

Step 1

Admitted we were powerless over (what ever your affliction) and that our lives were unmanageable.

It was suggested to me that I wrote my step one down so that I could see it for what it really was!

I wrote what happened to me that last time I drank/drugs.

The fear it created.

The guilt it created.

The regret it created.

The harm I did to myself.

The harm I did to other people.

The financial damage.

The psychological damage.

The relationship damage.

The mental damage.

How it affected my working.

How it affected my self-esteem.

I wrote all of this down and then put the facts into an envelope, then I put the envelope in a safe place to be taken out, read and scrutinized. After a while the thinking says, "It was not that bad, you will get away with one". So, when the step one is written it cannot be denied that along with the passing of time, that all of this did not occur. So, I know today, that if I drink, all that is in that envelope will come back to me again. Thankfully, today, I have a choice. In the past I had no choice.

The "unmanageability", guilt, resentment, hatred, debt, anxiety, fear, panic attacks, intrusive thoughts, depression, self loathing, all of these caused "DIS-EASE" and that disease caused me to crave. Another way of looking at craving is that it is a feeling that will go away once you feed it with whatever it is crying out for!

In my case, my past had caused me so much DIS-EASE that I just wanted rid of feelings, I felt fear all of the time, and thoughts would race through my head. My drinking career was very short, but when I drank, I drank in a way that harmed people around me, and it also put my own life in danger. It cost me much more than money, I ended up in an army alcohol addiction unit. I would not accept that I was an alcoholic. The psychiatrist explained to me, (after I had tried to punch him for hinting that I had a drink problem!) that "an alcoholic is a person who constantly does damage to himself, or to other people through his or her drinking". I drank because of my anxiety. I can now see that it was unmanageable, because I had denied it. I did not want to discuss it. This was due to the fear of being thrown into the "nuthouse". Also I was trapped in "macho mode". How could I tell people that I was a serving soldier, but, I could not get on a bus, train or meet people in a social way unless I was under the influence of alcohol? Yet, I was still involved in active service as a soldier, and I carried out my job in an exemplary manner. I was a prisoner of people's opinions. I was always wanting to be liked, and I would crash down on anyone who I thought disliked me. It was always conflict, never peace. In my time in AA and NA, I have met so many people who had totally different drinking/using patterns to myself.

I was very lucky to meet a lovely old lady in Harrogate, North Yorkshire, England. I was asking her what her rock bottom was. She told me that she could not sleep, and she was told that a _ glass of Sherry would get her to sleep. She told me that she would crave all day for her Sherry. She said it soon crept up to 3 full glasses of Sherry. Her rock bottom was the thought of 4 glasses of Sherry! I looked at this woman who was old enough to be my Grandma and I thought, "Great, she has got more courage, and more of an insight into where she was heading, which is more than I did!". That taught me a lot. I realized then that the only requirement for membership was a desire to stop drinking. I know that if I was to drink, because of a problem, it would be like putting out a fire with petrol! It would only make matters worse. So, step one, I fully understand the implications of today!

I was always seeking the 4 'A's:

APPROVAL

APPRECIATION

ACCEPTANCE

APPLAUSE

Seeking the 4 'A's caused me so much pain. Always wondering what people would think of me, my fear of rejection kept me in a violent mode. I was scared to say no. This kept me involved in gang warfare, in my heart I knew I should not be involved with that lifestyle, but my head was telling me to seek the 4 'A's. I understand now that the heart and the head should be in tune. That is what the following steps are about.

Today I get the 4 'A's by trying to live a spiritual, caring life, not from everyone, but from the people that count.

Step 2

Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

This step caused me a lot of problems in my early days. I could never grasp the idea of a man sitting on a cloud looking down at me. So I had to find something that would work for me..

It came into my head that when I went to see a psychiatrist, I wanted him to find something in me that I could not find for myself.

Theoretically, once pointed out to me I would start to heal or be healed. So, in a sense, that was an act of faith, or hope!

The psychiatrist could not change my life. What had happened had happened. However, in a sense he would winkle out the causes and in doing so that would make the neurosis evaporate! (That is the Theory).

Where was this God that brought happiness into peoples lives? I knew there was not a God. So, all of these people in AA and other Twelve Step fellowships who had faith believed that God was guiding their life. They had a contentment, which I wanted. It then hit me, I knew there was no God, then all of these people got happy by believing in God's will. What they believed God wanted them to do. When was I going to find a God/Higher power? Well, my higher power did the business for me by the way of a friend of mine who always showed off anything new he had bought. He turned up at my house with a brand new BMW car. He spoke for an hour about the qualities of BMW cars. He lifted the bonnet of the car to reveal a giant engine. He said, "Feel the bronze on the engine". As I touched it he said, "They are the best designed cars in the world". So, I thought, "Who designed my hand?" I looked at my hand and saw for the first time ever, a fantastic piece of engineering. I moved my wrist, raised my arm, swivelled it around and said to him "Who designed my hand?" He looked at me as if I had gone mad. I walked up my driveway and for the first time ever, I knew there was a creator, and that I had been designed in away that if I was to do something wrong, it would hurt, and that pain is a warning. The most obvious being if you put your hand by a fire and you put it too close, it starts to hurt. That pain is a warning of great danger! So pain is a way of warning. Emotional pain, I then realized, was caused by me wanting people, places, past and present to be different to what they really are, were or are going to be. WOW!!

It was my reaction that was the problem. I had tried to run away from pain, repressing it or over reacting, never any middle ground. So God had designed to accept **the 3 'D's**, disappointment, dis-ease and death.. I could see it so clearly that my pain was craving, I wanted everything my way. Sounds childish, but true. I could not handle emotional pain.

When I was 17 I lost 3 relatives within a few months. I would not go to the funeral. Why? because I was running away from grief. It is no coincidence that shortly after these deaths I became neurotic, panic attacks started, anxiety came into my life.

Today, I know "repression without expression, leads to depression".

So my higher power, in my early days became courage, it became tolerance, it became gratitude, it became honesty, it became patience. If I did not do these things then I would suffer! So, simply to get restored to sanity means practice opposites. Seek to get a Teflon personality where nothing sticks! To obtain emotional muscle, one must do emotional exercises. We must understand that we are all products of our past! So, my past had to be looked at and understood, not just thought about, but to be looked at, and to see what triggers had caused my pain.

If you, right now, are tortured emotionally, then think you can't know what's best for you! If you did then you would not be suffering right now!

If you want peace of mind, then practice opposites, it's SIMPLE! The keys to peace of mind are accepting life and life's terms. You may be worried about death, disease or disappointments. Well, worry kills your spirit, it makes you feel down! It causes DIS-APPOINTMENT. A higher power to counteract this is affirmations like, "Am I OK now", "do I have money in my pocket/purse?" In short, all your needs have been met and always will do! If all your needs are met today, then why should they not be met next year! These affirmations return us to sanity!

I was walking around a Buddhist monastery and I noticed a gutter was dripping water, as I got close to the drip I noticed that the gentle repetition of a drop of water had worn a hole into the concrete floor! That was a spiritual awakening. I started to get faith just by knowing that if I changed my thinking I would change.

I suffered from obsessive, intrusive thoughts; those triggered anxiety in me which triggered craving! I learnt to laugh at my thoughts and not believe them!

Step 3

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as I understood him.

This step was the first time that I can say I practiced humility. I got down on my knees along with my sponsor and did the Step 3 Prayer.

In doing that small act of humility, what I was saying was, that my past actions, reactions to life's ways, had caused the pain and that I did not know what was best for me. So from now on I was going to TRY and accept life on life's terms. The tools I needed for this spiritual journey back to sanity was courage, tolerance, patience, honesty, gratitude, and awareness. If I had these in my life, this would mean less friction. Less friction. That is what I see the spiritual path leading to. These cause social lubrication; they stop friction between myself and other people.

That is what it is all about. Peace of mind!

Today I know that peace of mind is not about having no problems whatsoever, but about learning to deal with problems. So does handing over to a higher power now mean that I will never experience the 3 'D's, Death, Disease or Disappointment ever again? Does it mean now that all my bills will be paid, and every person I meet from now on will be polite, courteous, friendly and do everything I wish?!, "If only people would do as I want, when I want, where I want, how I want, would not life be OK for me?" No, it means EFFORT from me, plenty of EFFORT to accept life and life's events. That is a major key to understanding, it does not mean you agree but you understand! St Frances Pray, "It is better to understand than to be understood", trying to get people to understand my way of thinking just caused me agony. I can see that so clearly now. So, if I can understand the other person then I don't get any friction. Simple! Constantly wondering why the world was such a cruel place, wondering why my favorite people had died so young. Today, I understand that as I sow I shall reap. If I worry about all the people who gossip and slander I will always feel Dis-eased (he who talks to you about them, will talk to them about you). If I steal, guilt and a fear of being found out will loom.

I have never enjoyed an argument, violence, stealing, hatred, anxiety, fear, rage, grief, or tension, all of these are symptoms of me wanting life on my terms. But understanding, tolerance, patience, honesty, courage, awareness, these lead to peace and a non-tormented mind!

I made a decision to write this web page. I thought it out, I planned it, its content, its style, but it was not a decision until I actually picked up a pen and started writing! So handing my will over to a higher power means quite simply that if I am stuck at traffic lights, and I don't want to be there, and I start getting angry, that I suffer. But if I have patience, then I will not suffer. Patience is then in that case, handing my will over to the care of God as I understand it. What I will never know is that if I had not been at those lights then maybe I would of skidded off the road, or a wagon would of hit me, killing or causing serious injury! But I am at the lights, waiting, and in once piece.

So, I understand that Gods will for me, is for me to be happy, joyous and free! And I can be those, even if dying by acceptance but not wanting any of these things to be different.

How simple it is now to see that 90% of my pain was caused by not wanting people, places and later events to be different. Acceptance lubricates and stops friction.

3 'D's

DEATH

DIS-EASE (Physical and Emotional)

DIS-APPOINTMENT

4 'A's

ACCEPTANCE

APPROVAL

APPRECIATION

APPLAUSE

The 3 'D's will effect every single person and there is no escape from them. I do not write that to make you depressed but to see that they are reality!! By accepting it lubricates and stops friction. So instead of asking why, ask how can I learn to accept. Remember by accepting it does not mean that you agree, but it means you stop turmoil, torture and torment of the mind. By stopping wanting of people, places, past, present, etc. To be different, we start to get peace of mind

The 4 'A's

If like me, you want acceptance, approval, appreciation and applause and went to any lengths to be liked, respected and thought good of, well I am sure you have suffered greatly! I discovered that if your are ugly, beautiful, fat, thin, rich, poor, sad, glad, educated, illiterate, tall, short, verbal, quiet, drunk, sober, clean, using spiritual, aggressive, religious, non religious, whatever, you will be criticized. That is a fact!

If you are on a spiritual path, you will be criticized less. You will have more chance of living in peace and harmony. Seek the 4 'A's by none spiritual means and life will be a torment.

But live a blameless life and you will have friends who want you for what you are not what you die!

There is less chance of drinking, using, or going back to my suffering if I am on a path of spirituality. If I am seeking the 4 'A's there is more chance of me going back to my negative ways. Living a blameless life means in short, do not be arrogant, argumentative, or aggressive. But, be polite, gentle, kind and do not seek reward. That way you will not be disappointed.

Step 4

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Doing this step I can write honestly, it made me realize why I had suffered, and what the cause of that suffering was!

Moral means; " A standard". So I had to look at my standards for myself, and the standards I had set other people (THE CAUSE OF SO MUCH RESENTMENT).

My sponsor suggested that I list all of my guilt's, resentments, fears and sexual conduct because between these I would find the cause of my emotional pain or spiritual dis-ease, call it what you will.

Why do this step? Well, if you are a product of your past and you are unhappy now, then something has gone wrong in the past! If you have spent, drank, used drugs, eaten to get away from bad feelings, then it is suggested you look at the cause of these bad feelings. There is a cliché that says, "The straw that broke the camels back". Well, taking a fearless moral inventory takes straws off our backs; it makes life less of a burden. It lightens the load!

When you are full of resentment it is like farting, everyone close to you gets a whiff!

But when you are on a spiritual path it is like wearing a lovely perfume, everyone close to you gets a whiff!

The idea of a fearless moral inventory is to start to see what is in our character that causes triggers for resentment, guilt, and fear from other people to us or us to other people.

It is about learning not to over react! A word that flies off the tongue is like an arrow leaving a bow for a target!

If you are an angry or resentful person then the following list of defects of character are the cause of your pain! Without these defects you will have peace of mind!

Simple! Learn the cause and effect, and then learn to practice opposites, result peace of mind; and that is what it is all about. Practice opposites.

The following defects are the cause of resentment, anger and hatred. Anger is not a defect of character. If someone attacks you, you have to be angry to save your life! But if your anger is caused by one of the following defects of character, then that is self-righteous anger which means that we will always suffer, until we see the true cause of our Dis-ease.

THE CAUSE OF SUFFERING OR DEFECTS OF CHARACTER.

PRIDE – HIGH OPINION OF ONES OWN QUALITIES, MERITS OR CONDUCT.

Does pride stop you saying sorry, or asking for help?

Does your pride say “The best way not to fail, is not to try?”

A prisoner of peoples opinions that can lead us to overreact, or not to do anything because of “what will people will think”.

Healthy pride, makes us act in a way that is caring to ourselves and other people. It is a good sense of well being knowing that you have tried your best (you may of even failed, but you tried!).

IMPATIENCE – Not enduring! Wanting everything now.

HEALTHY IMPATIENCE – When your sick of being the way you are! And want to change now!

INTOLERANCE – Not able to endure opinions, beliefs, or actions.

HEALTHY INTOLERANCE – When your endurance of your habit, drinking, taking drugs or letting people walk all over you stops!

ENVY – Resentful of more fortunate people. Their health, looks, intelligence or ways.

HEALTHY ENVY – When it turns to admiration!

JEALOUSY – The fear of being out done, suspicious, dislike of someone who you see as better than you, wealthy, women, looks.

The fear of being replaced by another! Seeing people as rivals.

HEALTHY JEALOUSY - Makes you treat people well!, or they will go elsewhere.

SELFISHNESS - Doing your own desires or interests without caring how it effects other peoples emotions or life.

HEALTHY SELFISHNESS - Doing what’s best for you! Not being a prisoner of peoples opinions.

SELF-PITY - A feeling of being hard done by! Poor me.

HEALTHY SELF PITY - “People have hurt me, people have used me, people have stolen from me, people have abused me, but I am not going to resent, I am going to enjoy life and learn from the experience of the past”.

SELF-CENTEREDNESS - Pre-occupied with your own ways and actions, not caring about other people.

HEALTHY SELF

CENTEREDNESS - When you stop being a doormat, and stand up for what is right for you!

ARROGANCE - I am right and you are wrong! Tending never to listen, but to argue, and to believe that you are always right. What is an argument? A billion ways to say “I am right and you are wrong”.

HEALTHY ARROGANCE - What you think of me does not matter, humility when you think, “Does it matter?”.

SLOTH - Slow or absence of activity. When actions should be done.

HEALTHY SLOTH - Taking time out of the rat race and relaxing, meditating, contemplating!

DISHONESTY - **DECEITFULNESS, FRAUDULENT, LACK OF HONOUR** (before you resent, ask, “Have I ever done anything similar in my life for what I am going to resent that person for?”)

HEALTHY DISHONESTY - Is when a friend says “Do you think that I am fat and ugly?” and you say “No!”, even though you know different.

LUST - Animal desire for sexual indulgence! To want passionately.

HEALTHY LUST - I want peace of mind, I want to live a blameless life! Or a romantic weekend.

GREED - To want more than is needed.

HEALTHY GREED - To have peace of mind, and to then want more.

INTO ACTION

It is best to start with listing your resentments, my sponsor suggested to do it this way. List each resentment separately, never write the word "and" (between each resentment) because it is another resentment.

List Each Resentment:

WHO

WHY

DEFECTS (This after listing MY defects here I started to see how much power I had given people! I started to see that it is not the action of other people, but MY reaction is the cause of my resentment/emotional pain.)

Remember that "moral" means standards you have from yourself or other people.

A FEW EXAMPLES OT TAKING A MORAL INVENTORY:

RESENTMENT #1

WHO – John

WHY – He chatted my wife up

DEFECTS - Self Pity (How could he do that to me?).
Jealousy (The fear of being replaced by another).
Dishonesty (Have I ever chatted anyone up? Have I ever been unfaithful?).

This resentment can be undone by thinking “Is my wife with me now?”
Or
“Well, to be honest, I have chatted up other men’s wives and girlfriends”.

RESENTMENT #2

Who – Fred

WHY - He came into work late, he is always doing it, I have to do more work and the boss gets angry
DEFECTS - Impatience, Self Pity, Dishonesty.
Impatience – I want him to be on time
Self Pity – Poor me
Dishonesty – Have I ever been late?

RESENTMENT #3

WHO – Mary

WHY – She dumped me for someone else
DEFECTS - Self Pity, Pride, Self-centeredness, Dishonesty.
Self Pity – Poor me, how could she do that to me?
Pride – What will people think?
Dishonesty – Have I ever finished with anyone?
Self-Centeredness – You are only thinking of your happiness, in fact you want to take her prisoner!

If you look at this resentment you will see the cause of the reaction, I resented Mary because she finished with me, but had I ever finished a relationship?, Yes, would I have liked her to resent you? Would you have wanted her to put emotional handcuffs on you?, No. Then don’t do it to her!

Dishonesty is resenting someone for something that you have done yourself.

When you look at the right hand column you start to see the real problem and that peace of mind will not come if you hang on to your resentments. Practice the opposite of the defect box and peace and freedom will flow in!

In short, I may of had the worst childhood, or the worst parents/wife/girlfriend. They may have abused me psychologically or sexually by resenting, by hating them, they are still abusing me! We have to learn to accept our past. That does not mean I agree, but I stop hurting myself by making the mind spin around by wanting my life to be different! That is the cause of my emotion, wishing it had been different.

Again I had to learn that if I wanted peace of mind, acceptance is the key to the doorway that will lead me out of misery! I owe it to myself to let the past go.

If someone walked into the room now and hit you on the head with a hammer and then dropped the hammer on the floor and ran out, would you pick the hammer up and carry on hitting yourself, no, it would be madness, but with resentment we do carry on doing it to ourselves. Remember, resentment means to re-feel!! So we re-feel every time we hate them, resent them, despise them or want to get back at them. They have won! You are still suffering. Ask yourself how many weeks, months, years that you have had this resentment! Let it go.

If your hair went on fire now you would rush to water and put the fire out. But because of your instincts to survive or self preserve would kick in and take over. But with resentment we watch the fire and blame someone for lighting it! They are at fault, look what they did to me all those years ago.

FEARS

It was suggested to me that I should list all of my fears. Just like I did my resentments.

FEARS #1

FEAR – People

WHY - I think they will see me blush
DEFECTS - Pride – What people think of me?
Self Pity – They will laugh at me and I will run away.
Arrogance - Who am I to be laughed at?

FEARS #2

FEAR – Death

WHY - I don't want to die

DEFECTS - Self Pity – Poor me, I am going to die.

This is one of the biggest fears I have come across in my time whilst going through and doing the steps with people.

Self-Pity is the trigger!

Acceptance sets you free. Think that every time you become obsessed with death, you are killing your joy for life. Say to yourself, "Am I alive now?" - If you are, enjoy your life, help people, try and get out of self-obsession.

A Buddhist way of getting over the fear of death is by meditation on your own death. We will cover this in step 11.

I once said to a Buddhist monk, "I am scared of dying, what can I do?". He said "You are going to be very disappointed one day!" That was my answer, ACCEPTANCE.

SEXUAL CONDUCT

It was suggested to me that I list all of my sexual exploits and see if my pursuit of sex had led me to be selfish, dishonest, had it caused resentment – had I taken chances where I could have caught some dis-ease, had I effected my dignity or someone else's?

The idea behind this is to look, and to see that a bit of hugging, puffing and a few squelching noises, I put a lot of effort into the pursuit of it.

In short list, your sexual exploits and weigh it up.

If you are frigid, talk about!

GUILT

It was suggested to me that I list all of my guilt's. When I wrote them down it seemed that I resented myself! I could write forever about guilt, but I will keep it very short.

I wrote my guilt's down. I soon learnt that "Guilty" was not a punishment from God, but a feeling that was telling me that what I did in the past was not my true character, if it had been, I would not be feeling guilty! So I became willing to make amends (See Steps 8 and 9) and that I did.

Guilt is alright before the event when the head thinks "If I do that I will not feel right because I will hurt someone". So that is what guilt is about, stopping you doing something that will cause harm. So look at your guilt's. Make amends, where needed and forget it! (I bet your thinking, "It's alright for you, but if you had my Catholic, Jewish, Muslim etc, guilt", you would be tormented). Well I was tortured by guilt but I am not now! Why, because I did what my sponsor said, and truly realized that guilt was not a punishment but a feeling telling me that what I did at that time was a combination of what was going on in my life at that time! It was telling me it was not my true character!

In short, drop your guilt as you would a ton weight on your shoulders, because the longer you carry it the more damage it does, and in the end you will buckle under the weight.

Step 5

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

I was very nervous after I had written my resentments, guilt, fears, and sexual conduct. I arranged a time and I went to my sponsor's house, and I shared with him over a few sessions, my moral inventory, not a life story but a moral inventory. In other words all the stuff that made me feel dis-eased! It was painful, at times I felt I was going to burst out crying and run away!

But courage held me. Courage as a soldier, I saw bravery, people being involved in violence after the event, there was no reaction just, "Well, I did my job". Courage is going into a situation with the heart racing, the mouth dry, the sweat and a new panic experience, but still doing it. Well, I did it and today I am glad, it was like getting rid of a Cancer! Cancer of the emotions, caused by resentment, guilt and fear.

My sponsor gave me a lot of feedback and never once criticized. He kept saying "you too?". What that meant was, he had done a lot of the things I had done! When I finished he said to me, "Well, Billy, everything you shared I have heard before, you shared nothing I have not heard before from my other sponsees"

It was a burden carrying all the resentment, guilt and fear. Dave was my sponsor, but I know people who have used Priests, Rabbi's, Mullah's, Counselors etc. What is important is not to see it as an act of confession but as a learning of your character

When I admitted to God, I admitted it to my creator, I prayed that what I had learnt may be of use to my fellow humans! My creator wants me to be happy, joyous and free! If I am full of resentment, guilt and fear, then it speaks for itself. I could not be truly happy; maybe I was pretending to be happy in the past! Always behind that, the fear of impending doom! What I also learnt from my step 4 and step 5 was to write a gratitude list. I had always been obsessed by what I did not have and what I wanted, never looked at what I had.

I had always been obsessed with people I resented, and never the people I liked! I had always been obsessed with guilt, my badness, my self loathing. Well, after step 5 I realized I was a human being. The only person saying I was bad was me! All I had to do was to be willing to make amends (no, it says willing!), I did not have to hurt the world, I had seen things in a different light, what it meant was; If I could go back, I would change the event. I was willing!

All my needs have been met since I did my inventory. I realized I was not happy running my business, so I stopped, it paid my taxes. The problem was that I had brothers working for me. To be happy, joyous and free meant I had to have courage and look at the long-term problems if I stayed in business. Sure, I did not want to effect my brother's finances, but I had to put myself first! I had to remember "The man who asked a question feels a fool for twenty minutes. The man who does not ask a question is a fool for the rest of his life". I felt guilty, what would my brothers think of me, but I prayed and realized that my intentions were not to harm them. So, I had to be at ease with my intentions and not their reactions! I stopped being a prisoner of people's opinions. I realized I was in an unhappy relationship and I had to do something about that.

I never wanted to hurt my partner when I left and I had to be comfortable with that, again.

INTENTIONS

Happy, joyous and free! Did not mean that I had to put up with the unbearable, it meant getting into a way of life, which was blameless. Sure you might think that walking out of a relationship is cruel, but my intention was not to hurt. I was sure that in my step 4, that I resented a woman for finishing with me, after listing that resentment I realized she had the right to do what was best for her. Just like I had the right to do what is best for me, again I state it was not my intention to harm! After knowing how I hated that woman for finishing with me because I wanted to be liked, I stayed in an unhappy relationship, which led to resentment and unhappiness. A vicious circle!

Step 6

We're entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character!

After writing what I did in Steps 4 and 5, and seeing the exact nature of my wrong, it is obvious that I would want those defects removing just like a cancer! Remove, well, replace is another way of looking at it, if you have problems with God and don't know how God is going to remove those defects. Well you could start to add things to your character such as tolerance, patience, gratitude, honesty, courage, humility, etc these lead to a blameless life. Sure people will get pissed off with you, whatever you do, but to live a blameless life, where you mind your own business, get on with your own life, stop people pleasing, stop arguing (does it matter?), help, be caring, listen and learn. Let people be your teacher, not your master! Who would you sooner be stuck in a lift with, an arrogant self-centered person, or a caring gentleperson?

Dave helped me so much, he was a devout Catholic and I was on the Buddhist path. I asked him why I should do step 4, and he replied "In your case, Billy, to become a Gentle-man". I had heard that word a million times; I understood a gentleman in word, deed and nature. So I could not see any good reason why I should hang on to my defects, so, yes, I was ready.

If I think the same, expect the same, react the same, want the same, say the same, do the same, resent the same, hate the same, I will feel the same!

All I had to do was **PRACTICE OPPOSITES!**

Step 7

Humbly asked him to remove our shortcomings.

When I was writing my defects, I would burst out laughing at time, when I would see these defects that were causing me and the people around me so much pain! These defects were so obvious they stood out like a light in the dark. I had brought on so much of my pain by my reactions and in other ways by my lack of action.

So humility was not a case of being ridiculed, but a sense of humility, "Yes, I am the problem". So all I had to do was do what my creator wanted, and that was to use what I had learnt from the first 6 steps to practice opposites, simple, practice opposites. In doing so, you are getting your shortcomings removed.

Today I know how my creator designed me. I have started to use the, "User handbook", "The makers instructions pamphlet". It designed me to love other people as well as myself, to care about other people, "To do unto others as you would have done unto yourself". To be polite, gentle, caring, loving, tolerant, patient, humble, honest, courageous, gratitude and to try your best to live a blameless life. In doing so I will have peace of mind, knowing I am trying my best and that is all that I can do, my best. If I don't follow how my creator designed me, then I will suffer and those around me will suffer.

So all I had to do was practice opposites !

Step 8

Made a list of persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

The list in a sense was already part written, because those persons were on my resentment list and my guilt list from step 4.

So I wrote down a list of all, not just the ones who I thought it would be easy to approach, but all. To the best of my ability I wrote my list and I also wrote why I should make amends to them. With the exception of sexual abuse, every person that I resented, every person who I had harmed, I had done myself in one way or another. I have never sexually abused anyone. It was strange. The man who raped me when I was a boy kept coming into my mind. I realized that if I wanted people to forgive me, then I had to forgive! I don't know where that man is or whether he is still alive, but I forgive him. What did Jesus say?, "Let he who has not sinned, cast the first stone", not "Let he who has not committed the same sin as him, cast the first stone".

A sin is a sin. I am no better than anyone else, forgiveness sets people free, arrogance and a sense of being cruelly treated cause pain, friction, etc!

Well, my list was long, I went back to Dave and we talked it through, who I should physically approach, who I should write to, and those who I would be willing to make amends to. Willing, well I was involved in serious crime, if I went to these institutes I would end up in prison! So, I became willing.

The people I had inflicted my will, my violence, my arrogance, my selfishness my jealousy, my envy, my lust, my greed, my dishonesty, my pride, my self pity etc.

I had beaten a man up and this tortured me because he was not the usual gangster type character that I associated with! He got on the wrong side of me over a petty argument and I went berserk and became violent, which led to him being hospitalized! I would, when driving around Liverpool, avoid where he lived because I did not want to see him, because of the guilt it would trigger if I saw him!

I could see the value of this step in short, say your sorry, ask for forgiveness and try not to do it again, and live a blameless life!

It would be a waste of time making amends and then going out and doing the same things that lead to friction, resentment or violence.

So again, I set about learning to practice opposites. The road to freedom where I could look the world in the eye, knowing I had tried my best to clear the wreckage of the past.

In doing that, it makes the character stronger. It is not a weak thing to see that you are the problem, but it is a great strength. In reality, I can really only change myself. To know you are trying your best to bring about peace.

When I finished my list, I wrote the plan of action, who I would approach and when. I had stolen, so I paid money to charities to help drill water wells in India. I also sponsored 2 children in the third world by paying a monthly sum, so they could be helped in various ways.

Sure, I was nervous about approaching people, but I did it. I was never once made to feel guilty by anyone I made amends to! .

The other side is that it gives people faith knowing people do care. I would ask you to think about that step if you want people to forgive you for the way you have treated them. Then you have to forgive people for the way they have treated you!

I did not know I had defects of character, I only found out after doing my inventory. Now, if people are not on a 12 step programme how are they ever going to change, so you have to understand that you have changed but don't expect everyone to start thinking and reacting the way you do now, now that you are on a spiritual path.

Step 9

Made direct amends to such people except when to do so would injure others.

Made direct amends. My sponsor said that could be a letter, a phone call or "popping around" to see them. Some letters went out. Some phone calls were made, but most of my amends were made at a personal level.

People I now sponsor. I tell them not to confess to the loved one about affairs! As that could really hurt our loved ones. So the key there is willing. In short that means that if I could go back in time and change what had happened I would, I became willing.

I tell them not to put their jobs in danger by telling the boss they have been stealing! It would not help if you told your friend that you had an affair with his wife that would drag her into your guilt.

So in some cases, just become willing. Why confess to something that could get you put in jail! You can do more good passing on the 12 steps, than being stuck behind prison bars.

Don't let your amends be at the cost of other people's security, dignity and well being. As I wrote in the latter part of step 8, it was a healing experience for me and the people I made amends to!

In short, say your sorry when and if you can. If you can't go to someone just become willing. A change of attitude, a change of heart, that is what it is about!

Step 10

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

In short, it makes sense that after seeing the cause of your pain, seeing your defects of character to go out and do those things again, it will only lead to more heartache, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, eating, spending, gambling, etc. I expected everything to change overnight, but it did not, but it did change slowly, those fears that tortured me were not torturing me so much. Those resentments would kick in again, a scream that those people deserved what they got or how could that person say or do that to me (self-pity). What I did have was a little thought that if I looked at defects and became willing to change, things must get better!

If you break your leg, you know you did it. You are taught by the doctor what you must do in order for those bones to knit together again! You know the cause, you know the effect and you know the solution. But the leg is still broken! So, this is where I see step 10 doing the business! In short, we practice opposites, when fear tells you to turn back; you go forward and face it. When resentment starts justifying its presence, just look at your defects, and look at your reactions! When the past re-emerges, as it will and guilt bites at you again, say "my Higher Power forgives me" so don't believe those guilty thoughts, look for the good, think, "That was then, this is now".

Things from the past will pop into the mind at the strangest of times. Just write it down and look at it, just as you did in Step 4 and 5. When the depressing feelings come back, say, "You have been here before, so do your business and go when you're ready".

Continuing to take an inventory does not mean that you become self-obsessed, it means, just look, observe, but don't get involved with those thoughts that say, "The best way not to fail is not to try". The S.A.S, their motto is, "Who dares wins" a spiritual motto is, "Who cares wins".

I get ratty at times but I say I am sorry promptly, and let that be the end of it. If you are feeling resentful, fearful or angry say, "What is going on in my life?". "What has changed between now and the last time you were happy?", "What is going on in your life?". So, again the solution is practice opposites

Step 11

Sought through, prayer and meditation, to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for use and the power to carry that out.

In step 3, we decided to look for a new manager, because we were unhappy, addicted, obsessive etc. We thought, "Well, I tried everything my way, and the result was pain! So, that is where I suppose, humility starts to come into our lives.

Whether you believe in a Christian God, or a Higher Power, or just have a belief in wisdom, then this step will work. If your mind is full of neurotic thoughts then they have to be replaced with a belief system, a different attitude. I love the serenity prayer: I state acceptance, what is acceptance but a way of stopping anger, remember acceptance does not mean you agree, it means you stop the thoughts in your head spinning around like a washing machine! Your God wants you to be happy right now. The present is a result of the past, and the future will be a result of the present.

If, say, you miss a train, don't think, "I have to wait another 30 minutes", think "I had to learn this lesson sooner or later, it is better I learn it now, than putting it off to the future". If you had to get that train, (you will never know this) but, just maybe you would have fallen over someone's suitcase, breaking your neck and then being confined to a wheelchair. You will never know that, but it is less strain on the nerves to accept the situation, than blowing your top through impatience and self-pity. So if its Gods will for you to be at that station right now, or it is bad luck, take the less painful way out by accepting.

Gods will is for you not to suffer emotionally, it is fair to say that you may have put so much effort into your recovery that you will never have any problems. Well, the 3 'D's will come biting at your ankles. Death, dis-ease and disappointment. This is because you are now on a spiritual path, it does mean that you and your loved ones will never get sick, never die or never ever get disappointed, wrong, very wrong!

Reality has to be looked at and understood. The Power has to come into your life to accept the 3 'D's, to stop fighting the 3 'D's, but to work on that power, that power can be the power of prayer, wisdom, faith or sheer guts to beat the problem.

Remember, having peace of mind is not having no problems, but living with unsolved problems. Peace of mind, I remember the first time I had a space in between thoughts in my head, it was a spiritual experience. I knew what was on offer, I had never had a quiet mind, it had always been resentful, guilty, fearful or disappointed, and asking why.

To have a mind that is quiet, tranquil, serene, that is your creators design for you! Gods will, your creator has created lovely people, lovely places, it wants you to find them. If you do nothing then nothing will happen! I found that the 8 'R's helped to get on this path to peace and when I slipped off the 8 'R's, it helped me get back on them. They are the keys to a peaceful life.

Right Understanding
Right aspiration Wisdom
Right speech
Right action Morality
Right Livelihood
Right effort
Right mindfulness Concentration
Right concentration

There are also 4 'T's, that help me and they are four noble truths.

Truth of suffering
Truth of the cause of suffering
Truth of there is a way out of suffering
Truth of the way out of suffering.

When you look at the 4 'T's it is a fact that every human being suffers from the 3 'D's, that is true, no one escapes them, not the rich, not the poor, not the intelligent, not the illiterate, no one!!!

So, this is where Right Understanding comes in. To understand, not to agree, but to understand suffer when we want life different to what it is, was, or is going to be. We crave, we want to always be happy and to never let life's realities come our way, or the way of our loved ones! So, this is where right aspiration comes in. Aspiration is another way of saying desire. To know that there is a way out of mental turmoil. If we apply the following, life becomes less of a burden.

Right speech
Right action
Right livelihood
Right effort
Right mindfulness
Right concentration.

When you look at a lovely countryside, hear a bird sing, or feel a lovely breeze, my senses are alive. No more dulling of the emotions today, I feel grief when someone dies, I feel it, I accept it and I get on with my life! I know the feeling of grief never stays. Today, when I feel happy, I also know that that will pass. The cliché "This shall pass" does not only mean that the bad times will leave, it also means that death, disease and disappointment will be our companion. Not one person who has ever been born has escaped the 3 'D's, so don't expect you will. This is where meditation comes in, seeing reality and nurturing wisdom! Slowing the mind down.

When I meditate I picture myself drinking or using drugs again. I meditate, I watch the scenario unfold in my mind, I see how it can be if I don't stay on the path. The twelve steps. These are my tools, I reflect on them, I visualize my own death, and I realize that I, like everyone else is not perfect !

I think of the joy my children give me (as I write this I have a 20 year old daughter who has never seen me drunk, aggressive, violent or acting in any selfish type of manner. I also have a 10-year-old daughter who has only ever been loved by me. I learnt from my step 4 and step 5 how I suffered from other people's actions, so my girls only get love from me).

I like to reflect about my lovely dog, Marlon, who died, aged 18. I cried when he died. I cried in front of my daughter over the loss of my loyal, lovely dog (as I write I am crying thinking of him). I miss him, but not in a self-pitying way, but in a sad way!

Power mentioned in this step. Power to bring peace into my life and to others. That power can be tolerance, gratitude, acceptance, humility, honesty, courage. They are powers greater than my defects.

If you have a problem with a God then just practice opportunities and reflect using Insight Meditation.

Step 12

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to those that still suffer, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Well I was once mad, now I am glad. Yes, glad to be alive.

At times I feel so much joy that it seems like a dream.

Recently I went to 7 funerals in a very short space of time. My Dad, my Brother, my Sponsor, a cousin killed himself, my partner's Mother, a sponsee who I had sponsored for 10 years died. I was buckling under, the grief, panic attacks started to hit me. I kept thinking, "Feel the grief, don't try and repress it". I would not be human if I did not feel grief. Those 7 funerals, on reflection, made me realize that life is to be enjoyed. I would sit and meditate on grief. This, what I see as spiritual awaking, is about to realize that if our happiness depends on what other people say or do, then we are going to be miserable for the rest of our lives. Spiritual awakening is to see that I am the problem, my reactions to life's events.

Well, today I know my experience had helped people. I have 12 stepped people. One recently celebrated 25 years of sobriety. I pass the message when I can, where I can, to who wants to listen.

My pain has helped other people not to do what I did.

I practice these spiritual principles in every area of my life. Emotionally, sexually, financial, workplace, home, meeting room. I try my best. I tried one time, to try and save the world. My intentions were honorable, but I burnt out. So, today I would sooner do good, than bad. Today I would sooner kiss someone's feet, rather than fight them!

I owe my life to David B, the man who 12 stepped me and took me through the Steps. (A lovely man, I miss him). He put a lot of effort into passing the 12 Step message, he accepted life, a life's term, and in doing so, had peace of mind.

I owe so much to my Buddhist teacher, Ajahn Sumedho, whose caring non religious message goes hand in hand with my 12 Step path. Today I know what the spiritual path is about. It is not about religion, but about understanding life, understanding people and understanding that the more you want your own way, the more you suffer!

We all have peace of mind, it may be buried under the dust of defect of character. Blow that dust away and there is your peace of mind. If you are miserable now, then practice opposites. It is as simple as that.

Soldier Billy

<http://www.the12steps.com>