

## What am I doing? Step Four, Ten, or Eleven?

The book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* encourages spot-check inventories, a nightly review, and a periodic housecleaning, say once or twice a year. All three exercises are regularly termed 'doing a Step Ten'. The short form of Step Ten 'Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it' seems to encapsulate all three, as well.

However, the short form of the Steps (what are printed on page 59 of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* and what appear on the wall shades or scrolls) are simply handy aides-memoire and do not attempt to capture every nuance of the Step in question. The foreword to the Third Edition for instance describes the aide-memoire version of the Steps as what 'summarise' our programme. Nor does each Step claim for itself exclusivity over its subject matter.

The long form of the Steps—the AA programme in full—consists essentially in the content of the basic text section of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. The Steps, although simple, are not simplistic, and overlap in content. Prayer is not limited to Steps Three, Seven, and Eleven, the ostensible prayer Steps. Prayer is talked about through the programme, most notably perhaps in Steps Four and Nine. Steps Four and Nine, performed without a great deal of prayer and meditation, lose much of their substance and efficacy.

So, what inventories are there in the Big Book?

There is a Step Four inventory, a highly structured, systematic review of thinking and behaviour, taking as its entry point the emotional signposts of resentment, fear, and guilt for its three chief inventories. Add the harms list forming part of Step Four (as implied by page 76), and our review is complete.

There is a review at the end of the day, to be included as part of the evening meditation, and itself including prayers to God for forgiveness and corrective measures. This is set out as part of the meditation of Step Eleven, in the Big Book. It should be noted that meditation, in the 1930s, denoted chiefly contemplative, concentrated thought.

Then there is Step Ten in the Big Book. This deserves an essay of its own. Essentially it falls into two halves: developing an awareness of our own thinking and behaviour in real time, and envisioning and carrying out God's will in real time, too. A successful application of Step Ten will result in a shift from being the hapless victim of our lives, pushed and pulled by emotion and unbridled instinct, to being an observer-meets-actor, with a permalink to God and an array of mechanisms to keep the show on the right road. (See <http://first164.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/step-ten-line-by-line.html> and <http://first164.blogspot.co.uk/2010/04/step-ten-and-road-of-happy-destiny.html>).

So, if I am following the instructions set out on pages 84–85 of the Big Book, examining what is going on in the moment, etc., I am taking Step Ten. If I stand back from my life for a few minutes and examine the last twenty-four hours, I am

taking Step Eleven. If I stand even further back and survey my entire life since the previous systematic review, I am taking Step Four.

Why are all three necessary? In principle, a perfect Step Ten will result in no need for a Step Eleven review. In principle, a perfect Step Eleven review will result in no need for a periodic Step Four.

However, 'No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles' (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 60:2).

These are the three safety nets, therefore, that stop us from falling back into alcoholism.

Furthermore: driving provides good analogies: Step Ten is adjusting the steering wheel as we are driving along; the Step Eleven review is checking the petrol, oil, tyre pressure, etc., cleaning out the detritus that has built up inside the car, and checking our progress along the map; Step Four is the annual or semi-annual servicing of the car, which may include large-scale repairs or even the replacement of the engine.

No amount of steering will re-inflate the tyres or clean the cup-holders; no amount of changing the oil will replace a dud engine.

The reviews may overlap somewhat in method and substance but are essentially complementary. A programme that includes only one or two of these three review methods is incomplete.

Lastly, it does not really matter what you call these reviews: the main thing is that you do them.