

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

In the fourth step we had begun the work of breaking down the denial we had lived in for so many years. We had developed a clear picture of who we were. We were then ready to bring our fourth step into the full light of day. So, we moved on to Step Five where we simply shared the entire inventory we had made. We did this as soon as possible so that what we had discovered would not overwhelm us. By freeing ourselves of the secrets and shame that had driven our addiction, we freed ourselves to embrace the healthy side of our lives. Step Five furthered the process of healing and moved us toward wholeness. It opened us to feeling both love from others and love for ourselves.

When we took Step Four, we identified attitudes and patterns of behavior that had hurt ourselves and others. In the fifth step we referred to these as our “wrongs.” So what did we mean by “exact nature” of our wrongs? We meant an honest and thorough assessment. We were specific when we wrote down our inventory; we were specific when we shared it.

Writing our fourth step was an act of courage. Once it was completed, we may have thought, “Thank God, that’s over.” At that point we may have had resistance to taking the fifth step. Some of us said, “I know that God knows, so why do I have to tell anyone else what I wrote down? Why can’t I just take this with me to the grave?” We may have believed that talking about what we had written down wouldn’t do any good. “What’s done is done,” some of us thought. “My talking about it can’t change anything.” Others of us even believed taking the fifth step would hurt us. “What will someone who hears these things think of me? Will what I’m sharing be kept confidential?” In any case, the prospect of doing the fifth step frightened many of us. Yet, our collective experience and the wisdom of almost all spiritual paths, tell us that talking about our deep secrets *will* heal us. We were reminded of the slogan, “We are only as sick as our secrets.”

How did we choose the person with whom we would take the fifth step? We were careful to select someone who understood our addiction; someone who knew us and the process we were going through in recovery; someone who would not judge us; someone we trusted, who would listen with understanding and compassion. Many of us chose our SRA sponsor. After all, she or he was helping us walk through the Twelve Steps. Others chose a respected spiritual advisor, a trusted friend, or a counselor. A definite advantage to sharing our fourth step with someone who knew us well was that their input often helped to clarify what we had written. They helped us to deepen our understanding of what had happened.

When we met with this person to share our inventory, we started by saying the Serenity Prayer or other appropriate prayer together. This helped us remember that we were not alone—that our Higher Power was there to guide us and give us strength. Indeed, it reminded us that in sharing with another person we also would be admitting our wrongs to our Higher Power.

We started by sharing what we had written in our fourth step. Some of us, who were afraid that we had written too little, often found that in sharing, we verbally elaborated on what we had written. Others of us with this fear realized that what we had written was, in fact, enough. Then there were those of us who thought that we had written too much and feared that no one would listen to all of it. Here we discovered that our listener was willing to go the distance. Others of us feared that a lengthy fourth step meant we were obsessive or perfectionistic, or that such a long list meant we were just plain “bad.” In the end, it became clear that honesty and thoroughness were what was most important, regardless of the length of our written fourth step.

We realized that the process of lifting the words from the page and sharing them relieved us of shame. Before taking our fifth step, we were afraid that if we brought our secrets into the light, we would be crushed by the weight of this shame. Instead, sharing our deepest secrets lifted a heavy weight from our shoulders, a weight we had carried alone for so long. Many of us even recalled events forgotten or repressed. Indeed, we found that we revealed those secrets that we had sworn we would take with us to the grave.

By admitting our wrongs to another human being and our Higher Power, we were also more clearly admitting our wrongs to ourselves. We gained a deeper understanding and awareness of the exact nature of our wrongs. By sharing out loud we further acknowledged those behaviors and beliefs that contributed to our unmanageability.

After sharing “our wrongs,” many of us found it difficult to share our assets that we had listed in Step Four. Since we were very hard on ourselves we felt we did not deserve to talk about them. For some of us these assets seemed insignificant in comparison to our wrongs. However, the person we shared with often helped us become aware we had even more positive qualities. Recognizing our assets was an important beginning to a new way of looking at ourselves. We started to gain a more balanced perspective of who we really were.

After sharing, many of us felt exhausted and grateful. Completing our fifth step, we were encouraged to have a quiet time alone to meditate and review what had just taken place. If we felt vulnerable after taking Step Five, we stayed in very close contact with our sponsor and other people in the program.

With our secrets shared and the burden of shame relieved, many of us felt free for the first time that we could remember. One person related, “When I began my fifth step I felt that I consisted of two parts. After taking this step, I was one again. That part with the secrets was gone.” In this oneness, we were free to emphasize and enhance our positive characteristics and channel our energy into our healthy self.

If we did not experience this intense relief we may have believed we had done something wrong. However, we were assured that this was not uncommon and that the change within us could be subtle. We eventually came to realize over months and even years how deeply we were changed.

For many of us, taking Step Five was a spiritual experience. Walking free in the light of truth for the first time in many years, we were beginning to understand more deeply the words written in the SRA pamphlet:

“The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of SRA offer a healing home in which our spirits can at first rest, then grow, and finally soar.”