

Step 8 - Balancing the Books
by Don P. from Aurora CO
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My first experience of freedom came while I was locked up in the state penitentiary. I had been carefully guided through the first seven Steps and had begun to awaken spiritually. I trusted the AA process and was beginning to trust God.

But my sponsors and I were faced with a logistical problem. No matter how willing we were to make direct amends, the state would not let us out to do so. One of my sponsors had committed murder, and for him to directly contact the victim's family would cause much undue harm.

As we discussed these issues, it became clear that the key to the Eighth Step was willingness; if this God were truly loving and merciful as it appeared, we would not be kept in bondage simply because we could not reach those to whom we owed restitution. Freedom would come, it seemed, when I stood entirely ready to make amends wherever possible.

My sponsor gave me an exercise to do. I was to make a list of all the people I had harmed. This list would start with the names from my inventory. It was suggested that there were many others I had harmed that also must go on the list, even though there was no resentment or fear connected with them. I was to be as clear as possible as to the harm I had done. But – my sponsor pointed out – even though I knew what I had done to each person, I was so insensitive that I probably did not know the consequences of my actions. He gave me the key to freedom; I was to close my eyes and picture each person separately in front of me. I was to look each straight in the eye and see if I could feel a willingness to say: "I have been wrong and have caused you harm. Will you please tell me what I must do so that we can get the books to balance?" As I sat in the cell that night going over my list, I had the experience I had been looking for all my life: I was lifted and set free.

In my blindness I had always believed that a spiritual awakening was the end of the road. Now, having had one, I knew it was but the beginning. Finally, at thirty-four years of age, I could truly begin to live.