From the early Akron pamphlet, *Spiritual Milestones in Alcoholics Anonymous* -

“Consider the eight-part program laid down in Buddhism: Right view, right aim, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right mindedness and right contemplation. The Buddhist philosophy, as exemplified by these eight points, could be literally adopted by A.A. as a substitute for or addition to the Twelve Steps. Generosity, universal love and welfare of others rather than considerations of self are basic to Buddhism.”

**Suggested Key Stages of the Twelve Steps, with Buddhist Correlates**
1. Surrender to Our Powerlessness and Our Human Nature (Step 1; Noble Truths 1 & 2))
2. Seeking Help from a Higher Power/ Powers Other than Self (Steps 2 & 3; Noble Truths 3 & 4)
3. Self-Investigation, Responsibility (Step 4 – 7; Five Precepts, Five Hindrances)
4. Amends, Repair, and Forgiveness (Steps 8, 9, 10; Lovingkindness, Compassion, Forgiveness)
5. Spirituality, Awakening, Service (Steps 11, 12; the Brahma Viharas)

**SURRENDER – STEP 1** We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.

**The Noble Truths**

The 1st Noble Truth: The Truth of Stress, Unsatisfactoriness of Life. “This is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering; aging is suffering; death is suffering. Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering. Association with what you dislike is suffering; separation from what you like is suffering. Not getting what you want is suffering.” [2] This is the diagnosis of the “illness” or condition we face as humans: Powerlessness over suffering, stress, dissatisfaction – states we are almost always feeling at least in smaller, subtle measure.

**Desire & Aversion – the engine of addiction**

The 2nd Noble Truth: The Truth of the Cause of Suffering. “It is desire (literally “thirst”) which gives rise to … sense desire, desire for existence and desire for extinction.” [2] - Roughly, sense pleasures, ego inflation, and unconsciousness/ escape. Two points are worth noting: Drinking until we pass out or blackout may be a desire for extinction, escape from being. And craving doesn’t just lead to suffering, it is functionally the same as suffering.

Desire for the pleasant and aversion to the unpleasant is the cause of our illness. Mental and physical stress, emotional reactions to them, and the behaviors that follow take the addict deeper and deeper into powerful habits that eventually seem impossible to break.

A paradox: Our desire for pleasure becomes the source of suffering. “For most of us, drinking begins as something else: something we do for fun, or to fit in, or because it makes us feel good. Sometimes drinking is actually a survival strategy, delivering us from life situations which are
too painful to be faced, especially without other tools for coping. (Some of us can say, quite honestly, that drinking saved our lives.) But it does become, sooner or later, an analgesic for suffering. And, paradoxically, at some point the drinking is what we do to blot out temporarily the suffering caused by the drinking.” [2]

**SEEKING HELP – Steps 2 & 3**

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

**The 3rd Noble Truth.** The Truth of the End of Suffering. When we can let go of craving and accept things as they are, suffering can end, at least in that moment of suffering. This is a “cure” to our condition. Just as “Pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional”, desire is inevitable, but attachment is optional. This is the prescription to cure the illness.

**The 4th Noble Truth – The Truth of the Way to the End of Suffering.** The Buddha’s Eightfold Path offers the “prescription” that will cure us. The 3rd and 4th Truths provide hope through action - a road map to change our future by acting skillfully in the present toward a better future (remember karma?). This is the “treatment plan.”

**The “God Problem.”** Buddhism does not assert an external, divine entity. This can be a relief to those who have trouble with the “God thing” about A.A., though some will also have trouble being open to Buddhist teachings because they seem foreign or exotic. In any case, taking an open, experimental attitude towards this Step can pave the way to directly experiencing results.

“My friend suggested what then seemed a novel idea. He said, “Why don’t you choose your own conception of God?” In the book, Alcoholics Anonymous, there are about 50 different terms for God.

**Taking refuge in the Dharma as Higher Power**

We take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, also called the Three Jewels.

- The Buddha refers to the historical Buddha, and also the Oneness of the Universe, the True Nature of all beings and to all the boundless manifestations of Buddhahood, including our teachers, A.A. sponsors, and other mentors, our fellows, and our own “Buddha nature”.
- The Dharma refers to the teachings of Buddhism, the Four Noble Truths, The 3 Characteristics, Karma, etc.
- The Sangha refers to our Buddhist and our recovery fellowships, others who are “good company”, and help us to live skillfully.

**The Eightfold Path** concentrates on three essential areas of Buddhist practice:

- **Integrity** begins with taking the 5 Precepts, below. (Speech, Action, & Livelihood) It creates positive Karma, reduces mental agitation, and heals past damage. Similar to the 4th through 10th Steps.
- **Mental Cultivation or Meditation** involves the development of relaxation and concentration. (Effort, Mindfulness, & Concentration). Like the 11th Step
Wisdom (View & Resolve) develops from gaining insights into the “reality” of existence, including the workings of our own body and mind. The 3 Characteristics of existence are usually referred to as Impermanence, Un-satisfactoriness and Not-Self.

SELF INVESTIGATION, RESPONSIBILITY – STEPS 4 – 7

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

The Five Precepts of Non-Harming:

I embrace the teaching of loving-kindness; I abstain from harming others.
This precept counsels us to avoid intentionally hurting or killing any living being. But it also means that we should not be the cause of—or approve of—harm coming to any living being. This includes inflicting mental, emotional, and spiritual injury as well. Moreover, it means that we should try to treat all beings with kindness and compassion.

I embrace the teaching of generosity; I abstain from taking things not freely given. This precept counsels us not only to abstain from cheating and stealing, but it actually advises us to avoid participating in, through commission and omission, all forms of exploitation, injustice, and oppression, and to cultivate generosity and loving-kindness toward all living beings.

I embrace the teaching of respect for all beings; I abstain from sensual misconduct. This precept counsels us to abstain from sexual abuse or other sexual activities that cause harm to ourselves and others. It can be extended to avoid immoderate indulgence in any physical or sense pleasure such as overeating, overindulgence in entertainment like video games or television, or other compulsive escapist behaviors.

I embrace the teaching of mindful communication; I abstain from deception and discord. This precept counsels us to avoid false and insincere speech, as well as speech that is harsh, harmful, and slanderous. It also advises us to cultivate speech that is loving, beneficial, and intended to bring happiness to others. Another aspect of mindful communication is deep listening; often the most compassionate discourse we can offer to others is to simply be present for another person and truly witness his or her life experiences, both joyful and sorrowful.

I embrace the teaching of mindfulness; I abstain from substances and actions that lead to intoxication and heedlessness. This precept counsels us to cultivate mindful consumption and sobriety and to abstain not only from drugs, alcohol, and other intoxicating substances, but also to avoid anything that has toxic effects, such as pornography; certain films, television programs, books, magazines, foods, and activities (like gambling or enabling another person’s addiction); or even some conversations.
The Five Hindrances:

1. Sensory desire: the particular type of wanting that seeks happiness through the five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and physical feeling.
2. Ill-will/Aversion: all kinds of thought related to rejecting, hostility, resentment, hatred and bitterness.
3. Sloth-torpor: heaviness of body and dullness of mind which drag one down into disabling inertia and thick depression.
4. Restlessness-worry, inability to calm the mind.
5. Doubt: lack of conviction or trust.

AMENDS, REPAIR, FORGIVENESS – STEPS 8, 9, 10

8. Made a list of persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

SPIRITUALITY, AWAKENING, SERVICE – STEPS 11, 12

11. 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. 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Meditation – Vipassana, Insight, Mindfulness. Prayer – Metta and other forms of the phrases, “May I,...”, “May you...”, May all beings...” AA: Sponsorship. Buddhist Practice: Teaching, the company of other Dharma practitioners, being a model to others.

The Bodhisattva Vow The bodhisattva vow is the commitment to put others before oneself. It is a statement of willingness to give up one’s own well-being, even one’s own enlightenment, for the sake of others. And a bodhisattva is simply a person who lives in the spirit of that vow, perfecting the qualities known as the six paramitas [perfections]—generosity, discipline, patience, exertion, meditation, and transcendental knowledge—in his effort to liberate beings.


The Four Divine Emotions are known in Pali as the Brahma-viharas and are also known as the divine abidings or the divine abodes. They are emotional states to be strived for. By practicing and developing the divine emotions, we will have a peaceful and patient daily life practice.

Metta (loving-kindness) is a soft, affection and care for others and yourself. It is not a hard, romantic type of love and not a love that includes extreme attachment or controlling feelings.

Karuna (compassion) is like an open heart that cares for everyone. It includes empathy, being able to see the other person’s position and caring for and about them.
Mudita (joy with others), sometimes is called sympathetic joy or appreciative joy. It is the ability to be happy when you see others happy. Their joy becomes your joy as you welcome less suffering and happiness of others.

Upekkha (equanimity) is the balanced state of mind. It is the middle way state of mind that is neither clinging nor pushing away.

**A Buddhist’s Non-Theist 12 Steps: by Bodhi. Sydney, Australia.**

1. We admitted our addictive craving over alcohol, and recognized its consequences in our lives.
2. Came to believe that a power other than self could restore us to wholeness.
3. Made a decision to go for refuge to this other power as we understood it.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to ourselves and another human being the exact moral nature of our past.
6. Became entirely ready to work at transforming ourselves.
7. With the assistance of others and our own firm resolve, we transformed unskillful aspects of ourselves and cultivated positive ones.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed.
9. Made direct amends to such people where possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. In addition, made a conscientious effort to forgive all those who harmed us.
10. Continue to maintain awareness of our actions and motives, and when we acted unskillfully promptly admitted it.
11. 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.
12. 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.

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**References:**


2. 9 Essays – Buddhism and the 12 Step Model of Recovery. Available at: www.buddhistrecovery.org/downloads.htm where you’ll find many other articles for download, and the official website of the Buddhist Recovery Network.


4. Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness by Bhante Gunaratana. Visit www.mindfulrecoverytoday.com/mindfulness-meditation for this and other mindfulness related book suggestions. Also visit http://bhavanasociety.org/ to visit the site of Bhante
G’s monastery and retreat center in West Virginia, download printed and audio materials, and access their YouTube and Facebook pages. He also wrote the book, *Mindfulness in Plain English*. A 75 page preview is available to download for free at http://www.urbandharma.org/udharma4/mpe.html

5. **AA Big Book 12 Step Study Workshop** – www.12stepping.org/workshop/ws-weeks-6-10/week-6-transcript/


**OTHER RESOURCES**

**A Buddhist’s Insights into the 12 Steps of Recovery** – Available at Darren Littlejohn’s website and www.BuddhistRecovery.org: http://the12stepbuddhist.com/a-buddhists-insight-into-the-12-steps-of-recovery/

AccessToInsight.org – a very deep site with much information about Buddhism, including study guides, Buddhist scriptures and commentaries.

**Bill and the Buddha – Friends in Recovery: How Buddhist Principles and the 12 Steps Complement Each Other**. For a full copy of the working paper by Fran DiDomenicis, go to www.MindfulRecoveryToday.com/CAMFT

**Buddhism & The Twelve Step Workbook** by Kevin Griffin. Good for clients.

KevinGriffin.net – Kevin Griffin’s teaching schedule, YouTube links, and more. For Kevin’s 30 minute guided Vipassana meditation audio, go to bottom of page at: http://www.mindfulrecoverytoday.com/buddhist-addiction-recovery

**The Art of Living**, By S.N. Goenka. Visit http://www.mindfulrecoverytoday.com/mindfulness-meditation for this and other mindfulness related book suggestions. Also visit www.Dhamma.org for information about Goenka’s free 10 Day Vipassana Meditation Courses, including course locations in California. This retreat was used as an experimental treatment for addicts, with good results, cited in *Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention* - http://www.mindfulrp.com/


Lists of Buddhist Recovery groups in San Francisco
https://www.buddhistrecovery.org/meetingslisting/meetings/USA/California/San+Francisco.htm
Search the same site for meetings in the East Bay and elsewhere.

**Refuge Recovery Meetings**: http://www.refugerecovery.org/meetings-in/california/