



eating disorders *anonymous*.

EDA Step Workbook



A guide for new members and
Eating Disorders Anonymous groups

Step 11-
**“Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious
contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge
of God’s will for us and the power to carry that out”**

Step eleven invites us to adopt prayer, meditation and clear-headed, open-hearted action as a way of life.

For all of us, this step is a significant daily challenge. Many of us have struggled to maintain relationships with people in our lives – physical, flesh and blood people we can actually see. Now we are asked to keep contact with a power that is intangible, inaudible, and invisible. But most of us have found that this relationship is one of the most important we will ever have. We have worked hard to build a Higher Power of our understanding since beginning our work on Step 3. This power has guided us as we faced the demons that had led us to our eating disorder and had kept us there. This power was with us as we looked at our shortcomings. Our Higher Power was there when made a list of the people we had harmed and as we approached each of them individually to clean our side of the street. Our Higher Power has brought us so far through our willingness to trust in something other than ourselves; it seems obvious that nurturing this relationship can only continue to help us as we move forward in life. More than that, we have often found that this constant contact is imperative to maintaining balance in our lives and staying away from those natural instincts which would have us go back to the eating disorder.

We must not let old thoughts and fears dissuade us from our goal, which we now understand is to not only to fit ourselves to be of maximum service' but to be of maximum service.' We find we can keep progressing if we more or less continuously apply the same practices that initially brought us relief and freedom. We maintain adult perspective through honesty, humility, open-mindedness and willingness to change. When wrong, we promptly admit it. We try hard not to repeat mistakes and we are grateful for progress. We keep things simple and enjoy what life has to offer. We work to help others. We try not to judge anyone, and we remember that everyone is doing as best they can. We are not frightened by these practices; they have become a way of life. By now, we are determined to continue with ever more grace and purpose. And we can find this through the practice of prayer and meditation. It is the antidote to our disorder.

To begin, we first need to examine meditation and prayer without prejudice. Though many are comfortable with traditional religious approaches to these practices, others become shockingly close-minded and skeptical when they reach this step, even if they had been open to prayer in Steps Three and Seven. When faced with the realization that our relationship with a Higher Power requires life long effort, people often balk. We have worked so hard to regain our sense of self and the ability to think without the eating disorder making decisions that being asked to give the rest of our lives over to the care of a Higher Power can feel like walking with a crutch the rest of our lives. In dismissing Step Eleven, however, many miss the full experience of recovery. Some of the most satisfying realizations, intense feelings and surges of personal power and courage

are reserved for those who are willing to surrender to a daily practice of prayer and meditation. In order for our Higher Power to work through us and our lives to help us grow, we must first allow that power in. The concepts are not fundamentally mystifying. Prayer is an expression - verbal, written or thought – in which we consciously reach out beyond our limitations. We ask for guidance and strength. And in so doing, we are humbly reminded that we are working to create a greater good. Prayer is the expression of our longing to do, to be and to create something right and enduring which we cannot do or be or create alone. We ask for help from something (or some One) that is not the self. Many of us pray to a God of our understanding whom we are comfortable calling God, but many others' prayers do not take a traditional form. All we need is to take time each day to ask for direction from some positive force outside of and greater than ourselves.

For many of us, a structured prayer to recite has helped us to create the habit of reaching out to a Higher Power. There are hundreds of sources of prayers from all over the world that express gratitude, acceptance, and the need for guidance. We might choose prayers from the tradition we grew up in or seek prayers that resonate for us from other sources. What is most important is that the prayer, whether traditional or directly from our thoughts expresses our earnest desire to serve, our gratitude for the opportunity and a request for whatever is needed to serve cheerfully, purposefully and well.

Meditation goes hand in hand with prayer. While we use direct words and thoughts in our prayers, meditation involves stopping, quieting the mind and listening deeply. When we meditate we create an inwardness of the mind. We reach into our unconscious self and, through quieting the daily chatter, listen to what our heart has to say.

When our mind is quiet, we can better hear and feel guidance from that part of us that connects with something beyond our finite conscious mind. Whatever our spiritual orientation, our restless mind is an obstacle to living honestly and truthfully. Many of us permit our minds and our lives to be overly busy as a means of keeping disquieting thoughts and feelings at bay. Living honestly means sitting with whatever uncomfortable thoughts and feelings we might have, turning them over gently and carefully, and letting our Higher Power guide us towards peace. When we are able to sit with our worst fears and darkest thoughts and make the commitment to let them go, we are set free. We can grow through any situation we may face, but only if we let ourselves feel the discomfort of uncertainty and learn to give it over to a power more capable of handling it. Prayer and meditation are the tools that allow us to sit in the discomfort. When we feel helpless it is then that we begin to search for guidance. We have been working on beginning to let go' of our troubles since we began the steps. From the moment we admitted powerlessness we had begun on the journey of letting go. Step 11 asks us to bring this practice into our everyday lives. And why wouldn't we? We have sought long and earnestly to bring our Higher Power into our life and we've found that when we do that things start to get better. We find that we are less stressed, less anxious, less agitated by our eating disorder when we keep a Higher Power in our life. Why, then, wouldn't we want to bring peace and light into our everyday lives to address those things which bring chaos to our minds and hearts? We also must remember that though these daily stresses may not be linked directly to our

eating disorder, they are most surely linked with our character defects, our shortcomings. That is, most of the negative things we encounter are at least partially a result of the troubled ways we have learned to deal with the people and things in our lives. Our long-standing issues are all the more reason to communicate daily with our Higher Power. When we practice letting go, the Promises begin to come true and we find ourselves becoming caught up in our daily drama less and less.

This process of sitting with and letting go is difficult and painful for all of us at times. New sources of pain, new losses, new mistakes, and newly dashed expectations are sure to come up. New situations are almost never easily overcome. We would not be human if we did not hurt and we will feel pain for a while. Our usefulness in any situation, however, is impaired so long as we permit our pain to impede clear thinking and thoughtful action. The solution is always at hand. We put aside the pain, we let go, and we do the next right thing. We pray for guidance about what this might be, because when we are seriously hurt we cannot think clearly. We pray for the strength to act in a sane and positive way. We move on as we are able. We find that hurt does subside enough for us to act in a positive way. Collectively, we in EDA have weathered the deaths of parents, spouses and children. We have survived divorces and job losses, terrible accidents that left us or those we love tragically impaired. We have suffered domestic violence, rape and trauma to ourselves and to our loved ones. We have endured countless insults and injuries. Some, faced with horrific circumstances, have kept their recovery. Others have lost it and recovered again, while still others lost their recovery and have not been heard from since. Those who kept their recovery through some of the toughest situations above cite Step Eleven, prayer and meditation, as essential to finding perspective and peace though they were in terrible physical and emotional pain. One man in our fellowship, an avowed atheist, described his efforts at prayer and meditation during the period immediately following the sudden and unexpected death of his daughter as pathetic attempts to find a God whom he could rebuke. Yet this man's rigorous practice at Step Eleven in the years leading up to the tragedy enabled him to see - and live with - his (albeit minor) part in the tragedy, and helped him accept and appreciate what he still had. He focused his attention on his other children and used his influence to help pass legislation that now protects others situated as his daughter had been at the time of her death. Prayer and meditation helps people find a way to act responsibly through (and from) their pain; in this example we can see that the effectiveness of these practices is not limited to those with specific religious beliefs. Let us be clear: prayer and meditation do not prevent us from feeling pain and usually doesn't take the pain completely away. Rather, prayer and meditation allow us to move through the pain that can often feel more intense because we are no longer covering it up with bingeing, purging, starving, over exercising, or other eating disordered behaviors. Step Eleven helps us get and keep perspective and to take meaningful action even when engulfed in a world of hurt. Most of us do not have to deal with such severe challenges, but especially for those new to recovery, every emotionally charged situation can seem insurmountable. Often, our emotional responses to quite normal situations can be quite extreme. Quieting the mind for even a few minutes a day can help us think and feel with greater clarity. This is important, for we are sure to be hurt and confused at times. We will find peace and resolve if we are able to calm ourselves enough to ask our Higher Power the best way to handle the situation at hand. We ask ourselves, would my Higher Power be better

served if I removed myself from a situation for a while? Should I adopt a different attitude towards someone or something? Do I need to pay attention to something I have been consciously or unconsciously ignoring? Is there something that I should have said or done differently, if I do not like how I feel about an outcome? We make a conscious effort not to allow ourselves to wallow in what we might have done wrong with our attitudes or actions, but we know we cannot immediately will ourselves into right-thinking. We reflect on the principles involved in each situation. If we need to change something, we ask for the courage to change what we can as well as accept those things that are out of our control. As in Steps Six and Seven, we do not expect miracles of change. We work to change a little at a time, starting with where we are and moving toward where we now think we need to be. We ask for the power to do what we know we must do next and we wait until we feel peace before we move on. We reflect with gratitude that our effort, though perhaps momentarily unsatisfying and full of heartache, is sure to bring us the opportunity to grow even when things seem at their bleakest; soon we will be back to a point of adult perspective where we can again feel at peace.

The end of Step Eleven gives us the guidance we need to bring our Higher Power fully into our lives as we move into recovery. But we must look fully at the Step to bring about the benefits. Step Eleven ends by saying —praying only for knowledge of God's will for us, and the power to carry that out. All examples we have given here exemplify this method of prayer and meditation. Asking our Higher Power for things to go our way or for our fleeting whims and fancies to be fulfilled will leave us disappointed. When we pray in this manner we are setting up expectations for our Higher Power and for the world. In the Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book it says:

Perhaps the best thing of all for me is to remember that my serenity is inversely proportional to my expectations. The higher my expectations of... other people are, the lower is my serenity. I can watch my serenity level rise when I discard my expectations. But then my rights' try to move in, and they too can force my serenity level down. I have to discard my —rights, I as well as my expectations, by asking myself, 'How important is it, really?' How important is it compared to my serenity, my emotional sobriety? And when I place more value on my serenity and sobriety than on anything else, I can maintain them at a higher level—at least for the time being. (*AA Big Book, 4th Edition, pg 420*)

If we pray in a manner that leaves the results up to our Higher Power, we will find that all things become resolved for the best in the end. They won't always be the way we'd like them to be nor will they necessarily be pain-free. But we can trust that our reliance on our Higher Power will free us to focus on doing the next right thing. When we let go and trust we grow spiritually and emotionally. To stand fast in the face of life's daily challenges, hurts and triumphs, and to see our way clear through the myriad choices we have for the use of our energies and talents, we need to live a life based on principles. Like sunlight, our relationship with a Higher Power can dry up the swamp of our emotional messes and light the path to peace and freedom. We need this every day and some days every hour. Prayer and meditation are our investment in a life of

principle, peace and purpose. This way of being in the world is our strongest defense in recovery, and it is arguably also the most fun. Life is full of incredible delights that often pass completely unnoticed in the midst of crisis and drama. If you have not already done so, take the time to secure your recovery; explore daily prayer and meditation as a disciplined practice for four weeks. Through prayer and meditation, we discover and deepen our understanding of these principles and we find comfort in their increasing steadiness and clarity. Our understanding of how we may best serve our Good Orderly Direction in each situation, we will also grow and deepen as we ask and reflect on what needs to be done.