



EDA Step Workbook

Step 12

A Guide for EDA Members

www.4EDA.org

**Step Twelve –
Having had a spiritual awakening¹ as the result of these steps,
we tried to carry this message to others,
and to practice these principles in all our affairs.**

Moving into recovery means transforming our lives, opening our hearts and minds to possibilities we never imagined. When trapped in our eating disorder, our world was remarkably small and constrained. Obsession with food, weight, and body image filled our waking hours. People in our lives may have cared deeply about and for us, yet we felt disconnected and alone. Our eating disorder was all that mattered. On a meaningful level, nothing and no one else seemed to exist at all. We could barely see beyond our fear, self-pity, resentment and pride. In recovery we set aside these defects and learn to walk, haltingly at first without them, or at least with less of them. We gradually open our eyes to the life-affirming, deeply moving beauty of the reality beyond ourselves. By working Steps 1 through 11, we are finally able to let go of the protective veil that had shrouded the rest of the world from our hearts as well as our eyes. Working The Steps does indeed deliver a spiritual awakening.

To be clear, a spiritual awakening is not an event typically characterized by parting clouds and booming voices from the heavens. Most of us found ours to be far more subtle. Sometimes, we did not recognize it until we began to look back on our journey through recovery and through The Steps. We noticed points in our life when we could see our Higher Power working for us, whether through circumstances, others, or ourselves. We took note of these instances and when we began to chain them together we could see a true shift in paradigm.

Many times we could see the transformation that occurred from our Step work. Certainly, the process of cleansing ourselves and making amends to those we have hurt created a profound effect. Yet, sometimes the shift in attitude and behavior occurred so slowly it felt as if geologic time could serve as a gauge. At such junctures we needed to remind ourselves to open our hearts, to look deeply within, and to trust that something wonderful has happened and continues to happen to us each day.

As we begin to realize that our world has been changed for the better, through the Step work we have done, we simultaneously become aware that the gift of life in recovery comes with the responsibility to share it with others. Now that we have begun to experience healing in our lives we must extend a hand to those who still suffer. It is our charge to pass on what we have been given because we know how the newcomer feels. We remember the day we arrived at our first meeting broken, beaten, and alone. We know the immeasurable strength we were given by those first people who reached out to us and welcomed us with warm smiles and authentic laughter. We can still feel the initial desire we had to grasp the happiness these people like us seemed to share. We know the newcomer feels much the way we did, so we extend a hand to those who follow after us. We find that when we are truly devoting ourselves

¹ The term “spiritual awakening” can refer to an event – a “vital spiritual experience” – or to a gradual change. Atheists in Twelve Step recovery experience a transformation that enables us to place service before selfish desires.

to improving lives around us, our own recovery is strengthened, and our happiness and serenity begin to take root.

The ways we give back are numerous; we set up the chairs at meetings or make copies of literature; we volunteer to chair meetings or stick around after meetings to talk with newcomers. When ready, we raise our hands in the meetings as available to be a sponsor or a buddy. At every point in our recovery there is much we can do in service to others and we must start as soon as we can, but there are precautions we must take into account. In our eating disorders, most of us were more than willing to give of ourselves, usually to a fault. We gave when we had nothing to give and became more lost than ever because we had compromised our needs and boundaries. Now that we are in recovery we must be keenly aware of the tendency to people-please. We must guard against falling into an eating disordered mindset at all times. Before we do something for others we ask ourselves, "Do I have the internal resources to give this and not disregard myself and my needs?" If the honest answer is "no," we must hold back and let others pick up where we cannot. This process of "right-sizing," learning healthy boundaries and doing only what we can, ironically leaves us with much more capacity because we are taking care of ourselves. We notice in due time that we are actually fully capable of taking on the extra responsibility of service. Here we must not let old fears impede us.

Before recovery, many of us were so fearful and anxious we were walled off from life and the responsible parts that it is our privilege to play. It is a disservice to ourselves, to others and to our recovery if we continue to respond fearfully to opportunities where we might be useful. We may feel a very strong desire to respond from fear. Yet if we succumb, we end up doing something we do not have the resources to complete or we end up refraining from doing something because we are uncomfortable. We consider each opportunity in our daily reflection (Steps 10 and 11). In recovery, we let our conscience be our guide. We seek guidance from our Higher Power and we do what we think is right. We cannot let self-deception creep into our lives for long; we work hard to eliminate it when we understand the situation. Being true to ourselves in service allows us to be the most help, to the most people, including ourselves.

There is another aspect of our old thinking that may lead us astray when we begin service work. For many of us, a key aspect of our eating disorder was perfectionism and black and white thinking. When we start to bring ourselves back into balance through working with others, it may be tempting to bring old expectations with us. We may think that if we do not say the exact right thing in a meeting, we will sound stupid or that if we are chairing a meeting and something doesn't go smoothly, that everyone around us will judge how we did. In our roles as buddies or sponsors we may become upset at ourselves if the other person relapses or fails to make progress as they should. It is easy to believe we have failed them if we can't get them to where we think they need to be. But bringing perfectionism or black and white thinking into any service situation will only cause us or another person distress and then it becomes less about genuine giving and more about feeding our destructive thinking patterns. Those of us with eating disorders are in a unique position to help those around us, but before we do this we must make sure we have the internal resources to give. Airline attendants tell us with good reason on each flight to put on our own oxygen mask before attending to anyone else; we're no help to anyone else if we are not functioning all that well ourselves. As long as

we protect ourselves and serve from a position of healthy objectivity, we can be assured that the Promises of our program will come true.

Lastly we are asked to put the principles we have learned through the 12-Steps into use in **all our affairs**. This means that we strive to live with honesty, integrity, and humility in everything we do. We work to serve others and to take care of ourselves. We embrace the knowledge that we are neither better, nor worse, than any other person we encounter. We do the best we can in every area of our lives, not just because it is the right thing to do, but because it is the most useful and the most joyful. By this point, we are living Step 12. Yes, we are going to make mistakes -- that is our human legacy. Mistakes are the source and roots of our learning and growth; if we didn't make mistakes there would be no reason to learn or grow. Though they are painful, such opportunities for growth can be the greatest rewards our Higher Power offers.

In applying the principles of EDA in all our affairs, we need to stay conscious and aware. Each time we find ourselves straying from the principles we learn and apply in the 12-Steps, we stop, regroup, and bring ourselves back on track so we can continue our spiritual progress. There will be times when our growth is quick and steady. There are sure to be other times when it seems unrecognizable. If we are in recovery and are working The Steps, we can be assured that growth never stops. As we work diligently and patiently with ourselves and other people, we continue to move forward in recovery. We find that even when things are hard or painful, they are much better than they used to be. When we were active in our eating disorder, life was miserable no matter what was going on around us. In recovery, no matter what happens, good or bad, life itself remains beautiful and precious. We can be happy, joyous and free, no matter what.

"The Beginning is Always Today" –Mary Wollstonecraft