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## Freethinker Alternative 12 Steps for Overeaters<sup>1</sup>

**Step 1:** We admitted we were powerless over food—that our lives had become unmanageable.

**Step 2:** Came to believe and to accept that we needed strengths beyond our awareness and resources to restore us to sanity.

**Step 3:** Made a decision to entrust our will and our lives to the care of the collective wisdom and resources of those who have searched before us.

**Step 4:** Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

**Step 5:** Admitted to ourselves without reservation and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs.

**Step 6:** Were ready to accept help in letting go of all our defects of character.

**Step 7:** With humility and openness sought to eliminate our shortcomings.

**Step 8:** Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

**Step 9:** Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

**Step 10:** Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

**Step 11:** Sought through meditation to improve our spiritual awareness and our understanding of the OA way of life and to discover the power to carry out that way of life.

**Step 12:** Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to compulsive eaters and to practice these principles in all of our affairs.

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## Serenity Poem<sup>2</sup>

We seek the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference.

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from the SF AA Freethinker 12 Steps and in use by the Emeryville OA Freethinker meetings from February 2016 until November 2019, when the meetings were threatened with being delisted unless they ceased using these Steps.

<sup>2</sup>This is a secular version of the “Serenity Prayer” in use by the SF AA Freethinkers. You can also substitute the pronoun “we” for “I.”

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## Step Ones

**Traditional:** We admitted we were powerless over food, that our lives had become unmanageable.

**Freethinker<sup>1</sup>:** We admitted we were powerless over food, that our lives had become unmanageable.

**Buddhist<sup>2</sup>:** We admitted our addictive cravings, and recognized its consequences in our lives.

**Cleveland<sup>3</sup>:** Admit we are powerless over other people, random events, and our own persistent negative behaviors, and that when we forget this, our lives become unmanageable.

**Humanist<sup>4</sup>:** We accept the fact that all our efforts to stop eating have failed.

**SOS<sup>5</sup>:** I have a life threatening problem. My best efforts to establish sobriety have been unsuccessful. I believe that I have choices and that my life no longer need be unmanageable. I accept responsibility for myself and my recovery.

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## Serenity Poem

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**Sources, from *The Little Book: A Collection of Alternative 12 Steps* by Roger C**

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<sup>5</sup>12 Statements from SOS, aka Secular Organization for Sobriety/Save Our Selves.

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## Step One Interpretations<sup>1</sup>

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### ALLAN BERGER

This Step helps us shatter our reliance on a false self, which was fed through lack of self-awareness, poor self-worth, and lack of language, plus denial, and a physical, mental and spiritual compulsion.

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### STEPHANIE COVINGTON

The first step in recovery is to look inside ourselves. Turning inward is the beginning of becoming more truthful with ourselves. Honesty is essential because addictions thrive on dishonesty: we have become accustomed to hiding from our true feelings and values. (p. 15)

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### GABOR MATÉ

Step One accepts the full negative impact of the addiction process in one's life. It is a triumph over the human tendency to deny. We recognize that our resolution and strategies... have not liberated us from the addiction process and all its mechanisms that are deeply ingrained in our brains, emotions and behaviours.

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### THÉRÈSE JACOBS-STEWART

By opening our hearts, admitting our powerlessness over alcohol, drugs, and other people's choices, we are able to remember we are part of the great stream of We. (p. 11)

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**Allan Berger:** An expert in the science of recovery and author of many Hazelden [a recovery publisher] books.

**Stephanie Covington:** Therapist and author of several recovery books including *A Woman's Way*.

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## Step Twos

**Traditional:** Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

**Freethinker<sup>1</sup>:** Came to believe and to accept that we need-ed strengths beyond our awareness and resources to re-store us to sanity

**Buddhist<sup>2</sup>:** Came to believe that a power other than self could restore us to wholeness.

**Cleveland<sup>3</sup>:** Came to believe that spiritual resources can provide power for our restoration and healing.

**Humanist<sup>4</sup>:** We believe that we must turn elsewhere for help.

**SOS<sup>5</sup>:** I believe that a power within myself in tandem with supports and strengths beyond my own awareness and resources can restore me to a healthier, more balanced, and positive state of mind, body and soul.

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## Serenity Poem

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## Step Two Interpretations<sup>1</sup>

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### ALLAN BERGER

Hope is an important ingredient in all forms of healing. We are given hope, and humbled further because we won't be able to solve our problem on our own.

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### STEPHANIE COVINGTON

What can we believe in? Whom can we trust? The problem is that life is more difficult and empty without someone or something to trust and believe in. (p. 27)

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### GABOR MATÉ

(A higher power) may, but does not necessarily, imply belief in a deity. It means heeding a higher truth than the immediate desires or terrors of the ego. (Dr. Maté provides a fuller understanding of the higher power concept in chapter 34 of his book *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*.)

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### THÉRÈSE JACOBS-STEWART

We "come to" out of the fog of our deluded, addictive mind, reaching for something more. There, waiting for us, are the ancient practices of meditation and mindfulness. (p. 20)

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## Step Threes

**Traditional:** Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

**Freethinker<sup>1</sup>:** Made a decision to entrust our will and our lives to the care of the collective wisdom and resources of those who have searched before us.

**Buddhist<sup>2</sup>:** Made a decision to go for refuge to this other power as we understood it.

**Cleveland<sup>3</sup>:** Made a decision to be open to spiritual energy as we take deliberate action for change in our lives.

**Humanist<sup>4</sup>:** We turn to our fellow men and women, particularly those who have struggled with the same problem.

**SOS<sup>5</sup>:** I make a decision to entrust my will and life to the care of myself, the collective wisdom of those who have struggled with the same problem, and those in support of me.

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## Serenity Poem

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## Step Three Interpretations<sup>1</sup>

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### ALLAN BERGER

This Step is about commitment. We need to make a commitment to finding a new and more effective way of living.

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### STEPHANIE COVINGTON

Of course, simple things aren't always easy. This Step says we turn our will over. When we cling to our will – our fierce determination that things should always go our way – we'll always be in conflict with something. Our willfulness keeps us pushing against, not flowing with life. (p. 51)

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### GABOR MATÉ

The word God could have a religious meaning for many people. For many others, it means laying trust in the universal truths and higher values that reside at the spiritual core of human beings, but are feared and resisted by the grasping, anxious, past-conditioned ego.

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### THÉRÈSE JACOBS-STEWART

We decide to let go of our delusions of control, and instead turn toward three specific spiritual practices. These practices are... taking refuge in awakening (buddha)... in the path of mindfulness, understanding, and love (dharma)... in community (sangha). (p. 30)

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## Step Fours

**Traditional and Freethinker<sup>1</sup>:** Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

**Buddhist<sup>2</sup>:** Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

**Cleveland<sup>3</sup>:** Search honestly and deeply within ourselves to know the exact nature of our actions, thoughts, and emotions.

**Humanist<sup>4</sup>:** We have made a list of the situations in which we are most likely to drink.

**SOS<sup>5</sup>:** I make a searching and fearless inventory of myself, of my strengths and weaknesses. I choose not to permit problems to overwhelm me, rather to focus on personal growth and the unconditional acceptance of others and myself.

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## Serenity Poem

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## Step Four Interpretations<sup>1</sup>

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### ALLAN BERGER

The essence of this Step involves increasing our self-awareness, self-honesty, and insight into our behavior.

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### STEPHANIE COVINGTON

When we carry intense guilt, we can hardly bear the thought of reviewing our past deeds. It may feel too painful to think about how we have hurt others and hurt ourselves. We may question the value of opening old wounds and remembering scenes we'd rather forget. It was a revelation to discover that Step Four wasn't just about agonizing about my past. Instead, it was about getting to know myself better. (p. 59)

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### GABOR MATÉ

The idea here is not self-condemnation, but the preparation of a clean slate for a life of sobriety. We search our conscience to identify where and how we have betrayed ourselves or others, not to wallow in guilt but to leave ourselves unburdened in the present and to help clear our path to the future.

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### THÉRÈSE JACOBS-STEWART

In Step Four we are asked to look at parts of ourselves we are uncomfortable with, the parts that we reject and keep hidden out of fear or shame. (p. 49)

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## Step Fives

**Traditional:** Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

**Freethinker<sup>1</sup>:** Admitted to ourselves without reservation and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs.

**Buddhist<sup>2</sup>:** Admitted to ourselves and another human being the exact moral nature of our past.

**Cleveland<sup>3</sup>:** Will talk to another person about our exact nature.

**Humanist<sup>4</sup>:** We ask our friends to help us avoid those situations.

**SOS<sup>5</sup>:** I admit to myself, and if I choose, to another person or persons the exact nature of the negative, injurious aspects of my thinking and behavior. I explore the goodness within myself: the positive, courageous, and compassionate.

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## Serenity Poem

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## Step Five Interpretations<sup>1</sup>

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### ALLAN BERGER

We learn the value of self-disclosure, authenticity, and healthy relationships. This Step also continues to dismantle the false self and false pride and helps develop more humility and authenticity.

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### STEPHANIE COVINGTON

The Fifth Step offers healing. It shows us how to create a new kind of relationship with people. We make ourselves vulnerable and open, allowing ourselves to be seen for who we really are, maybe for the first time. (p. 93)

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### GABOR MATÉ

Communicating the information – to ourselves in the form of a journal, or to some other human being – makes our moral self-searching into a concrete reality. Shame for ourselves is replaced by a sense of responsibility. We move from powerlessness to strength.

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### THÉRÈSE JACOBS-STEWART

When we admit our wrongs and receive the acceptance and kind understanding of another human being in the Fifth Step, we begin the “healing into the depths” of our addictive mind. Taking Step Five can be the start of cultivating loving compassion towards ourselves. (p. 67)

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## Step Sixes

**Traditional:** Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

**Freethinker<sup>1</sup>:** Were ready to accept help in letting go of all our defects of character.

**Buddhist<sup>2</sup>:** Became entirely ready to work at transforming ourselves.

**Cleveland<sup>3</sup>:** Be entirely ready to acknowledge our abiding strength and release our personal shortcomings.

**Humanist<sup>4</sup>:** We are ready to accept the help they give us.

**SOS<sup>5</sup>:** I focus on healing, abolishing self-blame and shame, and understanding the boundaries of my responsibilities. I remain open to the help and support of others as I address the challenge of change.

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## Serenity Poem

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## Step Six Interpretations<sup>1</sup>

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### ALLAN BERGER

We experience the pain of what we have done to hurt ourselves and others, and we begin to understand and develop insight into our behavioral patterns and the psychological functions of our character defects.

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### STEPHANIE COVINGTON

In this Step we become willing to be open to change, willing to let go of habits or traits that cause our lives to be unbalanced. We become open to a deeper knowing and a clearer vision. (p. 95)

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### GABOR MATÉ

We accept that our missteps and our lack of integrity do not represent who we really are and commit to let go of these tendencies as they continue to arise in the future - for they surely will.

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### THÉRÈSE JACOBS-STEWART

The Eastern view is that defects of character are rooted in confusion, based on deluded ideas about ourselves and others. Mindfulness practice develops the clarity to cut through our confusion, getting to the root of it. Once we become aware of a delusion, its spell is broken. (p. 79)

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## Step Sevens

**Traditional:** Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

**Freethinker<sup>1</sup>:** With humility and openness sought to eliminate our shortcomings.

**Buddhist<sup>2</sup>:** With the assistance of others and our own firm resolve, we transformed unskillful aspects of ourselves and cultivated positive ones.

**Cleveland<sup>3</sup>:** Work honestly, humbly, and courageously to develop our assets and and to release our personal shortcomings.

**Humanist<sup>4</sup>:** We honestly hope they will help.

**SOS<sup>5</sup>:** I embrace introspection and work towards alleviating my shortcomings. I strive for personal growth and fulfillment over perfection, and to become integrated with collective humanness.

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## Serenity Poem

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## Step Seven Interpretations<sup>1</sup>

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**ALLAN BERGER**

We are learning the importance of being vulnerable and asking for help. This is important in attaining more humility.

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**STEPHANIE COVINGTON**

But for all of our awareness, we may still not accept ourselves. Step Seven gives us the opportunity to move from self-awareness to self-acceptance. Acceptance is the key to change. Another paradox I have learned in recovery is that when I accept myself just as I am, I can change. (p. 120)

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**GABOR MATÉ**

Our shortcomings are where we fall short of, and even lose sight of, our true potential. Thus, in giving up the short-term rewards of addictive behaviours, we are choosing a vast enrichment of who we are. Humility is in order in place of pride, that desperate grandiosity of the ego.

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**THÉRÈSE JACOBS-STEWART**

We felt the pain of our defects in Step Six. We find it uncomfortable to be self-absorbed, or bitter, or filled with fear. We don't want to be separated from our true nature any longer; it's painful to veil it in delusion and choke its expression. (p. 100)

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## Step Eights

Traditional and Freethinker<sup>1</sup>: Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

**Buddhist**<sup>2</sup>: Made a list of all persons we had harmed.

**Cleveland**<sup>3</sup>: List all people we have harmed, including ourselves, and be willing to make amends to them all. Be willing to forgive those who have harmed us.

**Humanist**<sup>4</sup>: We have made a list of the persons we have harmed and to whom we hope to make amends.

**SOS**<sup>5</sup>: I will consider those that I have harmed and those that have harmed me. I will become willing to explore my feelings regarding those harms.

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## Serenity Poem

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## Step Eight Interpretations<sup>1</sup>

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### ALLAN BERGER

The lessons taught in this Step have to do with the fundamentals of healthy communication; delivering our message to the proper person and being as specific as possible.

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### STEPHANIE COVINGTON

Where is there ongoing bitterness, animosity, fear or hostility in our relationships? Whom do we resent or avoid? But as we continue to work this Step, we realize that "harm" has other meanings as well. We might want to consider relationships that feel unresolved - whether we believe we've harmed someone or not. Is there unfinished business to attend to? (p. 122)

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### GABOR MATÉ

We are prepared to accept responsibility for each and every sin of commission or omission we have perpetrated on people in our lives.

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### THÉRÈSE JACOBS-STEWART

Finding Pearls in the Dust-bin: Step Eight invites us to strip off the armor of our denial, to let go of rationalizing, justifying, or blaming others for our actions. (p. 115)

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## Step Nines

**Traditional and Freethinker<sup>1</sup>:** Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

**Buddhist<sup>2</sup>:** Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. In addition, made a conscientious effort to forgive all those who harmed us.

**Cleveland<sup>3</sup>:** Whenever possible, we will carry out unconditional amends to those we have hurt, including ourselves, except when to do so would cause harm.

**Humanist<sup>4</sup>:** We shall do all we can to make amends, in any way that will not cause further harm.

**SOS<sup>5</sup>:** I will make direct amends, as I deem appropriate and not injurious, to those whom I have harmed or negatively impacted and to myself.

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## Serenity Poem

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## Step Nine Interpretations<sup>1</sup>

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### ALLAN BERGER

We learn to be responsible for our behavior; we learn how to respect others; and we learn that we are as important as others, no more and no less.

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### STEPHANIE COVINGTON

What does it mean to make amends to another person? It means taking responsibility for your part in a relationship. Responsibility refers to the ability to respond appropriately. When you do, you extend hope for something new to yourself and to another person. (p. 137)

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### GABOR MATÉ

Step Nine is not about us, but about others. Its purpose is not to make us feel or look good, but to provide restitution where that's appropriate... Our fears of how we will look to others should neither drive this step nor inhibit it.

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### THÉRÈSE JACOBS-STEWART

Once we have atoned for our wrongs – even if the other person is not inclined to forgive us, even if this person is not willing to own his or her part in the difficulty – we need to let go... We can experience the relief of having no secrets, making no excuses, and holding no pretences. (p. 119)

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## Step Tens

**Traditional and Freethinker<sup>1</sup>:** Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it

**Buddhist<sup>2</sup>:** Continue to maintain awareness of our actions and motives, and when we acted unskillfully promptly admitted it.

**Cleveland<sup>3</sup>:** Continue to monitor ourselves, to acknowledge our successes, and quickly correct our lapses and errors.

**Humanist<sup>4</sup>:** We will continue to make such lists and revise them as needed

**SOS<sup>5</sup>:** I will continue sincere and meaningful self-evaluation, and strive for personal betterment.

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## Serenity Poem

We seek the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference.

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**Sources, from *The Little Book: A Collection of Alternative 12 Steps* by Roger C**

<sup>1</sup>Used by the OA Freethinkers from February 2016 until November 2019, based on the SF AA Freethinker Steps.

<sup>2</sup>A Buddhist's Non-Theist 12 Steps, created by Bodhi in Australia.

<sup>3</sup>A Nontheistic Translation: From Martha Cleveland and Arlys G., in their book, *The Alternative 12 Steps: A Secular Guide to Recovery*, 1991.

<sup>4</sup>BF Skinner, 1987.

<sup>5</sup>12 Statements from SOS, aka Secular Organization for Sobriety/Save Our Selves.

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## Step Ten Interpretations<sup>1</sup>

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### ALLAN BERGER

This Step concerns maintaining our humility, being honest with ourselves, and guarding against false pride.

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### STEPHANIE COVINGTON

Now we make a daily commitment to continuing observation and reflection – recognizing when we're out of balance or hurting ourselves or others. Our ongoing awareness allows us to meet each day and each relationship with responsibility. (p. 152)

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### GABOR MATÉ

This is Step Four in action. As human beings, most of us are far away from attaining perfect saintliness in all our behaviours or interactions, and therefore can afford to give up the process of moral self-inventory only when they lower us into the ground.

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### THÉRÈSE JACOBS-STEWART

Ongoing mindfulness helps us notice the pressure in our chest, the hairs rising on our neck, or the toxic thoughts that precede an emotional hijack. Regular on-the-spot checks – before, during, or after our actions – help us have fewer emotional or relationship messes to clean up. (p. 131)

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### <sup>1</sup>12 Step Interpretation Sources, from *The Little Book*

**Allan Berger:** An expert in the science of recovery and author of many Hazelden [a recovery publisher] books.

**Stephanie Covington:** Therapist and author of several recovery books including *A Woman's Way*.

**Gabor Maté:** Physician, Buddhist, and author of the recovery book *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*.

**Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart:** Counselor, Buddhist, and author of *Mindfulness and the 12 Steps*.

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## Step Elevens

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

**Freethinker<sup>1</sup>:** Sought through meditation to improve our spiritual awareness and our understanding of the OA way of life and to discover the power to carry out that way of life.

**Buddhist<sup>2</sup>:** Engaged through the practice of meditation to improve our conscious contact with our true selves, and seeking that beyond self. Also used prayer as a means to cultivate positive attitudes and states of mind.

**Cleveland<sup>3</sup>:** Increasingly engage spiritual energy and awareness to continue to grow in abiding strength and wisdom and in the enjoyment of life.

**Humanist<sup>4</sup>:** We appreciate what our friends have done and are doing to help us.

**SOS<sup>5</sup>:** I will seek to improve my awareness and understanding of myself, my addiction, and of other individuals and organizations with the common goal of arresting alcohol addiction.

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## Step Eleven Interpretations<sup>1</sup>

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### ALLAN BERGER

Maintenance is not enough. We need to continue to grow or we will regress. This Step is about expanding our consciousness and continuing to seek more knowledge about our new way of life.

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### STEPHANIE COVINGTON

We can choose whatever practice gives us a sense of inner peace. (p. 173)

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### GABOR MATÉ

This is not a demand for submission but a suggested path to freedom. Human life, I believe, is balanced on four pillars: physical health, emotional integration, intellectual awareness and spiritual practice. There are no prescriptions for the latter.

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### THÉRÈSE JACOBS-STEWART

In Step Eleven, we find that making conscious contact with Great Reality deep down within us provides a quiet peace, quenching, at last, our restless yearnings. (p. 143)

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## Step Twelves

**Traditional and Freethinker<sup>1</sup>:** Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to compulsive eaters and to practice these principles in all of our affairs.

**Buddhist<sup>2</sup>:** Having gained spiritual insight as a result of these steps, we practice these principles in all areas of our lives, and make this message available to others in need of recovery.

**Cleveland<sup>3</sup>:** Practice the principles of these Steps in all our affairs and carry the 12-Step message to others.

**Humanist<sup>4</sup>:** We, in turn, are ready to help others who may come to us in the same way.

**SOS<sup>5</sup>:** With new-found acceptance and insight I will try to keep awareness, and compassion for others and myself, in the forefront.

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## Step Twelve Interpretations<sup>1</sup>

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### ALLAN BERGER

We develop a new purpose to our life that is not about us. We discover the importance of being of value to others, and we learn that we need to maintain our integrity in all our affairs.

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### STEPHANIE COVINGTON

With recovery this can mean that we offer a straightforward explanation of the Twelve Steps, as well as our own personal experience – how we reworked, translated, revised, or otherwise molded the Steps until they were relevant to us. We all have more to offer than the party line and a by-the-book recitation of the Steps. We can share our story any way we like. (p. 188)

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### GABOR MATÉ

Carrying the message to others means manifesting the principles of integrity, truth, sobriety and compassion in our lives. It may call for providing support and leadership when appropriate and welcome, but does not mean proselytizing on behalf of any program, group or set of beliefs.

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### THÉRÈSE JACOBS-STEWART

Through the Twelve Step program, we cross over to a new way of living. We awaken to freedom from cravings, shallow desires, and clinging to what we cannot change... We can live the way of kindness in the world, in "all our affairs," and let our true face shine. (p. 164)

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