



Alternative
12 Step
Discussion
Guide
for
Secular
Overeaters



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Credits

Originally created in 2020 by the Emeryville, CA, OA Freethinkers as a guide for the unregistered OA monthly Alternative Step Discussion meeting which began face to face in February 2020 and then moved to Zoom in April 2020 during the Pandemic’s shelter-in-place.

Content updated in 2022 for the third Sunday of the month Freethinker Step Discussion meeting, 9AM Pacific Time, check the meeting tab for Zoom link: <https://secularovereaters.org> All are welcome!

We are grateful to Roger C, author of *AA Agnostica: A Collection of Alternative 12 Steps* for letting us use excerpts of his book for our discussion guide.

For more information, contact Secular Overeaters, secularovereaters@gmail.com



Freethinker Alternative 12 Steps for Overeaters¹

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.

The Serenity Poem²

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

Sources

¹Adapted with permission from the Steps created by the San Francisco Alcoholics Anonymous Freethinkers and in use by the Emeryville, California OA Freethinker meetings which began February 2016. In November 2019 the meetings were told by OA they would be delisted if they continued using these Steps, and that's what motivated members to start the "unregistered" Step Discussion meeting.

²San Francisco Alcoholic Anonymous Freethinkers, 2019.



Freethinker Step Discussion

Step One Versions

OA Principle: Honesty

Traditional OA and Freethinker¹: We admitted we were powerless over food, that our lives had become unmanageable.

Buddhist²: We admitted our addictive cravings, and recognized its consequences in our lives.

Cleveland³: 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.

Humanist⁴: We accept the fact that all our efforts to stop eating have failed.

Practical⁵: Admitted we were caught in a self-destructive cycle and currently lacked the tools to stop it.

Proactive⁶: I face reality. I am not able to control what I do, and this has serious consequences.

SOS⁷: 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.

Your notes

Step Sources

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

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

⁴BF Skinner, 1987.

⁵*Staying Sober Without God: The Practical 12 Steps to Long-term Recovery from Alcoholism and Addictions* by Jeffrey Munn, 2021.

⁶*The Proactive Twelve Steps: A Mindful Program for Lasting Change* by Serge Prenel, 2021.

⁷12 Statements from SOS, aka Secular Organization for Sobriety/Save Our Selves.

Other sources: *The Little Book: A Collection of Alternative 12 Steps* by Roger C.

Step One Insights

Allen Berger¹: 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.

Martha Cleveland²: Step 1 shows us we have been fighting against ourselves, not for ourselves. We let go of the belief that we are managing well. We shift from thinking that we are powerful and in charge to believing in a new reality.

Stephanie Covington³: 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).

Gabor Maté⁴: 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.

Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart⁵: 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).

Serge Prengel⁶: You have tried to control your impulses, only to fail so many times. You face a harsh reality: There's a big difference between what you want to do and what you actually do.

12 Step Insight Sources

¹Allen Berger: An expert in the science of recovery and author of many Hazelden [a recovery publisher] books.

²Martha Cleveland: Co-author of *The Alternative 12 Steps: A Secular Guide to Recovery*.

³Stephanie Covington: Therapist and author of several recovery books including *A Woman's Way*.

⁴Gabor Maté: Physician, Buddhist, and author of the recovery book *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*.

⁵Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart: Counselor, Buddhist, and author of *Mindfulness and the 12 Steps*.

⁶Serge Prengel: Author of *The Proactive Twelve Steps: A Mindful Program for Lasting Change*.



Freethinker Step Discussion

Step Two Versions

OA Principle: Hope

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

Freethinker¹: Came to believe and to accept that we needed strengths beyond our awareness and resources to restore us to sanity.

Buddhist²: Came to believe that a power other than self could restore us to wholeness.

Cleveland³: Came to believe that spiritual resources can provide power for our restoration and healing.

Humanist⁴: We believe that we must turn elsewhere for help.

Practical⁵: Trusted that a healthy lifestyle was attainable through social support and consistent self-improvement.

Proactive⁶: I understand that I cannot force change through willpower. I need to disentangle my life patiently.

SOS⁷: 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.

Your notes

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⁷12 Statements from SOS, aka Secular Organization for Sobriety/Save Our Selves.

Other sources: *The Little Book: A Collection of Alternative 12 Steps* by Roger C.

Step Two Insights

Allen Berger¹: 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.

Martha Cleveland²: Spiritual power comes from whatever gives us peace, hope or strength and enhances our humanity.

Stephanie Covington³: 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).

Gabor Maté⁴: [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.

Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart⁵: 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).

Serge Prengel⁶: The central belief of Step 2 is a belief in the process of the Twelve Steps. It has worked for others and can work for you. The normal human tendency is to try to force change through willpower. Instead, in Step 2, you realize that the only way to do it is to shift gears. You commit to a program that will help you slowly and patiently disentangle your life. This is the kind of attitude that works for changing deeply ingrained habits. You face the reality that the strands are entangled, and there is no quick and easy way to undo the mess. Then, one by one, you disentangle the various strands of your life.

12 Step Insight Sources

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Freethinker Step Discussion

Step Three Versions

OA Principle: Faith

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

Freethinker¹: 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.

Buddhist²: Made a decision to go for refuge to this other power as we understood it.

Cleveland³: Made a decision to be open to spiritual energy as we take deliberate action for change in our lives.

Humanist⁴: We turn to our fellow men and women, particularly those who have struggled with the same problem.

Practical⁵: Committed to a lifestyle of recovery, focusing only on what we could control.

Proactive⁶: Moment by moment, I take a mindful pause to deal with my life calmly and effectively.

SOS⁷: 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.

Your notes

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⁷12 Statements from SOS, aka Secular Organization for Sobriety/Save Our Selves.

Other sources: *The Little Book: A Collection of Alternative 12 Steps* by Roger C.

Step Three Insights

Allen Berger¹: This Step is about commitment. We need to make a commitment to finding a new and more effective way of living.

Martha Cleveland²: We learn to step back from ourselves, to take time and to apply new knowledge. With the help of the Third Step, we take full responsibility and begin to guide our own destiny.

Stephanie Covington³: 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).

Gabor Maté⁴: 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.

Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart⁵: 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).

Serge Prengel⁶: Think of any situation as having two components. There is the situation itself, and there is what it triggers in you. If you separate these two strands, you create more space for yourself.

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⁶Serge Prengel: *Author of The Proactive Twelve Steps: A Mindful Program for Lasting Change*.



Freethinker Step Discussion

Step Four Versions

OA Principle: Courage

Traditional OA, Freethinker¹ and Buddhist²: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Cleveland³: Search honestly and deeply within ourselves to know the exact nature of our actions, thoughts, and emotions.

Humanist⁴: We have made a list of the situations in which we are most likely to eat ~~drink~~.

Practical⁵: Made a comprehensive list of our resentments, fears, and harmful actions.

Proactive⁶: I examine my life with honesty, searching for patterns in how I have been relating to people and situations.

SOS⁷: 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.

Your notes

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Step Four Insights

Allen Berger¹: The essence of this Step involves increasing our self-awareness, self-honesty, and insight into our behavior.

Martha Cleveland²: We each have beautifully crafted webs of denial about situations in our lives, about other people and, most deadly, about ourselves.

Stephanie Covington³: 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).

Gabor Maté⁴: 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.

Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart⁵: 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).

Serge Prengel⁶: Thinking in terms of patterns means taking into consideration different circumstances, different times, different people. Then, you can reflect on what it is that tends to activate you. Bad patterns... and good patterns as well. The only thing that makes this kind of honesty possible is removing the notion of judgment, that is, the potential for blame and shame... the attitude you are cultivating is one of compassion, the notion of mindful observation, and the art of finding serenity and patience in looking at yourself, being curious. This builds up an inner sense of safety and trust which makes it more bearable to face reality.

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⁶Serge Prengel: Author of *The Proactive Twelve Steps: A Mindful Program for Lasting Change*.



Freethinker Step Discussion

Step Five Versions

OA Principle: Integrity

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

Freethinker¹: Admitted to ourselves without reservation and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Buddhist²: Admitted to ourselves and another human being the exact moral nature of our past.

Cleveland³: Will talk to another person about our exact nature.

Humanist⁴: We ask our friends to help us avoid those situations.

Practical⁵: Shared our lists with a trustworthy person.

Proactive⁶: I explore these patterns and describe them to another person, noticing the healing power of compassionate listening.

SOS⁷: 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.

Your notes

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Step Five Insights

Allen Berger¹: 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.

Martha Cleveland²: Step 5 is a way station. It's a place to off-load painful memories that haunt and hurt, to leave behind things that hinder, hamper or slow our journey. It's a place to repack other things that will make our lives safer, richer, happier and more productive.

Stephanie Covington³: 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).

Gabor Maté⁴: 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.

Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart⁵: 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).

Serge Prengel⁶: What you gain is not just better conceptual understanding. You experience the healing power of compassionate listening. You have a sense of spaciousness and acceptance. Accepting what is gives you the capacity to change.

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⁶Serge Prengel: Author of *The Proactive Twelve Steps: A Mindful Program for Lasting Change*.



Freethinker Step Discussion

Step Six Versions

OA Principle: Willingness

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

Freethinker¹: Were ready to accept help in letting go of all our defects of character.

Buddhist²: Became entirely ready to work at transforming ourselves.

Cleveland³: Be entirely ready to acknowledge our abiding strength and release our personal shortcomings.

Humanist⁴: We are ready to accept the help they give us.

Practical⁵: Made a list of our unhealthy character traits.

Proactive⁶: I understand how these patterns have been ways of coping with my fears.

SOS⁷: 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.

Your notes

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Step Six Insights

Allen Berger¹: We experience the pain of what we have done to hurt ourselves and others, and we begin to understand and envelop insight into our behavioral patterns and the psychological functions of our character defects.

Martha Cleveland²: We are entirely ready when we stop using shortcomings to quiet fear and anxiety, and instead we use our strength to accept our fright and to reach for spiritual help.

Stephanie Covington³: In this Step we become willing to be open to changes, 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).

Gabor Maté⁴: 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.

Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart⁵: 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).

Serge Prengel⁶: In Step 6, you are getting more in touch with the intensity of emotion involved in these patterns. Emotions are what move us to action. Sometimes, we are conscious of them. Much of the time, we are not. You have to understand how these so-called defects are an attempt to cope with something that feels overwhelming. It is then possible for you to replace them with something else that fulfills the same function but works better and has fewer side effects.

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Freethinker Step Discussion

Step Seven Versions

OA Principle: Humility

Traditional OA: Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Freethinker¹: With humility and openness sought to eliminate our shortcomings.

Buddhist²: With the assistance of others and our own firm resolve, we transformed unskillful aspects of ourselves and cultivated positive ones.

Cleveland³: Work honestly, humbly, and courageously to develop our assets and to release our personal shortcomings.

Humanist⁴: We honestly hope they will help.

Practical⁵: Began cultivating healthy character traits through consistent positive behavior.

Proactive⁶: I learn to accept the sense of vulnerability that goes with life's pressures and uncertainties.

SOS⁷: 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.

Your notes

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Step Seven Insights

Allen Berger¹: We are learning the importance of being vulnerable and asking for help. This is important in attaining more humility.

Martha Cleveland²: Our new rule becomes, “If it feels familiar, watch out, I’d better stop and look at this”...Whenever a reaction feels involuntary, it may be something that needs changing (p. 68).

Stephanie Covington³: 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).

Gabor Maté⁴: 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 behaviors, we are choosing a vast enrichment of who we are. Humility is in order in place of pride, that desperate grandiosity of the ego.

Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart⁵: 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).

Serge Prengel⁶: The idea is to become more tolerant of that unbearable feeling progressively. Realize that you can feel that bad and still survive it. As you do this, little by little, you develop the ability to live through the pain. You become able to have more choice in what you do, despite the pain, instead of automatically defaulting to the coping mechanism.

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⁶Serge Prengel: Author of *The Proactive Twelve Steps: A Mindful Program for Lasting Change*.



Freethinker Step Discussion

Step Eight Versions

OA Principle: Self-discipline

Traditional OA and Freethinker¹: Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

Buddhist²: Made a list of all persons we had harmed.

Cleveland³: List all people who we have harmed, including ourselves, and be willing to make amends to them all. Be willing to forgive those who have harmed us.

Humanist⁴: We have made a list of the persons we have harmed and to whom we hope to make amends.

Practical⁵: Determined the best way to make amends to those we had harmed.

Proactive⁶: I explore alternative behaviors and rehearse them in safe settings.

SOS⁷: 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.

Your Notes

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⁵*Staying Sober Without God: The Practical 12 Steps to Long-term Recovery from Alcoholism and Addictions* by Jeffrey Munn, 2021.

⁶*The Proactive Twelve Steps: A Mindful Program for Lasting Change* by Serge Prengel, 2021.

⁷12 Statements from SOS, aka Secular Organization for Sobriety/Save Our Selves.

Other sources: *The Little Book: A Collection of Alternative 12 Steps* by Roger C.

Step Eight Insights

Allen Berger¹: The lessons taught in the Step have to do with the fundamentals of healthy communication; delivering our message to the proper person and being as specific as possible.

Martha Cleveland²: With Step 8 we need to acknowledge that we've hurt others and are honestly willing to do something about it. We don't have to like making amends, we don't have to feel good about making them, we don't have to feel ready to do it. We just have to do it (p. 75).

Stephanie Covington³: 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)?

Gabor Maté⁴: We are prepared to accept responsibility for each and every sin of commission or omission we have perpetrated on people in our lives.

Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart⁵: 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).

Serge Prengel⁶: In Step 8, you are brainstorming some ways in which you can respond to people differently. You are exploring and practicing possible changes in the privacy of your mind. You're finding a way to be respectful of your needs as well as the needs of the other person. The goal here is to confront your dysfunctional beliefs. In the Proactive Twelve Steps, Step 8 is more comprehensive. You don't just prepare to apologize. You figure out a way to avoid hurting people in the future.

12 Step Insight Sources

¹Allen Berger: An expert in the science of recovery and author of many Hazelden [a recovery publisher] books.

²Martha Cleveland: Co-author of *The Alternative 12 Steps: A Secular Guide to Recovery*.

³Stephanie Covington: Therapist and author of several recovery books including *A Woman's Way*.

⁴Gabor Maté: Physician, Buddhist, and author of the recovery book *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*.

⁵Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart: Counselor, Buddhist, and author of *Mindfulness and the 12 Steps*.

⁶Serge Prengel: Author of *The Proactive Twelve Steps: A Mindful Program for Lasting Change*.



Freethinker Step Discussion

Step Nine Versions

OA Principle: Love

Traditional OA and Freethinker¹: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Buddhist²: 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.

Cleveland³: Whenever possible, we will carry out unconditional amends to those we have hurt, including ourselves, except when to do so would cause harm.

Humanist⁴: We shall do all we can to make amends, in any way that will not cause further harm.

Practical⁵: Determined the best way to make amends to those we had harmed.

Proactive⁶: I apply these new mindful behaviors in my everyday life. I sincerely apologize to people I have hurt, except when counterproductive.

SOS⁷: I will make direct amends, as I deem appropriate and not injurious, to those whom I have harmed or negatively impacted and to myself.

Your Notes

Step Sources

¹Used by the OA Emeryville Freethinkers from February 2016 until November 2019, based on the San Francisco AA Freethinker Steps.

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

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

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⁷12 Statements from SOS, aka Secular Organization for Sobriety/Save Our Selves.

Other sources: *The Little Book: A Collection of Alternative 12 Steps* by Roger C.

Step Nine Insights

Allen Berger¹: 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.

Martha Cleveland²: To make an amend means to change our attitudes and behaviors and to keep them changed. Making an amend may mean apologizing, or it may mean making an internal commitment, but it always means changed attitudes and actions...An amend is not meant to repair a relationship, only to acknowledge our mistake, clear our past and correct our future behavior. That's all. That's enough (p. 75-76).

Stephanie Covington³: 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).

Gabor Maté⁴: 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.

Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart⁵: 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 pretenses (p. 119).

Serge Prengel⁶: With the Proactive 12 Steps, we're not limiting the nature of the change to doing something morally reprehensible and making amends for it. We're talking about paying attention to behavior patterns that are not what you want to be doing. Then, the focus is on understanding them to find better alternatives for your own sake and others. That is part of your learning to interact with people differently. It is much better to change how you act so that the apology corresponds to a genuine change.

12 Step Insight Sources

¹Allen Berger: An expert in the science of recovery and author of many Hazelden [a recovery publisher] books.

²Martha Cleveland: Co-author of *The Alternative 12 Steps: A Secular Guide to Recovery*.

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⁶Serge Prengel: Author of *The Proactive Twelve Steps: A Mindful Program for Lasting Change*.



Freethinker Step Discussion

Step Ten Versions

OA Principle: Perseverance

Traditional OA and Freethinker¹: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

Buddhist²: Continue to maintain awareness of our actions and motives, and when we acted unskillfully promptly admitted it.

Cleveland³: Continue to monitor ourselves, to acknowledge our successes, and quickly correct our lapses and errors.

Humanist⁴: We will continue to make such lists and revise them as needed.

Practical⁵: Practiced daily self-reflection and continued making amends whenever necessary.

Proactive⁶: I keep paying attention to the causes and effects of my actions. I act accordingly.

SOS⁷: I will continue sincere and meaningful self-evaluation, and strive for personal betterment.

Your Notes

Step Sources

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

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⁷12 Statements from SOS, aka Secular Organization for Sobriety/Save Our Selves.

Other sources: *The Little Book: A Collection of Alternative 12 Steps* by Roger C.

Step Ten Insights

Allen Berger¹: This Step concerns maintaining our humility, being honest with ourselves, and guarding against false pride.

Martha Cleveland²: In order to find balance in our inner lives we have to attend to all of the things we've been talking about—our emotions, thoughts, moods, relationships, work, finances, orderliness, physical condition and boundaries. When we monitor ourselves in all these areas, correct ourselves and find self-respect and moderation, we also find inner balance (p. 92).

Stephanie Covington³: 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).

Gabor Maté⁴: This is Step Four in action. As human beings, most of us are far away from attaining perfect saintliness in all our behaviors or interactions, and therefore can afford to give up the process of moral self-inventory only when they lower us into the ground.

Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart⁵: 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).

Serge Prengel⁶: There is a sense of pleasure and liberation in being more aware of who you are and feeling able to change what you don't like. There is a lot of satisfaction in being able to do this moment by moment. Noticing gives you an occasion for pausing and wondering. You're trying to understand better what it is that makes it uncomfortable for you. Little by little, as you know it, you have a higher possibility to change it.

12 Step Insight Sources

¹Allen Berger: An expert in the science of recovery and author of many Hazelden [a recovery publisher] books.

²Martha Cleveland: Co-author of *The Alternative 12 Steps: A Secular Guide to Recovery*.

³Stephanie Covington: Therapist and author of several recovery books including *A Woman's Way*.

⁴Gabor Maté: Physician, Buddhist, and author of the recovery book *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*.

⁵Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart: Counselor, Buddhist, and author of *Mindfulness and the 12 Steps*.

⁶Serge Prengel: *Author of The Proactive Twelve Steps: A Mindful Program for Lasting Change*.



Freethinker Step Discussion

Step Eleven Versions

OA Principle: Spiritual Awareness

Traditional OA: 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.

Freethinker¹: 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.

Buddhist²: 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.

Cleveland³: Increasingly engage spiritual energy and awareness to continue to grow in abiding strength and wisdom and in the enjoyment of life.

Humanist⁴: We appreciate what our friends have done and are doing to help us.

Practical⁵: We started meditating.

Proactive⁶: I make space in my life for mindful reflection. A sense of meaning and purpose naturally arises from that.

SOS⁷: 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 food ~~alcohol~~ addiction.

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

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⁷12 Statements from SOS, aka Secular Organization for Sobriety/Save Our Selves.

Other sources: *The Little Book: A Collection of Alternative 12 Steps* by Roger C.

Step Eleven Insights

Allen Berger¹: 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.

Martha Cleveland²: Wisdom comes through our open and quiet mind and tells us what we need to know, even when we don't want to hear it (p. 102).

Stephanie Covington³: We can choose whatever practice gives us a sense of inner peace (p. 173).

Gabor Maté⁴: This is not a demand of 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.

Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart⁵: 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).

Serge Prengel⁶: Over time, you have started to learn new habits, new ways of living. The new ways of living are not just behaviors. They have to do with the attitude you have toward living life, moment by moment, mindfully experiencing life. By paying attention to what it's like to change a behavior, you have developed your ability to pay attention to your inner sense of self. About the notions of prayer and mindful reflection: The cultural context is different, but the underlying experience is similar, a deep connection to something very meaningful.

12 Step Insight Sources

¹Allen Berger: An expert in the science of recovery and author of many Hazelden [a recovery publisher] books.

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Freethinker Step Discussion

Step Twelve Versions

OA Principle: Service

Traditional and Freethinker¹: 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.

Buddhist²: 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.

Cleveland³: Practice the principles of these Steps in all our affairs and carry the 12-Step message to others.

Humanist⁴: We, in turn, are ready to help others who may come to us in the same way.

Practical⁵: Sought to retain our newfound recovery lifestyle by teaching it to those willing to learn and by surrounding ourselves with healthy people.

Proactive⁶: My life reflects a growing sense of respect and compassion for myself and others. I share this process with others who are struggling.

SOS⁷: With new-found acceptance and insight I will try to keep awareness, and compassion for others and myself, in the forefront.

Your notes

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Step Twelve Insights

Allen Berger¹: 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.

Martha Cleveland²: Bringing the 12-Step principles to life is a continual process of learning to live with personal integrity... Our integrity is determined by what we understand about ourselves, what we do, how we actually live (p. 106).

Stephanie Covington³: 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).

Gabor Maté⁴: 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.

Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart⁵: 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 of our affairs,” and let our true face shine (p. 164).

Serge Prengel⁶: Throughout this process, you have learned to be aware of, respect, and understand different parts of yourself that may conflict. You now see your experiences as part of the human condition. Your struggle is simply the form that it takes for you. And so your heart opens up to better understanding other people in the world, as you feel a kinship with them. You are seeking connection because you have experienced how connecting with others who are willing to face their vulnerabilities helps you. Now, you know that being helpful to others helps you as well.

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²Martha Cleveland: Co-author of *The Alternative 12 Steps: A Secular Guide to Recovery*.

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