

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity

While working Step One, some of us said, “Okay, I’ve admitted I can’t stay sober and yet I want to stay sober—so how am I going to do it?” We heard that continuing with the Twelve Steps was the way out of this dilemma. But for many of us Step Two created a new obstacle: we had little reason to believe that someone or something could heal us from this disease. Our pain had given us such a deep sense of hopelessness that we thought we were beyond repair.

There were three major difficulties preventing us from taking Step Two. First and foremost, we relied only on ourselves. This, in turn, revealed a second problem—we had almost no trust in other people. Finally, we had no belief that there was a loving presence anywhere in the universe that could heal and care for us.

Looking at the first of these, we were confronted with our total and faulty self-reliance. Before coming into recovery many of us thought we “knew all the answers,” even as we had little belief in ourselves. So, upon entering the program, we had the dilemma of wanting help from others while still resisting ideas other than our own. This was the residue of our self-reliance.

In order to believe that a “Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity,” we had to begin to let go of the belief that we would be the ones doing the restoring. As an old-timer in the program was heard saying to a newcomer, “Your name does not belong in the

second step. It does not read, ‘Came to believe that I can restore myself to sanity.’” Still, we held on, subconsciously and even consciously, to our so called “superior knowledge.” We resisted listening to anyone else for the answers to our problems.

In addition, our so called “superior knowledge” and “answers” were laid upon a foundation of cynicism and skepticism. Many of us were not even conscious of how deeply this kind of thinking was ingrained into our view of the world. We took it for granted that this was the natural order of things. In fact, it was this very “thinking” that had landed us, hopeless and helpless, in the rooms of SRA in the first place.

When we started to work Step Two, we were presented with another way: the way of trusting. This brought us to the second of these obstacles: trusting other people. Our inability to trust usually originated during childhood when people with power, such as parents, relatives, or other trusted caretakers, had abused, neglected, or betrayed us. Not surprisingly, we lacked the basic element of trust necessary to “come to believe.”

When we looked more closely at the rest of the step, “a Power greater than ourselves...,” we were faced with the third obstacle: our struggle to believe in a loving presence that could heal us. Some of us recoiled in distaste at the idea of such a “Power,” especially since we thought that the “Power” in this phrase really referred to God. Others came to the program with religious convictions, even deep ones. Regardless of our beliefs we were still unable to heal.

No matter what our belief or non-belief, we began to realize that because of our addiction, sex had become our one and only higher power. We always believed that the rush and high we got from sex would make everything okay; we would feel good, it would take away our pain. In fact, our addiction totally consumed us and told us that sex was the true source of our well-being. It was the focus of an outpouring of energy and determination that overpowered everything in its way. We worshipped addictive sex and unhealthy relationships. We believed that “the next one would save us.”

Having looked at these three obstacles (our faulty self-reliance, our lack of trust in others, and our lack of trust and belief in a higher power), many of us felt we were faced with a nearly impossible task. How could we become less self-reliant and turn to others and a higher power when we had so little trust and so little belief? Our first impulse when we approached the second step was to try to force ourselves past our distrust. We found that didn’t work out any better than trying to not act out by our unaided will.

Another approach to the second step was to take a lesson from the first step and admit we had been unable to trust anyone or anything. By making this admission and seeing that our old ways didn’t work, we were led to consider ideas other than our own.

We heard that keeping an open mind was all we needed to do to start the process of Step Two. One of the most important things we were told was that “coming to believe” was a process, not an event. It took place over

time. So keeping an open mind gave us the time to help us believe in something besides ourselves. For some this turned out to be the fellowship. We saw the possibility for healing in ourselves when we witnessed others in the group healing. We were able to see the strength in the fellowship that was greater together than the strength of any one of its individual members. We were able to see and feel the process of recovery.

When we speak of the possibility of healing we are referring to an important part of Step Two—the part about “being restored.” But restored to what? It is here we find a word that stops us cold: sanity. Restored to sanity? Does this mean that we were actually insane? As we started to understand what this really meant, we saw that it was not so far-fetched after all. It was suggested that insanity could be defined as repeating the same action over and over, expecting different results. Isn’t this what we were doing when engaging in our addictive behavior—believing that each time would be the one that “fixed” us? Our addiction took us to places where we were beyond making rational choices.

“Restore us to sanity,” suggests that we had been sane at some previous time in our lives. This implies, that perhaps gradually, we had crossed over a line; a line, in our experience, that couldn’t be recrossed by mere human will alone. Some of us found it hopeful to acknowledge that since we had once been sane, then perhaps we could be sane again.

So we asked, “How do I work Step Two to become sane again?” Our work here was

challenging in a way we had never considered. It was the challenge of keeping an open mind, getting us and our rigid thinking out of the way. We wanted to take control, but it was suggested that we step back and open ourselves to new ways of thinking and living. We were asked to sit and absorb, not to make quick judgments. When we opened ourselves to other possibilities, we found that something other than ourselves and our own ideas was starting to change and heal us. It was then we first became aware that there was a power greater than ourselves restoring us to sanity.

With this awareness came a gift: we no longer had to face the great burden of self-reliance. Step Two offered the promise and process of connection. Something other than ourselves was now healing us. We were changing and recovering, and our healing came not from solitary struggle, but from surrender to a power greater than ourselves. Recovery was brought to us by spirituality not by fear inflicted by a punishing deity. The choice of a spiritual power was at the discretion of the individual. The group in fact, encourages individuals to find their own spiritual path whatever that may be. Returning to sanity was learning to live without being ruled by fear. We replaced old behavior with new practices—and got different results. Daily acceptance of our disease brought daily acceptance of our spiritual power.

Though at times we experienced pain in our healing, it was not inflicted by a punishing higher power; it was the pain of changing and growing, of accepting feelings and emotions long repressed. We saw the evidence of healing

mount in both ourselves and those around us. We saw our lives improve. Sometimes, friends told us they saw a difference in us long before we felt it. People noticed it without even knowing we were in recovery. And yes, even with the evidence of our healing, we continued to doubt. This reminded us how deep our distrust was embedded in us by the painful events of our past. It also reminded us that Step Two would not be a simple one-time event, but a continual and enriching life-long process.

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