

Step Eight

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

In the previous four Steps we worked to uncover and heal from those actions and behaviors that had hurt ourselves and others. We started out by writing a moral inventory of our lives; we admitted to God and to another person those things we had written down; we became willing to let go of our defects and then moved on to ask our Higher Power to remove them. This was the beginning of a process of letting God return us to vulnerable human beings, equals among equals, with genuine feelings capable of giving and receiving love, respect and affection. We were now prepared to deal even more deeply and directly with the work of actually cleaning up the debris of our past. We were ready to take the next step by preparing to mend the harms we had caused as part of our illness—we were ready to take Step Eight.

However, many of us still hesitated to move forward. The reality hit us that we were going to be confronted by the shame that has stemmed from our past misdeeds: our inability to stop harming others and our willingness to take part in activities we believed to be wrong. We had already experienced so much damage to our sense of self-worth that we thought that this Step would be too painful to complete—especially for those of us who grew up in conditions of abuse or neglect.

At that point we were reminded by members of the fellowship that, by taking Steps Eight and Nine, they had been able to set right the wrongs they had done to others. When we thought about our own past, we did not believe it possible for us to do the same. However, we could not deny their happiness. Even though they had been burdened with shame about the damage they had caused, they were now at peace. They were able to readily share their experience, strength and hope about Steps Eight and Nine. They talked freely about wrongs they had done and how they made their amends. Hearing them, we realized the harms we had done were not so different from theirs. This gave us the courage to move ahead with this step.

When we read the Eighth Step we saw that there were two parts to taking this Step: first, we were asked to list all those whom we had harmed and second, we had to become willing to make amends to them. Looking at the first of these, no matter what our intentions had been, when we interacted with others, our actions had consequences and sometimes those around us were hurt.

We found it helpful when working this step to have an understanding of what it meant to “harm” another person. Some of the more obvious harms may have been physical, such as attacking, hitting or striking someone. Less directly, we could have done physical harm by infecting another person with a sexually transmitted disease or involving them in a car accident caused by our sexual addiction. Other obvious harms were financial, which may have occurred in the

form of stealing, damaging property, not repaying our debts, billing for hours not worked or padding expense accounts. Indirect financial harm may have come from spending money on our disease rather than taking care of the needs of our loved ones and ourselves.

Some of us also harmed people emotionally. An obvious instance was when others close to us discovered our sexual acting out and felt betrayed. Other examples of emotional harm included being verbally abusive, judgmental, shaming, domineering or controlling. Less obvious ones may have been lying to, gossiping about, ignoring, or withholding affection from others. Another important emotional harm could have been manipulating others to get what we wanted, especially for sex when our only intention was to feed our addiction while leading others to believe differently.

There were also times when harm occurred through physical or emotional neglect. Physical neglect may have included lack of attention to another's basic needs such as food, clothing or shelter. Emotional neglect could possibly have come from not keeping our commitments or not showing up for others. A lack of caring, supporting, understanding and being compassionate were some of the other ways we created emotional neglect. These behaviors happened most often and were most hurtful to those whom we were closest to, including our significant others and children.

Harms were also brought to our attention when the person we had harmed communicated this to us directly, either verbally or in writing.

Sometimes we had harmed others without realizing it because we had done this subconsciously. In these cases, whether we felt that we had harmed others or not, we needed to seriously consider putting them on our list of amends. A person may have communicated to us indirectly by a change in their behavior. This could have included becoming reluctant to honestly communicate with us, withdrawing from us or avoiding contact with us entirely. In these cases, we may have tried to communicate with the person to better understand the meaning of their behavior. If it turned out that they felt harmed by us and we were still unclear if they belonged on our list, we discussed it with our sponsor or others we trusted.

Having become aware of the many ways we may have hurt others, the next part of our work was to make a list of all those we had harmed. Most of us had already started our list in our Fourth Step inventory. When we had written down our inventory, we had also named the specific individuals we felt hurt by, angry with or who we resented. Importantly, it is also here that we may come face to face with our greatest obstacles to making our list: these same lingering hurts, angers and resentments.

So it often proved difficult putting certain people on our list. Some of them had genuinely treated us badly. Did we now have to make amends to them? “He hurt me more than I hurt him.” “She treated me with disrespect.” Would we really have to humble ourselves by offering these people amends for our reactions to their wrongs?

At this point, in order for us to wrestle free from the shackles of our past, our sponsors or other program members may have helped us understand that we needed to stay focused on our own behavior rather than the behavior of others. In the previous steps we came to see that those harms that came from our resentments and anger only diminished our spirits—made us bitter, fearful, ungrateful and untrusting. This had shrunk the quality of our lives and sapped us of the joy of living.

Furthermore, these behaviors may have conditioned us to get through life by striking out at others who had actually done nothing at all to harm us, dooming us to a circle of ever more despairing behavior. We saw that we could not change what had happened; we could not alter how other people had harmed us. The only course of action for *our* healing was to put these people on our lists.

Along with these people, we also need to guard against thoughts such as “oh, it really wasn’t that important,” “it was such a long time ago” or “I don’t even know who the person was.” These thoughts, along with our pride or fear often led us to wanting to minimize what we had done in order to shorten our list. However, in the end, a list that is as thorough and accurate as possible will lead us to our greatest healing.

In considering what harms we have done others, something significant has been left out of our list, namely the idea of making amends to ourselves. For most of us, it was not intuitive that we

include ourselves on our lists but others told us they found it was critically important. When we had looked back at our lives and seen how many experiences we had lived through without really being present for them because of our addiction, we started to realize the depth of the harm we had done to ourselves. Those included missing relationships that might have truly enriched our lives, being absent while our children grew up, missing family relationships that might have had the chance of healing and growing, and never finding the intimacy and closeness that we always sought.

Also, there were many other things that we missed due to our addiction. There were career and work opportunities that we wanted and either missed or sabotaged. There were the living situations we missed such as the house or apartment, the neighborhood or city where we wanted to live. Added to this were the loneliness, stress and depression we endured, which led some of us to suicidal thoughts. Then there were the diseases we contracted due to our addiction, some of which were life threatening. We need to keep all these things in mind when we go to Step Nine to make amends to ourselves.

After considering and praying on all we had read and heard about Step Eight, it was time to actually write down our list. It was helpful for us to see that Step Eight only asked us to make our list of amends. It did not require us to go any further than that. Yes, we may have had feelings about the people on our list; we may have feared facing these people, but it was useful to remember that at this time we were

only making a list. We didn't have to plan how we would make our amends.

Then when we had finished making our list, it was helpful to share it with our sponsor or other trusted person. When we turned over our Fifth Step it had helped us to see our part in things more clearly. Similarly, sharing our Eighth Step list helped us get more clarity. Sharing our list helped some of us gain a balanced and objective view of what we had written. Our sponsor might advise us to leave amends off our list that were perhaps unnecessary, or help us face up to amends that were too scary to admit.

Then there was the second part of Step Eight, a part that we may have wanted to avoid or that we overlooked: "became willing to make amends to them all." We may have assumed that having made our list we were ready to go on to Step Nine; we might have thought there was nothing to do between making the list and making the amends. However, Step Eight specifically asks us to be willing to make amends to *everybody* on our list, something that we may not have been ready to do. There may have been some people who we thought we could never face again and who we would be better off avoiding. However, this was a lesson in humility which we had been preparing for in the previous seven steps. We began to trust that if our Higher Power had taken us this far, we would be given the strength to face whatever was next. Our Higher Power had given us the willingness to scour our past, the honesty to admit our secrets

and the courage and humility to make our list of those we had harmed.

So we turned once more to our Higher Power for this willingness. Many of us heard that the way to do this was through prayer and meditation. It was, after all, prayer that brought us through so many of our recovery challenges to this point. Therefore we turned to our Higher Power with prayer and meditation to help us with the resentments, shame and fear that came up as we considered making these amends. In addition, we remembered that our Higher Power also spoke through the group as a whole. Others in the meeting shared their experience, strength and hope with us about this step. We saw how they were at peace as a result of working Steps Eight and Nine. So we reached out to them for support to help us become willing. Through prayer and reaching out to others we continued to trust that our Higher Power would give us the strength and the willingness to make amends to all those we had harmed. With this help we knew we could take whatever actions necessary in order to be free. Then we moved on to Step Nine.