

The Wraparound Mirror (Step 5)

I was a member of AA many times over a period of ten years, but I always met the same fate. I would get sober and become convinced I would never drink again. But I would eventually (most times in short order) find myself at a place where the obsession to drink would become too great, and once again I would be overcome by restlessness, irritability, and a feeling of discontent. I would begin to feel helpless and would sometimes struggle with the Steps before getting drunk once again.

Finally, something changed. Working out of the Big Book with my sponsor, I began to see a pattern, and I came to believe that unless I experienced the complete psychic change described in "The Doctor's Opinion," I would be completely hopeless. This process finally allowed me to give up and give in to the process of the Twelve Steps.

Going through the first four Steps in the Big Book was an ego-deflating and difficult process for me. I attended a Big Book workshop and a dozen of us went through the Steps. I was sure I was being misunderstood and that everyone could benefit from my experience if they would just listen to me. During the process of writing my Fourth Step, I decided to ask the facilitator of the group to hear my Fifth Step. Jeffrey became my second sponsor in AA and is still my sponsor today.

A date was set, but I was slow in completing my inventory and then had to finish by the assigned date or risk embarrassment. I was sure once Jeffrey heard my Fifth Step he would see how terribly I had been treated my entire life. He would see how the defects of selfishness and self-centeredness really did not apply to me.

The night before I was to do my Fifth Step, my inventory was still far from complete. I knew Jeffrey would be at my house in the morning, ready or not. I was living in a small apartment in back of a car lot. From upstairs I could look down the busy street and see the sign for a small convenience store. The thought of drinking was with me strongly. I did not know whether to finish the inventory or drink. My life at that time was completely unmanageable. I felt worthless and hopeless and could not understand how the Fifth Step was going to help me.

I continued to fight with the thought of going to that store and buying a bottle of cheap wine and drinking it down as fast as I could. I had a few dollars to my name and knew I could get the desired effect for a few hours. That night I spent most of my time thinking about drinking, and the rest praying I wouldn't. In between thinking about drinking and praying, I was writing the remainder of my Fourth Step. As the night dragged on, the legal time for selling alcohol passed. I continued writing well into the early morning and went to bed emotionally, mentally, and spiritually exhausted.

Jeffrey arrived in the morning and we began our journey. Just before we started reading from the Big Book, Jeffrey told me some of the more horrendous and gruesome details of his drinking career. He shared some of his darkest secrets and told how he had planned at one time to take those items with him to his grave. We said a prayer and he left me alone for thirty minutes to add to my inventory those items I had left out or not found a place for. There were plenty.

When he returned, we went to it. Beginning with resentment, we went back through my life. Jeffrey began to point out how selfish I had been in most situations. How I claimed to love some people while the evidence in the inventory showed that I resented them for having some success in life. I was angry with any and all family members who had met with success. It was a hard pill to swallow, but I realized I'd never asked them about their lives because I really did not care. I cared only about my life and what was happening to me.

The depth of my selfishness and self-centeredness was clearer than ever. I saw how my own actions in most situations had placed me in a position to be hurt. My view of myself as a victim

was losing reality. I could see, for the first time in my life, how completely self-absorbed I was. It was like being surrounded by a wraparound mirror - no matter what direction I looked in, I could see only myself.

We moved on to the fear section of the inventory and I began listing my fears. I was afraid of everything: afraid to stay sober and afraid to drink. Afraid to live and afraid to die. Afraid to lose and afraid to succeed. Afraid to be in a relationship and afraid I would not have a relationship. As we moved through the list, I saw that I could have made a much shorter list of those things I was NOT afraid of!

Jeffrey and I looked at everything on the fear list and, using the instructions from the Big Book, subjected each item to the question of why I was afraid. Was it not because self-reliance had failed me? We also looked at how most of my fears boiled down to the same thing - I was afraid I would be all alone in the world. I was afraid I would be in pain and die alone and afraid. I had relied only on myself all these years, and the best I could do had brought me to that point. I was dying, I was lonely, I was in pain, and I was afraid - sober or drunk.

We boiled down the fear list to my most basic fears and then looked at what each fear would be like if I relied upon God. I broke down in tears many times that day. I was still fighting; I was sure I would be able to fix all this once I knew what was wrong. I had been looking at the inventory as a method of finding out what was wrong with me and how I was going to fix it. I now saw that this was not possible. I would not be able to continue on my own. I saw how terribly damaged my life really was: the alcoholic family, my parents' divorce, the group homes, the jails and institutions, my alcoholism and drug addiction, the lies, the stealing, my broken relationships, the abuse of other people. I saw that this inventory really was about just what the Big Book said it was: identifying the weak items in our personal inventory and having them cast out. This was about getting a new life, as I could not fix the life I had been living.

We moved into the sex part of the inventory. I had written this as described in the Big Book. I had looked at each relationship and subjected it to the tests of selfishness, dishonesty, and inconsiderateness. I looked at those I had hurt as well as how I had aroused jealousy, suspicion, or bitterness. I was easily able to admit that I needed an overhauling here as well. I had taken all of these relationships and looked them over well. I had written a few paragraphs on my new ideal for this area of my life, and I read them to my sponsor. At that point I was truly ready to have my Higher Power take me to a new place in my life.

Then I read to my sponsor those things I had written during the thirty minutes he had left me that morning - the things I thought I would never tell anyone. We prayed and I was given instructions on some meditation I was to do and how to follow up my Fifth Step with Steps Six and Seven. When Jeffrey left, after we had been together for many hours, I was where I was supposed to be after a Fifth Step. I was completely ready to follow through with the rest of the Steps. I had the humility talked about in Step Seven. I truly knew I could not go another day living life the way I had been living it. A major shift took place in my life that day, and I did follow through with the rest of the Steps. I recently celebrated ten years of sobriety.

I hope this account of my Fifth Step finds its way into the heart of at least one alcoholic and encourages him or her to get a sponsor who has experience with the Steps and to ask to be taken through them. I have had the chance to sponsor many people since then and have been on the other end of many Fifth Steps. It is especially rewarding to watch the light come on for someone else the way it came on for me that day.

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