

INNER PEACE AND THE TWELVE STEPS

AS LONG AS I REMAINED ATTACHED TO RESULTS, I COULD never find freedom from conflict. It was evident that only an internal, or spiritual, solution could provide relief. For spiritual truth must be lived in practical experience to change everyday life. Until I could discover and implement a spiritual solution, life would continue to be an experience of dissonance.

Eventually it dawned on me that all of my struggles came from a misplaced desire to be anyone other than who I was. The outer world refused to change, so I saw that the change must come from within. As each

experiment failed, as my options vanished, it became evident that the only peace I would ever find would be inner peace. So the journey, which had always been external, now became internal. This is the place I found myself when I walked into my first meeting.

Finding peace from within was not easy. It was impossible for me to wake up one day and say, "I'm going to have peace today." Instead, I needed to review my repeated failures to see where it had all gone so terribly wrong. It was not until after I had completed my Fourth and Fifth Steps that I clearly saw there was another way. During these Steps, I looked at what didn't work—in some cases what simply didn't feel right—and at my part in those mistakes. I admitted to another person the things that did not work for me. From there, I started to create a new life.

This new way manifested itself in two stages. The first was the Sixth Step—a willingness to do things differently, view the world and my place in it from a new perspective. This is referred to as the "thought level" of creation. The second was the Seventh Step. If I could have made this shift on my own, I would have already done so. But because I had failed repeatedly, I needed to ask for help this time. This asking, this speaking the words of the Seventh Step prayer, elevated the level of creation of my desire from mere thought to word.

Steps Eight and Nine offered me the grandest level of creation: action. The cycle of creation was complete: thought, word, and deed. Here was where contempt, that most poisonous of all human emotions, was converted to love. Not by me, but by that Inner Resource. Peace came slowly, in simple revelations. The first revelation was that I had always been taken care of and would always be taken care of. I began to see the tapestry of life, of being, woven into my experience. I began to understand that my conflicts came from expectations I'd placed on myself and others. These expectations had, consistently and reliably, led to my own failure.

Finally, I had something dependable to work with: my own failings. I began to view my own misguided thinking as a reliable catalyst for change. I could begin to take an opposite action from my initial implosions. And this, in an odd way, brought some internal peace.

Once I discovered this internal peace, whose assurance was that I would always be given what I needed, I also found that I could do without. This meant that I was no longer attached to results, the things of the

outer world. And being without a particular result, or need, offered great freedom. The first freedom was from fear—fear that I might lose something important; fear that there was something I wanted but would not be able to get; fear that without a particular person, place, thing, or relationship I might never find happiness. Indeed, everything I had ever needed I'd been given. The second freedom was from anger. Anger is nothing more than fear demonstrated. For when there were no longer clouds of fear, there could be no reign of anger. Not getting something I wanted became irrelevant because the desire was a matter of inclination rather than need.

The approval of others became unnecessary. Because I was comfortable, I no longer had any need for it. All I truly needed I tune into from within. When fear vanished into the light of my soul, I realized that everything could be taken from me including my very life—and I would not be angry. Everything, including my happiness, was of my own creating, of my own choice. This was the internal peace from which not-needing-ness comes. And, oh, the choices to create my own path, my own states of mind that came out of that place, were nothing short of delicious! —*Lee L.*