

Step Nine

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

As we started working Step Nine we began to realize the deep and meaningful connections from Step to Step that culminated in our arriving at this one. The very same defects of character we unearthed in Steps Four and Five and asked to be removed in Steps Six and Seven were responsible for our regrettable acts toward others. In these four Steps we looked inward and began to be freed of the pain that our character defects were causing us. In Step Eight we then looked outward and made a thorough list of those people we had harmed because of those defects. Now in Step Nine, we began to finish clearing up the wreckage of our past by making amends to those we had harmed.

However, the thought of making amends for the harms we had done was frightening for many of us. We still carried the emotional wounds of our childhood, which told us that being vulnerable and admitting mistakes carried a heavy price of humiliation, shame and punishment. Prior to recovery we rarely received compassion or understanding when we made mistakes or did things that we knew were wrong. So we may have felt dread or terror when thinking about approaching people we had harmed because of our sexual acting out or our character defects. We wondered how they would react. And we felt concern for our sobriety. What if contact with them would make us want to act out again?

This was where our previous work in the program aided us. Members of the fellowship had been with us since our early recovery. They helped us remember that our lives had changed and healed in ways we never could have imagined. Besides, we couldn't deny that we had seen the same changes take place in them. At the same time, we were warned that if we did not make amends, the memory of our wrongs might live in us, returning again and again to trouble us. They assured us that this Step was going to lead us to one of our deepest healings—putting our past to rest by making amends. This gave us the courage to move forward.

We started our work by looking at the list that we had prepared in Step Eight. It had been necessary to approach each of our amends with humility. That meant we had asked for God's help and guidance. We reviewed what we intended to say with a sponsor or other program member. This helped us to be clear about

our motives and do the right things for the right reasons. We found that there could be no room for thoughts of revenge or spiritual one-upmanship, and that our amends needed to stay focused on our part, and our part alone. We sought the love and care of our Higher Power, both for us and the person to whom we were to make amends. This made it more likely that our amends would lead to healing, rather than making matters worse.

It was also critical to consider whether making direct amends would do harm to the intended person or others. While we hoped to feel relief from the burdens of our past when making amends, we could not do this at the expense of further hurting someone else. We needed to weigh carefully the benefits of full disclosure against the possibility of opening fresh wounds. Sometimes those hurts had the potential of running very deep. For many of us, this was particularly true with our partner or spouse. We decided these things neither lightly nor by ourselves. When questions came up about whether or not we might hurt someone with our amends, we shared our uncertainties and reasoned things out with our sponsor, other members or other spiritual helpers. Most importantly, we were reminded to go to any length to make every single amend. We needed to do this to stay honest and sober.

While we may have hoped making amends would restore broken relationships or bring healing within our families, there was no guarantee that would happen. This was not the purpose of our amends. In some cases, we were not as well received as we had expected but we did not use that as a reason to avoid making amends. Once we had made our amends and any restitution necessary, no matter how the other person reacted, we found ourselves free from the burden of the past.

Most of our direct amends had consisted of an acknowledgement of what we had done wrong, a sincere apology for our behavior, a willingness to make restitution and, in many cases, an explanation of how we were trying to live differently. It was best when we kept it simple, not rehashing old events or dramatizing the situation. We were particularly careful not to let old resentments stand in the way of making an amend. We avoided any argument that tried to justify ourselves or our behavior. We remembered we were not there to change the other person. We were there only to acknowledge our own wrongs. When resentments still stood in the way of making an amend, our sponsor usually suggested we return to Steps Four and Eight in order to surrender that resentment and move forward.

There were some amends we found very difficult to make. Not often, but sometimes, no matter how carefully and humbly we approached the person we were making amends to, we were met with hostility. In situations such as these, we returned to our sponsors or others for their help and support. In cases where the person may not even have been willing to hear us, we chose to complete our amends indirectly. In any case, we did what we could given the circumstances. We then let go and moved on.

Other difficult situations could include financial amends. We needed to be honest about them and completely willing to make full restitution. However, we were advised that the time and manner of the restitution should not be unreasonably burdensome to us or our families. Otherwise we were in danger of failing to keep our word and breaking any trust we may have gained. Sometimes, we had unresolved legal situations. In those cases, we needed to deal with the appropriate legal authorities. Again, we found it critical to seek the guidance of a sponsor or program friends when approaching these situations. They could talk us through what we planned to say so we could keep it honest, direct, and respectful. Whatever we had to face, we did not have to face it alone. In any case, we practiced patience, making amends right away when we could, and trusted that our Higher Power would lead us to the right circumstances for making other amends.

The amends to the family could be particularly difficult. When making these amends, we found it best to approach each family member separately because blanket amends did not address individual feelings and experiences. Of course, the most meaningful and helpful amends we could make were “our living amends”—to live sober, honest and spiritual lives going forward. We worked to be a part of their lives by being caring and supportive.

There were times when direct amends were not advisable or possible. In those cases, our sponsor or spiritual advisor suggested we make indirect amends. We found their help was necessary when deciding which amends should be indirect. In many cases, the reasons for making indirect amends were fairly obvious such as when the person was no longer living or we didn't know the person's name or where they lived. Then, there were cases where the answer was not clear as to when amends might have hurt another person. In these situations, we asked ourselves, “Am I truly avoiding hurting that person or am I avoiding making a direct amend?” We answered this question and others in discussions we had with our sponsor or spiritual advisor.

Having decided on making an indirect amend, we were then faced with the decision about *how* to make that amend. Once again, we turned to our sponsor for experience, strength and hope. We found that there were many ways of making indirect amends. One suggestion was to write a letter. Then, we found a quiet place where we could read this letter to our sponsor. We shared our feelings with our sponsor about having made that amends. Often, our sponsor gave us further insight and support about what we had written. Then, our sponsor helped us decide what to do with the letter. Some of us burned it; some of us mailed it, knowing the address on the envelope wasn't sufficient for delivery; some of us kept it, reminding us of our amend.

Other times the best indirect amends was to do some act of kindness for someone else entirely. We treated this other person or organization as we wished we had treated the one we had harmed. Sometimes we made amends in unique ways that came to us from discussions with our sponsor. One member who received food stamps illegally made monthly donations to a food assistance program as his amends. For women he could not remember by name or could not reach, another member made donations to a battered women's support agency. We also got ideas for other unique amends from listening to other members share about their amends at meetings. As always, one of the most important indirect amends we made was our "living amends"—our continued commitment to our recovery and the changes we were making in our lives.

There were also situations from past amends that still burdened us. In those cases, we came to realize that not all the harms done were addressed the first time or that the amends had not felt sufficient. So, we revisited those amends and worked with our sponsor or spiritual guide and chose another way to complete them. As an indirect amend, there was a member who wrote a letter to a person he had harmed but later felt the letter did not seem to complete the amend. So after a discussion with his sponsor, he performed a charitable weekly-service thinking of the person he had harmed as he carried out that service. The guilt and shame of the harm he had done finally left him.

Along with these amends to others, we were reminded to include ourselves in our amends. We did this in many ways. First and foremost, we worked on our recovery daily: we worked the Steps with our sponsor; we went to meetings; we reached out to others; we did service; we got sober. We started to take better care of ourselves than ever before. We stopped berating ourselves and started to treat ourselves with gentleness. Eventually, with God's care we came to love

ourselves. We forgave ourselves for our past wrongdoings. One member used this prayer, "I make amends to myself. I forgive myself. I am powerless and I am human. I forgive myself for actions that harmed others and me. I forgive myself as my Higher Power forgives me. I am being restored to sanity by my loving Higher Power."

After making each amend, either direct or indirect, we took some quiet time to reflect on what we had experienced and how we felt. Many of us felt an immediate sense of relief. We began to sense the profound changes already happening in our lives. The burdens of the past were starting to be lifted. We saw that each time we made an amends to another person we felt freer.

At this point in our recovery, we found that we were being transformed in many positive ways. We were learning how to live life with openness, honesty and integrity. We were being healed of the shame and guilt that had burdened us. We were making peace with our past and were being given a new sense of freedom. Self-loathing and feelings of worthlessness were giving way to a deeper sense of self-love and self-worth. Sorrow and regret were giving way to joy and gratitude. Fear and negative projections were being replaced with hope and optimism. We were coming to realize that we were equal with others, no better or worse. We were realizing we were part of the world, not apart from the world. We were accepting, even welcoming, our feelings rather than denying them. Obsessive thinking and fantasizing were diminishing and we were becoming better connected to the real world. We were finding a new capacity for compassion, generosity and caring, and were helping our fellow sufferers and others. Spirituality and self-love were bringing us the gift of healthy sexuality. More and more, we were feeling a deep gratitude to our Higher Power. We were realizing, increasingly, that our Higher Power was working in our lives; problems and situations that once seemed intractable were resolving themselves. Experiencing these changes made us ready to be of greater service to our Higher Power and others.

Are these Promises within our reach? Yes, they are! SRA offers us a healing home in which our spirits can at first rest, then grow and finally soar.

Having done our best to be thorough, we trusted we would have the strength and willingness to deal with other amends when the time came. This brought us to Step Ten.