

The 17 Topic 4th Step Exercise

The 17 Topic 4th Step is a specific Spiritual exercise for members of Alcoholics Anonymous interested in attaining a new deeper level in the 4th Dimension of existence. The whole purpose of this exercise is to have a new experience with inventory and to discover in detail how short, on a daily basis, we fall from God's chosen ideals in thought, word and deed. This exercise should give each of us specific guidance into the areas of our lives that need the immediate, intense focus of God's Love.

The idea of The 17 Topic 4th Step was given to me from one of my spiritual advisors, Mark H. from Dallas Texas and was derived from an inventory process described in the March 1978 Grapevine article on sponsorship titled, Don't Sell the Newcomer Short written by Paul M. from Riverside, Illinois. Paul has been working and re-working the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous for 50+ years now and he has always maintained that his experience has been immeasurably benefited by repeated inventory work through Step four.

Paul M. wrote "After sixteen years of sobriety, I tried repeating them [the 4th and 5th Steps] and found immense benefits that far outweighed trying to subsist on the Tenth Step...So I encourage the person I work with to get started writing his inventory early in his sobriety. This is with the understanding that his Fourth Step, like all the Steps, is to be repeated as long as he's in A.A..

In my experience, these headings are generally helpful for a Fourth Step: Resentments, Dishonesty, Sex, Selfishness, Self-Pity, Fear, Sarcasm, Intolerance, Jealousy, Money. In addition, the seven cardinal sins can be used, too: Pride, Lust, Anger, Envy, Greed, Sloth, and Gluttony. There is some duplication, but not enough to hurt. To be effective, the inventory should be honest, thorough, specific, and written."

In keeping with time tested experience and the fact that **we only ever want to add to our experiences and never to replace anything in "The Program" of A.A. found in the Big Book**, therefore; we shall write the three traditional inventories described in the Big Book Alcoholics Anonymous including a 4 column resentment inventory, a fear inventory, a harms done to others inventory with emphasis on our sex harms and a sex ideal.

Once we have done this, in attempt to have a new and powerful experience with who we really are, we shall write out an "honest, thorough, specific and written" inventory using the headings Paul gave to us. The attached worksheets cover all 17 topics and offer us a chance to look for "character defect themes" found in the 8 major areas of our lives. As an aid to stimulate your thinking, within the header of each worksheet I have included a definition of the topic at hand.

Also, in keeping with the Big Book and being "quick to see where religious people are right", I have borrowed heavily from several sources for this exercise including: Saint Augustine's Prayer Book, The American Heritage Dictionary, The Oxford Thesaurus and The Augustinian Prayer Book. Keep in mind that these are religious publications and they use some terms which some may find undesirable, if you fall into this category please feel free to substitute words of similar meaning. For example, some may take offense to the use of the word "Sin"(an archery term meaning to miss the mark) feel free to substitute...maybe "shortcoming" will work better for you.

Before we begin to write, I suggest prayer and meditation because I have experienced what the Big Book says; that my own prejudice is one of my greatest roadblocks to true progress. Therefore, before I begin any inventory or Step work, keeping in mind my own powerlessness of Step One, I always seek Power through Prayer and meditation...

I have included two prayers you may find helpful:

"God, I ask you to be with me, to guide and direct me as I seek your truth. Father, please set aside within me, that which would block me off from the truth. Lay aside my Prejudices about what I think I know about this process, this exercise, and my spiritual condition.

Remove my fears about what I may find out about myself Lord and help me realize your truth. As I start on this path to penance, forgiveness and healing, I ask that you also grace me with the strength and courage I shall need to share these discoveries of your truth with another person. Help me to always act in the real spirit of Love and Compassion for my fellow man as I attempt, with your Love, strength and guidance, to correct my wrongs. ...Amen"

"O Holy Spirit, Eternal Source of Light! Mercifully vouchsafe [grant or bestow] to enlighten the darkness of my understanding, that I may clearly perceive the true state of my conscience. Thou who hast created me, and art to be my judge, dost fully behold the most secret recesses of my heart... My object at present is to prevent the rigorous account I must there give of all my thoughts, words and actions; for were I now deficient in that sincere exactness, which is necessary in the examination... all those secret thoughts, irregular desires, criminal words and actions or omissions of my duty, by which I may have violated Thy sacred law, or scandalizes my neighbor. Oh, do not permit self-love to seduce and blind me! but rather remove the veil it places before my eyes, that, beholding the true state of my interior, I may make a humble and sincere confession of my sins..."

Keep in mind that this inventory is very emotionally draining and that it is going to take time, therefore don't try to cover more than 3 or 4 worksheets at one sitting. Remember what the Big Book says, "nothing counted but **thoroughness** and honesty" so take your time and do it right the first time. In this inventory especially, you get out of it what you put into it. So what do we do now with these sheets you may ask? Well, for starters let's ask this question for each of the 17 topics: "Am I guilty of _____ in these 8 areas of my life? Then just write down your answers. It's that simple... Also, here are a universal series of questions from The Augustinian Prayer Book which may aid you in identifying your harms in thought, word, and deed while you fill out the worksheets:

In Thoughts - have you been deficient in point of charity towards your neighbor? **Have you judged rashly of him?** Have you willfully **entertained thoughts of hatred, aversion, rancor, coldness, or resentment against him?** Have you on this account endeavored to **avoid meeting or speaking to him?** Have you envied him in his merit, reputation, fortune, or employments? Have you **conceived desires of revenge against him, or wished that harm might befall him?** Have you been hard hearted, or without ally feeling or compassion for him in his affliction? Have you felt in yourself **a secret pleasure and satisfaction when any disgrace happened to him,** and discontent on seeing him thrive and flourish?

In Words - Have you **spoken harshly to your neighbor,** used abusive language, railed at him, miscalled him, **mocked or ridiculed him,** exposed him to scorn, affronted him, **censured his conduct, found fault with everything he did,** put wrong constructions upon his actions, calumniated or detracted him, **been pleased to hear others speak ill of him,** listened to and encouraged the calumny or detraction when you could prevent such discourse?

{The motives for speaking thus, the number of persons present, and the subject of this uncharitable language must be specified, as **you are bound to repair the injuries to the best of your power.**

[Sin is also **committed by ill-natured reports or insinuations, malicious expressions, whether true or false,** by giving bad advice or bad example, by instilling bad or dangerous principles, by flattering others or approving of evil, by giving false testimony, **by discovering the secrets or the faults of others, by abusive words, reproaches, bad wishes,** or imprecations, etc.]. }

And In Deed through:Actions - Have you wronged, deceived, or circumvented your neighbor in buying or selling? Have you injured him by stealing, cheating, usury, extortions, or by any unlawful contract? By passing false money, or using false weights or measures? Have you bought or received stolen goods? **Have you contracted debts without design of paying them?** [We also sin **by wronging our creditors, or our own family by prodigal expenses; by refusing to pay our just debts, when able, or by culpable extravagance,** rendering ourselves them; **by neglecting the work or business for which we were hired,** and obliged by contract to perform; in fine, by unjustly taking or keeping anything belonging to another, **in which case it is impossible to obtain forgiveness without making restitution to the best of our power.**]

{Here it is to be observed that where two or more jointly injure another in goods or reputation, they are jointly and severally obliged to make restitution: that is to say, they are bound to contribute their respective proportions towards repairing the injury; and every individual of them is answerable before God for the whole injury, should the others refuse to repair their portion thereof. }

And In Omissions – **Have you neglected to succor, comfort, or assist your neighbor in necessity? Have you neglected to restore ill-gotten goods, or repair injured characters? Have you refused to be reconciled to an enemy, or to perform duties of obligation, such as respect and love towards parents, obedience to superiors.**

After your work is complete, 5th Step it as you normally would...

If you have never done multiple 5th Steps, I highly recommend you try it! (A) Either 5th step this inventory several different times with different people or (B) get several people together and 5th Step to multiple people at one time (this is my preference). If you choose the first option, I would highly recommend you include a priest or minister because they offer a wonderful perspective most of us have never shared. If you choose the second option, I would highly recommend you include at least one relative newcomer (less that a year of sobriety [at most two years], this will keep your ego in check) and one of your protégés or sponsees (to make sure nothing slips through the cracks). I also like to add someone who has had significant experience with inventory work (ie: an old timer).

Last but not least, I have added the following for those **who have an open mind** and want a meditation to help them prepare for and to use after their 5th Step...

CONTRITION OR SORROW FOR SIN

Having discovered the different sorts of sins of which you have been guilty, together with their number, enormity, or such aggravating circumstances as may change their nature, your next endeavor should be to excite in your breast a **heartfelt sorrow** for having committed them, and a sincere detestation of them. This being the most essential, as well as the most difficult of all the dispositions requisite to a good confession, with what humility, fervor and perseverance should you not importune Him, Who holds the hearts of men in His hands, to grant it to you.

In the meantime, seriously meditate on those powerful motives for exciting contrition which the Church holds forth to her children; and, in order to feel their force the more effectually, **endeavor to enliven your faith, to strengthen your hope, and inflame your charity,** by devoutly reciting the Acts of the three Theological Virtues (Faith, Hope and Charity). In the next place, reflect on those motives which are most capable of alarming, and, at the same time, of melting your heart into compunction, such as the everlasting torments of hell, the eternal loss of God **and the joys of heaven,** the horror and filthiness of sin, **the goodness of God in all He has done, in all He still does, and all He will do for you if you continue to love and serve Him** particularly that astonishing instance of His love and undeserved mercy, in forbearing to cut your slender thread of life, and to precipitate you into eternal torments in the very height of your rebellion against Him. This consideration alone must necessarily engage you to cry out with ecstatic surprise, "How good must God be in Himself, Who has been so good to me, his faithless and ungrateful child!" He saw nothing in you deserving of His mercy; He saw everything in you that merited His wrath and indignation.

This last reflection on the infinite goodness of God, if dwelt on with due attention, cannot fail to inflame your heart with an unfeigned love of Him for His own sake, *the purest and best of all motives.* Whilst the heart is thus softened by divine love into compunction for your sins, form an unshaken resolution of never more offending Him, **of doing the utmost to amend your life,** of satisfying for your sins **and of repairing any injury you have done your neighbor in his person, character, or property.**

If, with these sentiments glowing in your breast, You cast yourself at the feet of your confessor and reveal to him all the sins you can recollect in a truly penitential spirit, be assured you will return with joy from the tribunal of confession and feel realized in yourself the consoling promise of the Holy Spirit, that "They who sow in tears shall reap in joy." Ps. cxxv.[Ps126]

#1 Resentments –

A 4 column resentment worksheet should be completed for each specific resentment

Resentment: Refusal to discern, accept or fulfill God’s vocation. Dissatisfaction with talents, abilities or opportunities He has given us. Unwillingness to face up to difficulties or sacrifices. Unjustified rebellion or complaint at the circumstances of our lives. Escape from reality or the attempt to force our will upon it. Transference to God, to our parents, to society, or to other individuals of the blame for our maladjustment; hatred of God, or antisocial behavior. Cynicism. Annoyance at the contrariness of things; profanity, rudeness or grumbling.

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#2 Dishonesty

Dishonesty: Any acts or attempts to conceal oneself or one's intentions. Untruthfulness, especially through false or misleading statements, double-dealing, false or fraudulent practices, underhandedness, deceitfulness, unscrupulous, unprincipled or untrustworthy practices with full knowledge of your deception. Cheating, white lies, duplicity, corrupt behavior or out and out treachery. Acts of insincerity to appear other than you actually are or to avoid expressing how you actually feel. Hypocritical.

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#3 Sex

Separate sex inventory worksheets should have also been completed to include a new sex ideal

Sex: Of or pertaining to sexual feelings, thoughts, acts or impulses to include participation in amorous kissing, petting, foreplay, voyeurism, pornography, adultery, infidelity, masturbation or intercourse whether or not it results in an orgasm.

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#4 Selfishness

Selfishness: Of or pertaining to one's self. Narcissistic. Thoughts, acts or deeds where the primary result will affect you, whether the effect be a positive or negative one. Assertiveness in promoting oneself, plans, claims, ideas, or points of view. Self-centeredness, self-concerned, self-interest, egotism and egoism. Resulting in self-seeking rather than seeking to promote and/or help others whether through conscious decision or being driven by unconscious fears. Exercising your will for the betterment of yourself. Obstinate doing what one wishes without respect for others or for God.

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#5 Self-Pity

Self-Pity: To have compassion for and sympathize only with yourself. To feel sorry for your own life conditions, situation, sufferings, problems or regrets whether fancied or real. Justification of a refusal to take responsibility for ones own actions, feelings or situation resulting in sorrow, self-loathing, remorse, low self-esteem, or victim like feelings.

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#6 Fear

Separate fear inventory worksheets should have also been completed to include a hit parade

Fear: The lack of faith and trust in God. Most often occurring as the direct result of trying to exercise your self will to control an outcome or the results of a situation, which is out of your control, although your ego usually doesn't think so. Fear is another way of describing the "dis-ease" of the ego which results in an unpleasant sensation, real or imagined, of anxiety, dismay, worry, alarm, foreboding, dread, trepidation, fright, horror, or panic. Fears occur as the direct result of the ego not getting its way and the individual's resultant refusal to accept situations as they truly are.

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#7 Sarcasm

Sarcasm: . A “put down” often used as a means to demonstrate superiority or control through use of egoistic wit, or sharp, spiteful, stinging and embarrassing comments specifically designed to make the other person look bad and is most often control disguised as an insincere and disingenuous attempt to help the other person. The root word means “to tear flesh” and includes any comments which are degrading and ironically scornful usually used in a biting, sardonic, caustic, cutting, or scathing way.

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#8 Intolerance-

Intolerance: Scorn of another's virtue, ability, shortcomings, or failings. Prejudice against those we consider inferior, or who consider us inferior, or who seem to threaten our security or position. Bigotry, narrow-mindedness, prejudice, fanaticism, bias, chauvinism, disparagement in a judgmental way.

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#9 Jealousy

Jealousy: Fearful, wary, or apprehensive of loss of position or affection. Offense at the talents, success or good fortune of others. Envy. Resentful, bitter, selfish or unnecessary rivalry or competition. Pleasure at others' difficulties or distress. Belittling others.

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#10 Money

Money: Wealth or any commodity, asset, property that may be converted into actual currency or traded for goods, services or power which is used in the control of your surroundings.

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#11 Pride

Pride: is putting self in the place of God as the center and objective of our life, or of some department thereof. It is the refusal to recognize our status as creatures, dependent on God for our existence, and placed by him in a specific relationship to the rest of his creation. An excessively high opinion of oneself; conceit; arrogance.

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#12 Lust

Lust: is the misuse of sex for personal gratification, debasing it from the holy purpose for which God has given it to us. Sexual craving, especially excessive or unrestrained which often results in mental fantasies, masturbation, and inappropriate behavior which may or may not be sexual in nature.

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#13 Anger

Anger: is open rebellion against God or our fellow creatures. Its purpose and desire is to eliminate any obstacle to our self-seeking, to retaliate against any threat to our security, to avenge any insult or injury to our person. A feeling of extreme displeasure, hostility, indignation, or exasperation toward others including intense agitation, wrath, ire, and rage. Often used as a defensive means of getting others to back off.

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#14 Envy

Envy: is dissatisfaction with our place in God's order of creation, manifested in begrudging his gifts and vocation to others. A feeling of discontent and resentment aroused by contemplation of another's desirable possessions or qualities, with a strong desire to have them for yourself. The root word meaning "To look at with malice".

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#15 Greed

Greed: An insatiable desire for more of anything which is usually motivated by unconscious fear, distrust, ingratitude, lack of faith in God, ignorance or prejudice. Self-indulgence at its worse. A rapacious desire for more food, money, wealth, power or possessions than you need, deserve or can reasonably use; Avarice.

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#16 Sloth

Sloth: is the refusal to respond to our opportunities for growth, service or sacrifice. Sluggishness when the situation calls for action and aversion to work or exertion. Laziness expressed through inertia, a feeling of paralysis, or apathy usually covering up deep seated fears or a lack of faith.

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#17 Gluttony

Gluttony: is the overindulgence of natural appetites for food and drink, and by extension of the inordinate quest for pleasure or comfort.

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