they loved me, they seemed to, and sometimes they literally, verbally or physically hurt me. So, I could never depend on my parents to really do anything consistent for me. So, if I look at the AA step, what it seems to be doing for me, as an ACoA, is telling me to turn my will and my life over to the care of my parents, as I understood them, on a feeling level. And since my spiritual experience can go no higher than the relationship that I had with my parents, regarding either fear or love, I'm in somewhat trouble here.

So, the 3rd Step, that I'm offering for the ACoA movement, is: "We made a decision to practice self-love and to trust in our Higher Power." And I'd like to read a little bit of that from the Step here: "Instead of surrendering our lives to the sick parents that reside within us, we choose to put forth our faith in a spiritual power, greater than ourselves, however we choose to define it. In my efforts to resolve the difficulties in my life, I recognize that I have to accept myself and learn to nurture myself. I found that I could no longer give myself away to the needs or demands of others."

As difficult as it sounds for me, trust, which is probably one of my most difficult issues, has to be basically a growth process; and, it has to be an ongoing process. Trust, for

me, is not an event. This Higher Power has to prove itself over and over again to me, almost on a daily basis, that it's guiding me, taking care of me, and that I mean something to it. Otherwise, I need constant reassurance from my Higher Power. As a victim, which I believe we all are, and as a damaged victim, I need constant reassurance that there is something in the invisible world that loves me. And the process, I believe, are these Twelve Steps towards learning how to love myself and how to accept the love of this Higher Power. I'll go on with that in a minute.

READING SUGGESTIONS:

- Book: The Laundry List: The ACoA Experience:
 - Chapter 3 (entirely);
 - Chapter 5: Getting Started with Recovery – Working the ACoA Steps of recovery: Step 3.
- Book: Big Red Book: ACA Disease Model page xxvi

STEP 3 - REFLECTIONS:

1. In which ways do I practice self-love? Do I do this on a daily basis?
If not, am I willing to? How am I going to start?
2. Do I trust my Higher Power more or less than when I first started recovery?
3. Do I believe my Higher Power loves me unconditionally? I will give some examples of how I experience this unconditional love.
4. What does my Higher Power want for me? (I will meditate on this for 5 mins and write down what comes up during this period of silence).
5. Has my Higher Power changed since entering ACoA recovery? What changed?

STEP 4 - (TIME 15.54)

The 4th Step of Alcoholics Anonymous – are that we made a fearless and moral inventory of ourselves, thank you. As a fear-based person, it's impossible for me to make a fearless moral inventory of anything. My whole life, as a victim, has been predicated on fear. Somebody asked me, as I was walking down the stairs, and as I was coming in the room here actually, in the book section, how I was feeling. And I said: well, I'm extremely nervous about this talk. I feel as it's probably the most important talk that I have ever made since ACoA started, other than when I read the Laundry List for the first time. He said "but what's the difference?" I said, I'm not a heck of a lot more nervous or frightened than ANY morning that I'm getting up, because this has been my experience all my life. Fear has been probably my motivating factor. The last 22 years of sobriety and, the last say, what is it? Since 1977, since the ACoA movement started, the fear has slowly diminished but it isn't gone from my life.

Anyway the 4th Step for Adult Children of Alcoholics is: "We made a searching and blameless inventory of our parents, because in essence, we had become them." I've been told that the Adult Children of Alcoholics movement, I was not in it for many years, I remained in anonymity, so I was not going to groups much. But I had heard, that it's been said that the ACoA movement has been stuck in blame, blaming parents. That you can go to some meetings and they are blaming their parents, and three years later you go back and the same people are blaming the same parents. So that's an area where we've been stuck. In '78- '79, I think it was, when I first sat down with these steps, I felt that there could be no recovery for me unless I made an inventory of my parents; because, I knew on many levels, that I had become my parents, and my stepmother. I knew that under certain conditions of stress, that I would become either my father or my stepmother.

As I said before, one of the glaring incidences when I ten years sober, I walked into a shoe store and an older man, very nice, kind man, bent down and he started fitting shoes on my feet, and I found that I was rude, angry and abusive to this man. And I got up and walked out, walked down the street, and I said: "My God, what's that all about? I'm 10 years sober and I'm abusing a perfect stranger." And it suddenly hit me - my stepmother was always abusive to shoe clerks and cleaning establishment people.

Always. And I found that as I would walk into a shoe store, or a cleaning establishment, rage would start moving up in my stomach. And I suddenly realized under certain situations I actually became and felt like my stepmother. I took on her actual being.

I was sober about a year, and I found myself limping out of a restaurant after I paid the bill. I said: "My God, what's that all about? There's nothing wrong with my leg." And I looked back at my life and I realized that my father always over-tipped in restaurants. He was a real people pleaser when it came to maître d's and waiters. And I realized that I had felt that I hadn't tipped enough. And I left the restaurant, in order that the waiter wouldn't yell at me, I started to limp so he would feel sorry for me. And I realized that I started doing that when I was about 15 or 16. So, as far as I could see, what I was in a restaurant, was I became my father. And if I didn't become my father, what I did was, I tried to get pity so nobody would hurt me for not becoming like him. So, I began to look at my life and I began to realize that actually what I had at that time, was that I had become my father. In many instances, I had become my stepmother. And the women that I was seeking out to have affairs with, live with or marry, all looked like and were the mother that had disappeared from my life when I was two years old.

So, I later learned that we become one parent, and we marry the other. So basically, what I found out was that, in order to have any type of forgiveness at all, I had to take a searching and blameless inventory of these parents, and these people who had brought me up - see what their positive aspects were and their negative aspects. Look at them really from an objective viewpoint, looked at some of the patterns of life that they used, looked at some of the words that they used, looked at some of the bias-ness they used. My father was Jewish, my mother was Christian, and my father was about as anti-Semitic as you can get. He hated being Jewish and he didn't like Jews. He taught me that I should never play with Jews. Above all, I should never marry one. And that basically Jews were socially inferior to Christians, although they were intellectually superior. So, in essence, I took on all those characteristics. One of the hardest things for me to do, is to basically cut down on anti-Semitism, because I became an anti-Semite just like my father. So, it's one of the issues I have to work on, on a daily basis.

So what does it really mean? Half of me looks at the other half with disgust. It's a wonderful way to be brought up. So, in order to forgive myself, I have to take an inventory of my parents and learn how to forgive them. In order to forgive them, I have to learn how to forgive myself. Hopefully, the 4th Step of the ACoA, this new 4th Step, will help the movement go through blame. I do believe that blame of parents is probably the first healing process that ACoA's go through. I have to come in touch with the fact that although my head tries to forgive the abuse that was done to me, my gut, basically my little child within is very, very angry and mad at these people.

READING SUGGESTIONS:

- Book: The Laundry List: The ACoA Experience:
 - Chapter 4: Family Drama & How Parents Define the Child.
 - Chapter 5: Getting Started with Recovery – Working the ACoA Steps of recovery: Step 4.

STEP 4 - REFLECTIONS:

1. Make a searching and blameless inventory of my mother/primary caregiver. (positive and negative aspects)
2. Make note of the main traits/behaviors that reside in me from my mother or primary caregiver. (positive and negative)
3. Make a searching and blameless inventory of my father/secondary caregiver. (positive and negative aspects)
4. Make note of the main traits/behaviors that reside in me from my father or second primary caregiver. (positive and negative aspects)
5. Make a searching and blameless inventory of any person that may have been a parental figure in my life. (positive and negative aspects)
6. Make a note of the traits that I have taken on as a child from these people that impact my life in a negative way today. (take note that “with stress, we regress”, notice who we become when we regress, Mum, Dad or other.)
7. How am I like each of my parents emotionally?
8. Have I accepted this about myself?
9. How am I different from my parents emotionally?

10. Have I come to understand the pain, fear, confusion and sadness my parents experienced as they grew up?
11. Have I truly accepted my parents for who they were when I was growing up and who they are today?
12. Can I forgive my parents? (in order to forgive my parents, I must first learn to forgive myself)
13. Can my inner child forgive my parents? (this is imperative to begin coming out of blame).
14. Tony talks about how we can become one parent and marry the other. Has this been my experience? I will go into specifics/details.

STEP 5 - (TIME 22.48)

The 5th step: "We admitted to God, ourselves and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs." That's the AA 5th step. I think that's fine for AA. I believe that as in Alcoholics Anonymous, I was a perpetrator. I did wrongs to all kinds of people, including myself. I hurt people, I ran rough shot over their lives; and, even prior to when I picked up a drink, I did wrong to the people, there's no doubt about that. But the Twelve Steps of AA are fine for perpetrators. Adult Children of Alcoholics, in my belief is, Adult Children of Alcoholics was formed and created by my Higher Power and your Higher Power for victims, for little children, for people basically who were victimized, were not their perpetrators.

So, the 5th Step for ACoA is: "We admitted to a higher power, to ourselves and to another human being, the exact nature of our childhood abandonment."

Abandonment is the core issue, for people like us. That is our basic ...that's is what we live not to feel or experience. But the strange part about people like us is that which we are frightened of feeling the most, is what we are addicted to finding in our lives. In other words, abandonment is my major issue – it's the feeling I don't want to feel most of all – so what do I do? I'm addicted to finding abandoning types of relationships.

So in order to realize this, in order to go through the process of basically finding nurturing relationships, I have to look at abandonment. I'd like to read a little bit about what I have written here: "Out of a searching and blameless inventory of our parents, we come to see how we reacted, adapted, revolted, resisted, and ultimately abandoned ourselves. When we review the nature of our parents' illness, we come to see how many of their behavior patterns replaced our youthful innocence and spontaneity. We see all the desperate adaptations, all the frightened offenses we built, all of the repression, frustration and flight. Through these parent-taught mechanisms, we truly abandoned ourselves. All these harmful, acquired behavior patterns we adopted are truly our childhood losses. We need to acknowledge them to our Higher Power, to ourselves and to another individual, so that we can move toward a healthy self. The intent of this step is to help us recognize how we were emotionally abandoned as children, and how we abandoned ourselves, and became our parents."

READING SUGGESTIONS:

- Book: The Laundry List: The ACoA Experience:
 - Chapter 4: Waiting In The Wings.
 - Chapter 5: Getting Started with Recovery – Working the ACoA Steps of recovery: Step 5.

STEP 5 - REFLECTIONS:

1. I will list all the ways that I was/felt emotionally, physically and spiritually abandoned as a child.
2. I will now list examples of how I have done this to myself as an adult.
3. Is this still true today?
4. What do I believe to be the exact nature of my childhood abandonment.
Why did my parents abandon me, over and over again?

STEP 6 & 7 - (TIME 25.36)

Alright I'll move onto 6 and 7.

6th: "We were entirely ready to begin the healing process with the aid of our Higher Power." And 7: "We humbly ask our Higher Power to help us with our healing process."

In this step, we ready ourself to turn to a power greater than ourselves. No matter how hesitant or uncertain we may be about the wisdom of such a move, we should keep in mind that healing can and does take place in this world, and is often propelled by acts of faith and belief. Here we are asked to open ourselves to the healing help of a spiritual force. This is part of the process on the road to trust.

7 - "We humbly ask our Higher Power to help us with our healing process." This is a powerful step. It requires both humility and participation. Humility involves becoming aware that we really are not masters of the universe, and that in all probability, there is a divine order that we can tap into.

Humility comes from the word "humus" which is really "of this earth". And I was told years ago that what I needed to do was to become average in order to become humble. And I believe that's very true. I also feel that I have to go back in life and go back through the feelings that I experienced, the traumatic feelings, in order to find some sort of an authentic self. A prayer I used years ago when I was asked by the AA program to look at so-called character defects and shortcomings and I learned a prayer for myself which I think is very applicable also to ACoA. And that prayer was: "Please God, empty me of me and fill me with Thee." Because I don't really know what I am supposed to be emptied of as an adult child. I have no clue. I do not know what my rights are, what my wrongs are. All I know is, I hurt. I'm frightened of abandonment, of feeling pain, anxiety. I live my life with, say, unshed tears, and I'm always on the verge of grief. Uh... it's better now. I can't say I'm over all of this. But in truth, this is what I would like to be emptied of. I would like to be emptied of these feelings of shame, guilt and fear, and terror, uncertainty, the desperate need to be loved in the external world because I am unable to love myself.

These Steps were written with the point of view that the goal would be self-love. Learning how to nourish, love, care for me, my little child. And basically, be open enough, then, to receive the love of my Higher Power.

READING SUGGESTIONS:

- Book: The Laundry List: The ACoA Experience:
 - Chapter 5: Successful Involvement (final reading Making Friends);
 - Chapter 5: Getting Started with Recovery – Working the ACoA Steps of recovery: Step 6 & 7.
- Book: Big Red Book: Chapter 8 – page 295 to 330

STEP 6 & 7 - REFLECTIONS:

1. I will now answer the questions, from the “I” position, throughout Chapter 8.
 - a. What is a Loving Parent?
 - b. What is an Inner Child?
 - c. How does my Inner Child connects with my Higher Power?
 - d. How many Inner Children do I have?
 - e. How did I meet my inner child?
 - f. How does my Inner Child sabotages me?
 - g. How do I build trust with my inner child?
 - h. How do I help my inner child build self-esteem?
 - i. How do I validate my inner child?
 - j. How do I negotiate with my inner child?
 - k. How do I celebrate my inner child?
 - l. An example of my Inner Child integrating with my adult.
 - m. If I can envision a critical parent inside, is it possible to envision a loving parent, who is there as well waiting to step forward? Am I willing to explore this possibility?
 - n. Can I see how I took care of myself as a child and how I can now use that care to nurture a loving parent within?
 - o. If I was self-destructive as a child/teen how would a loving parent care for an abused or neglected child? Would I be willing to do this caring things for my Inner Child?
 - p. I'm going to name a way I can meet my loving parent.
 - q. What are five traits of a loving parent?
 - r. How does my loving parent communicate regularly with my inner child?

- s. How might I establish trust with my inner child?
 - t. How do I let my inner child play regularly?
 - u. How do I integrate my inner child into my feelings and decisions?
 - v. How do I affirm my inner child or inner children?
 - w. How does my inner child help connect with a higher power?
 - x. Do I love my inner child unconditionally?
 - y. How has my inner child sabotaged me from getting things done?
2. What current damaging ways of living are being made clear to me at this point in my life? (Self-destructive behaviors)
 3. Which behaviors am I willing to change?
 4. Am I feeling any resistance to letting go of any of these behaviors? I will elaborate on this.
 5. With my non-dominant hand, I write about the fears associated with this resistance.
 6. Am I now ready to get out of the way to allow my Higher Power to aid in this healing process?
 7. I will now create my own prayer based on what I specifically want to be emptied of.
 8. Am I willing to humbly ask my Higher Power to help me heal from emotional mucks such as shame, guilt, grief, fear of abandonment, etc?
 9. Can I do this with my sponsor or a fellow traveler using prayer?

PRAYER EXAMPLE

God. I am now ready to let go and let you remove from me all my survival traits, which block me from accepting your divine love and living with true humility toward others. Please renew me with faith, courage and love so that I might help myself and others along this path of recovery.

(Survival Traits: Stuffing my feelings, judging myself harshly, addiction to fear/excitement, fear of people and authority, fear of abandonment, approval seeking, confusing love with pity...)

STEP 8 & 9 - (TIME 28.31)

Now, the 8th and 9th steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, deal with amends. Now, as an AA member and as a perpetrator, and somebody who did many wrongs to many people, I needed to make a list of these people and I needed to make amends to them. In my AA experience, I found that when I wrote down the names of these people, was the beginning of the realization that there was a Higher Power in my life, which was actually making itself known to me on a daily basis. By taking a piece of paper and writing down the names of those people I harmed, and those people I had believed that harmed me, because I found that they were interchangeable. And then, become ready to make amends to these people, I found within at least two days after having written this list, my Higher Power started bringing these people into my life, in such a way that I could make amends to them. So I found that writing was an incredible tool, which actually could create a connection between me and my Higher Power. That when I wrote things down, all of a sudden it gave my Higher Power a chance to become active in my life.

So, the 8th and 9th steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, the making of amends, was an incredible spiritual experience for me. However, as a member of the Adult Children of Alcoholics movement, I feel that perpetrators should make amends. Grown up people who marry perpetrators, such as Al-Anon people, should make amends. Children who had been raped, incested, beaten, victimized, abused – do not have to make amends. Who to? And they certainly don't have to make amends to themselves.

So I would like to read a little bit from what I wrote here about the 8th and 9th Steps for ACoA's. 8th step. Incidentally, when I say "I wrote", I'm offering these steps to the ACoA movement. Some of these steps came to me from outside sources, some of them came to me through things I've read – so I'm not claiming authorship of these steps. Two or three of them, I am. But I claim authorship of the laundry list. These 12 steps is something I feel have been given to me, over a period of years, by a power greater than myself, and from a power great than myself.

So, anyway, "8: We became willing to open ourselves to receive the unconditional love of our Higher Power." 9: "We became willing to accept our own unconditional love by understanding that our Higher Power loves us unconditionally." In our alcoholic homes we were the victims and our parents were the aggressors. As we internalized our parents, we became our own aggressors, unable to give ourselves anything but self-hate and self-criticism. Now we are willing to let go of the idea of ourselves as either victim or aggressor, and open ourselves to the unconditional love of our Higher Power. As we open up, we are flooded with the warmth and love and acceptance we were denied as children. The infinite source of love is always available to us, waiting only for us to open the gates and let it in.

Around 1979-80, I read a book on the Kahunas, the medicine men or the wise men of Hawaii. And one of their spiritual practices, they believed, that on this level of experience there's three of us. In other words, there is Tony that you see talking now to you all on this level, and there is you all on your level, and we're all on the same level together. About an inch above our heads is our Higher Power. And each one of us has our individual Higher Power, and that Higher Power is one with God. So my Higher Power, the invisible Higher Power, is one with God and your invisible Higher Power is one with God. And then down around this area, this is our little Child. And as I was reading this material, I began to realize that there was really some truth in this. Because every time I got hurt, every time I was abandoned, every time something seemed to go wrong in my life, I would get a pain in here which was unbelievable. And I began to realize that in this particular area of my body, it seems to reside, a personality all of its own. The Hawaiians teach that in order for me to achieve some sort of spirituality, that I have to love this little child.

So what I did at the next ACoA meeting, I described what I just described to you and I took my arms and I shut my eyes, and I started hugging myself and I started saying: "I love you little Tony, I love you little Tony." I described that to the group, and I said I believe this is probably the major way that I will be able to achieve some sort of self-love. That night I went to my hotel room, I was living alone in a hotel, and I sat and I hugged myself. I shut my eyes and I visualized myself as a little child, two and a half years old, on my father's knee from a picture, and I started hugging myself, and I said: "I love you little Tony, I love you little Tony, I love you little Tony."...I got to five and I

started sobbing. And I realized, at that time, that it was the first time in my life that I had ever loved myself.

The Hawaiians teach that in order to love myself, I have to love this little child within me. Now I don't know whether that was the beginning of the loving of the little child within that happened. But apparently, for me, that's when just about every day of my life – this morning before I came downstairs, I sat upstairs and I hugged myself and I says, "I love you, Tony. I love you little Tony. I love you, Tony. I love you little Tony." I wanted to love little me and big me, because I figured we both needed it for this hour. And then I prayed and I said: "Please God, help me to be your instrument in this talk." I believe that the reason, probably, I have been brought out of anonymity is basically to present new steps for the ACoA movement. So, from my viewpoint, as I say, this is probably one of the most important hours of my life. [sigh]

So anyway, I believe that it's my Higher Power's job to love me unconditionally. I also believe that this Higher Power cannot love me unconditionally, until I love little Tony unconditionally. And as I love little Tony unconditionally, to the extent that he starts to be calm and accepting, then my Higher Power's unconditional love starts flowing through me to him, and then we become a trinity: my Higher Power, me and little Tony become merged in love, and as such, then we can be presented basically to Home, or to the Source, or to God. This is my personal belief. So my major spiritual job in life is to love this little person within me.

READING SUGGESTIONS:

- Book: The Laundry List: The ACoA Experience:
 - Chapter 5: The Group As Your Family;
 - Chapter 10 (entirely);
 - Chapter 5: Getting Started with Recovery – Working the ACoA Steps of recovery: Step 8 & 9.

STEP 8 & 9 - REFLECTIONS:

1. I will now describe what I know or imagine this Unconditional Love of my Higher Power feels like.

2. What blocks my being to be able to feel this love all the time?
3. How can I become more willing to open myself to this Unconditional Love?
4. What can I do as a daily practice that connects me to my inner child, the source of unconditional love?
5. Give 2 examples of how I love myself unconditionally, like my Higher Power does.
6. How can I expand this type of love within myself to be even bigger, better and more consistent?
7. Can I take a moment and hug myself and let my Inner child know how much I love her/him/they?
8. Describing the feelings and thoughts rising up during this moment of Self Love.

STEP 10 - (TIME 36.28)

Ten: "We continued to take personal inventory and to love and approve of ourselves."

As you can see, each one of these steps basically, is on the road to love. I'm very, very good. I have been judge, jury and executioner over myself all my life. There's no doubt that when this talk's over, I'll go upstairs and say: "Hey, you stupid son of a gun, you missed saying that!" Hopefully I will find that I won't have to do that.

The 10th step: In this daily action step, we monitor our actions and seek out those opportunities and situations where we can increase our self-esteem and self-love." In other words, look for the positives in what I've done today. "We can use these steps to correct the course in the event that we stray from healthy actions and begin re-enacting destructive patterns of behavior. If we see ourselves flirting with, or contemplating harmful behavior, it's important to recognize that change must come from within. We can ask our Higher Power for assistance, and we can turn to our group for support as we struggle with those actions that bring with them self-loathing, resentments and guilt. We need to establish a new vigilance – one that centers on our behavior. This we can do by working the step on a daily basis, examining who we are, what we are doing, this day, to grow and change.

READING SUGGESTIONS:

- Book: The Laundry List: The ACoA Experience:
 - Chapter 6: The Importance Of Accountability (entirely);
 - Chapter 5: Getting Started with Recovery – Working the ACoA Steps of recovery: Step 10.
- Book: Big Red Book: Chapter 15 – page 429 to 444.

STEP 10 - REFLECTIONS:

1. I will now gently create my own personal laundry list, list the bothersome issues and behavior patterns which are most troubling in my day to day affairs. (Thoughts, words & actions based on fear)

2. I will now establish some personal recovery goals that may facilitate change related to my laundry list behaviors (starting small if needed).
3. How can I continue to use my personal laundry list and my recovery goals to seek out opportunities and situations to increase my self-love and further build my self-esteem?
4. Am I willing to continue to take personal inventory and to love and approve of myself on a daily basis?
5. Am I willing to take accountability for my own actions, make amends when needed and set up boundaries in place to guarantee my Inner Child's safety.

STEP 11 - (TIME 38.03)

Now, the 11th step of the ACoA is very similar to the 11th step of Anonymous Alcoholics. Instead of saying "We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with a Higher Power of our understanding, praying only for knowledge of Its will for us and the power to carry that out." Instead of "Him" I made it "It". And instead of using the word "God" I used the word "Higher Power". I must say I did that, because I feel that ...I do not believe that God is He/ She, I believe it's It.

And I'd like to say that prayer and meditation have probably been the major step which saved my life. As I said, my first eleven months in Anonymous Alcoholics, my hands were sweating so bad from fear and terror, I really couldn't shake anybody's hand. My sponsor and I – he took me over to transcendental meditation, where I was initiated into the TM discipline. And the first day that I was taught to meditate, I was walking to Central Park in New York and my left hand had stopped sweating. And I must say, at that particular time, I wondered whether it was the Jewish half of me or the Christian half which had stopped sweating. I saw, from this experience, that the meditation basically could change me physiologically...that it could change my chemical makeup. I went back for the refresher course two or three days later, and after that meditation my right hand had stopped sweating. And I realized that basically meditation was a way of changing me physiology. And I began to study all kinds of spiritual readings, and I got myself into Western mysticism, Eastern mysticism. I found that Western mysticism seems to concentrate on the head. In other words, I see you as the Christ, I love you, I do a lot of mental work in order to try to become one with my Higher Power. Eastern mysticism, on the other hand, concentrates mostly on the body. Their belief system states that there has to be a physiological transformation. As well, there has to be a physiological change in the body, in order to effect a permanent spiritual transformation.

In other words, the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous talks about "God consciousness". And it talks about the overwhelming God consciousness which our early founders received. Bill Wilson had an overwhelming spiritual experience, as did Marty Mann had overwhelming spiritual experience. Most of us who came after those two people have had what is basically called the "educational variety" of spiritual

awakening. My spiritual awakening has been going on, on, on, on, and on ... And I have not had that overwhelming spiritual experience that the founders of AA had. On the other hand, after Bill Wilson had this spiritual awakening, as did Marty Mann, they tried to recapture it over the next 25-30-35 years, and never could. In fact, I was at the meeting that Marti Mann spoke, and she said that she had just gotten over a twenty-year depression. She'd just gotten initiated into transcendental meditation.

What I'm saying is that, in order to get myself aligned with my Higher Power, I had to give up caffeine, I had to get rid of smoking three to three and a half packs of cigarettes a day, I had to get off of sugar, which I'm now five days off of again. That has been the toughest one for me, is sugar. I find it the primary addiction. But, God is calmness in action. Human beings are excitement in action. And I find that the drugs I put into my body, basically to create some sort of stress of excitement, are those kind of obstacles to spiritual progress. I learned that prayer is talking to God, meditation is listening to God and the highest form of prayer is listening. When my mind stops, God's mind starts.

The treatment facility, they were working with the indigents. And I ran a ¾ house for indigent men. And the man who was my superior. How do you like that? The man who was my boss, said that he also had been initiated into the same meditation technique I had - transcendental meditation. He felt that the people we were working with, were the lost souls. Those who were coming and who were living under bridges, those who had 10-15 treatments, those who were deemed the cocaine whores, the people with AIDS. And the only way, that he felt, that possibly, any of them could have some sort of spiritual experience was almost right after they got clean, which was almost within a day or two. So what I did was, I taught prayer and meditation to these people as soon as they came in. And what we were doing was we were offering the 11th Step to the hopeless. And some of those people are still sober today.

So, I found that my job, seems to be at the moment, is that I teach meditation where I am. I'm at a place called "Renaissance" in Boca Raton, and Thursdays, what I do from 6 o'clock to 6.30 – I teach meditation to the public, and 6:30 to 7:45 I have an ACoA meeting, which I run. The only way, as I said, prayer is talking to God, meditation is

listening. I was in an ashram, which is an Eastern form of the teaching center, which taught meditation. We meditated for hours. I was in it. There was a man named Ram Dass, who had an oath of silence. And this was in the 70's. At this place I learned it was Brahmacharya, which was basically we were celibate. I found that while I was doing all of this, and working with things like Kundalini energy, which is an energy which moves up the spine into the head - this is eastern mysticism – that I was learning all different types of techniques of meditation, everything from breathing basically to mantras. And I was fascinated with the subject. And strangely enough, at this time in my life was about the time that the four young kids who started the ACoA movement asked me to come. And I was doing all these spiritual exercises, and going through all these spiritual concentrations; and at this period is when I believe the laundry list came through me. So it all seemed to hang together.

So anyway, prayer, the deepest form of prayer is listening. And when I listen, I hear the silence. There was a book once written called "The Thunder of Silence". And as I listen to the silence, the silence becomes God. Now for Adult Children of Alcoholics, silence is a very threatening sound. Because the deeper I get into silence - what did silence mean in my household? There was always silence before chaos. So, silence, to me, in my sick background, puts me back into fear and terror. Because the deeper I get into it, the more I'm waiting for the explosion. The more I'm waiting basically for the terror and the horror of my childhood. So, meditation, for us, becomes a deeper experience. It really does.

While it's in my mind, I would like to talk, which I had forgotten, a little bit about abandonment again. It is true that abandonment is something that we've all suffered here. It's a horrendous feeling. It is a gut- wrenching experience. And it's part of all of our lives. There isn't anybody in this room who has not suffered abandonment - a deep, painful level. I came across a teaching in the East, which states, that "those of us of the human race who have not suffered abandonment at a very deep level cannot make the next level of spiritual awareness." In other words, abandonment is the passport to the next spiritual level.

So, those of us who have suffered abandonment, I would like to offer the proposition that, in actuality, it's a huge spiritual plus. Because it's an emptying out feeling, and nature avoids a vacuum. And, as I'm emptied out of human-ness, my spirit can start moving into the God shaped hole - If I allow it to. That hole has always been filled up with people, places and things for me. And if I can allow myself to feel the feelings, stay empty, it allows this void to be filled up with Spirit. And in the process comes "Please, God, empty me of me, and fill me with Thee."

Somebody once asked what is the Buddha's void? What does the Buddha's void feel like? And the answer came back: the Buddha's void is emptiness without fear. And that's, hopefully, is what I hope to achieve this in lifetime. Feeling that emptiness and aloneness, without the fear. (Clearing throat) You can hear my voice. That means I'm frightened. Hopefully there will be a day when I can describe that experience without the fear. Have I covered prayer and meditation? Hopefully.

READING SUGGESTIONS:

- Book: The Laundry List: The ACoA Experience:
 - Chapter 7: A Matter of Faith (entirely);
 - Chapter 5: Getting Started with Recovery – Working the ACoA Steps of recovery: Step 11.

STEP 11 - REFLECTIONS:

1. How often do I pray?
2. How often do I meditate?
3. What do I pray for?
4. Do I have a daily program for prayer and meditation? If not, Am I willing to start one?
5. I will now take a moment to meditate/pray, while seeking and listening to my Higher Power's will for me. I will write down what comes up.
6. Do I believe I have the power to carry out, my Higher Power's will for me?

STEP 12 - (TIME 49.08)

Moving onto 12. Alcoholics Anonymous 12th step states that we need to go out having had a spiritual experience as a result of these steps, excuse me – that was the original – “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps we try to carry this message to other alcoholics and practice these principles in all our affairs.” That’s pretty self-evident. Now that I am spiritually more sound, I then go out and share this experience with other alcoholics, hopefully to bring them into Alcoholics Anonymous. I think that’s wonderful for AA.

But as Adult Children of Alcoholics, “We have had a spiritual awakening as a result of taking these steps, and we continue to love ourselves and to practice these principles in all our affairs.” “Self-love and self- acceptance inevitably lead us to feel connected to the larger universe. When we were victims in an alcoholic household, we lost our authentic self to the demands of the disease. Throughout our adulthood lives, and especially in the ACoA, we have been attempting to recover and cherish our authentic, spontaneous self. Through working these steps to the best of our ability, and developing a relationship with our Higher Power, we can gain a wonderful new awareness and an opportunity to truly change. We can find a happiness and contentment beyond anything we could imagine. This does not mean that our life will always be trouble free, only that we can readily and competently deal with life's problems. There is a solution beyond ourselves. By working the ACoA program daily and admitting that we are powerless over the effects of living with alcoholism, we can learn to love ourselves. And when we do, we are free to love others in a new and healthy way. By sharing with each other, we act as a mirror, reflecting our new growth and love. By using this program in all our affairs, we can dispel the old destructive personality that so crippled our enjoyment of life. No longer do we imitate a normal life, now we embrace it.”

So, it is my personal belief that I am here basically by the grace of my Higher Power, this morning, to present 12 Steps for victims, rather than perpetrators. It does not mean that sometimes, if I'm new to ACoA, that after having done these steps, and worked this program, that it might not be a very positive act on my part to look at the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, which are the same as Co-dependents Anonymous,

and the same as Al-Anon, and make amends to people I have harmed. But as children, and that's what we are working on in ACoA, what I need to do is to put the focus on learning how to love me, and not to blame and shame myself. Fear is what I am, I'm a fear-based person. ACoA is what I am, and co-dependency is what I do. And I feel my job, basically, is to help people learn about their personality profile.

A very wise man, I think it was 400 BC, he said that the way to do, was to be. And what I believe the ACoA program and these steps will do is to help us learn how to be, along with the laundry list. In Anonymous Alcoholics, I was taught I had to do before I could be. I had to change my behavior in order to become something different. The ACoA movement is teaching me that I have to learn what I am. In other words, I have to be before I can do. This morning I've done my very best to be something. To be someone. And I hope this has been of some help to you. I know it's been some help to me. I know this is being taped, and it's my hope that this tape will get around, maybe to the membership and maybe can be of some help. I thank you very much and now I'd like some discussion here today. [clapping] It's 8:30, I took up a lot of time.

Yes, sir? [inaudible audience question] I honestly feel that there should be no music in meditation. I believe there are different levels of meditation. I believe music, water, is distraction. My personal belief is that: what I am trying to do is to hear the still, small voice within me. And I'm trying to go beyond the mental level. So what I use, basically, is I relax my body. I relax all the way up, and I count backwards from 10 to 0. I inhale God, exhale loves me. And as I get calmer and calmer, I then say: "Please God, reveal Yourself to me now", and listen to silence as long as I can without a thought. Even if it's only for one or two seconds. For those one or two seconds, when my mind stops, I'm truly humble, my mind is not working, and I can then hear the silence. And the silence is God. For me to use anything else - music, water - is very distracting. But the most important part of that meditation is: "Please, God, reveal Yourself to me now." And the moment of listening is when I can make the God contact. I'm not saying that whoever else's meditations are imperfect, I'm just giving mine. I can't use...this is what I use... So I have been taught that anything other, that violates the peace of mind, is a hindrance. Anyone else? I want to thank you all for your attention. I appreciate the time and what I listened to.

READING SUGGESTIONS:

- Book: The Laundry List: The ACoA Experience:
 - Chapter 8: Resistance And Setbacks To Recovery (entirely);
 - Chapter 9: Does The ACoA Recovery Program Work? (entirely)
 - Chapter 11: The Individual And The Group: Some Lessons Learned: Anonymity
 - Chapter 5: Getting Started with Recovery – Working the ACoA Steps of recovery: Step 12.
- Book: Big Red Book: Chapter 10 – page 353 to 363

STEP 12 - REFLECTIONS:

1. Have I awoken spiritually? How do I experience this awakening?
2. Do I believe the spiritual awakening(s) have been a result of working the steps?
3. I will now list an example or examples of how I love myself.
4. I will now list an example or examples of how I practice the 12 steps spiritual principles in my daily life;

The Spiritual Principles behind the 12 Steps from the Big Red Book:

Step 1. Powerlessness and Surrender

Step 2. Open-mindedness and Clarity

Step 3. Willingness and Accepting Help

Step 4. Self-honesty and Courage

Step 5. Honesty and Trust

Step 6. Willingness

Step 7. Humility

Step 8. Willingness and Self-forgiveness

Step 9. Forgiveness and Courage

Step 10. Honesty and Discernment

Step 11. Seeking and Listening

Step 12. Love and Self-love

