

Rev. Sam Shoemaker & Step 9

Rev. Shoemaker was Bill W's spiritual mentor during the early years of AA. Dr. Samuel Shoemaker, the widely known Episcopal clergyman who helped so greatly in the founding of A.A., wrote this article for the Grapevine several months ago. It was already in type and scheduled for the present issue [Jan. 1964] when the news of his death on Thursday, October 31, 1963, reached us.... Here he reviews our Twelve Steps with that wonderful clarity which has always characterized his speaking and writing.

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

We must be willing to be absolutely honest, but indiscriminate "absolute honesty" would blow the roof off many a house and destroy entirely some human relations.

We must hold nothing back through deceit or pride; we may need to hold something back by discretion and consideration of others.

Take a thing like infidelity in marriage - sometimes this must be disclosed to wife or husband in all candor.

Sometimes, as in the case of someone with a bad heart, or terribly sensitive or innocent of nature, "telling all" may be almost a self-indulgence for ourselves.

The people we have hurt may be dead, in which case prayer to God to let them know our repentance may be all we can do.

Or there may be facts in the situation which would help clear the relation, but they involve telling what we know about someone else's sin.

This is allowable under only the rarest circumstances - usually it spreads the evil and does more harm than good.

If in order to clear our own souls we must damage the reputation of another, it is an extremely dubious practice.

Those who deal much with human souls - priests, psychiatrists, lay-folk like A.A.'s must learn the secret of a tight lip, or we shall do damage and gain the reputation of a gossip, which will shut off people's confidence from us.

Such actions are usually those of the Pharisee-type, the good and righteous type. But they are sometimes those of the changed Prodigal also and nothing is worse than the fury of a Prodigal - turned - Pharisee.

What is known in confidence should be kept in confidence until or unless the person involved gives us permission to speak of it.