

## NOTES ON STEP 4

***When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically. (64: 3)***

*I ruthlessly faced my sins* [blocks to Spirit]. (Bill's Story, 13: 2)  
Heard in a meeting: "We need self-acceptance before we can have self improvement."

### **Problem / Solution / Program of Action**

We have come a long way to reach Step 4. We now understand that our problem lies in being powerless over such recurring mental obsessions as the thought that we can drink again in safety, when taking that drink triggers our physical compulsion to drink to excess.

Our solution is to find a power greater than any one of us which can restore us to sanity, health, and wholeness.

Our program of action is to turn our life and will over to such a power, of our own understanding, by the discipline of the daily practice of the Twelve Steps within the AA fellowship. The key to this action is our experience that *our troubles...are basically of our own making.* (62: 2) We have learned that our own reactions to hard times or good times have become self-centered thought-habits that frequently stand in the way of recovery. We learn that with help, we can change these for our own serenity.

### **Kit of spiritual tools**

We have been promised a *kit of spiritual tools.* (25: 1) Step 4 delivers a *process* (64: 1), a *method* (114: 1) and a *treatment* (551: 1) that we can use often on our reactions to past events and present day troubles (Step 10), so we are less likely to pick up a drink and more likely to have peace of mind. While there is hard work ahead, we will be learning a lot about ourselves, and we do not have to dread it. Step 4 is not a test, we cannot fail it. The last thing we need is another chance to beat up on ourselves.

### **Assets**

[An] *inventory...is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade.*(64: 1)  
We are in the business of staying sober, and the ways we think and behave are the stock

in trade. We are practicing understanding the exact nature of what in our lives has not worked to give us peace of mind and also what have we done right. We may address questions like these:

- What qualities do I like about myself? That others like?
- What are my values? Which ones am I committed to living by, and how?
- How have I shown concern for others, including myself?
- What spiritual principles am I practicing in my life?
- When have I done the right thing? What are my successes?

[For Step 4 assets see BB pages 67: 0, 1 and 70: 3. Also see the optional adapted 1946 A.A. *Grapevine* “Assets and Liabilities checklist” on page 34 of this workbook for a sample list of assets.]

### **Blocks to our Spirit**

The premise of Step 4 is that we have difficulty turning our life and will over because some of our thoughts and behaviors block us from experiencing our Spirit – our higher power or our own better nature. We use the Step 4 process in order to identify these habitual blocking thoughts and behaviors in any resentment, fear, or hurtful action. Once we look deeper inside for the source of our old worn out defenses, or patterns, or defects, or shortcomings, which are usually involved in the roles we played in painful life events, then we can move on and change them in the Steps that follow. This enables us to clear a channel choked up with self-centered, dishonest or fearful motives and permits us to return to our search for our higher power's will, not our own, in any moment of stress. (Optional, see *12&12*, 103: 0)

### **What part of ourselves?**

Through practice we learn to focus not so much on who it was that hurt or threatened us, or how they did that, but more on what part of ourselves was disturbed so that we drank, or acted as though we had been drinking. This often relates to feelings associated with our attitudes, personalities and behaviors in reaction to real or imagined threats to our security, our self esteem, or our sex / relationship instincts. We have little control over others and what they do, but we can change how we habitually react to life events. This is difficult for us. But, if we do not change we may drink. We have to ask for help. We find that help through the discipline of the practice of the Twelve Steps.

## **Where are we responsible?**

We develop new skills in asking where we were responsible in the course of day to day happenings. The Big Book authors never accuse, criticize, or judge us. The purpose of this step is to help us become aware of ourselves as we were in the past and how we are today. We are invited to precisely describe our thinking and behavior. We name our part. We wrestle with spiritual inquiries such as where was I self-centered or dishonest or at fault? We must honestly ask what these terms mean to us in our own experience and in our own words. (See 47: 1; 63: 3) We set down a true picture in accurate proportion and real perspective of how we were involved.

We may have been selfish intentionally, or because we did not even think of the concerns of others. Certainly we have often lied or not been genuine on purpose, but we are also dishonest when we see things only in our own distorted way, and not as they really are. Our self-seeking and inconsiderate behaviors relate to where we tried to control or manipulate others, thinking that we were better than or inferior to them. Fear is our number one character defect, underneath all the others. Our behaviors are driven by ancient fears for our very existence, of losing our security, of not getting our desires, and of being shown up for what we are trying to hide. These culminate in our faults: our instincts and emotions in collision, or deep seismic gaps between what we instinctively want for ourselves and what we wish for others.

In Step 4, we practice giving accurate descriptions of what has blocked us from our Spirit. We state where we missed the mark when we could have been on target, and where we were out of bounds in this game of life. Why do we behave in these ways? Because we are alcoholic. (See 60: 2; 338)

## **Turnarounds**

In focused meditation and prayer, we recognize that others like ourselves are sick and suffering. We ask our higher power to help us wish for others and for ourselves that we all may have deep happiness, genuine serenity, and peace of mind. This helps return us to being right size, and gives us a new perspective as we join in with life. We find that we put our trust in this new faith, not by way of emotion or wishing, but by our own experience through our own practice.

## Step 4 Directions

The directions for Step 4 are in the Big Book, yet surprisingly few alcoholics in recovery comprehend them, and fewer still practice them. Our goal is to do both. Our method is to follow the instructions as written and see what the results are.

The reading describes what an inventory is. (64: 1) Then the Big Book authors look at *the things in ourselves which had been blocking us* (64: 0) from our higher power, which turns out to be *self, manifested in various ways*. (64: 2) This chapter specifically mentions the blocks to our Spirit of our *resentments* (64: 3), our *fears* (64: 3), and the consequences of *our own conduct* (69: 1) in the area of *our personal relationships (including sex)*. (64: 3 - 65: 0) For each of these three manifestations of self (anger, fear, sex) the book has us analyze our life experiences in these four ways:

1<sup>ST</sup> *We set them on paper*. (64: 3) We learn that our troubles are not so much **who** hurt us or **how** they did that, but rather may stem from our own reaction to **what** part of ourselves is being threatened.

2<sup>ND</sup> *We considered it carefully*. (65: 3) **Why** work to change? We learn that we have to wrestle with these issues or we may drink again and die.

3<sup>RD</sup> *We turned back to the list*. (66: 3) **When** we are ready to change we learn we must avoid retaliation, and instead see others as being as sick and as worthy as ourselves.

4<sup>TH</sup> *Referring to our list again*. (67: 2) We learn that by examining our *defects* and *shortcomings* (50: 1), our *motives* (86: 2) and *the exact nature of our wrongs* (59: 2), **where** we may be *selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, and frightened*, (67: 2) we thereby become **willing** *to set these matters straight*. (67: 2)

Each of these four workings of our lists teaches us something from our own experience that can keep us sober and open the way to our own higher power.

For our resentment inventory in Session 8 and Session 9, we will do a close and careful reading of the Big Book pages 64 to 66, and pages 66 to 67.

Session 10 covers fears, BB pages 67 to 68.

Session 11 looks at our sex and relationship conduct, BB pages 68 to 71.

Session 12 has an optional 'pocket' Step 4 guide written by a group member, which is available for review.

Optional Step 4 written inventory forms are included.