

June 1989



In early March 1973, the American forces were pulling out of South Viet Nam. I, an army sergeant, was having a final talk with my sponsor, a Department of the Army civilian, who was due to leave Saigon the next day. I had made my first AA meeting just three months before and I wasn't sure how I could handle moving back to the States, rejoining my wife, and not having the benefit of other AA members for the next couple of weeks.

"Jerry" asked me if I was convinced that I was powerless over alcohol, that my life was unmanageable; and if I had come to believe that a Power greater than myself had restored me to sanity. I assured him that I had taken the first two Steps.

"Being convinced, then," he said, "it's time you took Step Three!"

He asked me to make a quick mental review of my life, to see if I had made the best use of it. Had I taken care of myself, mind and body? Had

I driven a car while drunk and even in blackouts? Had there been accidents, or even battles, when I could have been seriously hurt or even killed, and wasn't? The real question he was asking was: could I see that a Higher Power had actually been taking care of me all my life?

I had to admit that I had really done my best to destroy my life, that God must have been taking care of me, because I surely hadn't been. Jerry asked me, "Then what's the big deal about letting God continue to do what he has been doing all your life anyhow?"

He further explained that there was nothing in the Third Step that would take away my "free will." I could go get drunk anytime I chose to. Nor does the Step say that God will run my life in any way against my will. However, it does say that God will protect me from myself if I will make a decision to let him do so.

My sponsor gave me the names and addresses of a couple of AA members to look up when I got to Fort Knox, Kentucky, which was where I would go when I left Viet Nam. He told me several ways to contact AA and AA members in my travels. He did his utmost to impress on me the need to get on with working the Twelve Steps as soon as possible. He reassured me that if I asked for God's help in staying sober and in running my life, he would give it to me.

Finally he asked if I was ready to make the decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God. I told him that I was. He picked up a Big Book, turned to page 62, and asked me to read the last paragraph and all of page 63. When I finished reading, he asked if I was ready to make the decision required in Step Three and to confirm that decision by reading the prayer in the middle of page 63 aloud with him.

We read the Step Three prayer together, talked for a while longer, then parted and were not to see each other again until some three years later.

Within two weeks of Jerry's departure all of the other sober AA members I knew had left Viet Nam. Being on my own gave me the incentive to begin working the rest of the Steps. Within six weeks of his departure, I had completed all of the remaining Steps for the first time. By then I had arrived safe and sober at Fort Knox, where I would begin the lifetime process of practicing the principles of AA.

At a recent meeting I was reminded again how fortunate I was to have had such a great sponsor for my first months in the Fellowship. The chairman explained that she had been approached by a person with much less sobriety than she, who had asked her opinion of the suggestion on page 63 to take the Third Step with another person, such as a wife, best friend, or spiritual advisor.

She had told the newer person that he was confused, it was the Fifth Step that we take with another person. She was dumbfounded when he showed her the sentence, in reference to Step Three, that said: "We found it very desirable to take this spiritual step with an understanding person..." She had talked with others, and had gotten almost the same reaction.

Shouldn't we be telling more people about that apparently very much overlooked part of the Big Book?

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