

**The “Into Action Big Book Group” in Berkeley Heights NJ
presents for 6 weeks only...**

**“HERE ARE THE STEPS WE TOOK”
THE 1940’s A.A. BEGINNERS’ MEETINGS**

**A BIG BOOK TWELVE STEP WORKGROUP
with Lisa M. & Marie S.**

Held on 6 consecutive Monday nights from 7:30 – 9:00PM

Note: You are encouraged to bring your sponsor and anyone you are sponsoring. “Temporary Step sponsors” will be available, if needed, for anyone who wishes to take the Steps with us during these sessions. We are also looking for help from anyone who has done the work out of the Big Book and is willing to act as a “temporary Step sponsor” for those who don’t have one during these five weeks. Please bring your Big Book, something to write with, and try to attend all five sessions.

Session Five – Steps Five through Nine

August 11th, 2008

Step and Information Packet

The Wraparound Mirror

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.

Ken D., from Lynnwood, Washington
May 2001, AA Grapevine

Steps Five, Six & Seven – All Meant To Be Done On The Same Day

Step 5 Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Please notice that the Fifth Step does NOT say that we just admit our wrongs. It says that we admit the EXACT NATURE of our wrongs, so we need to do more than just confess what we did. We ALSO need to see WHY we did what we did so that we can ask God to help us with it. The Fourth Step's Resentment, Fear and Sex/Harms Inventory guides mentioned in the previous newsletter help us see just that.

Steps Five, Six and Seven in the Big Book can be found at the beginning of Chapter 6, "Into Action". Please notice that this chapter is NOT named "Into Thinking" or "Into Hearing About What Others Did" or "Into Studying" or "Into Planning", but is called "Into ACTION". Page 72 says, *"Having made our personal inventory, what shall we do about it? We have been trying to get a new attitude (Step 2), a new relationship with our Creator (Step 3), and to discover the obstacles in our path (Step 4). We have admitted certain defects; we have ascertained in a rough way what the trouble is; we have put our finger on the weak items in our personal inventory (all Step 4). Now these are about to be cast out (that was a promise, and they're cast out by our working Steps 5 through 9). This REQUIRES ACTION on our part, which, when completed, will mean that we have admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the EXACT NATURE of our defects. (Step 5 actually says, '...the exact nature of our WRONGS.' But this sentence says, '...the exact nature of our DEFECTS.'* Bill Wilson likes to use different words that all mean the same thing. Throughout the Big Book and the 12 & 12 he interchanges the words faults, wrongs, mistakes, defects of character or just defects, things we have admitted are objectionable, shortcomings, flaws, liabilities, maladjustments, human failings, deficiencies, and even sins. They ALL mean the same thing - whatever blocks us off from God and others.) *This brings us to the Fifth Step in the program of recovery mentioned in the preceding chapter. "This is perhaps difficult - especially discussing our defects with another person. We think we have done well enough in admitting these things to ourselves. There is doubt about that. In actual practice, we usually find a solitary self-appraisal INSUFFICIENT (self cannot overcome self, a self-will problem cannot be fixed by self-will). Many of us thought it necessary to go MUCH further. We will be MORE reconciled to discussing ourselves with another person when we see good reasons why we should do so.*

"The best reason first (here's a warning): If we skip this VITAL step, we may NOT overcome drinking. Time after time newcomers have tried to keep to themselves certain facts about their lives. Trying to avoid this humbling experience, they have turned to easier methods. Almost invariably (or almost always) they got drunk. Having persevered with the REST of the program, they wondered why they fell. We think the reason is that they never COMPLETED their housecleaning. They took inventory all right, but hung on to some of the worst items in stock. They only THOUGHT they had lost their egoism and fear; they only THOUGHT they had humbled themselves. But they had not learned enough of humility, fearlessness and honesty, in the sense we find it NECESSARY, until they told someone else ALL their life story."

The 12 & 12 expresses this warning in a similar way when it states on page 56: "Most of us would declare that without a fearless admission of our defects to another human being we could NOT stay sober. It seems plain that the grace of God will NOT enter to expel our destructive obsessions until we are willing to try this."

It's obvious why we share our inventory with another person - because we are MASTERS at believing in our own justifications and half-truths. Aren't we the ones who used to say we didn't have a drinking problem? Didn't we tell ourselves over and over that we were doing fine as we were sinking deeper and deeper into the abyss of alcoholism? Since we're not good judges of character, especially our own, we confide in someone else. Only ANOTHER person or person's can see us as we REALLY are. That's why it says that a SOLITARY self-appraisal is insufficient.

The book continues and I'm going to personalize it a bit. Please note that these next two paragraphs apply whether we are drinking or not: *"More than most people, I lead a double life. I am very much the actor. To the outer world I present my stage character. This is the one I like my fellows to see. I want to enjoy a certain reputation, but know in my heart I don't deserve it.*

The inconsistency is made worse by the things I do on my sprees (drinking sprees, anger sprees, spending sprees, sex sprees, etc.). Coming to my senses, I am revolted at certain episodes I vaguely remember (or remember very clearly). These memories are a nightmare. I tremble to think someone might have observed me. As far as I can, I push these memories far inside myself (which is another way of saying that I ignore my conscience, my Inner Guide which is that piece of God within me). I hope they will never see the light of day. I am under CONSTANT fear and tension - that makes for (or leads to) more drinking.

"We MUST be ENTIRELY honest with somebody if we expect to live long or happily in this world. Rightly and naturally, we think well before we choose the person OR PERSONS with whom to take this intimate and confidential step. Those of us belonging to a religious denomination which requires confession must, and of course, will want to go to the properly appointed authority whose duty it is to receive it. Though we have no religious connection, we may still do well to talk with someone ordained by an established religion. We often find such a person quick to see and understand our problem. Of course, we sometimes encounter people who do not understand alcoholics.

"If we cannot or would rather not do this, we search our acquaintance for a close-mouthed, understanding friend. Perhaps our doctor or psychologist will be the person. It may be one of our own family, but we CANNOT disclose ANYTHING to our wives or our parents which will hurt them and make them unhappy. We have NO right to save our own skin at another person's expense. Such parts of our story we tell to someone who will understand, yet be unaffected. The rule is we MUST be hard on ourself, but ALWAYS considerate of others."

When the Big Book came out, the mentality was that this book would fall into the hands of a person who had no AA in their town. Our fellowship has grown to the point where today very few people have to go outside AA to do their Fifth Step. The book gives us four specific attributes to look for in someone who is going to hear our Fifth Step - someone who will understand yet be unaffected, it is important that they be able to keep a confidence, they need to fully understand and approve of what we are driving at, and they need to not try to change our plan. So they should be closemouthed, trustworthy and supportive. They MUST NEVER discuss our inventory with ANYONE else. If you are NOT able to keep a confidence, please do not EVER listen to a Fifth Step! It is a sacred event and may be the first time a person is trusting someone else entirely. You literally have the persons future trust life in your hands. This is NOT to be taken lightly.

Next are the specific instructions for taking the Fifth Step: *"When we decide who is to hear our story, WE WASTE NO TIME (so as soon as we finish writing our Fourth Step we IMMEDIATELY do our Fifth Step. If you're not sure who is going to hear your Fifth Step, it's a good idea to start looking at the beginning of your Fourth Step so that when you are finished with it you can share it with someone at once). We have a written inventory and we are prepared for A LONG TALK. (I'd like to suggest that the most effective way to do a Fifth Step is by doing it all in one day. That way, we get the full effect and the full picture of how devastating our life run on our will is to ourselves and to others.) We explain to our partner what we are about to do and why we have to do it. He should realize that we are engaged upon a LIFE-AND-DEATH errand.*

We first share the Fourth Step with God and begin to feel a sense of forgiveness and accumulate power that we bring into admitting these things to someone else. When we then admit our inventories to someone else, we experience humility, get deeper insight and see that we can trust again by

telling our deep, dark secrets to someone else. In admitting these things and seeing the truth ourselves, we gain more of an understanding of our inner workings.

The Big Book provides us with more directions: *"We pocket (or put away) our pride and go to it, illuminating EVERY twist of character, EVERY dark cranny of the past."* Three of the things that I always try to draw out of listening to a Fifth Step is the fact that 99.9% (or more) of the Resentment Inventory can be covered in one sentence – "They're not acting the way I think they should." This is a form of playing God and is very self-centered. After this is pointed out again and again, it becomes annoyingly obvious. Another fact that I always try to draw out is a concept called mirroring. Mirroring is seeing in someone else something that we struggle with ourselves. The people that irritate us the most are just showing us something that we don't like about ourselves. So it usually doesn't have anything to do with them and almost always comes back to us. The third thing that I always keep in mind when hearing a Fifth Step is that victims never get sober.

If you split up a Fifth Step over a period of weeks or even days, the offensive picture and effect of a life run on self-will will be compromised. So again, to get the FULL effect and the FULL picture of how self-will has damaged and controlled our lives, it's best to do a Fifth Step ALL on the same day, if possible. It usually takes most of the day, so make it a priority and simply get started early enough by scheduling an entire day for this life-changing activity. You'll be grateful that you did.

Next are the Fifth Step Promises: *"Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are DELIGHTED. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Creator. We may have had certain spiritual beliefs (Step 2), but now we begin to have a spiritual experience (that's because we are now taking specific spiritual actions). The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will often come strongly. We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe."*

This is about AFTER we have finished sharing our inventories: *"Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet for AN HOUR, carefully reviewing what we have done. (So we take ONE hour after the Fifth Step to do the following.) We thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know Him BETTER (this is a prayer. Many spiritual texts say that God is love and truth. After a Fifth Step we certainly know a lot more about love and truth, so we certainly know our Higher Power better). Taking this book down from our shelf we turn to the page which contains the Twelve Steps (which is page 59). CAREFULLY reading the first five proposals (which is referring to the first five Steps) we ask if we have omitted ANYTHING, for we are building an arch through which we shall walk a free man at last. Is our work solid so far? Are the stones properly in place? Have we skimmed on the cement put into the foundation? Have we tried to make mortar without sand?"*

Now let's take another look at these questions: *"Is our work solid so far?"* (Which is another way of saying have I omitted ANYTHING from the first five steps that will cause me to have a weak foundation?) *"Are the stones properly in place? Have we skimmed on the cement put into the foundation?"* (Are my first five Steps solid?) *"Have we tried to make mortar without sand?"* (Which is another way of saying have I tried to take the rest of the steps without really being convinced of the First Step?)

After sharing our inventories with our sponsor or "spiritual advisor", we 1) spend about 20 minutes in prayer and meditation thanking God for the experience and for knowing Him better, 2) spend about 20 minutes ask the God of our understanding if there is anything more that needs to be included in Steps Four and Five, 3) spend about 20 minutes praying and meditating to see if the first five Steps have been done as thoroughly as possible.

Step 6 Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

The 12 & 12 says the following about Step Six: "There is a big difference between striving for a self-determined objective and for the perfect objective which is of God. The only urgent thing is that we make a beginning, and keep trying. We shall need to raise our eyes toward perfection, and be ready to walk in that direction. It will seldom matter how haltingly we walk. The only question will be "Are we ready?" It is suggested that we ought to become entirely willing to aim toward perfection. We note that some delay, however, might be pardoned. That word, in the mind of a rationalizing alcoholic, could certainly be given a long-term meaning. He could say, 'How very easy! Sure, I'll head toward perfection, but I'm certainly not going to hurry any. Maybe I can postpone dealing with some of my problems indefinitely.' Of course, this WON'T do. Such a bluffing of oneself will have to go the way of many another pleasant rationalization. At the very least, we shall HAVE TO come to grips with some of our worst character defects AND take action toward their removal as quickly as we can. The moment we say, 'No, never!' our minds close against the grace of God. Delay is dangerous, and rebellion may be FATAL. This is the exact point at which we abandon limited objectives, and move toward God's Will for us."

In the Big Book, all of Step Six can be found in the first paragraph of page 76. The first line says: *"If we can answer to our satisfaction, we look at Step Six."* If we can answer WHAT to our satisfaction? The Big Book is talking about the questions in the last paragraph of the page before this, page 75. These are the questions we ask ourselves when we take the hour of reflection AFTER we do our Fifth Step by asking us to review whether or not we were thorough and honest in completing the first five Steps. So the Sixth Step is done IMMEDIATELY after taking the hour of quiet time after the Fifth Step.

"We have emphasized willingness as being indispensable (which means absolutely essential). Are we now ready to let GOD remove from us all the things which we have admitted are objectionable? Can He now take them all - everyone? If we still cling to something we will not let go, we ask God to help us be willing."

So in the last three sentences here the book asks us two questions, and depending upon what our answer is FOR these two questions, will depend upon whether we need to involve the last sentence. According to the Big Book, immediately after we do our Fifth Step, it will be decision time once again. The person or person's hearing your Fifth Step will ask you the first Sixth Step question, which is for nothing more than the willingness (or to be entirely ready) to have God remove the defects of character that block us off from our Higher Power working in and through us. These "wrongs", "defects" or "shortcomings" were disclosed in our Fourth and Fifth Steps. When asked, take a moment of silence to reflect on whether you are entirely ready, by asking yourself if you are willing to let God help you with these defects.

After you answer the first Sixth Step question, whoever is hearing your Fifth Step asks you the second Sixth Step question, which is do you believe that the God of your own understanding is capable of now taking them all – everyone.

Notice that the Book says in the last line of this paragraph that if there is still a defect of character that we are NOT willing to ask God to help us with, we pray for the willingness. That is all there is to the Sixth Step: Is the God of my own understanding capable of removing my defects, and am I willing to ask my Higher Power to help me with these shortcomings. If I am NOT yet entirely ready to turn over one or more of these human failings to my Higher Power, I pray to ask God to help me become willing.

If you are NOT willing to go to God with one or more of these defects, please remember to pray daily for the willingness and it WILL come, but still go on to Step Seven with the REST of the flaws you ARE willing to let God help you with.

Step 7 Humbly asked him to remove our shortcomings.

We need to start realizing that when God begins to remove our self-will defects of character, He will ALWAYS replace them with one of HIS OWN characteristics. If He didn't, we would be the hole in the doughnut and we would be left with an empty space. That space needs to be filled with the OPPOSITE of the defect that we are asking our Higher Power to remove. For instance, if I found a lot of selfishness in my inventory, when I ask God to help me with it, He will replace it with unselfishness. God does for us what we CANNOT do for ourselves, BUT He will NOT do for us what we CAN do for ourselves, so we need to start practicing the opposite of our defects of character. He will help us with our motivation and our thinking, but part of the Seventh Step is that we need to start practicing God's Will characteristics.

In the Big Book, Step Seven is straightforward. It consists of a daily prayer to be said going forward: "*When ready (after answering the Step Six questions), we say something like this: 'My Creator, I am now willing that You should have all of me, GOOD AND BAD (which is a reference back to the Third Step). I pray that You now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to You and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do YOUR bidding (another Third Step reference). Amen.'*"

Step Seven says, "*HUMBLY ask Him to remove our shortcomings*" so I'd like to attempt explaining the difference between just ASKING, and HUMBLY asking. Being humble is becoming aware of the littleness of ourselves, compared to the bigness of God. Did you ever think that your only problem is not getting your way? Being a servant of God is the highest attainment in AA. We CLIMB our way, all the way to servant. That's what a winner is - a servant. A winner is just out there doing what God gives us the intuition to do. And when this transformation takes place, our needs are being met from the inside. So we don't have to go out and get anything to get fixed, we're ALREADY fixed because we already have everything we need, and we're simply moving through life, just looking for ways to be of service to God. So humility is an awareness that we are willing to go through whatever it takes to become God-centered. That means we're going to have to go through the pain of often not getting our way and voluntarily go through this transforming discomfort. Let me use the following story as an illustration: A lump of gray clay was sitting on the shelf next to beautiful teacup. The clay says to the teacup, "Is this all there is to life, just sitting here not doing much of anything? Why can't I be just like you, a teacup that people love, and say is very beautiful?" The teacup says, "Not too long ago, I was just like you. One day soon you will be a teacup too, and people will say that you too are very beautiful and they will also want to take you home with them." "Yes, I would LOVE that," says the lump of clay, "Can you ask the Master to make me into a beautiful teacup?"

Right HERE, in THIS part of the story, the clay is just ASKING to become a teacup. But HUMBLY asking is a little different than that, as this will be shown by the REST of the story.

The teacup continues: "Let me tell you what it takes to become the most gorgeous, the most beautiful little teacup that everyone admires and loves. "I didn't always look like this. There was a time in my life when I too was just a hard cold lump of gray clay. Well, one day my Master came along and He picked me up and He began to pat me and roll me and I said, 'What are you doing, stop it, quit, that hurts, don't do that, ouch, leave me alone.' And He simply said, 'Not yet.'

"And then He put me on this wheel and began to spin me around and around and around and I said, 'I'm getting dizzy, getting sick to my stomach, let me off of here, I can't stand this, oh, oh, what's happening, my whole shape is changing, stop it, stop it.' And He said, 'Not yet.'

After my shape had changed, He began to paint me all over. I said, 'Eew, cough, cough, that stuff stinks, stop it, stop it.' And He still said, 'Not yet.' "Then He put me in this oven and closed the door. The oven had a little window and He kept just looking at me. And I said, 'I can't stand this heat, let me out of here, cough, cough, don't You love me, let me out of here, why are You just looking at me?' And He simply looked at me through the door and said, 'Not yet.'

"Then, finally, He opened the door, took me and dried me on the shelf for a while and put another coat of that awful paint on me (cough, cough). And then He turned that oven back on seven times hotter than it was before and put me back in there again, and I said, 'What are you doing, I can't stand this, You don't understand, I can't do this, I can't take it, let me out of here,' He just looked through the glass at me and said, 'Not yet.'

"Finally one day, He opened the door, took me out and set me on the shelf, let me cool off for a while and then came by with a mirror and He held it up in front of me and I couldn't believe it. I was so beautiful, I was so changed, I was so different. I didn't even look like that old lump of gray clay any more. And now people EVERYWHERE appreciate and love me."

NOW, if you ask, you're HUMBLY asking. You KNOW what's involved, you KNOW that it's not going to be easy, but you want it ANYWAY. Spirituality is about changing our attitude about pain and discomfort. It is looking THROUGH the pain to see the beauty of what is coming. The transformation is just on the OTHER side of the willingness to experience not getting my way. And as soon as we go through it, it isn't even painful, it merely becomes a little effort. It's kinda like when you're OUT of shape and you want to get back IN shape. It's hard at first. Remember that first week in the gym when you go home and everything hurts, everywhere? But as you keep it up, a month later, it's no longer painful, it merely becomes a little effort. And it's wonderful because you know the great results it's going to produce. After a while, you LOVE pushing yourself because of the wonderful results. And the same thing can happen in the spiritual world. I UNDERSTAND that at times I'm going to be uncomfortable, but I'm willing to go through with it anyway because I trust my Higher Power. That's the difference between just ASKING, and HUMBLY asking.

In the Fellowship of the Spirit,
Barefoot Bill
Into Action Big Book Group in Berkeley Heights, NJ

FROM HEAD TO HEART

I have always struggled with feelings of inadequacy - I always had an ideal of who and what I was suppose to be and the sad fact was that I never came close to reconciling my inner and outer worlds. I fell short in thought, word, and deed. So I gave up trying and settled deeper into the bottle. As my disease took a greater hold and my life became a living hell, I reached out for some form of relief, namely AA and the Twelve Steps. The fog began to clear. I began to see the light at the end of a very long alcohol sodden tunnel. A fierce determination to be somebody, to be something, returned. My inner critic that I had locked up had sprung loose and began to wreak havoc. By then I had done a 4th and 5th Step and I saw how I fell short in all areas in my life. My selfishness was blatant and I was ruled by fear. I understood that it wasn't everyone else's fault; there was a part I played. I knew I didn't want to live like that anymore; I didn't want the consequences! I didn't want to drink so I said the Seventh Step prayer and moved on to my amends.

Life went on and I was wondering why I wasn't enjoying as much relief as the Big Book promised - I tried to live what I thought was a good life - I tried to behave kindly, (kill 'em with kindness) I faked it 'till I could make it every day. Something was missing. I still thought the same, I had this parallel thought process; on one hand I had the selfish, the fearful, resentful, and judgmental fighting with the patient, loving, tolerant thoughts, but that was as far as it went. I was still in so much pain. Torn between what I wanted and what I thought God wanted. My inner critic was kicking my butt. I had so many rules, standards, judgments and fears. I didn't outgrow fear. I converted it into a prison of politeness, superiority and judgment. While, deep down inside, I still felt inadequate afraid and lonely.

The question is, "how did all of this change?" The fact that I am writing this proves that although I was closer to drinking that I had ever been, I didn't. By the grace and love of infinite God I sit here sober happy and free. After four years of inner torture in recovery I am enjoying all of promises of our book, and have been for a while. It started with one sentence in the Big Book; it changed my whole perception of the Steps. Recovery took on a whole new meaning. That fateful sentence can be found in WE AGNOSTICS:

Pp53:2 - "*When we became alcoholics, crushed by a self-imposed crisis we could not postpone or evade, we had to fearlessly face the proposition that either God is everything or else He is nothing. God either is, or He isn't. What was our choice to be?*" I always took that to mean God was every thing - you know the trees, rocks, you, and me. One day I was listening in a meeting and it occurred to me that God has to be everything to me - He has to be involved in everything I do. My sponsor always says, "Get God involved, invite Him in". And I did. When I thought I couldn't handle something, I would say out loud, "Okay God, get involved " and things would be okay until next time. But I never offered ALL of me to ALL of God. I just offered what I couldn't do. What didn't occur to me was that I couldn't do anything relying on my own power, (remember the miserable results?). My relationships with myself, God, you, everything, had to be totally in his care because they weren't mine anyway, they were His. HE IS EVERYTHING! So with this lightning bolt up my butt, I looked at the book again.

While reading How It Works with a protégé I had an epiphany, I saw a paragraph in a way I had never seen it before:

Pp62:2 - "*So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so. Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us! God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without His aid. Many of us had moral and philosophical convictions galore, but we could not live up to them even though we would have liked to. Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We had to have God's help.*"

Then it occurred to me that I had been trying to moralize or philosophize myself into unselfishness. As I thought about it, I remembered that there were other places in the book that echoed such sentiments. My book just opened to them:

Pp66:4 - "*We saw that these resentments must be mastered, but how? We could not wish them away any more than alcohol.*"

I never thought that I was just as powerless over resentment or self as I was over booze. I always just looked at it as a matter of character defects. And that if I knew what they were, I could work on them, with God's help of course. I saw that I was not in control of my emotional nature - that was God's job. I was under qualified. Next I turned to:

Pp44:4 and 45:0 - "*If a mere code of morals or a better philosophy of life were sufficient to overcome alcoholism, many of us would have recovered long ago. But we found that such codes and philosophies did not save us, no matter how much we tried. We could wish to be moral, we could wish to be philosophically comforted, in fact, we could will these things with all our might, but the needed power wasn't there. Our human resources, as marshaled by the will, were not sufficient; they failed utterly. Lack of power, that was our dilemma. We had to find a power by which we could live, and it had to be a Power greater than ourselves. Obviously. But where and how were we to find this Power?"*

With all of these things running around my mind, I asked myself what they meant. My answer was rather profound to me. This may be something you guys have already grasped but to me it was news. I had always known it in my head but never integrated it as part of my soul. At that moment it became part of me. I knew that I couldn't control any relationship in my life; I was just borrowing God's love in these things. His loving hands and the invisible threads of His grace hold my life together. My life had been shot through with the evil and corroding thread of fear, which is now equally balanced with Gods' loving mesh. With that, I was able to go beyond human power, to grab a hold of something that truly allowed me to see myself as I am. After having finished an intense (long form) inventory I took my quiet hour, while reflecting on the first 5 steps and what I just learned, I got the idea of applying all of this to Step Seven. So instead of just saying the prayer, I thought about what I was asking for. I was asking God to have all of me, not just my character, my soul, my fate, but ALL that I am - a mother, a wife, a daughter, a sister, a friend, an A.A., a human being, all of these things. To allow Him to guide and direct me, to truly be his agent, to offer all that I may be, along with everything that I once was, to a God who was with me every step of the way. So I made a list from my 4th Step of all the places that I had utterly failed under my own power (where I brought confusion) and asked Him to have it ALL. I placed this list in to my God box and knelt down to say the prayer with a deeper understanding of what I was doing. I was asking God to live in and through me, and for the first time I felt what I said. The results are apparent - I don't talk at meetings to sound good, I ask God to speak if I open my mouth, I don't give crap to protégés because I trust God to guide them as he has me, I don't try to manipulate to get what I think I need. Furthermore, I have found the grace to transcend years if abuse and fear in order to trust and love the members of the opposite sex without guile or fear. To communicate with fellow children of our infinite God on a level that I couldn't have dreamed of (I no longer fear being found out). Today I truly see myself and everyone else as a child of God. So for me, that change was pretty profound. I hope that this little story may help someone else to bridge the gap between his or her inner and outer world.

Kerry C.

SHORTCOMINGS AND DEFECTS

Characteristics of self-will:

Selfishness & Self-seeking
Being Self-centered
Dishonesty
Fears
Being Inconsiderate
Pride
Greed
Lustful Thoughts
Anger
Envy
Sloth/Procrastination
Gluttony
Impatience
Intolerance
Resentment
Hate
Harmful Acts
Self-pity
Self-justification
Self-importance
Self-condemnation
Suspicion/Jealousy
Doubt

Characteristics of God's Will:

Interest in Others/Altruism
Being Love-/Others-/God-centered
Honesty
Faith & Trust in God
Being Considerate
Humility, Seeking God's Will
Giving & Sharing
Respectful Thoughts
Serenity
Being Grateful
Taking Right Action
Moderation
Patience
Tolerance
Forgiveness
Love & Concern for Others
Good Deeds
Self-forgetfulness
Humility & Truth
Modesty
Self-forgiveness
Trust
Faith & Trust in God

Important Points Regarding Amends & Restitution

Excerpted from the Big Book's explanation of Step 9, pages 76 - 83

Amend type (a) – *The people we hated / resented:*

- It may be some have done us more harm than we have done them. With a person we dislike, we take the bit in our teeth. It is harder to go to an enemy than a friend, but the benefit is greater.
- We go to them in a helpful, forgiving spirit, confessing our former ill feeling and expressing our regret.
- Under NO condition do we criticize or argue.
- We are there to sweep off OUR side of the street, realizing that nothing worthwhile can be accomplished until we do so.
- NEVER try to tell them what they should do. Discuss YOUR faults, not theirs.
- Be calm, frank, and open.
- It doesn't matter if they accept the apology or throw us out of their office. We've made our demonstration, done our part.

Amend type (b) – *The people / institutions owed money:*

- Most (All?) alcoholics owe money.
- We do not dodge our creditors.
- In some cases, some of us had to disclose our alcoholism by way of explaining what drove us and what we are now trying to do.
- We do not try to beat anyone out of anything, but we arrange a deal that we can live up to. Arranging time payments has worked for many of us.
- Let them know we are sorry. Drinking has made us slow to pay.
- We must lose our fear of creditors no matter how far we have to go, for we are liable to drink if we are afraid to face them.

Amend type (c) – *Incidents of criminal offense:*

- Some of us padded expense accounts, fell behind on child support, wrote bad checks, and committed other offenses of the law, which might land us in jail if it were known to the authorities.
- We remind ourselves that we MUST be willing to go to ANY lengths to set right these wrongs if we are to stay sober. We don't have the power to do this so we ask God for strength and direction to do the right thing.
- No matter what the personal consequences may be, we know God will protect us if we try to do the right thing (for a change).
- We may lose our position or reputation or face jail (though most of us had already experienced that), but we are willing anyway. We have to be. We must not shrink at anything.

Amend type (d) – *When others are involved:*

- We are not to be the hasty and foolish martyr who would needlessly sacrifice others to save ourselves.
- Before taking drastic action, which might implicate other people, we secure their consent.
- If we have obtained permission, have consulted with others, asked God to help and the drastic step is indicated we must not shrink.
- Sometimes it is better to take these risks than to stand before our Creator guilty of our wrongs.
- We have to place the outcome in God's hands or we may soon start drinking again, and then all would be lost anyhow.

Amend (e) – *Domestic troubles:*

- We may be mixed up sexually in a fashion we wouldn't care to have advertised. After years with a drunk, spouses get worn out, resentful, and uncommunicative.
- We begin to feel lonely, sorry for ourselves. So we look around for "someone who understands", feeling justified, when WE were really the source of the problem in the first place. If we are involved in this way, we often feel very remorseful at times and we have to do something about this.
- If the spouse does not know, we do not always say it is best to tell them. If they know in a general way that we have been wild, we admit our fault.

- We feel we ought to say that we have no right to name the people involved even if our spouse insists on knowing all the particulars. We are sorry for what we have done and, God willing, it shall not be repeated. It is better that one does not needlessly name a person upon whom our partner can vent jealousy.
- Perhaps there are some cases where the utmost frankness is demanded. No outsider can appraise such an intimate situation.
- It may be that both of you will decide that the way of good sense and loving-kindness is to let by-gones be by-gones. Each might pray about it, having the other one's happiness uppermost in mind.
- Keep it always in mind that we are dealing with that most horrible human emotion: jealousy. Don't risk more combat over this.
- Even if we have no such complication as sex outside of the relationship, there is plenty we should do at home.
- Some alcoholics say that the only thing we need to do is to just keep sober. This isn't true because we are yet a long way from making good to our spouse and family whom for years we have so shockingly treated. Sobriety without amends is NOT enough.
- We have been like a tornado roaring our way through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Our selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept the home in turmoil.
- A remorseful mumbling that we are sorry won't fill the bill at all. We sit down with the family and frankly analyze the past as we now see it, being very careful not to criticize any of them. Yes, they may have defects, but the chances are that our own actions are partly responsible for a lot of them.
- We set right our wrongs with the family, asking each morning in meditation that God show us the way of patience, tolerance, kindness, and love. The spiritual life is not a theory. WE HAVE TO LIVE IT.
- Unless one's family expresses a desire to live upon spiritual principles we think we ought not to urge them. Our behavior will convince them more than our words.

Amend type (f) – *Wrongs we can never fully right:*

Be **very careful** about listing anyone or anything here. We only list someone here if we can HONESTLY say that the wrong cannot be righted, usually when to do so would further injure them or another person. We are **willing** (or pray for the willingness to become willing) to make the amend if we could. This should also be discussed with others practicing this way of life because we are very good at justifying just about anything.

- We don't worry about them if we can HONESTLY say to ourselves that we would right them if we could.
- If the case is that they cannot be seen, we write them an honest letter. If they are alive, we send it to them; if they are not we read it to them (perhaps at a place or with a person that we associate with them).
- There may be a valid reason for postponement in some cases but we don't delay if it can be avoided.
- We should be sensible, tactful, considerate and humble without being servile or scraping. We don't crawl before anyone.

9th Step Prayers from the Big Book

- “Reminding ourselves that we have decided to go to any lengths to find a spiritual experience, *we ask [God] that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be.*” (pg. 79, ¶ 1)
- “If we have obtained permission [from other people who might be affected by us making this amend], have consulted with others, *asked God to help* and the drastic step is indicated we must not shrink.” (pg. 80, ¶ 1)
- “*Each might pray about it* [in cases of domestic problems], *having the other one's happiness uppermost in mind.*” (pg. 82, ¶ 1)
- “So we clean house with the family, *asking each morning in meditation that our Creator show us the way of patience, tolerance, kindness and love.*” (pg. 83, ¶ 1)

Examples of 9th Step Prayers

- **Asked before we attempt every amend:** "God, with regard to this amend, please remove my fear and give me strength, courage and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be. Amen" (from the thoughts on pg. 79, ¶ 1)
- **Cleaning house with our family, we pray each morning:** "God, please show me how to find **patience, tolerance, kindness and love** in my heart, my mind and my soul. Please help me show these attributes to my family and also, to those around me. Amen" (from the thoughts on pg. 83, ¶ 1)

Amends & Restitution List

Step 8 says, “Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.”

Step 9 says, “Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.”

* “+” (plus sign) = Willing to make the amend, “-” (minus sign) = Not willing (If you have any minuses, continue to pray for the willingness.)

** There may be additional harms you’ve caused this person. Ask them, “Is there any other way I’ve harmed you that I’m not aware of?”

*** Fill this space in **after** you’ve made your initial approach to the person and you’ve asked them “What can I do to **right this wrong**?”

*+ or -	Whom did I harm	**The harm I caused	***To make the amend I will...

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A GREAT AMENDS LETTER

Told by his ex-wife that he couldn't see her directly, he WAS allowed to send her a letter. After three edits from his sponsor, here is how it ended up:

Dear S._____,

I'm writing to do what I can to set right the harms that I did during the years that I was in a relationship with your mom. I've chosen to type rather than phone for two reasons: First, my handwriting is pretty awful, and second, because I want you to have something tangible that you can look at later when life may be treating you rough. To tell you the truth, I'm tempted to let things just stay the way they are because your mom tells me that you have some good memories of the time we spent together. Part of me says why mess with that? The best answer I have is that I loved you and I'm certain deep in my heart whether you know it yet or not I did you harm. I'm sure that you were aware that during the years we were together I was an active alcoholic. **LET ME BE VERY CLEAR THAT THIS IN NO WAY WHATSOEVER RELIEVES ME OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR MY ACTIONS.** I used alcohol and drugs because they were the only things I knew that could give me the relief from the constant fear I felt. I was drawn to you and your family because I desperately wanted to love and to be loved, but I was also scared to death of the prospect of being responsible, especially to others. Emotionally I felt like I had one foot on the gas and the other on the brake. I'm sure that it was hard for you to figure out what was real - is the real Mike the one that wants to loves me or the one that's pushing me away? You weren't crazy, I was. You were a wonderful, lovable child and you had every right to expect consistent love, emotional support, and parenting from me. What you got instead was fear, chaos, confusion, and abandonment. I want you to know that I didn't fail to give you those things because you were unlovable or undeserving but because I was a sick and frightened man incapable of giving. If you feel emotionally ripped off it's because you were. If you feel abandoned you're not crazy, you were. I know at some deep emotional level it's hard not to believe that if you were really worthy and valuable that these things wouldn't have happened to you. Please believe me, this just isn't so. You are worthy and deserving of love then and now, it was I that failed you. S._____, I hope that you'll accept my heartfelt regret for these and the unlisted harms that I did to you. Should you ever want to talk about any of this please give me a call. If I can ever be of any service to you as a friend I'd be honored.

Mike L. from Indianapolis, IN.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OVER THE NEXT WEEK

For the newcomers and those taking the Steps with us, your assignment for the next week is:

- 1) Continue saying the Third Step prayer every day.
- 2) If you haven't done so yet, please finish writing the rest of your three Fourth Step Inventories (Resentment, Fear, and Sex & Harms).
- 3) Create your Future Relationship Ideal.
- 4) BEFORE doing a Fifth Step with another person or persons, please spend an hour or two sharing your Fourth Step Inventories alone with your Higher Power at a place where you feel God strongly.
- 5) Do your Fifth Step BEFORE next week's session (schedule an entire day for this life-changing event).
- 6) After sharing your inventory with another person or persons, please take an hour of uninterrupted and undisturbed time (remaining at the place where you did the Fifth Step) to see if you have been thorough and honest in working the first five Steps.
- 7) After completing this hour after your Fifth Step, the person or person's who listened to your Fifth Step will return and please go through Steps Six and Seven and then start using both sides of the Seventh Step card on a daily basis.
- 8) Immediately after you start working with Step Seven, put together an amends list, and start making amends by going out to those you have harmed. Before going out to make a specific amend, talk with your "sponsor" or spiritual advisor to ask for help. Please also keep in mind that one of the definitions for the word "amend" is "to change". So part of making amends is not ONLY to set right the wrong we may have done, but ALSO to change our behavior so that we no longer continue to harm others.

Even if you do NOT finish this week's assignments, please still come back next week for the information on the last three Steps. If you are not able to finish your Fourth Step and do your Fifth Step during the next week you may do it the week after next. If you wait much longer than that to do your Fifth Step you will begin to deteriorate the transformational effectiveness of the process so please be sure to finish your Fourth and Fifth Steps within the next week or two. You'll be grateful you did because this is quite possibly the single most important thing you will EVER do in your life.