



Welcome to my second book. This work completes my trilogy of financial serenity, self-development, and spiritual growth. Instead of piecing together spiritual or religious truths without form, now everything comes together in clear and precise steps for your own personal awakening. Prepare yourself for the sublime results of inspecting the world's spiritual and religious paths for their similarities instead of their differences....regardless of whether you simply want a more peaceful satisfying life; want to address long-ignored personal or family issues; or are truly hungry for the answer to such questions as "Who or what am I, and why am I here?"



...As We Forgive Our
Debtors

Twelve Steps to
Self-Development,
Spiritual Growth,
Performing Miracles

ROBERT E. STRAYER

The author has made this PDF download free to all Americans. It is his humble contribution to help you overcome our current health, cultural, financial, and constitutional crises.

“As We Forgive Our Debtors” is supported on my [Facebook Page: www.AsWeForgiveOurDebtors.com](http://www.AsWeForgiveOurDebtors.com) Feel free to ask your questions and obtain your clarifications among new friends. Don't miss the Step Study Book Club on this FB page... Are you ready for a national step study program of peace and love??

Use the precious bonus time of your stay at home, to understand and renew your relationships with others, including family members. Never before in your lifetime have you seen such division and confusion in your beloved country...separated only by one's information source.

Copyright © 2017 Robert E. Strayer.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted by any means—whether auditory, graphic, mechanical, or electronic—without written permission of the author, except in the case of brief excerpts used in critical articles and reviews. Unauthorized reproduction of any part of this work is illegal and is punishable by law.

The information, ideas, and suggestions in this book are not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice. Before following any suggestions contained in this book, you should consult your personal physician. Neither the author nor the publisher shall be liable or responsible for any loss or damage allegedly arising as a consequence of your use or application of any information or suggestions in this book.

ISBN: 978-1-4834-6693-4 (sc)

ISBN: 978-1-4834-6692-7 (e)

Because of the dynamic nature of the Internet, any web addresses or links contained in this book may have changed since publication and may no longer be valid. The views expressed in this work are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher, and the publisher hereby disclaims any responsibility for them.

Any people depicted in stock imagery provided by Thinkstock are models, and such images are being used for illustrative purposes only.
Certain stock imagery © Thinkstock.

Scripture taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

The Twelve Steps are adapted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. ("A.A.W.S.") Permission to adapt the Twelve Steps does not mean that A.A.W.S. has reviewed or approved the contents of this publication, or that A.A. necessarily agrees with the views expressed herein. A.A. is a program of recovery from alcoholism only - use of the Twelve Steps in connection with programs and activities which are patterned after A.A., but which address other problems, or in any other non-A.A., does not imply otherwise.

All quotes from *A Course in Miracles* © are from the Third Edition, published in 2007. They are used with written permission from the copyright holder and publisher, the Foundation for Inner Peace, P.O. Box 598, Mill Valley, CA 94942-0598, www.acim.org and info@acim.org.

Lulu Publishing Services rev. date: 04/13/2017



In ...*As We Forgive Our Debtors*, Strayer accomplishes something many find impossible: A way to teach a problem-free existence to anyone, despite their religious or spiritual belief, or the lack of either. Even the atheist or agnostic will weep with joy at the loving truths contained herein.

Strayer himself admits to being an agnostic as recently as 1987. But today he cannot disguise his excitement after stumbling upon several bodies of knowledge that all teach the same loving truths. This includes Twelve-Step Programs, *A Course in Miracles*, all religious documents based upon a loving Creator, the works of Robert Bly, the teachings of Marianne Williamson, and the marvelous interpretations of Joseph Campbell, just to mention a few.

You will finally understand the critical role of guilt as a major catalyst to disease; important observations on how the mind works; how to dissolve anger and discord of any kind; the psychological reasons why people gain excess weight; and how to eliminate the fear of death. You will even learn how to receive and perform miracles.

Every home should own a copy of this loving work. Consider, the possibilities, my friend, of everyone knowing who they are and determining their own unique true purpose in life...

Strayer's first book, *Forgive Us Our Debts...*, explains how both multi-generational and 7-year cycles are now pointed down, and why all major markets based on debt will quickly do the same. He also provides the precise steps anyone can take to reach financial serenity during one of the greatest economic

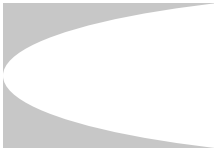
changes this country has ever known. And how families prospered during the first great depression. It's time to step away from financial debt...*and* existential debt...

Now that you are doing everything professionally possible to avoid the many financial traps and to take advantage of the rare but tremendous financial opportunities over the next several years, you're now ready for "the final chapter."

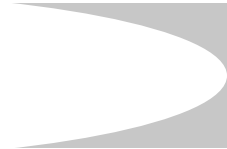
With the help of his first book, most of your financial fears are now gone. You can now concentrate fully on the most important areas of life itself: Self-development and spiritual growth.

You will now benefit from the author's remarkable understanding of the most rapid and clear-cut path to serenity ever used. Hundreds of thousands worldwide have become "happy learners" using this approach, despite their former beliefs. Anger, excess weight, problems and fears of all kinds, including the fear of death itself, will melt away as you finally remember what you are and your reason for being.

You will even learn how to perform miracles. If you are hungry for the Truth, all this is yours, with just "a little bit of willingness..."



Contents



Author's Biography	xi
Preface	xiv

PART ONE **The Problem**

Denial.....	1
Recognizing Dysfunction	4
Who Loves Ya' Baby?	8
Co-dependence and Counter-dependence	9
Causes of Dysfunction	12
Family Patterns	14
Personal Patterns.....	19
How the Mind Works.....	25
On Learning.....	27
The Ego's Primary Defenses.....	32
The Best Defense is a Good Offense?	36
Other Dysfunctional Families.....	37

PART TWO
The Solution
The Twelve Steps

Step 1: Humility	39
A Story of Denial	40
A Story of Humility	42
Growth	43
The Twelve-Step Meeting	45
Up, Up, and Away!	50
Insanity Reborn	53
More Insanity	55
“I Don’t Know”	58
 Step 2: Hope	 64
Choices	67
Choose Again	70
Social Commitment	72
Fear	73
Desires and Expectations	75
Practical Applications	78
Attend a Meeting	83
Summary	86
 Step 3: Commitment	 88
How Does God Work?	92
Doing His Will	95
The Laws of God	98
Summary	99
 Step 4: Evaluation	 103
The Twelve-Step Inventory	107
Patterns	108
 Step 5: Acceptance	 110

Step 6: Courage.....	118
Step 7: Correction.....	125
Step 8: Responsibility.....	131
Step 9: Forgiveness.....	140
Step 10: Vigilance.....	150
Step 11: Seeking	154
Problems and Guilt Explained	158
The “Accidental Miracle”	163
Step 12: Sharing	168
Sharing As A Sponsor.....	170
Sharing With Others.....	172
Sharing With Children.....	177
Summary.....	182
Contrasts.....	190
Epilogue.....	193
The Little Garden.....	193
Appendix.....	195
Glossary of Terms	195
Affirmations.....	200
The Foundation for Inner Peace	202
The Twelve Steps of _____ Anonymous	203

Author's Biography

Robert Strayer was born and raised in Palisade, Nebraska, where he attended public school and played all major sports. As a “straight-A” student he refused earlier offers to be advanced a grade; was voted homecoming king; and graduated valedictorian.

Enrolling at the University of Nebraska, he joined Triangle Fraternity, a social fraternity that only accepts engineers, architects, math majors and other technical majors. He spearheaded the fastest growth in that chapter's history, became its President, helped plan its new home, and was elected to the all-Greek honorary, Gamma Gamma.

His exceptional grades earned him a scholarship and election to four honoraries. He became president of one honorary fraternity and was voted Outstanding Senior Student in his department by fellow classmates. By at least one measure, in 1968 he was the third most recognized student at the large university. The only two students surpassing him were a member of his own fraternity, of which he was President, and the quarterback of the University of Nebraska football team.

Upon receiving his Master's Degree in Mechanical Engineering, he accepted employment at the worldwide headquarters of Caterpillar, Inc., where he worked in International Marketing for 12 years; received an outstanding management evaluation (the highest possible); and was featured in the company's worldwide service publication. Caterpillar was often referred to as one of the best-managed corporations in America, and was also the largest business exporter in the U.S. Strayer designed a strategy for integrating the sale of prime product, parts, and service,

which is still in use today. In his last position with this huge Fortune 50 company, he coordinated worldwide service marketing.

He received considerable international business experience while traveling in 33 different countries, and living and working 6 years in Paris, France; Geneva, Switzerland; and Johannesburg, South Africa. Out of necessity he quickly learned French and conducted business and socialized in that language for 3 years. During this overseas period he conducted operations studies; consulted management; evaluated the economic, political, and social trends of several countries; determined how client companies were reacting to sales opportunities; and either adapted or developed programs to help these companies increase their business.

In 1977 he began studying the works of Jim Dines, one of the world's four most successful and longest-practicing independent investment advisers. Dines had been the leader in urging a gold standard and the purchase of precious metals. It was not known at the time that if Dines told everyone when to buy, it would be Strayer himself that would issue the best gold stock sell signal in the business in the fall of 1980, within two weeks of their all-time high at the time. Mr. Dines eventually became a subscriber to Mr. Strayer's newsletter.

During his last four years with Caterpillar, Strayer's stock investments yielded an annualized 112% return on investment. In 1980 he completed his state exams, and became a fully-registered investment adviser with the Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington, D.C. Mr. Strayer clearly stated in his registration that he would never sell commissioned securities, insurance, or real estate. As President of Strayer Investment Advisers, Inc., this allowed him to clearly see economic and financial developments by removing vested interests from his observations. The company also refused to accept custody or possession of client funds, for client safety.

Beginning in 1980, the company managed money for and assisted numerous clients on financial matters from virtually every category: Salaried employees, hourly workers, U.S./overseas business owners, financial planners, CPAs, stockbrokers, bankers, economists, and even Nobel prize-winners.

Combined with his extensive worldwide experience, Strayer's research produced a keen understanding of investment cycles and their

profitable application. Using math to predict the future, he was surprised when his research with cycles also proved that economic, social/personal, and health trends move in tandem, in a precise and predictable manner. Strayer developed a proprietary set of technical indicators for the timely purchase and sale of stocks, bonds, and gold. The success of such tools was not only proven for gold in 1980, but prior to the October, 1987 stock market crash: The company moved all clients totally out of stocks 2 weeks before Black Monday, avoiding a 35% price collapse.

His first book, *Forgive Us Our Debts...*, explained how economic cycles work and why, how to invest, and how to manage money, including a total financial plan. There are times to maximize debt and periods to totally avoid it. The book (now out of print) was nationally published under a different title by Barclay House in 1996. Strayer's second book, *...As We Forgive Our Debtors*, focuses on dysfunctional families and clearly shows how Twelve-Step programs work. His heroes: Joseph Campbell, teacher of comparative religion who inspired "Star Wars," and Robert Prechter of Elliott Wave. His favorite book: "A Course In Miracles."

An award-winning speaker, he has been aired several times on TV and radio, and has won numerous speech contests with Toastmasters International. He has served as Area Governor and District Governor for TI, and in 1994 was elected club president of the 3rd best club in the world (among 14,000 clubs), Sunrise Center Toastmasters in Citrus Heights, CA.

Mr. Strayer retired from investment advising in 1996, turned his company over to the next in line, and began substitute teaching. The advisory company he formed was closed in 2003, when he started teaching math full-time at Center High School in Antelope, CA, until retiring in 2014. On a state rating of 1-10, Center rates a 10 among similar California schools, consistently tests better in math than other area schools every year, and is on the national honor roll for AP classes. Contracting prostate cancer in 2007, and following radiation treatments, he is now cancer-free. A bachelor most of his life, he has no children of his own. Strayer is now enjoying the freedom of retirement, and is updating, finishing, and publishing his two books digitally to help more people find financial and spiritual serenity.



Preface

...As *We Forgive Our Debtors* was originally written as part of a trilogy of financial serenity, self-development, and spiritual growth. The most effective and practical tools available formed the basis of this total work. After all, if we can become comfortable with our finances, learn how to lead a happy and problem-free existence, and finally know who we really are and our purpose on earth, what else is truly important?

The financial segment, *Forgive Us Our Debts...*, was published early because of massive economic change. When combined with this book, the original objective will be accomplished...albeit under two different titles. You now possess two documents that deal with the three most important tasks of life, and which belong on the bookshelf of every family. Strangely enough, we receive little, if any, formal education or training in such areas.

For example: Who learns budgeting at an early age? Who, despite their “wealth,” does not worry about money? How do the economy and investments really work, and how are they related to debt?

Or more importantly: Who or what are you? What is your true purpose in life? Where were you taught parenting with love? What causes anger, resentment, stress, and other physical and mental illness, and what are the real solutions to each? What causes problems of all types? Why do people consume alcohol and other drugs? Why do most diets fail?

The two books peel back the veil of illusion disguising the insanity of our current health, social, and economic problems, laying them bare. And then provides a timeless solution to each. These proven steps

provide the tools for you to lead a healthy, happy, prosperous, even serene life, and much more. By using these steps, anyone can become totally debt-free, in every sense of the word.

Self-development, financial serenity, and spiritual growth would certainly appear to be three strange bedfellows. Even the mention of the spiritual and money in the same breath evokes images of television evangelists and their never-ending solicitations for our dollars. Such obvious and well-publicized developments are instead clear examples of how financially, socially, and morally bankrupt we have become. We are now very dysfunctional in all three of these areas on a personal, family, business, national, and even international basis.

In fact, the personal, spiritual, and financial cannot be totally separated. As a retired independent investment adviser, Strayer's research shocked even him when it revealed that powerful cycles massively influence economic, financial, social, and health developments *at the same time*. We are extremely confused and deluded, and are rapidly approaching critical mass as you read this. The enormous change already beginning will leave many lost for a time as a new order unfolds.

As an investment adviser, psychological counselor, and spiritual adviser, the author simply wants to explain what is happening and how best to prepare. The opportunities, in fact, far outweigh the growing problems. But only if you understand the why and the how of the "Second Grapes of Wrath." Thus the purpose of the two books.

Our greatest problem lies in not seeing "the big picture." We become so involved with our daily tasks and problems that we see only parts of the picture, only pieces of the puzzle, instead of the frame that holds it together. What can be learned with the broader view provides great hope and clarity...

...the impairment of the ability to generalize is a crucial learning failure.

- A Course In Miracles T-12.V.6:4

Strayer was very blessed in receiving several important experiences that allowed the writing of this book. Graduate thesis work taught him how to research. Two degrees in the sciences taught him how to

assimilate the complex and apparently unrelated, and introduced him to cycles. Investment research yielded great financial and economic insight, and a new respect for mob psychology and contrary opinion. A Twelve-Step program and in-depth spiritual work provided a spiritual awakening and a new clarity and simplicity. Having had the opportunity to live and work overseas provided a world view of how everything is related. The grand puzzle does fit together, and nothing is random.

When sharing with others the goal of writing a trilogy on self-development, the spiritual, and investments, the usual reaction was a chuckle: "What do investments and spirituality have in common?" Of course the only natural response is: "What is not an investment?"

Everything we do is an investment. We have investments in alcohol, other drugs, judgment, certificates of deposit, worry, bonds, stocks, control, potato chips, greed...the list of what is called special relationships is endless. Or we can invest in the pursuit of the Truth. Money, for example, is not the root of all evil, except for those with an unnatural relationship to it. Even the excess fat on our bodies is primarily a function of our emotional need to literally "distance" ourselves from others. So our relationship with our bodies, money, or anything else can be either fearful or harmonious.

In fact, debt is the key to both books: *Any expectation creates a debt*. The expectation can be that of returning borrowed money; that an investment will not default or fall in value; that alcohol will give us something; that others should live up to our expectations of them or receive our judgment and anger...

The secret solution to dealing with debt and expectations is to draw upon the experiences of others who have no investment in what they share. For example, even before retirement, Strayer would never sell or collect a commission on the financial investments he recommended, and never accepted custody of client funds. This avoided any vested interests in investments recommended and provided safety for those applying such a strategy. Using the experience of others who have no vested interest - except in your needs and welfare - opens a wondrous door. Anyone can learn how to react to any situation or event. But increased awareness permits us to become actors instead of reactors. Only by *anticipating* developments can we find the path to mastery.

This book completes your mastery of the learning of “special relationships” and investments of all kinds. Both personal and financial. And rather than have a vested interest in what you learn, the author only wants the best for you...because your interests are seen as the same. This is the difference between getting and giving. The masters know that only by giving can they keep and grow what they have. You will learn this too.

It is probably fair to say that all people have one compulsion or another...no one is perfect, nor are any parents. Solution to such problems took a giant step forward in 1935 with the advent of the Twelve Steps, via a service program called Alcoholics Anonymous. To this day, “AA is numerically by far the most successful program of recovery from alcoholism.” (J. E. Royce: *Alcohol Problems and Alcoholism*)

The same Twelve Steps are now opening new and wondrous doors for everyone... Programs now number more than thirty, and deal with many other special relationships including co-dependence, imperfect parents, narcotics, overeating, emotions, co-dependency, sex...there is even a Debtors Anonymous. A core program within such self-help programs is something called “Adult Children of Alcoholics.” This is also known as ACA, AAC, or ACOA, depending on the sponsoring body, and all are based on the original twelve steps of AA. This program is viewed by many as the most generic of all, for exploring any type of pattern.

A basic recognition is rapidly evolving that a perceived lack of love or appreciation is creating most dysfunction. The special relationship that manifests is only a symptom of the root cause. Gravitz and Bowden (*Recovery: A Guide for Adult Children of Alcoholics*) point out that “Dysfunctional backgrounds affect as much as 96% of the U.S. population.”

So this book concentrates not on the symptom, which can be overeating, drug abuse, workaholism, chronic worry, alcohol abuse, physical abuse, or countless other common problems that we’re constantly trying to “fix,” but focuses on the real problem and the clear solution to low self-esteem. Furthermore, because of the preponderance of the problem, it is extremely rare not to be a member of this fraternity.

Whether you’re a literal or generic “adult child,” you are presented with the author’s own experience and growth within ACA. This is his

experience only, though it resulted in phenomenal spiritual awakenings and peace, which will help speed your growth.

Although Twelve-Step programs are the key approach to improving self-esteem, the success rate in ACA is not extremely high. When one counts those who have worked all twelve steps with a sponsor and are truly living the steps, this percentage of those who “graduate” is modest. Most drop out of the program early, barely understanding how it works. Having attended hundreds of meetings, chaired many, served as secretary of dozens, spoken at district meetings, and sponsored many people, Strayer noticed several common problems that inhibit success. The most important are:

- Blaming parents for one’s lot in life
- “I AM” syndrome (“I’m this way because . . .”), freezing one from change
- Not understanding how the steps work
- Trying to work the program alone, without a sponsor
- Trust problems, particularly in a Higher Power

It was also noticed that adult children tend to manifest problems in the financial arena...either in terms of financial worries based on lack (struggling to keep jobs or making ends meet) or greed (sometimes a very high “net worth,” but lacking financial serenity). But if you are fighting financial problems, how can you effectively focus on self-development? And without higher self-esteem, how can you grow your finances? Wouldn’t it make sense to attack both at the same time and lift both boats at once? This was a major impetus in the decision to publish the two books.

In 1988 two other important aspects were identified. First, that twelve-steppers normally had an abundance of self-help books. But often the many different approaches *complicate and extend* the solution. Second, and most important, it was noticed that numerous successful twelve-steppers “graduate” into something called *A Course In Miracles* (ACIM) to continue their spiritual growth. That course came from such a high level of spirituality that it didn’t matter from what religion

the person came: The Christian faith, Judaism, Buddhism, atheism, Hinduism...it didn't matter.

"The Course" (ACIM) is devoid of judgment and has helped countless people experience truly incredible spiritual awakenings. When asked what the course is, the spiritual level is so high one can only respond "It's a PhD in Twelve-Step, philosophy, personal growth, and spirituality."

It was also noticed that those who were working "the Course" and a Twelve-Step "program" *at the same time* were taking giant steps toward self-awareness, growth, peace, and serenity.

A total concept started to emerge. Twelve-steppers owned many self-help books. The many obstacles to a successful program were also increasingly obvious. Could a low success rate in what is still perhaps the most effective approach be improved? Strayer had enormous experience in the program, and had even sponsored many people, including psychologists. He was also intimately familiar with *A Course In Miracles*, which provides a wonderful construct of how everything works. He was also a successful investment adviser and had foreseen great economic change in the past, including when to sell gold after its 1980 peak, and getting clients totally out of stocks two weeks before the 35% stock market crash in 1987.

The decision was made to write a book that would share all the tricks and shortcuts known in Twelve-Step; reveal the most important things learned from *A Course In Miracles*; digest all the major mutually supportive self-help books available; and provide people with all the professional investment and financial assistance they would ever need. You are now reading the second installation on that labor of love. Accept this information gladly in the same spirit it was written. If it speeds your serenity in any way, we will all benefit.

With such a trilogy of self-development, financial serenity, and spiritual growth, all components carry enormous weight and can massively impact your life. A word of caution is therefore necessary. As your finances and, more importantly, your very concept of being are at stake, it's necessary to differentiate between opinion and truth. Because of such import, it was very difficult to decide whether to include certain

items, because they might have been a product of only one person's belief system. This problem was approached in the following way:

First, this book was recently reviewed by a PhD in psychology to make sure there were no obvious errors on the personal side. Next, if a concept did not fit into the grand puzzle, it was omitted as suspect or too confusing. (This was primarily the case with some "self-help" books.) If something fit, but a different approach also would work, this is reflected in the wording ("I believe..." etc.). Within commentary on Twelve-Step, this is the author's reaction to the program only, although the Twelve Steps are totally accepted as Truth and divinely inspired. Nevertheless, what was learned and presented will speed instead of impede your personal growth. Twelve-Step, in any case, provides such enormous latitude that your truth will be based on a new relationship between you and your Higher Power (which *you* will determine). Your route will be somewhat unique, because you are unique.

In the case of *A Course In Miracles*, this comes from such a high spiritual plane that references are comfortably stated as Truth, as fact. Despite your former learning you will have no problems with this material. If you do, discuss it at length with a loving sponsor.

In Chapter Eleven you will choose your own path of truth. If ACIM becomes your chosen path, fine. It is both clear and effective. Just make sure your gateway to enlightenment is direct and understandable. There are several true paths. Any two will each be an interconnected succession of steps, but will have the same result. But don't try to mix two paths, be true to one. Twelve-Step and ACIM, however, as well as the works of many quoted authors who believe in a loving God, fold together beautifully...

The term "brother" is used in an androgynous way, to represent total equality of us all...just as "man" has often been used to describe all humanity. This does not ignore each different sex, but male/female serves to separate instead of bringing us closer together.

Chapter Eleven describes how to do a miracle. This is based on the author's own "accidental miracle," which is fully described. Your own experiences might differ somewhat, as this is a highly personal act. Strayer's guidelines can help clarify and assist in understanding and performing this act of love, but ACIM should be your final reference.

It is suggested you freely make notes, even starting a personal notebook for your study. This will allow easier reference and referral in the future, and more quickly allow for answers to questions raised.

This work is presented as follows: The first section focuses on *the problem*, and concentrates on denial (not being able to even discern a problem). Before correcting any problem, it must first be recognized. Also presented are the basic precepts of thought and understanding.

The second section is divided into twelve chapters from the Twelve-Step format and is *the solution*. A first reading of the entire book will reduce fear and magnify hope. But when actually working the steps, it is suggested you complete each chapter before progressing to the next. It's possible to work at different speeds on the personal/spiritual and the financial. But because your every decision is a conclusion based on everything you believe, both are closely related.

The Appendix is a glossary of various truth terms, some Twelve-Step phrases you will hear in meetings, an assorted list of affirmations you can use as you find appropriate, and the Twelve Steps. You will also find a quick Summary of the Twelve Steps, for quick reference or review.

The Promise...

My brother, you are embarking on the most wonderful quest of your life. We cannot fail. The final chapter is already written. The only important variable is time.

In the next few years we will experience what the naive will call the "Second Grapes of Wrath." On a larger scale, many believe Bible prophecy will be fulfilled. This need not be fearful or painful if you understand what is happening and prepare. It is only a correction separating what is true from what is unimportant.

We have now entered the Age of Aquarius. We will no longer follow, but lead. As it approaches, and some call it the celestial speedup, unbelievable change will occur. Something wonderful... But your brothers will need you. They will not understand and many will be fearful. Use this time to become strong, so you can provide them support when they lose their way.

You will also need them. Share your growth and learning and walk

hand in hand in strength as a teacher. In particular you will be asked to forgive your brother for the sins he thinks he committed. By this you will come to know you have already been forgiven.

It is now time to complete our learning of how to forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors...for it is, as described in *Forgive Us Our Debts...*, the *Year of Jubilee*...



PART ONE



The Problem

Denial

*Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
- Shakespeare*

We will soon celebrate the 50th anniversary of our leap into space, as marked by the first moon landing. But the joy and wonder of that event stands in stark contrast to one sad fact: We don't even truly know members of our own family, let alone neighbors. A greater tragedy is we don't even know ourselves...who or what we are, or our purpose for being.

As individuals and societal units, we are now in an enormous cyclical period of denial in the world. By not recognizing this fact, we cannot confront the loneliness, frustration, and even pain of individuals. Or on a larger scale deal with the prospects of great religious wars, in the form of never-ending terrorism, and possibly nuclear or chemical in nature.

Most of our best intentions to correct such personal problems only mean vain attempts to change behaviors and other symptoms, instead of addressing the root cause. This means we simply end up with rearranged rules and new "shoulds," that only increase complexity, reduce freedom, and create new guilts.

...you cannot change your mind by changing your
behavior, but...you can change your mind.

- A Course In Miracles T-4.IV.2:1

The only sane solution is for everyone to start with "I." As each individual pulls back their unique veil of personal denial and searches deep within themselves, the beautiful truth is finally revealed. This arena of "inner space" is truly the last frontier. And ultimately the only one. The possibilities seen there would make the mass murderer weep with joy.

Do we experience peace, love, and joy at all times? If not, one response might be: "Who does? After all, I'm not an actualized Buddha or Jesus Christ!" If we do, how can we be certain? If one has not tasted the perfect wine, how is it known if Ripple is the best it gets? In truth, any individual can experience ever-longer periods of total serenity. Many have walked the earth to prove it is not only possible but should be normal. Could their examples have been only cruel games or improbable promises?

Virtually all of us are suffering from a serious mental disease. This malady causes strife, not only in the life of the one affected, but in the lives of virtually everyone they know. And in today's highly communicative world, the insanity spreads quickly. The symptoms are worry, fear, loneliness, intolerance, anger, excess weight, addiction to one of many legal and illegal drugs, depression and other mental illnesses, physical pain of every type...just to mention a few. Worse, we blame each other for their particular manifestations, while generally ignoring our own discord, thus postponing the solution.

The scorecard is frightening. John Bradshaw, *Bradshaw On: The Family*, points out that sixty million Americans are seriously affected by alcoholism, 50% are overweight, 34 million adult women were sexually abused by age 13, 10 million people are victims of violence in families every year, a huge percentage of men and women have extramarital affairs, and half our marriages end in divorce. Children run away from home to escape mental or physical abuse; sleeping disorders are common; we're addicted to television, social media, and many other new technologies; and workaholism is rampant. Alcohol, nicotine and other drug abuse is epidemic. Stress is killing us.

But it's not necessary to have such problems to be seriously affected

by them. It's estimated that on average, one dysfunctional person dramatically affects the lives of 27 other people - from direct family members to co-workers and friends, and sometimes their friends. At the extremes, we find that virtually all violent prison inmates were physically abused as children. Visual extremes include punks with purple hair and twenty earrings, but they are only rebelling against the insanity.

Many types of dysfunction (we will end up simply calling them "patterns") are modeled from one generation to another...and the beat goes on. Gravitz and Bowden, *Recovery: A Guide for Adult Children of Alcoholics*, point out "dysfunctional backgrounds affect as much as 96% of the U.S. population." The more generic description of this problem is often called *adult child syndrome*.

Numerous books have been written on the subject, and the cause has generally been defined as dysfunctional families. This explanation, however, tends to place the blame on parents. I wish not only to redefine the sickness, but its true cause. This not only aids understanding of the problem, but speeds the solution.

The true cause of all confusion is a perceived lack or shortcoming...a certain *yearning*. Prenatal conditions can obviously affect this condition, but it's easiest to start the discussion with birth. In brief, every human being expects to receive a certain degree of appreciation or treatment from this thing called life. In fact, and this is a critical fact, no biological parent can provide this near-perfect love and appreciation, or satisfy this yearning. Too often we feel cheated and dissatisfied. This is often described as a condition of low self-esteem or inability to love oneself. And the more "dysfunctional" the family, the greater the pain and dissatisfaction.

To fill this "hole" in our very being, we seek an infinite variety of "things" to make us feel complete. But nothing outside oneself can do the job. Nothing "out there" can make us whole and happy. Along the way we unconsciously repeat, in some fashion, the negative patterns from our family of origin, perpetuating the problem. We then pass it along to our own children. Or as stated in the song *Cats In The Cradle* by Harry Chapin, "He'd grown up just like me..." It's not unusual to see the same strange patterns passed down through five generations. In fact, man has been passing down these behaviors since time began.

At this point, many again respond with “But no one is perfect.” This is untrue. There have been several people in history who have learned or remembered the truth perfectly. Entire religions have often resulted from these accomplished teachers. This book does not hope to teach you how to become a god per se. But by better understanding the conditions for and ways to serenity, we can produce an infinitely more beautiful and loving world...a world more fertile for growing greater numbers of perfect teachers. On a more personal basis, this helps each of us achieve more peace, love, and joy in our lifetimes.

But, one may ask, “If most people are dysfunctional, who is functional?” I assure you, they are there, waiting to make themselves known to you. They have seen both the pain and now the glory. They are ready to teach love and understanding. In fact, teaching the truth is how they maintain and increase their own love and understanding. But until someone reaches a certain level of willingness, they will not interfere in our lives. Of all things, they will never deny free will to another. This means each of us must look closely at our belief systems for our obstacles to greater awareness. The first step, and the most difficult, is recognizing we even have a problem. This is why the first section of this publication concentrates on *denial*.

Recognizing Dysfunction

How do we know if we’re afflicted with a perceived “lack,” low self-esteem, or this yearning? Much like in a dream, what we only believe to be true isn’t obvious until we awaken and recognize the truth. One of the few ways to know if we’re troubled is by comparison. But this is impossible without a valid reference point. As we grow in self-awareness, our feelings will become our primary way to determine our well-being or recognize how we are thinking. But for now even this can be deceptive.

For example, stop and think just a minute. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your average level of peace, love, and joy?

Now consider this: How do you know, or how can you trust such an evaluation of feelings or emotions, if you’ve never experienced the agony (1) or the ecstasy (10)? Alone, our vantage point is worthless. It’s

similar to the wife who didn't know her husband was a drunk until one day he came home sober.

Other people can be very valuable in self-assessment. But this also can be deceptive, particularly if that other person is as mistaken as we are, or has a vested interest in what he or she sees. In fact, those with low self-esteem often base their own concept of self-worth on what others believe or think of them.

There is an old story circulating that can illustrate the crazy things we often learn from others: After many years a bachelor got married. He wasn't a great cook, but was curious when his wife always cut the ends off a roast before putting it in the roast pan. Confused, he finally asked her why she did this. She explained her mother had always done it that way. One weekend they asked her mother why she prepared roasts that way. The response was similar: "Granny always did it that way." That Christmas, the family got together and they ended up asking grandma the same question. Granny replied "I used to have a small roast pan and the meat wouldn't fit. I finally bought a bigger pan and haven't done that for years."

Virtually all of us exhibit hundreds of such misunderstandings. This is the very essence of denial - experiencing what is truly irrational behavior, without even knowing it. Where did we learn the millions of "facts" and behaviors that make up our current belief system? How much of what we consider fact is true? Even if something is obviously not true, if we hear it often enough it becomes true as an unconscious false affirmation, and is acted out unconsciously as stimulus-response.

Was our family - where we learned most basic patterns - functional or dysfunctional? How do we know? After all, in how many families were we raised, to even make a comparison? Again, one requires a valid reference point. We could have come from a severely dysfunctional family and not know it, because we considered that experience "average" or "normal." It was the only truth we ever knew, safely hidden behind "the green door," inside the home.

You cannot evaluate an insane belief system from within it.

- A Course In Miracles T-9.VII.6:1

In fact, the child of a dysfunctional family will find those from “more functional” families uncomfortable or even odd. It will feel unfamiliar, or literally “unlike family.” Well-adjusted people might even be perceived as boring or naive, even if the perceiving individual is now an adult. It’s important to understand that this is a primary reason why dysfunctional people actually seek out other dysfunctional people on a subconscious level as mates and friends. This also explains why more functional people find their peers. In both cases, people find such individuals familiar and comfortable. It’s tragic but true that millions of people grow old and their bodies die, never knowing their pain and loneliness was unusual...let alone unnecessary.

This might sound impossible. But one specific human behavior prevents comparison. It’s called the social mask. When alone it is safe to act out our family patterns. Can you think of anything you do in total privacy that you would never do in public? Fellow workers and even friends normally see only the mask you wear. And you see only their masks, assuming they’re happy, contented, or even “successful.” But behind that carefully-guarded mask is their particular set of fears, worries, and strange, or even terrifying, behaviors.

People find it incredible to hear from certain “tell all” books and tabloids how movie stars or even past presidents beat their children or acted out an unusual sexual appetite. This is simply what goes on behind “the green door.” Such intimate details often go unnoticed because we have a whole collection of masks to choose from, at a moment’s notice, depending on whom we encounter. We have one mask for our fiancée, one for the same person after we marry, one for each of the kids, one for friends, coworkers, authority figures, and the list goes on and on. As a particular example, we appear as one person when dating our future spouse, and after marriage our composite self starts coming out, although never completely. But the strain of spending all our time at home playing make-believe is too much. Our mask starts to “slip.” Suddenly our spouse decides “this is not the person I married.” Resentments surface, anger ensues, and if both individuals cannot get some increased maturity and fast, divorce is the result. (And then we often go out and find someone just like the one we left.) Or worse yet, the more dependent of the two sacrifices their very being and stays in a sometimes extremely abusive or simply unhappy marriage indefinitely.

In contrast, functional people have very thin and very few masks. They have searched inside and found their true selves. And they love what they have seen there, just as you can.

There is another way to determine if we are afflicted with the dreaded disease sometimes called low self-esteem. This is by recognizing the resulting effects, which can be quite obvious. The tip of the iceberg has to surface in some manner, as a product, event, or behavior. One easy way to identify a dysfunctional family is to observe the products of that family - the children.

In terms of events, if we are dysfunctional our lives will not work smoothly. One can remain in denial as long as they choose, but, pardon the expression, "shit happens." You can wear any number of masks in my presence as you wish, but I notice you've been divorced three times; can't seem to control your prescription addiction; experience repeated physical ailments; have problems staying at a job; are all but broke (or well to do and still overly-concerned about money)...I think you get the idea.

Behavior is also a good clue. You might experience chronic anger; be a raging workaholic; try to control everyone around you; be pessimistic or worry incessantly; be closed-minded to others' viewpoints or to new ideas; constantly talk about other people and "their problems"...again the list goes on and on. We will not dwell on it at this time, but we will eventually see that we are totally responsible for our interactions - the people we "invite" into our lives, our feelings, our "problems," how we react to others - everything.

Although the term dysfunctional family has been used, it's critical *not to place blame*. After all, if patterns are passed from one generation to another, how far back must one go to find the guilty? If you have great need to assign blame, place it on Adam and Eve for now. When we look for the guilty, we risk freezing ourselves into our current situation because we're not responsible! Try to concentrate not on who is or was right or wrong, but only on your own patterns.

Furthermore, it is not a sin to be dysfunctional, and extremely rare not to be. In fact, dysfunction is a blessing, because when finally recognized it signals the presence of an underlying problem. Hopefully this doesn't prevent children born into relatively smoothly-functioning families from

also looking deeply within. Such people are, nevertheless, a great breath of fresh air in a society fraught with generic insanity. Hopefully all souls in this lifetime will end up knowing who or what they are and their reason for being in this wonderfully challenging event called life.

Who Loves Ya' Baby?

Telly Savalas as Kojak, many years ago, couldn't have asked a better question. Even today it seems every other pop song asks the same question. Who does love you? As it turns out, the number might be quite low. Sometimes it seems like very few people in this world truly love us. And the opposite is also true. But we must first define love. There are numerous definitions. This book will use the following very important definition. Please internalize it:

*Love is wanting the best for someone; and
accepting them exactly as they are and are not.*

*See the Glossary in the Appendix for this and other terms used throughout the book.

Instead of wanting the best for another, we often have enough trouble even paying quality attention to others. This is not compassion. This is not wanting the best for another.

Do parents try to control children, demanding they act or perform in certain ways? Does it go beyond basic protection and assisting? Children are obviously an enormous responsibility. Unless invited to help them, we must be very careful not to intrude into kids' basic freedoms.

Do people try to change friends and coworkers, even spouses? Such attempts involve judgment, and do not represent love. In this world, any time we are not totally accepting someone, we are not loving them.

Anything else is denial. This does not mean we have to participate in another's irrational behavior. We can still evoke boundaries. But more often than not we try to fix or change others, which involves judgment. This is not love.

Perhaps our significant other wants to do something alone that doesn't include us. We become upset because we feel "left out." We

want to be with them and might start an argument that ends with us saying "But it's only because I love you!" This example is based on need, on getting, and implies a relationship addiction. We are not accepting them, or even respecting their right to be alone.

Perhaps we don't allow one of our children to play with another, because we don't approve of the other little kid. The child screams and we say "But it's only because I love you." With love's acceptance component, there is no emotional control. Often this is done under the guise of safety. Once you perceive the slightest glimpse of your and others' true eternal spirit, how can one fear anything?

Or we try to convince our grown children to take a certain job, attend a certain college, or start or end a relationship with someone. Until we're perfect, we can't possibly pretend we know what's best for anyone else, family member or friend. And when we are "perfect" we wouldn't want to. Everyone possesses free will, and we have no right to interfere.

Romantic love is rarely love at all. It is instead based on "liking." When we like someone, they give us what we desire...they feed and inspire our intellect or fancies. And early in relationships this giving can be quite complete, and feels great! (Hormones are also chemically injected into the body, which only adds to the feeling.) But little by little, the expectations develop and the resentments grow. Be very selective when using the "L" word.

Our confusion about the meaning of love, and how much we've received in life, is an important key to understanding and growth.

Co-dependence and Counter-dependence

So far we have only discussed the effects of family patterns. Of course this is not the only influence on our lives. Depending on whether we were born male or female, society tends to join family in molding a straight-jacket behavior system for each of us. The two resulting categories are co-dependence and counter-dependence. But we must still mix in some low self-esteem for this recipe to gel.

Few people are purely one or the other, but you will more closely identify with one. Terry Gorsky has done some wonderful work in this area, and I now summarize some of his enlightening observations.

Females tend to be taught co-dependence by family and society. As it is more socially acceptable for women to show feelings, co-dependents are insecure on the outside, more easily showing emotions, but are strong inside. To fit the mold of family and society, they actually hide their strengths, so as not to appear “pushy” or “controlling.” Such people make wonderful caretakers, like nurses and teachers. The most common trait among this group is people-pleasing, in order to be liked and accepted. This differs greatly from pure giving, which is not based on expectations. People-pleasing is crippling, because co-dependents tend to treat others better than themselves.

Often referred to as the “weaker sex” in today’s society, manipulation is often present. In fact, because of their influence in the family, women play a critical role in the world. But if low self-esteem is present, they will find it necessary to lose themselves in others, and actively seek out counter-dependents to become “complete.” Consequently, once this individual enters a relationship, they will go to great lengths not to lose it, thus fearing abandonment. It is difficult for such individuals to take praise or consider themselves fully capable. To envision the classic co-dependent, please picture Edith Bunker years ago, from television’s *All In The Family*.

Males tend to be taught counter-dependence. These individuals will go to great lengths to look good and appear strong, virtually infallible on the outside. This hides an insecurity and fear inside. Carrying the constant weight of this external mask and the related stress helps explain men’s shorter life spans. They immediately attack or dismiss weakness, dependency, or pain in themselves and others. Counter-dependents focus on their achievements and activities, and what they do well. But they need constant praise to function well. Filled with pride, they anger easily, or crumble, if it is suggested they are fallible or imperfect in any way. One will encounter great resistance when suggesting an activity they aren’t familiar with or in which they have little experience. Counter-dependents over-identify with self-confidence, strength, and power. They find it devastating to admit they are less than perfect. Archie Bunker and Donald Trump are classic examples.

Both have neatly-fitting interlocking traits. The more insecure but humble co-dependent needs the counter-dependent’s grandiosity to

complete a team, and vice versa. The former is dependent, the latter independent. The co-dependent is other-centered, and the counter-dependent self-centered. The former lacks personal boundaries, and the latter intrudes on others' boundaries. The co-dependent uses the counter-dependent's rationality, and the latter uses the former's feelings. But remember, *both are nevertheless based on low self-esteem*. Without a counter-dependent man, the co-dependent woman feels powerless or incomplete. When without a co-dependent woman, the counter-dependent man can feel very lonely and lacking support from the female energy. As stated, there is an extremely strong correlation, but sex does not automatically equate with basic style. We have all met a few "infallible" and controlling counter-dependent women, although her male relationships will be severely strained, and she will likely seek a co-dependent man. We also know overly-sensitive and outwardly-insecure co-dependent men. His social interactions will also be uncomfortable, because again, he doesn't fit the macho role model dictated by today's society and family units. Also keep in mind that few people are purely one or the other. For example, I tended to be about 80% counter-dependent but about 20% co-dependent, having had problems with personal boundaries (saying yes when wanting to say no, letting others intrude into one's space, etc.).

The situation also tends to change over time. The co-dependent, as the proverbial caretaker, spends most of their life living "shoulds" and yielding to others, while unconsciously trying to control, manipulate, and fix others. But even an Edith Bunker, once lacking self-confidence and spending most of her life being taken advantage of, starts becoming more "masculine" in later life. She starts stating her views and rights more succinctly. This individual develops more independence, particularly after age 42 (more later on this important age).

Likewise, the counter-dependent, having had enormous trouble sharing emotions and intimacy, and bulldozing those who disagreed with him, starts to become more "feminine." The stress of always being strong and infallible seems too much to bear. It finally doesn't work any longer. We have all seen John Wayne fathers, once consumed with activity, pride, and perhaps workaholism, shed a tear occasionally. Once overly-concerned with sex or "being right," this individual moves closer

to true intimacy. It's almost as if people, after age 42, become more androgynous - as they were at birth. Or perhaps they're simply saying, "I don't care what society says, I have to be real. No more bullshit!"

In therapy and Twelve-Step, counter-dependents are much more difficult to work with. Their masks can be extremely rigid and practiced, and there can be great resistance to change. Particularly if they haven't yet reached a good "bottom." One of the best tools I know of for "getting to" a resistant counter-dependent is Robert Bly's videotape, *A Gathering of Men*. Co-dependents, on the other hand, can much more easily develop the humility required for change.

At this stage you will likely be thinking of other people and how this applies to them. Please don't yield to this temptation. This book is for you. The only way we can change the world is to change ourselves, by how we think. It will become increasingly apparent, but you are the only person over which you have any real control. It also works both ways. No one can change you...as if anyone would truly appreciate such efforts.

Are you truly more influenced by what others tell you to do or how to think, or by the constant examples they provide or the truths they represent, that you admire and then adopt without outside pressure?

Causes of Dysfunction

As stated, families are not the only influence on our lives. Society and even government teach us constantly. In school we are greatly influenced by how other children treat us, and the reactions of teachers. Children can be very mean, and some teachers can put us into boxes from which it is very difficult to escape.

As adults we are often more greatly influenced by the eight plus hours we spend in our work environment than at home. If one has read any of Tom Peters' research on companies it is easy to see how few businesses are truly functional.

The influence of television on our lives is also profound. Bill Moyers points out that "The construction of news programs is designed to create the largest possible audience, not to inform and help people think," and that "We have become a permanent audience, waiting to be amused, looking on more and more, and joining in less and less." Those loving

commercials tell us: How to behave and what we should do to be perfect or more desirable; what we should buy to help us control our lives; and how to save time and get to our compulsions more quickly. They are meticulously prepared for maximum psychological impact to convince us we have needs and desires. Television programs and even movies seldom portray reality. If they did, they would too often be boring or totally confusing.

Other people, particularly those closest to us, also tend to pull us toward their patterns. We are also taught by our leaders in government, not only in what they do but what they say. The basic message is "Don't worry, we'll take care of it." Abdication to government is extremely destructive to our sense of independence, and particularly in taking responsibility for our own lives.

Nevertheless, we receive tens of thousands of hours of tapes from our family of origin, during a period that our belief system was most virgin and malleable. As infants we are like little sponges of information and particularly behavior. Therefore it is critical to take a fearless look at the family.

Let me be perfectly clear on one very important point. At this stage many people assume that if one's primary traits are the result of parental or societal teaching, that they're not responsible for their actions. *This is untrue.* Everyone must be fully responsible for their actions, in their relations with other people or a court of law. No one had perfect parents and everyone has the option to change their beliefs and behaviors.

Over the past several years, society has learned a great deal about the effects of family on individuals. In reality, it is virtually impossible for a therapist to work with a patient while knowing little about their family of origin. But scores still try. There are some very encouraging signs. As the secretary of an Adult Children Twelve-Step group, I was overjoyed to see parents attend meetings, propagated by problems with children. I have even signed attendance documents when parents of dysfunctional children were ordered by judges to attend a certain number of Twelve-Step meetings. The incredibly useful work of people like John Bradshaw has resulted in giant steps toward understanding the individual by looking at their family system.

Behavior learned within families is literally amazing. If one parent becomes overly-attached to one child, the other parent will often become

enmeshed with a different child. These types of inappropriate bonding can set the stage for severe problems, even incest.

Children also receive very conflicting messages and definitions. Love can be confused with and equated with duty. Sex and the body are often considered taboo and bad, creating enormous psychological problems.

Children typically react to family patterns in one of two ways... either by totally discarding them and becoming *rebels* to a behavior; or adopting the same patterns as *tyrants*. For example, if the emotional levels within the family are extremely high, often involving anger, the child will either totally withdraw or become a raging maniac themselves. Or, if the family has absolutely no morals, a child could either repeat that pattern, or become a priest.

Television programs in the 50s and 60s were terrible representations of what really goes on behind “the green door.” Families like the Cleavers were virtually nonexistent, even during that period. Instead, there is more typically some conflict or near-total suppression of feelings or problems, creating some degree of fight or flight. And only when we get these things into the open can they be dealt with. Once everyone realizes their family was not perfect (and we can assume none are), the level of guilt also drops dramatically.

How healthy was your family? It’s extremely difficult to analyze a situation when you were, or particularly still are, a part of it. But it’s still necessary to take a step back and act as an observer as best you can. Most people have trouble remembering many of their early childhood experiences. If one’s childhood was particularly chaotic, individuals often have blackouts where the memory has been deeply hidden, or multiple personalities can even result. The following takes a closer look at several very common family patterns. If any were prevalent in your family, and you haven’t completely dealt with them, I can guarantee they are causing discomfort or even severe problems in your current life...regardless of your current age. In general, the following are in increasing degrees of dysfunction.

Family Patterns

Extremely prevalent is the family where expression of feelings and emotions is not modeled. The message is “don’t feel.” There is virtually no

hugging or showing of affection between the parents in front of the kids, and very little touching between parents and children. Oral expressions of love and overt signs of appreciation are generally absent. Children do not learn true intimacy, and feel unloved and unappreciated. This family appears very normal, from both the standpoint of those inside and outside the unit.

The family can lack stimulation. There is little play, fun, or challenges. Nothing's going on. If the little critter has several friends or other avenues to learn what is appropriate "fun," some of this void can be partially overcome. But other more inappropriate ways to find stimulation are often found, including alcohol, nicotine, and other drugs.

Either parent can be over-controlling, rigid, or a perfectionist. Usually only one counter-dependent parent will do the trick, but if either is sufficiently co-dependent the results are very similar. Some basic messages received by children are: "You'll never get it right." "You don't know." "You're not important." "Be perfect." The child can either totally succumb and become very docile, or totally rebel in some manner. As in many other dysfunctional families, the child can become very compulsive in some given area, whether it be work, academics, sports, etc. To observers, this can appear incredibly positive, and a source of pride for the parents. But is the child doing this for himself (healthy) or to gain attention and appreciation from the parents (even decades later - in subconscious stimulus-response)?

The opposite extreme is at least one smothering parent, generally a good co-dependent. The child has little freedom of action or choice. If someone always does things for us or decides what will happen, the child, even when mature, will be overly-dependent on others. Becoming independent or responsible is very difficult.

There could have been an ongoing power struggle between the parents (but without physical abuse, which we'll look at in a minute). This can cause self-centered children who do not know how to appropriately deal with conflict or anger.

Predictability can be absent. Some examples are the family that moved often; occasional outbursts of rage from either parent; no limits or boundaries for parents or children; or chronic financial problems or worries. This can cause trust problems or abandonment issues.

The above list of family dysfunctions creates your standard run-of-the-mill neurotic of today's society. Whether the child is still young or fully-grown. Current age has nothing to do with it. Several types of addictions and compulsions can result.

The vast majority of the population falls into one or more of the above categories. I must again repeat that the purpose of this exercise is not to blame parents, but to help you identify your own patterns or those of your family of origin. The goal is to notice patterns that you want to change in yourself alone - to determine the need to look within.

It is also virtually impossible to try not to do something. This is trying to change behavior at the behavioral level, which doesn't work. The only solution is to increase your entire self-esteem or self-concept, which is the subject of the second part of this book. Let's now continue with some more problematic family patterns, often with more serious consequences:

Abandonment might be present, particularly with 50% of marriages ending in divorce. This includes the death of a parent while children are still at home. This raises one's fear level, particularly of being abandoned again. Once in any kind of relationship, even abusive, the individual will tend to stay - with the fear of loss being greater than the pain of staying.

A chronically-ill parent, grandparent, brother or sister might have been present. Even if psychosomatic, one person gets all the attention... while the rest of the family walks on eggshells, not expressing how they feel. This can result in long-standing resentment and anger, often carried to the grave.

Workaholism was once considered an admirable trait. It is now being determined that the effects on children can be nearly as severe as alcoholic parents. One parent is never around. Even when home, their mind is often on something other than family.

The problem here is children often interpret the opposite of love as apathy. Any parent can tell us that children, or even pets, will often behave destructively just to get some kind of attention. The little critter is silently screaming "Recognize me! I'm important! Even if you whack me once in a while, do anything but ignore me!" The reaction is a deep feeling of being unworthy, unloved, and unappreciated, or abandonment issues.

The negative effects and prevalence of over-zealous religious beliefs are greatly underestimated in today's society. I'm not talking about the family that regularly attends church and learns and teaches tolerance and unconditional love...but strict beliefs that preach scores of "do's" and "don'ts," of fire and brimstone, sins that only the church can forgive, and severe judgment of those not following the same beliefs. Such zealots preach a lot of judgment, and practice and model anything but love and acceptance. It appears that such beliefs were constructed not by any god, but by man, in order to control people. This is in sharp contrast to rejoicing in the total free will that a loving God or perfect parent has truly granted. Children under the age of seven have little moral sense or reason to begin with. And even an adult can internalize enormous levels of shame, good for a lifetime, when exposed to this insanity. In the extreme, I've seen cases where the child was physically beaten to "drive the demons from his body," or locked in closets. The milder forms are what I call "preacher's kid syndrome"...perfectionistic expectations of young people that can't possibly be met. The result is generally eventual rebellion and self-destructive behavior.

Emotionally abusive families can take many forms. All too common are the seemingly innocuous messages such as: "Children are to be seen, not heard." "Don't speak until spoken to." "Shut up!" "You're driving me crazy!" "Only babies cry!" They all hurt, and create guilt and possibly shame. Even if rarely uttered, the following are guaranteed to produce deep shame: "You make me sick!" "If it wasn't for you..." "I never should have had you!" "The only reason I got married was because I was pregnant with you!" And any child is guaranteed to break or ruin something from time to time. Even if rare, a parent's reaction often contains great anger, screaming, or physical acting out. As stimulus-response takes over, we always forget we did the same things when young. These behaviors create low self-esteem in general, internalized guilt, or a deep sense of shame.

Emotional starvation in the first few months is devastating. Psychologists have determined that if a baby is not bonded to the mother in the first six months, the child can be severely damaged.

Most people greatly misunderstand what constitutes an alcoholic, and the result is a great underestimation of how prevalent this pattern is. If a parent drank at all, particularly when we were children, this must

be closely evaluated. The primary consideration should not be how often or how much one drinks (or ingests any other type of prescribed, legal, or prohibited drug), but the associated change in behavior.

Let's say mom or dad drank some beer or wine on occasion. How did they react? Maybe there was no change in behavior. Or did they become quiet, go inside themselves and isolate, not wanting anyone around, or simply fall asleep? If this occurs very often, we have a situation involving abandonment. They basically left, leaving you. Another negative is they were modeling a pattern (drinking) that's considered OK by their children. Will the kid try alcohol and possibly continue drinking, even at an early age? Will the mature children of such families be able to handle alcohol or other drugs as well? And even this ignores the health problems such as cirrhosis of the liver, and early death, or fatal car accidents while under the influence.

There is also the binge drinker, who might really get loaded only on holidays. Despite how often it happened, what was the change in behavior? Unfortunately, the drug called alcohol causes most people to become more violent, and mental abuse, physical abuse, and even sexual abuse or incest can result.

Living in an alcoholic family as a child, or even having a drinking spouse, can produce the most frightening experiences possible, severely scarring all members of the family. I can also easily envision many a parent with drink in one hand, lecturing to their kids about the appropriateness of other drugs. The most devastating drug possible just happens to be legal and socially accepted...not to mention heavily advertised. Until the playing field is somehow leveled, drugs much less dangerous than tobacco and alcohol, but still governed by prohibition, will be consumed in great quantities. Meanwhile, instead of regulating prohibited drugs, we end up abdicating the distribution of billions of dollars of drugs to gangs and organized crime, just like during liquor prohibition. I would personally estimate that half of all American homicides are indirectly caused by drug prohibition itself, and involve gang wars over who has the right to sell drugs in each neighborhood.

The prevalence of sexual abuse is finally being recognized, but never fully. Of course this emanates from outside the family as well. The younger the child, the more negative the consequences. Much shame is

normally experienced, even if the event is not remembered. In fact, sexual abuse at a young age is often buried deep in the subconscious, but not the effects. The person unconsciously blames himself for this incredible “sin.” And sexual abuse does not have to involve penetration. Any words or acts the child believes contrary to what is involved in being a “good girl” or “good boy” are internalized, creating years of guilt or shame. Incest within the family can produce deep scars and adjustment problems. Simply observing the sexual abuse of another is also sexual abuse.

Physical abuse in the home must be considered the most traumatic event possible. We now know that “spare the rod and spoil the child” creates sick children, even throughout their later adulthood. Anything more than a quick whack on the bottom to get the child’s attention is inappropriate. Every time a child is hit, the young person internalizes anger and rage. When it explodes, terrible things happen. Most violent crimes are committed by those who were physically abused as children. If one collected all prison inmates incarcerated for violent acts and who were physically abused when young, and sent them off to work camp for one day, those prisons would echo in silence for 24 hours. Again, simply observing physical abuse is also physical abuse. And those who were physically abused in childhood are much more likely to abuse their own children. This is true for any of the patterns discussed above.

In some way, we pass along patterns, whether they are dysfunctional or loving. What we learn, we teach. What is modeled for us, we do. These are our “truths,” our belief systems. These things are considered “normal.”

And until we look closely within our families of origin and into ourselves, the associated pain, and our passing along of dysfunction to our children, will remain to our death beds. The hell will also continue until we recognize our denial, accept the fact that certain parts of our lives aren’t working, and willingly decide to change. Only in this way can the chain be broken. And yes, change is always possible, if you truly want it.

Personal Patterns

Unless we’ve found a support group or have been exposed to psychotherapy, it is nevertheless difficult to recognize dysfunction in our family

of origin. How can our only reference point, what is normal for us, be evaluated? Again, we can look at the products or results of what was learned. What are our own patterns today?

Twelve-Step programs such as Adult Children of Alcoholics or Al-Anon Adult Children are among the most generic in helping open our eyes. A growing percentage of these groups includes adults whose parents or spouses did not drink. Many simply attend to understand themselves better, or to increase the joy in their lives. When I was intently working on self-development, I attended scores of such meetings and believe they provide an effective and loving starting point for change of any kind. If our parents did not drink, it is necessary, however, to change our focus. Instead of concentrating on a parent who once drank, look instead at any dysfunctional pattern that existed in that family. We haven't specifically defined dysfunction, but this condition arises when any parental pattern left the realm of moderation or acceptance. If you recognized co-dependent or counter-dependent patterns in either parent, or particularly yourself, you're already well on your way.

But it's still easier to focus on our own patterns. The Twelve-Step programs mentioned above help us recognize them, display how very common they are, and provide a clear path for change. The following are typical characteristics of "adult children." See if any apply to you:

- See others as either greater than or less than oneself. In other words, anything but equal. Shrinking from authority figures in one instant, and putting down another person the next.
- Guess at what is appropriate and normal to keep others from finding out they don't know. Low self-esteem creates uncertainty. A healthy person is lovingly certain and accepting about most areas of their life, or can lovingly accept that which they do not know.
- Become concerned and confused about things they believe others don't get concerned and confused about. This often reflects certain levels of worry or fear, and can result in either procrastination or a frantic effort to control or "do things."

- Often deny that problems exist, or having even a partial role in causing them. “Why do those people or these events keep causing so many problems for me?”
- Judge themselves severely. Mistakes aren’t acceptable, and guilt is the companion.
- Always feel they “should” be doing something. Most periods of inactivity or leisure produce more guilt. One who believes they are incomplete pay close attention to the “shoulds” of society and other people.
- Have difficulty having fun. Are overly-serious and busy, instead of having a light-hearted, humorous attitude.
- Have difficulty separating themselves from their work. “Incomplete people” need something to occupy themselves, and work was long a socially-acceptable way to avoid looking at self.
- Have no frame of reference for healthy, intimate relationships. Several brief relationships or divorces are the pattern, instead of a long-term happy relationship. “Why do I keep meeting these jerks?”
- Are often accused of being overly controlling or rigid. If we aren’t happy with ourselves, we will try to control other people.
- Feel gaining control over their environment is very important. Again, if we can’t control ourselves, we try to control other things.
- Learn to trust themselves more than anyone else. Children who didn’t have both parents as total confidants did not learn how and when to trust others.

- Constantly seek approval and affirmation. If we didn't feel totally loved as a child, our subconscious will go to great lengths to receive strokes as an adult - even by becoming over-achievers.
- Feel isolated. This evolves from a perceived lack of love and appreciation as a child. It feels safer to be by ourselves, to "stay in our room," even as adults.
- Give others what they want in order to be liked. Extremely prevalent, this results from a "people-pleasing" message as children. As adults, we often say yes when we want to say no. The underlying belief is they won't like us or will get mad at us if we do or say what we really want.
- Are either super-irresponsible or super-responsible...giving up, or taking on the responsibilities of the world.
- Don't have a realistic sense of their own capacity. Often in the name of work, duty or parenthood, one becomes overextended.
- Often get sick or burned out as a result of having taken on too much. It's often the only way out when the "shoulds" become too much. One can even become a hypochondriac to justify certain behavior.
- Get hooked, through guilt, into relationships that are not good for them. We tend to find someone of similar dysfunction, whether we are "bad" in society's terms, or feel overly responsible. Like seeks like.
- Spend a great deal of time cleaning up messes, becoming "Drama Queens." These messes might appear to be caused by others or "uncontrollable" events, but in reality we create everything that happens to us (more on this later).

- Find it easier to be concerned with others rather than self, thus avoiding in-depth self-evaluation. Our kids have problems; we have to fix our friends; we find fault with others; we find causes in which we immerse ourselves, etc. A great distraction, but are we literally “losing ourselves” in these activities? Could we be afraid to look within?
- Will often find a compulsive personality. The choices are infinite. We can become compulsive about worrying, fear, booze, cigarettes, work, parenting, food, pity, illness, greed...it’s impossible to complete such a list.

In Twelve-Step meetings, and particularly if one finds their way into therapy, we learn that children tend to adopt one of four basic life patterns. The first is the *hero*. Sensing a lack of recognition within the family, even the adult child will often become the family hero. They become “straight-A” students, exceptional athletes through intense effort, or become workaholics, senators, or even presidents. The subconscious message is “Look, I’m now successful and finally lovable.” (It doesn’t work.)

The second type is the *scapegoat*. This child receives the brunt and the blame of much of the family’s frustrations. They become the “whipping post” when things go wrong. Intense guilt or shame is internalized, and such individuals can have much trouble “succeeding” in most ways this world defines such.

The third type is the *lost child*. Instead of taking on the family’s dysfunctions, they simply “drop out.” The lost child may appear the exception to the family’s typical patterns. They might spend much time in their rooms alone, and be very nice and “normal.” The frustration is simply buried.

The fourth type is the *mascot*. Their job becomes that of easing family tensions. Their funny antics and jokes try to distract the family from anxiety. It’s certainly better than conflict, but the mascot harbors deep-seated frustration that was never addressed.

If the above four categories help one to better identify family patterns, fine. Labeling, however, tends to lock people into certain behaviors: “I do or did that because I AM the hero, mascot, etc.” As we will learn, this was the past, and anyone can choose differently. I believe it is simpler to think only in terms of co-dependent and counter-dependent to identify patterns. But even these labels will dissolve as we move past problem identification and start to grow. In fact, it is essential to throw off the past, even though change can be fearful.

The closed mind believes the past and future will be the same... that is usually an attempt to counteract an underlying fear that the future will be worse than the present.

- A Course In Miracles T-3.III.3:2

In summary, there are three broad general areas in which to look, to determine if we have low self-esteem. These are family, finances, and relationships. Are they working?

Even if now on our own, do we have a harmonious relationship with old or current family members? Do we communicate openly with few secrets? Or simply try to overlook problems or avoid conflict?

Are our finances working? Are we debt-free and serene about future expenses? Or are we worried about insufficient income or savings, excess debt, or possible job loss? Equally problematic are those whose “net worth” is high, but it just “isn’t enough” (greed).

Are our relationships working? Do we have open, loving, and accepting friends and relationships? Or find fault with others? Do we isolate? Are our relationships with “things” or “emotions” without expectation and in moderation, or are we compulsive or addictive in terms of other people, material things, worry, fear, food, house-cleaning, alcohol, work, etc.?

The rather long list of personal patterns above is not meant to be a complete list, but the question is “Did you recognize any of your patterns?” The process by which we arrived at such behaviors should now start to clarify. If we did not receive our fill of love and appreciation from childhood, or if our parents were overtly abusive, we feel a hole in

our gut. We sense a certain *yearning*, and we look for fulfillment outside ourselves. But nothing “out there” will work, even if that rut is starting to feel comfortable. If we want change it’s always available, if parts of our lives aren’t working, or if we’re not truly happy.

And if we make the decision to change, and seek peace, we embark on the most wondrous quest of our life.

How the Mind Works

There is a certain part of us that is absolutely perfect. That part of our mind allows us to sometimes communicate with others without words, or know without being taught. That part of us doesn’t believe we can’t lift a car in a sudden emergency, or part the seas or move mountains. It is also not confined to the body. We couldn’t change this part of us even if we wanted to. It simply is. It was created, was never born, and doesn’t die. What you call this special part of you is your choice. We might use the term Truth, higher self, soul, Light, spirit, or even Friendly Fred.

There is a much smaller manifestation of us that is totally different. Its character can range from damned goofy to irrational, or even terrifying. Unlike Friendly Fred, this part was made by us. Let’s call this part Ernie the Ego.

It might be difficult to sense the two, so let’s quickly look at one concept that might help us do this. L. Ron Hubbard presented an interesting concept on the latter in his book *Dianetics*. I’m not an advocate of this pursuit, but he creates an interesting analogy that we can benefit from. In brief, he believed a portion of the mind was like a perfect computer, that always made sense. However, when we become temporarily unconscious, even as a fetus, something interesting happens. This event causing temporary unconsciousness could be caused while the mother was pregnant by numerous events, for example: An attempted abortion, coitus, periods of high blood pressure, a fall, being struck by an abusive husband, or even for a couple seconds when she tied her shoes. Even adults under anesthesia qualify. During this dazed state our computer couldn’t make sense of events. So they were stored as memory bits called *engrams* in a special bucket, leaving a gap in the computer’s memory.

We are not aware of these engrams. Worse yet, these memories

contain everything that was said, felt, or otherwise experienced when we were “out.” Even worse, these sensations and particularly the words expressed are like hypnotic messages, and are quite literal.

For example, let’s assume our pregnant mother was waiting for daddy when he came home drunk after the company Christmas party. An argument followed, and dad whacked mom, saying “You idiot, don’t tell me what to do!” If dazed from this event, as a fetus we created an engram that probably includes a physical sensation to some part of our body as well as the above words. Because we take the verbal message so literally, we have an enormous potential to be very reserved because for some reason we sometimes think we’re an “idiot” and should never tell anyone “what they should do.”

But based on *Dianetics*, these feelings and messages are inactive until they’re “keyed in.” In other words, we need a witness to transform the potential into accepted “fact.” This takes an emotional situation that greatly resembles the incident. Perhaps many years later we have a rare argument with a basically loving spouse, and we’re reminded of the engram that is then activated. At the time the engram is keyed in, we might even feel a similar pain in the same location we did as a fetus. But from now on the message becomes active, causing a behavior switch that internalizes the engram message.

I understand *Dianetics* deals with the reliving of that original event (the mind obviously stores everything it experiences), allowing it to be released, or finally restoring it to the main computer memory in a fashion that can be understood and thus processed. Based on our mind model including the all-knowing Friendly Fred and Ernie the Ego, there is no doubt where this bucket of engrams is located, active or not. They belong to ego. As to the Dianetics “perfect computer,” I must admit I don’t know. If everything in that computer is learned, I’m inclined to place it in ego as well. After all, Fred knows, and knows everything. What must he learn?

I have not worked with *Dianetics*, but please focus only on the above concept for a starting analogy. The main point is it helps give us a sense of two parts of us, and helps us understand how complex and crazy the mind can be. In fact, this book takes a different approach to personal growth. One complication with *Dianetics* is there is now strong evidence

that engrams are stored in the physical body not only in our lifetime, but in DNA. This means it might be necessary to not only root out the hundreds of engrams we have experienced ourselves since conception, but the engrams of all our ancestors! This makes the job of typical therapists almost infinitely protracted, not only in complexity but in time. If *Dianetics* is known by some as “The Owner’s Manual of the Human Mind,” maybe this book could be entitled “The Owner’s Manual of the Spiritual Mind.”

There appears to be only two types of therapy. *One method* is to go back and dig out and cleanse everything from the past. *The second* is to release all the past and other ego relationships by trusting a wise friend or preferably Someone who knows what caused us harm and what we should keep. Only after “turning everything over” would we then use typical psychoanalysis to mop up what’s left, if necessary. This book concentrates on the second type. But to do this we must develop total faith in some entity. That entity is Friendly Fred and his friends.

But this does not answer one important question. Who is “I”? We are who we think we are, but we only have two choices. We might think we’re Ernie the Ego, which is generally the case, or we can know we are Fred. We are consciousness who chooses between the two. Some call this the soul. We are a dreamer as long as we think we are even part ego or the slightest bit different from Fred. As we will see later, we are also in our ego if we think we are different from the “Fred” of others. This is because our Fred or spirit and that of a brother’s are like holograms that are at the same time different and the same. As long as we dream, we believe in space and time, and past and future. Only when we awaken from the dream, if only for an instant, will we remember who we really are and what we simply believed.

On Learning

On a more practical basis, it’s helpful to look at how our ego learns. When we’re born, our egos are small, and we’re almost completely perfection or spirit. Many a parent describes the birth of their children, as a virtual flood of holiness celebrating this newly created soul as it joins the physical body. Our egos are composed primarily of memories carried

forward in the genes of our inherited DNA, and what we potentially “learned” as a fetus. When born we felt disconnected from our mother and extremely confused by this new order of things. We again merged, in a sense, with the first being possible. In most cases this was our mother. After all, we had been a part of her for some nine months already.

In some cases this is not possible. When we are not bonded to our mother or a loving parent in the first six months, one can get extremely troubled children. Born out of continuous fear, these children cannot trust anything or anyone. Although this phenomenon is not restricted to orphans by any means, numerous such kids come from orphanages. Even if fed, bonobo babies quickly die without physical affection.

Bonding generally occurs. In fact, as infants we cannot usually distinguish between ourselves and either parent, for the first two years of our life (more in a couple paragraphs). These giants are part of us, and are also gods! Imagine the confusion when a parent yells at or hits a young child. We are beating up on ourselves! The gods must be angry as well! Our concept of safety and love is turned upside down at a young age, guilt and shame have no place to go but be internalized, and our first important concept of god is established...

There appears to be a difference in degree between shame and guilt. Guilted people unconsciously believe “I’ve done something bad.” Shamed people believe “I am bad.” Guilted people have known certain degrees of being accepted, so they have some sense of worthiness or being deserving. But such people can be totally devastated when any type of loss is experienced. Yuppies beware!

Shamed people have known little acceptance, feel unworthy, and seem to act differently. They tend to be the most withdrawn or hostile (one extreme or the other) and these behaviors and others are used to keep people away. Such people might appear cold on the outside to accomplish this, becoming uncomfortable when people get close to them. Millions gain weight, which is an extremely literal way to keep people at a distance. The mind does all these things.

After many years the negative results for both guilted and shamed people can cause comparable confusion. This is similar to the concept of two different types of alcoholics. Some people are Type I alcoholics. They are extremely susceptible to the drug, and with their first drink are

chemically addicted. It's almost as if such people have a certain allergy to the drug. If our mother drank while carrying us, the odds greatly increase that we too will become Type I alcoholics.

Alcohol also seems to have a pronounced physical effect on such individuals. The Type I alcoholic has every right to say "I am an alcoholic" even upon recovery, because one drink sets off the chemical imbalance. This seems to have strong genetic linkage. The Type II alcoholic doesn't seem to be affected much by the drug. In fact, they can often drink large quantities with little apparent effect. But after many years of heavy consumption, the same chemical imbalance can be triggered. Damage to the liver and other organs can also be equally severe. Shame can be compared to the Type I alcoholic. A head start on insanity is already present. The guilty, however, depending on how many disappointments and surprises they experience in life, can end up as confused and anguished as the shamed.

As infants grow older, they finally sense they are separate creatures. This generally occurs at about 2 years of age. A test can even be used to identify this point in our lives. Researchers put a red mark on the nose of children looking in a mirror. If they don't realize they're separate, they will simply smile. If they've already arrived at this point and realize they're individuals, they will touch the red mark in curiosity.

But even after we realize we're "separate," we have no sense of morals and little reason until about age 7. It's amazing that we insist younger children have reason, and become angry at what they do. Young children are simply that, *children*...little sponges of behavior and actions. Most learning is absorbed by the examples of behavior from those around them, and *not* based on what they're told. The worst we can do is to teach sin to children. Anything other than teaching a totally loving and gentle God to any child under the age of 7 is a crime.

Roughly from ages 7 to 14, we *assimilate and process* information based on this newly-accepted ability to reason. Some of our information and memories won't make any sense at all, and other information seems quite reasonable. Our belief system is being forged. It is most likely in this period that we decide to either base our value and identity on what others think of us, or what we decide. This phase culminates with puberty. Near age 14 we are sexually complete, and considered adults by many societies.

Our lives are massively influenced by such seven-year cycles. We pass through different phases perhaps best documented by Gail Sheehy in her wonderful book entitled *Passages: Between the ages of about 14 and 21 we enter a “breaking away” period. We start carving out a new sense of self. We’re no longer children, but we’re not yet sure if we’re adults. Peer groups, sexual identity, and a sense of how the world works are primary pursuits. So trying to “control” teenagers is almost a contradiction in terms. In fact, this age group will actively seek out things their parents don’t understand, and preferably find incomprehensible. It seems the best way to work with this age group is by simply establishing new adult relationships with each, which openly replace superior-subordinate roles. By age 21, a physical and psychological break with parents is generally achieved. This parting is very natural and normal, just as in the animal world. And any physical or emotional roadblocks to this process by parents will cause problems.*

Between ages 21 and 28, we are torn between two desires. One is to create something lasting and secure, and the other is to explore and experiment. Sheehy points out that the biggest fear during this phase is that our choices are irrevocable. Which, of course, is generally untrue. This period does, however, tend to establish a life pattern. Most end up pursuing *the typical “shoulds” of society* and without knowing it, our family.

Between ages 28 and 35, we sense an important need for change. If we spent the prior 7 years doing “shoulds,” we will often tear up such plans, and pursue a new direction. If married, some serious reconsideration is probably called for. If we’re unsuccessful, divorce often occurs. If we’ve somehow put off being married, we’re most likely to tie the knot. Major new plans are made and we become more concerned with self and less concerned with society. So during this period we typically end up trying to do it *our way*.

If we haven’t before found a reason to look deeply within, we will still reach an impasse between ages 35 and 42. “Shoulds” didn’t provide the answers from 21-28, and “our own way” didn’t provide real happiness from 28-35. Our earlier dreams either weren’t achieved or didn’t satisfy, and youthful bodies are visibly changing. But we still haven’t figured out what we truly believe in or why we’re doing all this. “Is this

all there is?" We become acutely aware of time. In terms of our physical life we can for the first time dimly perceive "the dark at the end of the tunnel." Depending on how well we've plugged into the harmony of the universe, this period can be one of great reawakening or utter turmoil.

Starting with a gentle knock at the door near age 35, by age 42 nature is creating personal earthquakes to ask of our decision to life. The hard-chargers are experiencing upheaval, perhaps heart attacks of increasing frequency and magnitude. The woman can become very confused, or experience a great exhilaration and rebirth if she gets "in tune" with life. The man puts "the pedal to the metal," seeking one last chance to "make it," to become the president of his own company or of the United States. (I'm now not surprised that I quit employment at a huge multinational company to start my own business at exactly age 35.) We have only two choices to this period - that of *resignation* or *renewal*. Either we stick to the old familiar rut and make the best of it, or experience a wonderful renewal. Questions of God, philosophy, wisdom and Self can no longer be ignored. This is the period during which most people find their way into Twelve-Step or spiritual programs.

The prior period is critical. Just as Moses was lost in the wilderness for 40 years, so it seems were we. If we choose renewal, gain a new sense of self, and begin to enjoy the wonder of how we fit into the universe, we are truly reborn. The rest of our years can be the most gratifying of our life. But if we choose resignation, all hell can break loose near age 49, for it is our personal *Year of Jubilee*. If we don't choose to change, anger, resentment, frustration and illness will start to consume us. We become isolated and start to fear our demise.

Forgive Us Our Debts... describes in detail the great importance of both seven and fifty year cycles on economic developments. *The Bible* describes both, and refers to the longer cycle in terms of forgiveness of debt (of *all* types), and is called *The Year of Jubilee*. The Mayans also celebrated massive change every 54 years. In financial circles this is called the *Kondratieff Wave*. Every 50-60 years the economy undergoes massive debt adjustment, some call them depressions, and this cycle has been recurring since at least Biblical times. In my first book I point out that about every 3 generations, debt is confronted and dealt with, and it's once again determined who owns what. Is there any similarity between

financial debt and existential debt (expectations)? Interestingly enough, *social and health cycles follow the same periodicity as financial cycles*. In other words our society will massively reverse itself in financial, health, and social terms. Epic change of all types can no longer be held back, and *Forgive Us Our Debts...* fully describes those investments that increased one hundred-fold in value during the last depression.

On the other hand, this book discusses a step-by-step approach to personal renewal and awakening. It is not the only path, but one that's the most simple and practical available. It's working for me and millions of others. It's composed of steps, because trying to awaken in one quantum leap is too difficult and fearful for most.

This pursuit is the Hero's Quest. It is no less important than the most wondrous myth or fable, old or new, you've ever heard. We can become the Luke Skywalker of our own movie, a script we are currently writing every second of every day. In fact, it is the only real challenge we face. We might spend great effort in our search for love, happiness, success, wealth, or power. But anything outside ourselves will *never* provide serenity. Peace, love, and joy are found within, at the end of our personal rainbow. I pray you well, because all of us will be uplifted as you near arrival. Become. By remembering. And let your loving light shine on the world.

This is the most enchanting and epic venture you will ever undertake. The way isn't always easy, and most give up early. What I have attempted to explain in this book are the major pitfalls and all the shortcuts I know. May "The Force" be with you.

The Ego's Primary Defenses

In today's world I have never met a single person who experienced a virgin birth, had perfectly loving parents, or grew up in the "perfect society of Atlantis." Virtually no one quite received the love and appreciation we believed were our due as children, and still today as adults. If we've not confronted and dealt with the situation, we've not reached enlightenment.

So we suffer from this certain "lack" or *yearning*. We sense a certain

hole in our being - we think we're incomplete. The incomplete seek completion. Seeking completion creates desire. Desire produces need. Need proves we are incomplete. And the circle continues and the cycle goes on. So we continue "looking for love in all the wrong places."

Picture, if you will, a sun or nucleus. Inside that nucleus is infinity, everything that we could ever want. Peace, love, and joy are found there. This is where Friendly Fred or spirit lives. It is the only real "I".

But we have created something else called ego. It is closely associated with our body and is based on fear and guilt, and tries to take on a life of its own. The ego is afraid of spirit, and will try everything to keep us from seeing our true self. It creates problems where none exist, simply to keep our mind busy. And it makes us believe we are incomplete.

What do we think we need? This is answered by what we do and think. Around our sun or nucleus spins dozens of planets or electrons. Etched on each particle is a name. These things are what we think we need. They might be certain feelings. Or behaviors. Or physical things. This is where the ego looks, it looks outward, to find satisfaction, completion, its salvation. Why does it look outward? To keep us from looking inward.

Every special relationship you have made has, as its fundamental purpose, the aim of occupying your mind so completely that you will not hear the call of truth.

- A Course In Miracles T-17.IV.3:3

These electrons, this planetary debris, constitute our unique set of perceived needs. They might satisfy, but only for a brief time. Sometimes we think they have made us happy, made us complete. But twenty seconds, or twenty months, or twenty years later, we realize they didn't work. We will either seek more of that "thing," or shift our focus to something else. Everyone's planetary configuration is different, in size or make-up. Some call these things "temptations of the devil." Others call them perceived needs created by ego. It doesn't matter.

Each of these spinning bits and pieces are called **special relationships**. What are our special relationships, our idols? Let's look at some examples.

Fear	Anger	Chocolate
False Pride	Worry	Sugar
Sex	Debt	Nicotine
Racism	Food	Alcohol
Control	Guilt/Shame	Marijuana
Power	Work	Peyote
Television	Procrastination	MDMA
A Lover	People-Pleasing	Cocaine
Bullying	Gossiping	LSD
Money	Sports	Methamphetamines
Politics	Materialism	Heroin/Opiates
Religion	Depression	Prescription Drugs
Being Right	Shopping	Gambling
Being Smartest	House-Cleaning	Our Parents
Judgment	Weakness	Our Children
Planning	Pity	Fantasizing
Pouting	Enabling/Fixing	Pessimism
Isolation	Perfectionism	Body Beautiful
Blame	Dependence	Schadenfreude
A Specific Person	Being Strongest	A Politician
Independence	Being Fastest	...etc., etc., ad infinitum
Envy	Sickness	

Be it a body or thing, a place, a situation or circumstance, an object owned or wanted, or a right demanded or achieved, it is the same.

– A Course In Miracles T-29.VIII.1:9

Our children are often special relationships. We think they will be someone to love, who needs us, who will love us. The result is generally something quite different... And when kids grow up and leave the household, withdrawal pains are normally experienced. Even when physically gone, we still try to hold onto them psychologically, perhaps intruding in their lives or worrying about them (both of which “prove” our love). Even the entire identity of millions of people are based on their children: “I am a parent.”

Or let's assume we have a special relationship with alcohol. I've met hundreds of people who have divorced this relationship through various means. The most successful avenue is *Alcoholics Anonymous*. There is often pain associated with this divorce. Something is gone, it feels different, an old friend has died. A grieving period must often be completed. But the individual is normally left with a lack...something is still missing. It's not unusual for such people to adopt a new special relationship. If it's joining a health club and working out 7 days a week, the new special relationship might be healthier or more socially-acceptable. This is obviously a better alternative, but we still have a problem. Our "dis-ease" has simply shifted from cancer to asthma. Our individual might instead unconsciously choose anorexia or bulimia as a new special relationship. Here the original problem is more obvious. But unless the original problem of self-esteem or the source of our yearning is not resolved, the "lack" still exists.

A housewife might "resolve" the problem of being a compulsive shopper and ruining the family's finances, only to become an obsessive house-cleaner. The problem is still there, but in different form. Special relationships are like different kinds of booze. Simply pick your brand. And any of these special relationships can become, in the words of Lady Gaga, a "Bad Romance."

There are some forty different Twelve-Step programs dealing with one special relationship or another. But "graduation" is not simply stopping that behavior...but in restoring true self-identity and esteem. If not, the program didn't "take." Often one finds such people chasing between numerous Twelve-Step programs without finding who they really are. Without becoming "complete." Often such people find their way into an Adult Children program where they finally start looking at their real past, dealing with it, and finally releasing it. I've seen many hard-core alcoholics reach a nice level of success in AA, but find it too painful to truly look inside themselves via Adult Children. Perhaps this is why ACA is often called "the black belt of Twelve-Step." The success rate, however, is not high. Of those entering the program, most drop out early. I would estimate the success rate at near 10%. But such a high failure rate is primarily due to how people use such a program. Having worked all twelve steps in this program, I've noticed several common

problems one encounters, and now know the solutions. Thus the book you are now reading.

The Best Defense is a Good Offense?

The average person is in such deep denial of these special relationships that they seldom notice their own perceived needs and attachments. But we can certainly see those of others.

And you might guess the results. We attack. Those with drinking problems can be the greatest enemy of finally ending marijuana prohibition. The pity pervert will find fault with a power addict. Those whose special relationship includes perfectionism easily find fault with anyone else's special relationships. The relationship addict will first dote on their new love, then when the bloom is off the rose, attack their former beloved. One over-zealous religious group will make war on another because they worship the same God differently.

Some almost make a profession of their special relationship, like the gossips who take turns making war on each other. Keep in mind that all suffer from the same disease, low self-esteem, but find fault in how the malady manifests itself as another's symptom.

Some special relationships bring people together. Entire organizations can assemble to further their insane beliefs. It often makes little difference in which special relationship this might be. Whether you hate Jews, blacks, or boysenberry pie, or obsess on sex, pedophilia, or plum pudding, you will find some comfort in sharing that belief with others. Having a drinking buddy is more fun than acting out one's special relationship alone.

It's important at this point to clearly distinguish between a destructive special relationship and a healthy, deep involvement. The answer lies in one critical question: "*What is the purpose?*"

An ideal example might be the Olympic gold medal-winner. One athlete will have arrived at such a grand level of competence because he was driven to excess in an effort to gain recognition or fill a hole within his being, to become "complete." Such a person might just as easily have become a workaholic (and there's still time!), simply to gain an overt expression of love and appreciation from his father.

A second gold-medalist could have succeeded because she was simply using part of her infinite power in a beautiful expression of love of life. She was doing it for herself as a total person in this pursuit. She was "following her bliss." This doesn't mean this individual doesn't have other special relationships, and surely does, but the *purpose* is totally different.

The first individual's purpose was based on lack and need, the second on wholeness and giving. The former was using the activity to avoid looking at self, and the latter to express self. The special relationship is governed by ego. A holy relationship is governed by spirit.

Other Dysfunctional Families

The concept of dysfunctional families can easily be extended beyond one's immediate family. Companies, for example, are families too. Here we find more of the same. We have already discussed different types of dysfunction, including rage, mental abuse, abandonment, religious prejudice, over-control, etc. Having served as a business consultant, I have personally witnessed every single one of these dysfunctions in business families, except physical abuse. And although less prevalent, there are several such cases described in the press. I've even seen incest: The business owner - "the parent" - has an affair with an employee - "the child" - with one or both being married or "committed" to someone else.

In my first book, *Forgive Us Our Debts...*, I explore in some detail the problems companies now face. It is suggested you refer to that publication for a more complete understanding of the current situation. But in the end, one need only ask one question to identify dysfunction within any unit: Does it work or not? With so many American companies now carrying such unbelievable debt, a great percentage will fail over the next five years. I'm sure you can identify numerous other problem areas in the business world, other than finance and debt, that simply don't make sense. If we can extend the concept of dysfunction from families to businesses, it is natural to take a look at entire countries. Again we find more of the same. The United States, for example, is the critical parent of the world. The messages are very clear: "Don't do as I do, do as I say." "I know, you don't know." "If you need help, always ask me." As

a result, our country has overextended its attempted worldwide control to the point of futility. As a result, on both a national and international level, citizens and other countries alike have abdicated enormous responsibility to the U.S. Government. Many have grown to despise it. Is it any wonder why we're experiencing such discord? Again I refer you to *Forgive Us Our Debts...* for a more complete description of such developments, what will result, and what to immediately do about it. Most people have no idea how to manage their investments during deflations and depressions, as the country experiences its own *Year of Jubilee*.

But as long as we pretend all is well and wonderful in any family, thereby avoiding a critical look at the true situation, true progress is highly unlikely. This obviously extends to our global family as well. And instead of quick fixes and the treating of *symptoms*, we must get to the core of the problem itself.

This is how denial works, and the results. Whether it be personally, or within a family, company, or country, no change is possible until we peel back the veil and take a close look at the situation at hand. But review is impossible as long as we stay within ourselves or in the situation. For example, the only way I could tell the United States was in such sad shape financially and socially was by living and traveling outside the country and directly comparing our nation with others.

This is similar to a computer that only makes one mistake...that $1 + 1 = 3$. Can you imagine the errors it would create? And that computer can self-analyze itself forever, and not see anything is wrong. But by comparing results with other units, at least a problem can be identified. The solution, however, cannot be resolved at the end result of its calculations, because these are only symptoms. To correct the problem, one must determine what is Truth.

Denial is broken when we move from "I don't know that I don't know." to "It simply isn't working. Maybe there's another way." Only then can real progress begin. And the only place to start is with "I".

We have now fully discussed denial, how the mind works, the precepts for understanding, and the real problem. It is now time to focus on *the solution*.



PART TWO

The Solution

The Twelve Steps

Step 1: Humility

Before honor is humility.

- Proverbs 15:33

The first part of this book focused on denial. Once we get beyond the “I don’t know that I don’t know” stage, we can at least see part of reality. Before we can deal with a problem, it must first be recognized.

Furthermore, if there are difficulties to be overcome, it is obvious our old actions simply weren’t working. We are now ready for the first step of the solution, finally realizing “I know I don’t know.” This should not cause anxiety. After all, we’re not judging whether what we think or do is good or bad, but simply whether it’s working or not. The word for this state of mind is *humility*...we become humble (which is *not* the same as humiliation). But until we have it, precious little change of *any* kind is possible, let alone practical.

As with most teaching, the best way to illustrate the differences between denial and humility is by example. Everyone has two vastly different life stories. One is a story of denial, and the other a story of

humility. You should be able to identify with many aspects of my own story. Let me begin with the *denial* stage, followed by one of humility.

A Story of Denial

In my own naive opinion, for decades it appeared that virtually everything had gone extremely well in my life. I was born and raised in Palisade, a small Nebraska town, and still remember the carefree days of wandering among the hills and valleys. Sometimes exploring on my own, often with young friends. My folks were never drinkers, and never once even spanked me. My father was a hard worker, highly-respected in the community, and my mother's major focus was staying home to support and raise the family. My sister and I always knew where our parents were, and exactly when lunch and dinner would be on the table.

My report cards were always loaded with "A's," and I was always one of the top one or two students in my class. I refused early offers to be advanced a grade. Particularly in high school, I played all major sports, including baseball in the summer. I was voted homecoming king, was dating the homecoming queen, and graduated valedictorian.

At the University of Nebraska, I pursued a difficult major, engineering, and was still named to four honoraries, and elected president of one. I earned a scholarship and was named the outstanding senior student in my department by fellow classmates.

I had also joined Triangle Fraternity, a typical social fraternity which restricted its membership to engineers, architects, science and math majors. In that organization I was elected Rush Chairman, doubled the size of the pledge class two years in a row, and was elected President. By at least one measure, I was the third most-recognized student at the large university in 1968, and graduated with a Master's Degree.

I was recruited straight out of graduate school by a huge multinational, Caterpillar Inc., to work in international marketing management. I was featured in one of their worldwide publications, and sent to a prestigious post in Geneva, Switzerland. That was followed by assignments to two prime locations, Paris, France, and Johannesburg, South

Africa, for a total of 6 years living outside the U.S. My travels took me to another 30 countries. I'd paid cash for BMWs and Mercedes, consulted with ambassadors, lived in the rented home of a count, and dined with Prime Ministers. Years earlier I even shook the hand of Bobby Kennedy two weeks before his assassination.

After dating even professional models and recording artists, at age 32 I was married to a wonderful and beautiful young lady and my stock investments had grown to \$100,000 (more than three times that in today's dollars). An annualized 112% return on that amount during my last four years with Caterpillar created a situation where I was making more on my own investments than my considerable management salary. My broker was calling me for advice more often than I was calling him. At age 35 I quit and became the president of my own independent investment management corporation in 1980.

I was aired several times on TV and radio, became an award-winning speaker, and served as Club President, Area Governor, and District Governor with Toastmasters International. My articles on political, economic, and social change appeared in various Illinois and California newspapers. My company became proficient enough to advise clients to sell gold-related investments within 2 weeks of their stratospheric highs in 1980, and to move clients 100% out of common stocks 2 weeks before the stock market crash of 1987. Clients included many common folk as well as stockbrokers, bankers, financial planners, CPAs, lawyers, U.S. and overseas business owners, and Nobel prize-winners.

But all this was my denial mask...the successes you talk about with other people. I knew exactly how everything worked. I was just "fine," and no one could tell me differently. Avoided were the personal things you seldom share, or even admit to yourself.

Everyone has such a success or denial story, but everyone also has a secret side. My humility story is quite different. And until I entered a Twelve-Step program I wasn't prepared to even consider any part of my life as less than perfect. After all, we're supposed to be positive, confident, successful and (as a man) macho.

Contrast the above with the other side of my story, only recognized through Twelve-Step:

A Story of Humility

While growing up, society and family never modeled closeness and overt affection to me. As a “counter-dependent-in-training” I was told not to cry, be strong, try harder, always do my best, be nice...I’m sure you can recount similar, or slightly different messages. My subconscious reaction to all this was I had to prove myself, which led to the substantial part of my becoming a chronic overachiever. Individuals either pursue this insane “high road,” or basically “drop out” of society.

I was also a small child. Combine this with having to wear glasses from age 8, and you have a fearful little person. I also had a weird uncle who had some strange ideas about women. He introduced me to sex games and masturbation, and was predominant in my treating women as sex objects for nearly 35 years. This confuses one’s ability to be truly intimate. Although I was not the victim of overt and physical sexual abuse by this man, my early exposure to sex still constituted abuse. (Penetration is not the defining measurement in this area. Innuendo, appropriateness, and the resulting expectations are sufficient.)

Particularly in my senior year in high school, after breaking my ankle playing my favorite sport, I became addicted to nicotine. Because of insecurity and low self-esteem, I was never comfortable and confident in my relations with the opposite sex. In my early twenties my confidence with women grew, and numerous sexual encounters resulted over a 15 year period, but for the wrong reasons.

In college, I felt driven to serve in numerous organizations, which looked great on a resume, and had much to do with obtaining a superb first job with Caterpillar. My over-achieving was starting to bloom in earnest. But a sense of confusion started to enter my life. When in graduate school, I remember driving out to a high hill overlooking Lincoln, Nebraska, trying to figure out what all this was for, what was missing.

Shortly after leaving college, I started to abuse alcohol. This was generally a six-pack in the evening. My physical reaction to alcohol was minimal, but it became a comfortable companion until 1987.

My 12 years with Caterpillar management could best be described as serious workaholism...going to work early, leaving late, and working on projects during evenings and often on weekends. I was married while

living in Africa, and that marriage failed after only 4 years. I simply didn't know how to love.

When I started my own company, I graduated to industrial strength workaholism. I was determined to know more about investing than anyone in the country. I read every book on the subject I could put my hands on, and subscribed to every major independent financial newsletter in the world...sometimes paying as much as \$1000 a year to access one of the best minds in the business. When I couldn't figure out how the pros made investment timing decisions, I paid as much as \$2500 to buy their strategies. As I look back, instead of starting my own business, which should make money, I had created a research department. Customers and income weren't important; "knowing" more about money than anyone else was. But there is a limit to how long you can be a "student." You drop out of school when your checkbook expires. My objective when starting my business was supposedly to make my first million on my own. I missed it by 1.3 million. Over a period of 7 years, as the zeros started falling off my net worth, I found myself nearly broke. I finally had the tricks to investing figured out, but didn't have sufficient capital to take full advantage of it. Simply because I didn't know how to manage my own business.

It might not be surprising that it was at this time I met a young lady, which resulted in one of the most destructive relationships I ever thought possible. It was time to resign as my own teacher.

Growth

I think you can appreciate the difference between my denial and humility stories. Everyone can contrast similar perceptions...one of great bravado, perfection, and "knowing" and another of true inner secrets and confusion. But the bottom line is very simple. Are you contented and joyful, or not? Are your family, relationships, and finances working, or not?

I think I received the first hint of my "bottom" back in 1982. My divorce was finalizing; we were in the process of losing \$50,000 on the sale of a \$120,000 home as prices plummeted; I sold a barter business and never received contracted payment for the sale; I was carrying a

second office lease at \$600/month (which was empty); I developed ulcers; my business was still consuming tons of money; and it was obvious my dad was dying.

I'll never forget the latter. Dad had been in and out of hospitals for many years, and the doctors said he had the worst case of arterial sclerosis they'd ever seen. He was again in the hospital and couldn't even go to the bathroom by himself without falling. As he lay in that hospital bed, he was obviously anxious because his body simply wouldn't perform any more. He started crying. What I somehow heard him say was "I simply couldn't do enough. It didn't work." I truly believe that *every parent* somehow believes this, particularly in their old age. I walked over, hugged him, and said "Dad, we love you and still need you." For the first time ever, we cried together.

That event was critical in my family. My father and I had truly communicated for the first time. Yes, he survived that ordeal, and lived another 9 years, to age 88. Those were wonderful years. From that point on, when we talked over the telephone, it seemed to be a race to first say "I love you" as the conversation ended. And we would again cry together... but this time, it was *tears of joy*. The macho, the invulnerability, the bullshit was gone. We could finally be intimate and simply care. Without trying to control each other's lives, without "knowing" what's best for one other, without blaming. We could simply talk about anything, be vulnerable, and still fully accept each other. To me, that is love.

Strangely enough, that development opened a loving channel within my family, but still didn't move me out of denial. My first real bottom was during a destructive relationship in 1986. I was engaged to be married a second time. But insane things were happening. I was exposed to rage, up close and personal, for the first time in my life. Things just weren't working. It seemed I was spending most of my time cleaning up messes and trying to figure out what the hell was going on. We even met with a local pastor to try to determine what was happening. Nothing worked.

One day I saw a Phil Donahue show. The subject was "Adult Children of Alcoholics" (ACA). I quickly saw this could be important and started the VCR, recording the program. When she came in later after her nurse's shift, I simply said "Sit down, I want you to see something."

That program explained everything that was happening, and why. To make a long story short, she began therapy and started attending ACA meetings. I accompanied her to the first meeting, because she didn't want to go alone. I certainly didn't need the program. My parents never drank...

The relationship eventually ended, but I took extreme interest in the subject. One year later I was still writing a monthly investment newsletter, and decided to share some of the psychological roadblocks to successful investing. A friend, Charlene Conley, was a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and agreed to help me write a 3-part series on adult children for the newsletter.

One evening we were working together on the article, and she was sharing the characteristics of adult children. And then she said something very important: "You know, it's not necessary that the parents drink in order to be an adult child." Later, I again reviewed the list of typical characteristics and was amazed with my conclusion. That was me too! I excitedly called her office the next day, and ended up talking to her business associate. I said, "I'm an adult child too!" The response: "Yeah, well, virtually everybody is."

That was all I needed. I was on my way. I immediately attended my first Adult Children of Alcoholics meeting...not to try and fix someone else, but for ME. And I knew before I attended that first meeting, that was where I belonged. Despite the fact my parents never drank. And strangely enough, this time they were telling my story.

The Twelve-Step Meeting

Some might wonder what happens in AA meetings, or one of the numerous other Twelve-Step programs like ACA. All are very similar, with the major differences in references to the particular problem at hand. I found ACA the most generic of them all, if one changes the focus from alcohol to imperfect parents.

You might have a friend in such a program, and wonder how it works; or maybe you want to consider a personal "tune-up" of your own; or you feel checking out such a meeting might be interesting.

An ACA meeting is generally started with an opening by the

Secretary with a moment of silence followed by the Serenity Prayer. Various readings are then done. Regardless of what was said, the following is what I heard at my first ACA meeting:

Opening:

A heart-felt welcome to everyone. We hope you will find in this fellowship the increased awareness, peace and love we have been privileged to enjoy.

We who live with, or have lived with, the problems of dysfunction understand where you're coming from. We too often felt lonely and frustrated, but in the Adult Children program we discover that no situation is really hopeless, and that it's possible for us to find contentment and even happiness, whether still living in a dysfunctional family or not.

We urge you to try our program. It has helped many find solutions that lead to serenity. Once our problems and attitudes are looked at in their true perspective, we find they lose their power to dominate our thoughts and our lives.

Our lives are bound to improve as we apply the program. Without such assistance, living in frustration is simply too much for most of us. Trying old ways to solve the same problems hasn't worked, and trying to force solutions has caused us to become irritable and unreasonable without even knowing it.

The program is adapted from the twelve suggested steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. We try, little by little, one day at a time, to apply these steps to our lives. We, also, use the Slogans and the Serenity Prayer. The loving interchange of help among members and the daily reading of the program literature make us ready to receive the priceless gift of serenity.

This is an anonymous fellowship. The identity of everyone must be preserved both inside and outside the meetings, particularly concerning what each might share. Only in this way can we feel free to say what is in our hearts and minds.

The Problem:

We found we had numerous characteristics in common, as a result of childhoods that saw too little or far too much emotion; too little love

and appreciation; or inconsistencies and even chaos. We learned to stuff our feelings as children and kept them buried as adults. We had come to feel frustrated, lonely, fearful, angry, and incomplete.

To protect ourselves we developed new personalities, losing our true internal identities. Some of us became co-dependent people-pleasers, overly-concerned with what others thought of us. We treated others better than ourselves so they would like us. We felt guilty when we stood up for ourselves rather than giving in to others. And became reactors instead of actors, letting others take the initiative.

Or some of us chose counter-dependency, a macho or independent image to hide the uncertainties inside. We became very controlling, doing anything to prevent people from knowing of our confusion. We looked down on others and hated weakness in ourselves or others. We became insensitive to people, insisting on being right, concentrating only on ourselves.

We often developed dependent personalities, terrified of abandonment, willing to do almost anything to hold onto a relationship so as not to be alone again. Relationships tended to be based on need and getting instead of intimacy, giving, and accepting.

To feel more complete, or to ignore our problems, we became attached to certain compulsions and addictions, often including other people. Although we felt better for a while, we eventually found these solutions were ineffective as well.

Refusing to look at our own problems, we preferred to concentrate on the problems of others. We perceived criticism as a threat and lived life from the standpoint of victims. This placed the responsibility for change on others and not us.

This is a description, not an indictment.

The Solution:

By attending these meetings on a regular basis, you will first learn that you are not alone and have no unique thoughts or fears. Look around you and you will see other men and women who know exactly how you feel. We know where you're coming from, because we've been there too.

By viewing each other as equals, seeking the same solution, you will

not be judged. Instead we will love, accept, and support you no matter what. We want you to accept us as brothers and sisters just as we already accept you. We aren't perfect. The welcome we give you may not show the warmth we have in our hearts for you. After a while, you'll discover that though you may not like all of us, you'll love us in a very special way - the same way we already love you.

By simply accepting each other, we learn to keep the focus on ourselves in the here and now. This releases us from the past, with its hangover of shame and blame. This means we become adults no longer imprisoned in childhood reactions. We become free from stimulus-response. By releasing our parents and others from responsibility for our actions today, we become free to make new choices as actors, not reactors. We finally take responsibility for our own lives.

We grow to learn that no one is perfect, and everyone has similar worries, guilts, and fears. We learn to accept our parents and others in the same way. We now see our biological parents simply as the instruments of our physical existence.

Our true and perfect parent is a Higher Power or intelligence we usually call God. God gave us true life. And we hope to learn how to love and accept each other the same way God always has with us.

You will not do all this alone. We talk to each other, reason things out with others, without criticism of one another. We use the steps. We use the slogans. We use the telephone. And we share our experience, strength and hope with each other. This work allows us to heal the way we think, one day at a time.

If you try to keep an open mind, you will find peace. You will come to realize that there is no situation too difficult to be bettered, and no unhappiness too great to be lessened. Simply let the understanding, peace, and love of the program grow in you one day at a time.

This is not a self-development program. It is not psychoanalysis or group therapy. It is not a religious program. But it is a spiritual program based on action coming from love and acceptance. We're sure that as the love grows inside you, you'll see beautiful changes in all of your relationships - especially with your parents, your God, and with yourself.

Cross talk:

When we try to avoid looking at our own problems, we concentrate on the problems of others. Placing the emphasis on others, trying to “fix” and “help” them, impedes our own recovery. Outside the program others have tried to fix, help, and otherwise judge us as well. So we come to these meetings tired of and perhaps fearful of criticism, feeling inner pain and frustration, and fearful and resentful of others. If others during the meeting try to give us advice, we can find it difficult to express our true thoughts and feelings because we do not feel safe.

This is a spiritual program based upon trust coming from love and acceptance. Trust can only be earned by allowing others to share their experience, strength, and hope, or other things on their mind freely without our opinions. We must maintain a safe place for everyone to speak what is in their hearts and minds.

This is why crosswalk is the bane of all meetings. Only by not criticizing, interrupting, questioning, or commenting on what others say can we truly assist our brothers and sisters in recovery. Inside or outside the meeting.

The Secretary would then have someone read the twelve steps and twelve traditions, or they were passed among participants. Someone with experience was also asked to comment on the role of sponsors, which is so important to program success. A brief reading was then done for newcomers, and newcomers were asked to introduce themselves by first name only. Everyone else then introduced themselves in the same way.

The secretary does what little planning is necessary, and holds that job for perhaps six months. The chairperson changes each week, and they are then introduced. This person shared ten or fifteen minutes of their story, their experience, strength, and hope. He or she finally introduced a topic for discussion, and other members then shared their experience or comments on that subject. Any member could also share a particular experience or any unrelated personal items at this time. This was not done to solicit advice on what to do, because comments by

others would be considered crosstalk and not allowed. Everyone is simply encouraged to get things out in this safety which in itself is cathartic.

During the meeting a donation basket was passed, and those able to contributed for program expenses. Those who could not afford to didn't contribute. At the end of the meeting a brief closing was read, and the meeting ended with the Lord's Prayer.

An abundance of literature is always available. Most are free. Copies of lists are also generally available which provide the times, dates, and locations of other meetings in the area. Most members stay around to chat afterwards, and someone is always available to answer any questions that newcomers have.

Many groups get together for coffee after meetings, where numerous friendships are forged. Most sponsors are found immediately after the meeting or over coffee.

I cannot fully explain everything I received from that program. But it certainly didn't happen overnight. I didn't know why, but for some reason I simply kept attending my Friday night meeting. For one year. I certainly enjoyed being around "real" people, whose pretenses were falling away, who were sincere and honest.

I also made numerous friends and simply enjoyed their company. Perhaps I looked forward to seeing some cute skirts that also attended, but something kept me going back. From today's perspective, I didn't grow much in that first year, and I was only playing with the program. I wasn't serious and I wasn't doing the footwork. Sure, I learned a lot about most of the special terms and language used in the group. And I'm sure some of the program was internalized by simple osmosis. But after twelve months, I started getting impatient. I distinctly remember saying to myself: "Are you going to screw around with this program forever, give it up, or give it a damned good shot just to see what happens?" I chose the latter. I found a sponsor, in fact two sponsors.

Up, Up, and Away!

My first sponsor, who I'll call Alan, had worked his twelve steps in AA. He was, at the same time, the most vulnerable and powerful person I'd ever met. An ex-marine, he was 14 years my junior. He had the most

piercing eyes I'd ever seen. He creates so much energy, he can't wear a wristwatch longer than 48 hours. They simply stop. His testosterone was pumping so hard he was already bald at his young age. We started meeting at his home every Tuesday evening, working a new step each week.

I even ended up with a second "sponsor," who I'll call Annie. She was finishing her Masters in Social Work. We would meet every Sunday evening, and she would "clear my week" for me. We'd discuss what happened, my reactions, and she provided me with ways to handle situations, or react to things differently.

But I had one potential problem. Or so it seemed. Twelve-Step is a spiritual program, not one of psychoanalysis. And I had grown to question most things religious. Not because of bad experience, which was mostly of a bland, formless Methodist upbringing. I wasn't forced to go to Sunday School or church as a kid, but it had little impact. I guess I became agnostic, and decided that if I lived a basically good life and was eventually judged that I'd probably be fine. But then in my world travels I met numerous different ethnic groups. I then became saddened by all the enormous cemeteries across Europe, and was sensitized to all the wars fought between religions, some differing only in how they worshiped or interpreted the same God. My eventual reaction was to avoid all "isms" like the plague. For the first full year I even refused to join in the Lord's Prayer at the end of meetings.

When Alan and I first studied a step relating to a Higher Power, within 24 hours I received my first obvious miracle. I was presented with *A Course In Miracles*. It was thanks to my angel Annie, who would become a second sponsor, and who gave me what I'd unknowingly craved all my life...

I had met with my sponsor Alan on a Tuesday night. He summarized our last step, and we then discussed Step 3. This is the first place in the steps that a Higher Power is seriously discussed. I told Alan I was going to need some help on this one, and was hoping that wouldn't slow down our pace of one step every week. I then returned home. There was a large Wednesday evening ACA group, which I attended the following night. Afterwards, some of us went to Don Z's for coffee, and we chatted about God knows what for a couple hours. It was getting late, and Annie found out I had just started Step 3. She asked if I had a Higher Power yet, and I told her I wasn't

comfortable with one yet. She got this big grin on her face, and asked “Do you have some extra time?” And invited me over to her place.

She was a student of a local guru, and was being presented with some pretty wild stuff. She was also studying something called *A Course In Miracles*, which was a popular spiritual document, to get confirmation of the other teachings. She had this audio tape that someone had professionally done, which took a whole series of quotes out of the course book, with soft music in the background. She lit some candles, turned off the lights, and started the tape...

The words riveted me with their truth, but in a strange way that was almost a reminder of what I already knew. Every single phrase was that way. That night became one of the most memorable and loving memories of my life. To say the least, nothing could stop me from running out and buying the book early the very next day, and I headed off to Carl's Jr. to begin my reading. From the very beginning, I would read a paragraph, and get so excited I wanted to share it with someone else, and then...the next paragraph was equally mind-blowing...the entire book was that way. I could not put it down for two solid weeks, until I had devoured it all in its entirety...complete with my own notes in the margins and many in my growth notebook.

During those “happy learner” days I got in the habit of attending an early evening Saturday ACA meeting to obtain my deeply psychological questions of life, and then immediately going to *A Course in Miracles* meeting at Karen's house, to get the answers. Those meetings were phenomenal...almost heaven on earth. With all the growing suspicions of others' religions, here were some 30 people on average from every religious and spiritual group you could imagine...Jews, agnostics, Christians, Hindus, atheists, Buddhists...everyone was there...all with this big loving and excited smile on their faces, excitedly studying the same spiritual beliefs! That spiritual study path opened the universe to me. I finally had an entity into whose arms I could fully leap.

In conclusion, after playing around with the program and making little progress for a full year, I had shown what is sometimes called “that little willingness.” When I decided to give it my best shot, just to see what would happen, and chose a sponsor, my growth was straight up...virtually exponential.

My new-found awareness grew by leaps and bounds. For example, one bonus was I now know that my mad rush to perfectionism and over-achieving for 42 years was an insane and unconscious effort to finally hear my father say “You know, I really appreciate you and am sincerely proud of you. I love you.” But even when I consciously knew that for certain in 1982, my stimulus-response mechanism was still intact for another 6 years! Of course my parents did love me, the best way they knew how, but that was simply my ego’s reaction to the situation.

Today I thank God that my parents were not more perfect, or I might never have experienced enough problems to decide to look closely within and find the existential treasures there. And I also thank God they weren’t more imperfect, or I might never have been provided enough reason to pursue the program. Today I can’t even imagine that I once believed certain things or acted in certain ways. It was simply removed. And what I learned was wondrous:

Insanity Reborn

Very early, I had turned to ego for protection and help. And a separation, the Garden of Eden story, was again repeated, like millions of times before in countless others’ lives.

That craving for love and appreciation is extremely difficult to find in this world. And no biological parent can provide it. My ego also had certain memories, passed along by physical genetics, and would construct a new belief system in this lifetime.

Early learning was from my parents. Much of what my ego learned from them made sense. Much did not. I also learned from others and from society itself. Much of this was totally insane, but it was assimilated anyway, and became my growing model of the world and everything in it. What started as a simple computer program, with a relatively small database, was growing into a strange mass of formulas and dubious interpretations.

I had bought the whole package. I had internalized and made part of me the some 25,000 hours of tapes from my parents, the true and the untrue, and I ended up carrying their feelings, behaviors, sexuality, and other characteristics far into my adulthood.

I had bought society's definition of intelligence - an interpretation measured in bizarre ways, not in terms of awareness. Our success is not correctly measured in terms of grandeur, but grandiosity - our yearly earnings; our professions; our "patriotism" and national pride; society's current but ever-changing agreement on the definition of beauty; which drugs we use or don't use; our possessions (usually acquired with debt); the friends we choose; the degree of our doing good...insanity all. I had played "follow the leader" on who the good and the bad guys were, what is right and wrong, and what was "true" and untrue. I had bought the shoulds of society, without questioning most.

The result was a confusing array of what was appropriate and inappropriate. The do's and don'ts were unclear. Should I or shouldn't I "Be a child, grow up, succeed, be me, be sincere, belong, hurry up, always do my best, be nice, be careful, be close, be strong, be perfect, always make sense, be important...?" When should I trust? When should I think? When should I feel? When can I simply...be?

All of us, as we get older, develop a much tighter and inflexible model of how things work. We try to squirt everything our senses receive into an orifice representing our unique and tiny model of the universe. If something, often what is true, doesn't fit our precise model, we bend it to fit or deny it outright.

Unconsciously, however, we know that many things we believe are untrue. This creates numerous subconscious guilts or, depending on magnitude, shames or "sins." These always accompany the ego - it simply goes with the territory. But we try to keep them hidden, from other people, and particularly ourselves. This generates fear. That perfect part of us, and ego, are in disagreement. Harmony turns to chaos.

*It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy,
To know I'm further off from heaven
Than when I was a boy.*

-Thomas Hood

As we grow older, and our insane ego system takes over more and more, our initial craving for love and appreciation grows. So we search

for ways of thinking or things to satisfy this craving and get what we think we want. These are **special relationships**.

Everyone's assortment of special relationships is somewhat different. Mine at some point in time had included:

Pouting to get what I wanted	Work
Ignoring to punish	Greed
Sex as intimacy	False pride
Being the most intelligent	Nicotine
Being right	Television
Beer	Control
People-pleasing	Isolation
Marijuana	Materialism

All special relationships are idols offered up by the ego. They are false ideas or things to be pursued or worshiped. Each literally becomes an investment. Each serves one of three purposes:

- A way to get what we want
- A way to feel feelings
- A way to avoid feeling

Special relationships are literally the glue that holds us together. After all, if our problems were solved, if all our alligators were tied up, what would we do with ourselves? We wouldn't have worries and distractions to occupy our mind. We would be free. When we place all our special relationships in a package, we have our ego's toolbox to accomplish one important task: To distract us from looking inside and seeing spirit.

More Insanity

It's not necessary, and even premature, to identify your special relationships right now. But it's important to understand how the ego works. But does this process explain resentment and pain? Yes. In fact, the ego is closely associated with the body.

As the ego prompts us to get what we think we want, we create expectations. But many of our expectations will not materialize, first because our total belief system is untrue, and secondly because extremely few things are truly within our control. There is an old Twelve-Step saying that "Today's expectations are tomorrow's resentments." This is true, think about it.

Pain is experienced when we start to lose a special relationship, one of our idols. This can also create fear, particularly when we are on the verge of giving up our entire ego. Hurt is also closely related. Think about the last time you were hurt. Was it not because you didn't get your way or didn't get what you wanted?

Special relationships also create impatience. We are in such a hurry to use or get to our idols, we become frustrated when obstacles block our way. If control is an issue, we will bristle until another steps out of the spotlight so we can enter. If we're big on being right, we can't wait to correct another. If alcoholic, we'll rush home from work to seek our heaven, and become anxious or angry if family members, other people, or even events interfere with getting our dose. If a workaholic, we'll impulsively hurry to enter our vocation, perhaps in mind only, to find that "better way" or "make our first million," ignoring friends and loved ones. These idols also keep us from other important things, like true life itself. John Bradshaw puts it well: "We become human doings instead of human beings."

Can you imagine the enormous energy required to constantly fit the world into our tiny imperfect model of the universe? Those carefree days of childhood become more obscure. And confusion grows. Co-dependents and counter-dependents react differently to the problems that result. Some examples are:

CO-DEPENDENTS

- Uncertainty
- Fixing or changing others
- Enabling
- Letting others dictate one's worth
- Following "shoulds"

- Sex for “completion”
- People-pleasing
- Manipulation
- Giving up boundaries
- Playing victim, and enjoying it
- Finding a counter-dependent

COUNTER-DEPENDENTS

- Bigger or more hammers
- More rigid, more macho
- Power
- Attack
- Anger
- Belligerent to “untruths” and the “wrong”
- Total denial
- Sex to control or prove our “worth”
- Finding a co-dependent

The pain and turmoil is increased if we come from a particularly dysfunctional family. Numerous behaviors and thought patterns which were modeled for us, and adopted, serve no practical purpose whatsoever in trying to lead a happy life. They only cause problems. But which of our beliefs are true and which ones are insane? Alone, we don't know, because our reference point doesn't even begin to allow comparison. Even the thought of change is fearful to many.

Positive thinking, when used alone, might appear helpful for a time. But this is still trying to change behavior at the behavioral level, which doesn't work. We might even convince ourselves that certain of our traits are more positive. But many other insane beliefs remain. In fact, “positive thinking” can even produce more turmoil because our expectations can increase, while we work with the same basic, insane box of tools.

Therapy sometimes brings some relief, depending on the therapist. Anything that helps us see our true selves as guiltless and innocent, or that increases our awareness, can even be called miracles. But again, changing certain beliefs (and not all) usually results in fear of change

and added confusion. I would hesitate to recommend a therapist who didn't have a firm understanding of the twelve steps. At one meeting alone I met two people, one had been in therapy for 2 years and another for 4 years, who had found no relief. But in combination with Twelve-Step, both finally started to achieve solid gains.

We might even try changing careers, moving across the country, separating ourselves from family, getting married, or divorcing a spouse. But again, unless this is done in the context of an honest review of our entire belief system, we will only find ourselves repeating the same patterns in a different framework. In Twelve-Step this is called a "geographic." We simply move our same toolbox to a different household, city, employer, or relationship. A caterpillar that moves to a different part of the tree is still a caterpillar. But the process of becoming a butterfly involves quantum change.

"I Don't Know"

So the only question we must answer at this stage is simply: "Is it truly working for me, or not?" Do my family, finances, and relationships really work, or not? Am I contented, free of worry and guilt, and rejoice at each new dawn? Do I live in the now, lovingly releasing all the past and future? Few can respond with a certain "yes."

When we're truly honest with ourselves, most of us must admit to a different drummer: We become frustrated with parents and family members, bitch about our jobs and bosses, and see every problem in the world. We've carefully decided who constitute the "good guys" and the "bad guys," and of what is right and wrong.

Jerks and downright assholes find their ways into our lives, and there is no situation or person who should not change in some way to fit our opinions or pre-judgments.

Do you prefer that you be right or happy?

- A Course In Miracles T-29.VII.1:9

We insist on showing our children how things should be and how they should think, only passing down our dysfunctional behaviors. To

keep from being controlled, we try to control or influence everyone and everything in our path. Only to find that what we try to control, ends up controlling us. "If everyone would only see it my way, and if everything could only be as I want it." In Twelve-Step, insanity is defined as "Doing the same things over and over again, expecting different results."

Tolerance for pain may be high, but it is not without limit.

- A Course In Miracles T-2.III.3:5

Sooner or later we finally decide that something is missing in our life, that something has gone wrong. Our attempts to use macho or play victim aren't getting us to where we want to be. That our attempts to be more beautiful or handsome haven't met with satisfaction. The weight of trying to be perfect, to be the smartest, fastest or richest, is simply too much. We decide that maybe, just maybe, we were wrong in our thinking...perhaps there's another way.

Step study programs describe this process in their Step One:

We admitted, that alone, we were powerless. That our lives had become unmanageable.

(Specific 12-step programs specify over what pattern we are powerless. The above step is restated to be more generic, to include all special relationships. The complete Twelve Steps are summarized on the last page of the book.)

The words "that alone" are mine. These two words recognize that alone we can try as best we can to construct a "true" concept of how things are and are not. But all our efforts have only produced a model of reality that no one else on earth will totally agree with. How can anything be true that can never be seen as the same? This, in fact, proves the ego to be false.

No two can look on sin together, for they could never see it in the same place and time.

- A Course In Miracles T-22.1:3

No ego can see itself. But another can see our ego. And when that person or entity looks in love, there is no judgment of what is right or wrong, but only an awareness of what is false.

*Yet when two or more join together in searching
for truth, the ego can no longer defend its lack of
content.*

- A Course In Miracles T-14.X.9:6

This describes the Twelve-Step program, the role of sponsors in that program, *A Course In Miracles*, healing, and our release.

Ram Dass, an American spiritual leader, described this process very well. He envisioned an airfield, where we are frantically running around, looking for salvation and completion. Meanwhile, our spirit and the truth are circling overhead looking for a landing place, saying "Get off the runway!" All we have to do is get out of our own way. Only by losing "ourselves" for an instant can we find our true Self.

The end to uncertainty is near. But we must prepare in our hearts and minds a place for the solution. Do we want the problem or the solution? There is not room for both. Is it worth a serious effort to try?

You are confronted with your first major choice. Do you want to keep the past you have made? Your decisions from the past affect how you interpret every situation, decision, and person you encounter. We are like huge drooling Pavlovian dogs, locked in stimulus-response.

I knew my own past and my rigid belief system were falling away one night after an ACA meeting. We usually had about 20 people who went out for coffee after the meeting. A close friend, Karen, casually asked me in greeting, "Whaduyaknow?" Program people usually become uncomfortable with trite greetings like "How are you?" Because it too often results in the trite response "Just fine," which is a lie. Caught off guard, I finally replied, "Frankly, I don't know what I know and what I don't know." She said "That's wonderful!" Now I was really confused, and asked her why. Her response: "That's great because you're getting out of "knowing" or stimulus-response. That's a very high state and leads toward reason." At that instant I was certain my Step One was complete.

Getting out of stimulus-response and the "I know" state needn't be

painful. But something is gone. It's not the same any longer. Don't fear this temporary sense of confusion, because it's an important basis for change. The new sensation we experience is not bad. It is only different.

*My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near.*
- Robert Frost

Admitting that we're not well and wonderful, that "we don't know," or recognizing our beliefs are false also does not mean humiliation. That differs greatly from humility, which simply opens a wondrous door. It removes the tiring need to judge everything, because we don't know.

...become as little children...they do not understand... and so they ask...
- A Course In Miracles T-11.VIII.2:1

Humility also solves the responsibility problem. Suddenly we realize that a great burden of responsibility has been lifted. We're not responsible for how others think and we're not responsible for them or the Western World. That to simply accept (do you remember the definition of love?) gives us a new freedom we've never experienced. The struggle is over.

Now we can fully concentrate on the only thing over which we do have control, "I". We can open our minds and hearts to a wonderful new learning process that leads to peace. And we sense a growing serenity when we observe that the patterns of our past are OK for now. That even as we grow further, we will still repeat several of our old ways, but we simply choose not to keep them. We might even again resume doing several things that once bothered us - but for a different reason, that is based on true choice, not stimulus-response or need. We are open-minded enough to understand our new path will give us new tools to create positive and lasting change. Our old ways certainly never produced anything that totally satisfied.

You are not guilty of anything. You simply learned incorrectly. This produced a belief system and resulting decisions that didn't work. Simply choose again.

Can the past cause us problems? Does the past really exist? Only in the minds of ourselves and others. You will learn how to set the past aside and, in a very real sense, choose rebirth when you want. Not by simply saying you're "born again," but as proven by your loving actions, your ability to simply accept, and your knowing it is true.

But we are only starting our journey. Many new tools and several higher levels of awareness lie ahead. But this is a progressive program. So when actually working the steps, continue only when you feel comfortable with each chapter. This will speed future growth.

*Tell me not in mournful numbers
Life is 'but an empty dream!
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.
- Longfellow*

At the end of each chapter we will suggest certain things for the day or week to help you internalize that major concept. These will be in the form of suggested actions to assist your growth. Also see the Appendix for affirmations that are listed in increasing order of awareness. Examples of the latter, for this chapter only, are listed below.

Suggested Actions:

- Buy a notebook to serve as a journal for future growth work. For now, simply note specific problems that occur, as well as new awarenesses.
- Consciously start to speak and respond less quickly. Use the extra time to notice your feelings, reactions, and how appropriate they might be. This helps extricate us from stimulus-response.
- Use fewer emphatic statements, and avoid the phrase "I know." Replace with "I believe," or "I learned..." Because we don't know.

- Use the term “they” less often. Instead, be specific on the source or originator of the thought or action.

Affirmations:

- My way has not given me serenity. There must be another way.
- I don’t know. I don’t understand what this world is for.
- (When uncomfortable) How I feel is only my reaction to what happened. I must have chosen incorrectly.
- (When angry or disappointed) What was my expectation? Was it about something over which I had no control?

Step 2: Hope

Man's extremity is God's opportunity.

- John Flavel

In the last chapter we moved from denial to humility. Once we looked closely at what we had made, we saw that we were only creating problems for ourselves. We didn't conclude problems were bad. In fact, one often learns more quickly when things don't work, if we have sufficient awareness. Instead, we simply made the decision that the old ways weren't working. We tried to change and control things in so many ways, and traveled down so many streets, only to find we still weren't truly happy. There has to be a better way.

There is another way. And the success of that path is proven daily by the hundreds of thousands who have taken it. Have you ever known someone who has successfully worked a Twelve-Step program with a sponsor? They can be the most gentle, loving, and serene people one will ever meet. I assure you that many people in your life have followed this path. But because the program is anonymous, you might be unaware of the reasons for change.

Those working a good program speak of improved relations with others, fewer accidents, less illness, a more harmonious life, and even incredible spiritual awakenings. I'm not talking about those who attend a few meetings, or even several, who haven't yet developed the trust to choose a sponsor, or who aren't yet really working or don't understand the steps. They are only beginning, taking their first steps to a new way of life. With persistence and growing humility and trust, their time will also come.

This path can be yours as well, if you want it. And if this book creates

that little bit of willingness for you, or increases your understanding of the program to enhance your growth, its purpose will be served.

The program's second step is we:

***Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves
could restore our sanity.***

Having worked the twelve steps, and looking back at this step, I remember my hair standing on end at that "Power" word with the capital "P". I certainly wasn't interested in more religion. I wasn't even able to understand the Bible. Just for now, to reduce fear, it might be helpful to think of this step in terms of:

We came to believe that Another could restore us to sanity.

It's dangerous to change the steps, because they were given by Someone who certainly had a purpose for stating it that way, that met our level of understanding at that time. But anything that reduces fear and still gets the job done should certainly be considered. This concept is more easily understood in the Eastern than the Western world.

But there's still that capital "A" word. Let's discuss it and the first major problem people have with this step. Untold millions want nothing to do with religion or spirituality. Perhaps they came from a background or church that robbed them of their I AM, of their freedom; taught a vengeful jealous god; was based on sins that only the church could absolve; or involved a mystical set of laws and shoulds that a saint couldn't obey. Or in the words of Joseph Campbell, "Gods with lots of rules and no mercy."

History certainly proves that religion has often been used, when modified by man, for control rather than freedom. The Crusades and the condoning of slavery by the church are but two obvious examples. Could it be that much of our reluctance was produced by the interpretations by man of basic truths? I believe so. When one returns to the basic precepts of Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and most other original doctrines, they all come together and say the same things. But how they are practiced today can differ enormously.

If your God is not eternally loving, is based on judgment instead of

acceptance and equality, or interferes with the free will of man, your God might well be different from mine. But I have no right to interfere with your belief, or try to change your mind about it.

In the end, it truly doesn't matter. This is the beauty of the Twelve-Step program. All we have to do is accept there is something or Someone out there that's more powerful than ourselves, or can lovingly help us come closer to the truth.

The term "Another" allows this freedom, and also recognizes another important possibility. Could another person play a major role in connecting us to that special Force, whatever it might be? Yes. If that person comes to me in love, wants the best for me, and accepts me for what I am and am not, they are a very real link to the One.

*Yet when two or more join together in searching
for truth, the ego can no longer defend its lack of
content.*

- A Course In Miracles T-14.X.9:6

This concept also describes the perfect sponsor in the program. A sponsor is someone who has worked the steps; who reaches out and takes our hand in love, to share what they have received from the program; who lends their experience, strength, and hope. They know their exact path might be different from ours, but the objective is the same when related to each of the steps.

The term "Another" also again reminds us we can't do it alone. I somehow doubt that Quasimodo, the famed Hunchback of Notre Dame, even knew he had a hump until he had a friend. It's difficult to see one's own ego, but we can easily see that of others. Our computer might always calculate $1 + 1 = 3$ and cause massive problems in our interpretations of the universe. The typical person might even judge us for that belief. But Another will simply point it out in love, increasing our awareness, but leaving the decision for change to us and our program.

A second major problem people have with this step is the "restore us to sanity" phrase. This implies we're insane! Peace and harmony are normal. If we're not in that state, we must be insane in one or more ways, trying the same things time after time expecting different results.

Perceive any part of the ego's thought system as wholly insane, wholly delusional and wholly undesirable, and you have correctly evaluated all of it.

- A Course In Miracles T-7.VII.11:1

Again, don't judge yourself. Simply accept. And rather than concentrating on the problem, focus on the opportunity. The excitement rests on the word restore. Do you remember Friendly Fred? That is our reality, and what we always have been. We simply want to restore and release that perfect part of us, by remembering what is and always has been.

This is known as the *hope* step. Regardless of whether we're alcoholics or fall into deep depressions, or whether we simply haven't made our ways work in achieving true satisfaction. This step offers the hope of peace and joy...another way.

The important key to this step is realizing we have free will, we actually have choices! Regardless of our background, we're not imprisoned by the past. We have options to choose from. We don't yet know all the ways to produce change, but there is another way. We can and will get out of stimulus-response, let old patterns go, and simply choose again.

Choices

Louise Hay presented a wonderful exercise early in her book, *You Can Heal Your Life*. All of us are working on various projects or have certain responsibilities. She suggests we take a piece of paper and briefly write all the major things we should do. Do this now:

I Should:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

For each item, next sincerely ask yourself "Why?" Why should I do these things? One might develop several reasons, like parental or

spousal pressure, societal pressures, perfectionism, or a multitude of other reasons. The word “should” is among the most damaging in our vocabulary. It produces great pain and guilt. Program people quickly learn to avoid it like the plague. After realizing this, replace Should with Could. Go back and review each item on your list and replace the preceding words with “If I really wanted to, I could _____.”

Next, ask yourself, “Why haven’t I?” Now you’re getting to the heart of the problem. Perhaps you simply don’t want to!

Incidentally, if I had a friend who knew nothing about Twelve-Step, and who was experiencing problems, her book would be among the first I would give them. It starts with self-awareness, and proceeds into some much higher levels. In fact, near the end Louise lists all typical illnesses and body problems, relating them to the mind set that produces them. I actually confirmed several of my Step Four inventory items with illnesses and other somatics during the period I was experiencing a particular mind set. My body was even witnessing what I was thinking! Louise actually cured herself of cancer by identifying the grievances and fears producing it.

But wait a minute. Does this mean our mind can create disease and what happens to our body? You bet it can. It is actually impossible to underestimate the power of mind. But where does this power come from? Friendly Fred is smiling. The power comes from our spirit side, but how we apply it is our choice. We can either create with this power or mis-create.

This doesn’t mean we reject medical procedures, prescription drugs or surgery. Anything that gets the job done must be considered. For now, simply consider the wonderful opportunities.

Nevertheless, any belief or thought has an effect. The research on this subject is exhaustive. Placebos work, simply because we believe they will have a certain effect. The University of Chicago conducted a well-known and fascinating study on mind power. They divided basketball players into three groups. One was told not to practice shooting or even think about it for one month. Another was instructed to practice every day for one month. A third group was instructed to only visualize successfully shooting baskets one hour a day for the month. The first group showed no improvement. The second improved 24%. The third group

improved 23%! Particularly traumatic childhoods can even produce what is called multiple personality disorder, or MPD. To escape trauma, the person actually creates different personalities, all in the mind. The mind does all this. Certain animals can actually change their sex, just by changing their minds.

In fact, the reality of the body, or at least its importance, is now being seriously questioned. Many people have experienced past lives, that were actually documented. This implies an eternal invisible spirit is only visiting and using a body for a period.

Even more people have had “near death” experiences. Again, how important is our body, particularly in the greater realm of things? The Western world leans in the direction of Christianity, and Jesus himself proved how unimportant the body is. He placed mind above body, and totally escaped it in the resurrection, serving as an epic example of what we too will do. The dead were even raised. These were not magic tricks, but a model of truth for us.

This raises an important question. What is real? Are we so caught up in the physical world that we are missing reality? Ask those having spiritual awakenings what is real. They will describe something much more wonderful than what we typically experience. And each time these individuals go to these special places, they tend to bring back more of the truth to us mortal souls. I’m not recommending it, but certain drugs have also allowed individuals to glimpse the same things. Generally those drugs have been LSD, and certain mushrooms. Both also seem to magnify our experiences and memories. If someone had a rather mundane childhood, they will tend to experience unspeakable love. If someone experienced a traumatic childhood, they might well see some demons.

I’m often amazed that alcohol and nicotine are legal, when spiritual drugs used by many American Indians, LSD, and mushrooms are illegal. But even those who choose to use such substances only for spiritual awareness must keep in mind that drugs will not bring you enlightenment. At best they will only show you the possibilities. They won’t allow you to stay there.

I now share with you the story of a young lady I’ll call Kate. She represents what is probably the most wonderful transformation I’m aware of in an individual. Between ages 14 and 21 (notice the 7 year period),

she experienced terribly deep depression. She accepted assistance from one of the best-known researchers and therapists in the nation. I'll leave his name anonymous for reasons you'll soon understand. She was so desperate that she was willing to try anything, including the most powerful drugs available, legal or illegal, to achieve peace.

Consequently she conducted massive personal research on drugs and how they work, and could spit out chemical names and how they work like a medical researcher. The therapist was successful in gaining her confidence and totally clearing her past. Her bowl was then clean. But what would fill the new void? She demanded LSD from her therapist to glimpse the eternal, and use that knowledge to fill her bowl with the spiritual. He finally complied. Today she's the most serene and spiritual person you'd ever hope to meet. She's now a wonderful and beautiful concert pianist and songwriter.

In a nutshell, this process describes spiritual awakening. It first involves putting the past aside, and removing its roadblocks to peace. This then allows a place in the head and heart for the spiritual.

I believe this to be confirmed in the case of savants, those who have lost significant "abilities" through various reasons. But without the blocks most of us have, the power of the spirit can flow in, manifesting in talents that amaze: Astounding artistic abilities, mathematical genius, the reciting of eternal calendars, playing music perfectly after hearing a song only once, incredible memory, etc. This was the theme of the movie *Rain Man*. All we have to do is get out of our own way, removing our roadblocks to a new level of awareness! So we not only have choices, but the incredible power of the mind to achieve peace, love, and joy. But what do you want? And do you want it truly?

Choose Again

Most people have at some time tried to get what they wanted through prayer. But given the power we have to create or mis-create, could it be we are asking a God to remove something *we* made? Would He interfere in such a way? Or perhaps we were only praying for special relationships that still wouldn't satisfy or only cause more problems. We'll discuss this in more detail in Chapter 3.

It turns out we would be better served in praying for peace, love, joy, understanding, and forgiveness. This creates harmony. The bottom line is simply knowing when we've chosen incorrectly: When we're not in harmony; when we're trying to force situations that won't fit; when we're trying to swim upstream. We finally become aware of a system that was so perfectly created we have three wonderful ways of knowing when we've chosen incorrectly.

Picture a river, or better yet a highway. When we're in balance and moving along the center, things work. We're at peace and in the flow. Some call this grace. But when we choose incorrectly, we start veering away from the center line, and start bumping into the guard rails. One of three things will tell us this is happening:

- A problem develops or an event doesn't work right
- We become ill, confused, or upset
- Other people react negatively

These are our DEW lines, our Distant Early Warning systems. And instead of trying to "fix" the problem, or forcing our own solution, we must simply realize we've chosen incorrectly.

Our bodies are wonderful devices to alert us to when we're thinking incorrectly. Current medicine tends to use drugs to mask the symptom, or surgery to actually remove the offending part. This doesn't mean we discontinue using such techniques, but that we simply stay aware of what our body is trying to tell us.

The first two items above are more obvious, but other people are extremely valuable mirrors to our lives. In fact, other people are the keys to our salvation. Only by forgiving others, can we know we are forgiven. By understanding others, we understand ourselves. Only by giving love to others, can we know that's exactly what we are. But few of us can leap from one belief system to another in one fell swoop. So it often helps to carve off some of the roughest edges of current beliefs. There are some basic truths that help us do this.

To increase our peace and harmony, we can learn a great deal from Buddha's description of Nirvana: "A psychological state of mind that IS here amidst the turmoil. It is a condition that comes when one is not

compelled by social commitment, fear, or desire.” Let’s more closely consider these three things.

Social Commitment

Our bondage to social commitment tends to manifest in “shoulds,” laws, and rules placed upon us by others. What we should do and how we should act places expectations on each of us. Expectations are debts. This means that rules and laws limit our free will. But if God refuses to interfere with our free will, how can one man dream of controlling another?

In reality, there are few worldly ways we can yield our freedom unless we allow someone to take it. Even in the case of laws, we seldom question them. We abdicate to the whims of lawmakers, allowing our imprisonment. Even in the case of onerous laws that make little sense. We have become wimps and dwarfs, in the words of H. Ross Perot, and must take full responsibility for assuming those roles. But allowing the creation of thousands of laws and rules does have one advantage for us. It allows us to avoid taking personal responsibility. Laws must exist to guarantee our freedoms, not for taking them away.

This might be difficult to grasp right now. But the “shoulds” we subject ourselves to are much more obvious. How do you feel when someone suggests you “should” do something or act in a certain way? If we want to maintain complete honesty with someone, and particularly ourselves, we must decline. At least until we achieve our awakening. No person has any right to place a should on us, just as we must refuse doing the same to others.

But more often than not we still abdicate to shoulds, either consciously or unconsciously. We easily buy the concept of beauty that society’s changing whims dictate. Millions of advertisements play heavily on showing us what we should do to become happy, natural, and normal again. They aim specifically not at our choices, growth, and preferences, but on our “deficiencies.” And how often do we say “I love you,” not to share a feeling, but to elicit the same response from the other? (You *should* say “I love you too.”)

Laws, rules, and shoulds are based on judgment. And those who

judge will feel judged. The most devastating effect of judgment is guilt, and even shame. A vast array of expectations placed on us by parents and society, some explicit and others implied, causes us to become very confused...what is true? The wonderful progression of a Twelve-Step program is to let us identify our shame, our “sins”; to translate these into guilts; to make guilts into mistakes; and to finally transform mistakes into incorrect decisions...so we can simply choose again. This assumes we give ourselves permission to think differently. It might also assume, in much of the Western world, that Jesus has already absolved us of our sins.

Fear

Fear causes chaos. In fact, fear is the opposite of love. And without love, peace has no home. Everyone is afraid of something, but many fears are quite common. One of the most typical involves money. This might range from the dread of losing what we have, to living in near-poverty. This was my primary reason for releasing *Forgive Us Our Debts...* early. If we can only deal with this one area, we can more easily proceed with other more important parts of our lives.

We are also scared of other people. We tremble at the thought of others seeing us without our masks, and are even frightened at looking inside ourselves. Those seriously working at the spiritual can experience a fright as one nears the loss of ego. The fear of death is legend. But deep down inside our subconscious, is our greatest fear: of God himself. Because of the sins we believe we've committed, we truly believe He might sentence us to eternal hell.

*Fear is always a sign of strain, arising whenever
what you want conflicts with what you do.*

- A Course In Miracles T-VI.5:1

It is usually difficult to figure out why we are fearful. The result is often a series of other fears, ending with the fear of death itself. Instead of this approach, Dr. David R. Hawkins suggests we concentrate on the item of which we are currently afraid, and then project through the

reality of the worst case scenario. Really get into it. He uses the example of financial fear. What if I became a bag lady? Well, that might actually be kind of interesting or even fun for a while. And no responsibility! And this completely ignores the social safety nets of unemployment insurance, food banks, food stamps, welfare, etc. Frankly, if we really were forced to and could set aside our false pride, we could live on peanuts. Once this worst case situation is envisioned fully, Dr. Hawkins then suggests we quit thinking about the fear and simply concentrate on the physical sensations. All fears manifest the same in the body, it's simply a question of magnitude. Let them come on more and more. Invite the sensations, don't suppress them. When they've gone as far as they can, we finally realize we were more afraid of the fear itself than the potential loss. Practically speaking, what can we really lose that's so damned important? Our pride? Great! That's part of ego! Our life? Spiritual leaders have already proven that the body is unimportant and death is only another transition.

I used to apply the worst case scenario method with my wife, without knowing what I was doing. She would on occasion be troubled about something that might happen. I'd ask her "OK, let's assume that really happened. What would be the result?" She would often describe another negative event that might result. I responded with the same question. When everything was down to its basic element, I asked "Would it really be that bad, could you survive that situation?" Her reaction, after some thought, was usually, "Oh, you're so damned practical." And a smile or a laugh was often the result.

The greatest enemies of what we call fear are love, honesty and truth. As our understanding of love increases and we are more capable of giving it, we receive more love. As we gain the strength to be totally honest with others and start peeling off our masks, guilt and the associated fears decrease. We learn how much we have in common: Uncertainty, periodic loneliness, confusion, fear, etc. Our humility and honesty allow others to set aside their masks.

I vividly remember one ACA meeting that proved this concept. A young lady sat next to me and I had never seen her before in my life. During the sharing part of the meeting she raised her hand, and instead of commenting on the topic presented, she talked about her current

confusion. Her comments were very heartfelt and she started crying before finishing. When the meeting ended I could not avoid turning to her and simply hugging her. It was not out of pity, because I never uttered a word. It was out of total love, based only on acceptance and human compassion. Her humility simply attracted like a magnet.

But we must also be honest with ourselves, and not get caught up in the whirlpool of fearing fear. Truth is the most powerful weapon. As we gain the certainty that we and others are eternally protected and innocent, and as we start to see our true selves, even the fear of death dissolves and we're drawn into the arms of God. We are home.

Desires and Expectations

Both expectations and desires are literally investments. There is no way to separate the two. But it might be easier to discuss each in turn.

We tend to primarily think of expectations in terms of other people. We paint extremely accurate visions of how other people should behave in a given situation and what should happen as a result. But on this worldly plane, no two people will agree on everything. So we have little true influence over the results. Furthermore, everyone is endowed with free will. When people don't comply, we receive the gift of resentment. The solution is to start by concentrating on ourselves. After all, everything isn't yet perfect in our lives. So why should we demand that others comply with our warped belief systems, when we can't even take care of ourselves? Have you ever noticed that the most confused people are the best at demanding others act in a certain way? On the other hand, the wisest people are often the most quiet. Fools rush in where wise men fear to tread.

And again, if God wouldn't dare interfere with our free will, we have no business whatsoever intruding in the lives of others. Simply let them be. Let them find and follow their own quest in their search for the holy grail and peace. As we pursue ours.

The only true way to teach is by example. As we become happier and healthier, our new ways will often be emulated out of free choice. Arguments and shoulds never work.

The best way to do this is to simply accept our brothers. Not by

judging what is appropriate for another or placing expectations on them, but to simply love them. Within your very heart and soul, *isn't this what you truly ask they do for you?*

It is, of course, difficult to live without some expectations. But what is your investment in the outcome? This is measured by the anger or anxiety, versus the laughter, that results. Desires are also investments. We have our numerous special relationships, as described earlier, and expect them to produce happiness. But as we found in Step One, even if they produce short-term pleasure, nothing outside ourselves will truly satisfy. We have many rationalizations on why we choose our special relationships, but in the end we expect some type of salvation. It never works.

...the ego perceives nothing as wholly desirable.

- A Course In Miracles T-7.XI.1:7

Desires also produce expectations. They can either be conscious anticipations of a certain result, or more subtle, subconscious expectations. Every person has their particular set of special relationships, and even develops complex rationalizations for maintaining them.

Even The Lord's Prayer asks us to release our desires and expectations: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Because any expectation establishes a debt. Something must come to us or someone has to do something. Isn't this true?

The more ingrained desires result in compulsions. The most intractable desires we call addictions. Within both we normally find three things. By better understanding each, we become better prepared to deal with them. The three components of compulsions and addictions are:

- A chemical dependency
- A habitual component (stimulus-response)
- A psychological dependency

Virtually all behaviors and thought patterns have all three. For example, drugs are certainly not the only things that involve a chemical component. Addiction to fear also maintains a high energy level.

Workaholism does the same. Sexual fantasies produce chemicals in the body that produce an interesting high. Even procrastination contains this component: The subconscious worry and guilt about not doing something triggers the mind to release certain chemicals, and a frantic effort to finally meet a deadline certainly produces a rush. Withdrawal from this chemical dependency can be uncomfortable for a period, but doesn't persist for long. Type I alcoholics, or those predisposed to other chemicals, seem to be an exception.

Next is the habitual component. By doing anything long enough, it simply becomes a part of our routine. For example, we always smoke after a meal or when picking up the telephone. We simply get into a rut. Stimulus-response takes over. Although certain actions can become very ingrained, this element is also not the most difficult to crack. When attacking the habitual component, it usually helps to disrupt our entire schedule for a period. There also seems to be a magical number of 21 in establishing new, perhaps more desirable, habits. When we can do something differently 21 times or for 21 days, the old pattern appears to be largely broken and the new one established.

The psychological part appears to be the most difficult. But now that we know the difficulty of separating mind, thought, and body, it's perhaps impossible to separate any of the three. The problem with psychological dependence is we usually aren't aware of the subconscious reason why we do something. Remember, a special relationship either helps us to get something, to avoid feeling feelings, or to increase feelings. They all separate us, in some way, from our brothers.

When attacking an addiction or compulsion, it can help to understand these three things and perhaps take certain steps to minimize their effects. But never forget that the Twelve-Step program is not a psychoanalytical approach to "figure it out," but a spiritual one. The above might only be of value if by Steps Seven and Nine your program doesn't "take." After all, as your awareness increases and your self-esteem and self-love grow, you will find your "needs" falling away naturally. But even the best twelve-stepper usually finds that at least one special relationship must finally be dealt with on a concerted One-Day-at-a-Time basis.

Practical Applications

It's wonderful to know there is real hope in overcoming our obstacles to peace. That we really do have choices in our lives. When attending program meetings, however, we will often notice that some people aren't truly aware they have choices. Particularly in Adult Children meetings, regardless of the words used, we too often hear "My parents were that way, and that's why I AM like this."

Don't accept such statements as truth, but consider this belief as only a temporary phase. In order to get out of denial and do a good Step One, it's sometimes necessary for some to, in effect, blame one's parents for their lot in life. But this must pass. We don't have to assimilate our parents' feelings, patterns, and beliefs into our very being. We don't have to continue cutting off the ends of roasts like mom did until the day we die. We can simply choose again, although it's not always as easy as it is simple. We do have choices. There are other helpful concepts, that increase our awareness and speed our growth within such a program:

"Fixing Others" When we don't want to look within our own being, or confront our own shortcomings, we tend to concentrate on the egos and problems of others. We can't see our own ego, but we can certainly see that of others. Nevertheless, we can't fix others! Most of us have experience with a family member or friend who was a drinker or had another problem that bothered us. The most we can do is point out what they might be doing. And this is only if they might not be aware of their behavior. But in order to change, they have to be given the room and the freedom to decide for themselves. How well do you respond when someone insists on changing you?

Did you learn more from what your parents told you or the things they were, that they modeled? This is the only way to teach. Only by making ourselves the best we can be, and then modeling it for others, can we change the world.

"Like versus Love" When we *like* someone or something, we are getting something we think we want or need from that source...it feeds us. When we love something or someone, we exhibit compassion and

caring, and simply accept it or them. Liking is based on getting and often implies deficiency. Loving is based on abundance and giving, without expectations of anything in return.

“Boundaries & Defenses” It’s very important to understand the difference between the two. We want to develop better boundaries, even if we’re only partially co-dependent. A boundary is something a person uses, when they love and respect themselves, to avoid giving up their freedom. A defense is often a rationalization and is always an attack. It’s necessary to give some examples.

Someone asks you to help them move, and you really don’t want to. An example of a boundary response is “I’m sorry, but I won’t be able to help you.” Period. A defense response would be “I’m tied up that day, but I really wish I could.” This is usually a lie, and an attack on your own honesty, creating guilt. Because there are no secret thoughts, the other person probably recognizes this as well. An outright attack would be “You didn’t help me move!” (An attempt to refuse the request by inducing guilt in the other.) If we have low self-esteem, we might even agree to help, even if we don’t want to. The result is anger at oneself for giving in, and resentment towards the other person for “taking our freedom,” and they’ll certainly pick up on this.

A second example is you’re busy at work and your boss asks you to take on another project. You can’t handle it. A boundary might be “My schedule is really over-loaded, I’m sorry.” Period. A defense would include a dozen justifications for not accepting, in effect trying to make the person feel guilty for even asking, and also making you sound like a real wimp. Many would respond “Oh no, not again! Why is it always me?...etc.” (Direct attacks.) Of course numerous people would fear loss of their job if they didn’t say yes, agree, and what would you guess are the results? More bitching about their job and their boss, getting mad at oneself, and increasing resentments of all kinds. Simply because we gave up our own freedom.

As you can see, people-pleasing is highly destructive to all concerned. You simply have to start taking better care of yourself, and to start now. The simplest boundary is a gentle “no thanks,” preferably with a smile. When we try to justify our response, we generally get into a

drawn out discussion (or even argument) about the rationalization. This is most obvious with children. "Daddy, will you play with me?" "No, I'm too busy right now." "You don't look busy." "Well, I'm thinking about how to do our taxes." "Why do people pay taxes?" And it goes on and on. And the little critter is just lonely, and realizes better than you know that you simply don't want to. Consider the difference of a response like "I don't want to right now. I can play with you after lunch."

You and everyone else has the perfect right to ask for anything at any time. But the flip side of this right is everyone must be able to accept a "no" as the response. As we grow in self-esteem, we must often change old expectations of people around us for having been a wimp. Others have to start understanding that we will sometimes say no and really mean it. This requires our not taking on others' feelings at their response to a direct answer. Children have to learn what no means. Observe communications between other parents and their children. The parent says "no," and the kids scream, cry, bitch and moan. Obviously this has in some way got them what they wanted in the past, or they wouldn't do it. Perhaps the parents use so many words, often hostile, that "no" is so buried in the verbiage the kids don't even hear it. Or perhaps the parents usually give in.

"I don't know" As we begin to take better care of ourselves and start to eliminate our people-pleasing, we will encounter one problem in particular. We become aware of not wanting to do something when asked, but won't know how to respond. There we are face-to-face with the other person, and we don't have time to think of an appropriate response. There is a wonderful tool for dealing with this. Simply say "I don't know, let me get back to you." You are simply stating you don't know how you feel about something, delaying your reply. This will first tell another they're asking something you consider important, and the response might not be yes. It also tells the other person that you might not be able to comply, and maybe they will find another way to solve their problem or get the help they need. It also gives you time to decide how to reply in an appropriate, gentle and honest manner...honest to both you and the other person.

“Hurt” By understanding this word we can learn to take more responsibility for our own reactions and place less blame on others. People can’t hurt us. It’s only something we experience when we don’t get our way. So “hurt” also comes from that old devil called expectation. As we become more aware of this, it can help us avoid attacking others and ruining our own peace of mind in the dogfight that ensues. Early in the program it’s helpful to know when this is happening. For example, we feel hurt by another. Too often we tend to attack a brother for what they did, or anyone else who might be handy. If it’s necessary to communicate our feelings to the other person, simply state how you feel. Don’t introduce the event that only seems to have produced it.

Let’s say your husband agreed to watch the kids while you attend a meeting. He arrived home too late for you to do so. Normally we would attack the being late, in no uncertain terms. Notice the contrast with “I’m disappointed I couldn’t attend the meeting. I was really looking forward to it.” Period. There was no attack. You simply stated your feelings. The ball is now in your husband’s court, and gives him the opportunity to assist you, if he has true compassion and wants the best for you. The response will often be a justification of why he was late. What you must now determine is whether he will probably be reliable in the future or not. If not, there’s no way to change hubby’s patterns or force compliance. This is not a power struggle for control, so don’t complicate the situation. You want to attend a meeting, nothing more and nothing less. If he can’t or won’t help, you either find a meeting with child care, or find someone else to watch the kids. There was no argument, you simply faced reality in order to get what you wanted - a way to attend the meeting. You simply stated your feelings, and what you wanted. Wow!

“Being guilty” Often without knowing what they’re doing, people try to make us feel guilty. For now, we need a boundary to avoid catching that ball, with as little counterattack as possible. If blatant enough, one response is paraphrasing. For example, “What I’m hearing you say is I should feel guilty about this.” Then shut up. It’s more difficult, but as you grow in self-esteem, another more loving response is a simple smile, and silence. When you don’t agree with someone, silence is almost always a better tool than argument. Silence, when a response is expected, also

tends to make the questioner re-evaluate his or her rationale or belief. Most importantly it prevents you from taking it on.

Because it's so concise and potent, we tend to quickly defend when confronted with the silver bullet "Why?" Often the best response is a simple restatement of what you want or what you believe. Or you can simply tell someone that you don't want to go into your reasoning right now. This question is typically an attack, because it asks the other person to justify their position. Do try to avoid one unfortunate temptation: As some people in the program gain a new-found sense of taking care of themselves, they use the program to be brutally honest, often injuring the feelings of others. If this is necessary to get people off your back until your new way becomes more spontaneous, it's better than people-pleasing. But please consider it an early phase that must soon pass.

"Approval-seeking" Few people, particularly co-dependents, escape some degree of treating others in a way so we will be liked. This is often done under the guise of being nice. What is truly happening is because of our low self-esteem, we seek love and acceptance, even if it means treating others in different ways so they won't reject us. We end up treating others better than ourselves. Is this what you really want?

When we confront a good counter-dependent, particularly if they have little concern for others' feelings, they walk all over us. In reality, people have little respect for approval-seekers. Wouldn't you prefer someone who is strong and independent? Or a wimp? "But I only like being around nice people." Could it be because they never disagree with you? Do you want the truth or the lack of conflict? Puppy dogs are great to be around, they demonstrate unconditional love. But we might learn and grow more by closely observing and being around a cat. We must state what we want and what we believe so we can be totally honest with ourselves and others. Again, this is helpful early in one's program. As we grow, we might start acting like puppies. But not because it gets us what we want (based on need), but because we are giving love (based on abundance), without expectations. Purpose, again, is everything.

"Self-Love vs Conceit" We often confuse the two, particularly if we've had some strong "be nice" training. The conceited person is acting out

a “better than” role. The cause is over-compensation for an internal “less than” belief. The mask is simply overpowering, in an attempt to keep other people at a distance, so they don’t see the fear or uncertainty inside.

Self-love, on the other hand, is not based on deficiency but abundance. When we love ourselves we have nothing to hide. We can afford to be real and honest. Those who feel “less than” might interpret this as conceit, but it’s more a case of jealousy. And remember, and never forget it, *we’re never responsible for the reactions of others.*

“I AM” When attending meetings, we hear many people identify themselves with their first name and a statement of the problem they have or what they are. For example, “My name is Bob, and I AM an Adult Child.” As you start attending meetings, this is fine. Again, it’s important to get out of denial and do a good Step One on humility. But as you grow, you will want to change this. Many AA people in particular will strongly disagree with this, but let me explain.

An “I AM” statement is among the most powerful spiritual affirmations possible. It identifies your very being. So instead of the above statement, it is preferable to say “My name is Bob, and I’m an Adult Child in recovery.” As you grow in awareness and moral strength, you might even prefer a more truthful statement: “My name is Bob. And I AM confused about my true identity.”

Attend a Meeting

At this point it might be very helpful to attend a Twelve-Step meeting. Initially, it doesn’t matter what kind of meeting. You will learn what happens there, and you might even be exposed to some truly humble people for perhaps the first time in your life. You will hear something called a “language of the heart.” This is the tongue people speak when they’re gently honest with themselves and other people.

If you drink, even some, you’ll find an AA meeting interesting. If you’re co-dependent, as described earlier, a Co-Dependents Anonymous meeting will be the most insightful. If neither of these fits at all, and you simply want to explore a new way of life, an Al-Anon Adult Children

meeting can be helpful for virtually anyone. The latter includes a growing percentage of people who didn't have alcoholic or seriously dysfunctional parents. If this growing minority more closely describes your background, just don't worry about the probable references to alcohol, and personally substitute the words "dysfunction" or "pattern." If you seriously want the benefits described in this book and the Twelve-Step program, there are two purposes for attending a meeting. The first objective is to remove the mystique about such meetings. Simply observe and become familiar with what happens there. Notice several of the things described in this book. The second objective is to find what I call a "blessing brother." When they introduce newcomers, keep a sharp eye for and remember the faces of some other newcomers you can possibly relate to. At the end of the meeting, go over and introduce yourself to some of these newcomers, and determine their reaction to the meeting and their possible intentions on future attendance.

Newcomers are the life blood of the program. They also tend to run in packs. As you meet more fellow beginners, a new group of friends can easily develop. You might even find it easier to attend future meetings if one of your new friends also attends. You can simply agree to meet there. Sharing phone numbers is very common. Getting together for coffee after meetings is also very typical. Some groups even have a regular location to meet afterwards. My original "home meeting" usually had about 20 people getting together for coffee at a nearby restaurant after the formal meeting.

If the meeting means nothing to you and the self-awareness parts of this book leave you bored, you're simply not ready yet. Many nevertheless decide to attend at least six meetings to make sure they're not overlooking reality, and to offer the benefit of a doubt. But don't be surprised if someone shares a story that's very similar to yours. And if your very first attendance results in you really wanting what is offered, great. If you decide you want everything the program can offer, as fast as you can get it, this book describes the fast track. Fast does not mean enlightenment in 4 weeks, but one can make massive gains in a few months of concerted effort with an experienced sponsor.

Attend as many meetings as you can. As soon as possible, pick another newcomer who is also serious about the program, and with whom

you sense a common interest and ease of communication. Make the firm agreement with this “blessing brother” that you’ll get together and work on denial and Step One, and more importantly, that you’ll never judge one other. The objective is awareness, through total honesty. You might even want to get them a copy of this book, so you’re speaking the same language.

Meanwhile, listen carefully to those who share at meetings to find a potential sponsor. After reading this book, you’ll be able to identify those who have worked the steps most effectively. You will decide who has what you want. There will be something about them that says “I understand, and I can share.” He or she might have worked on a similar “issue.” They won’t be perfect and they will still have some things they’re working on. But it’s someone you feel you could benefit from and learn to trust. Walk up to that individual after a meeting and ask what step they’re working on, and whether they have a sponsor. (The best sponsors will tend to have already done Step Nine and have a sponsor of their own.) Then ask if they do sponsoring. It doesn’t even matter if they haven’t so far. After all, you might be their first. If this person struck a certain cord in you, and both of you are willing, ask them to sponsor you. Don’t feel rejected if they can’t. They might underestimate their ability to sponsor, or not yet be ready. And the best sponsors can have several people already, and simply not have the time for another.

Remember too that you will have the responsibility of taking the first step and actually asking. Most sponsors, myself included, never offer first. This involves free will. It’s assumed that when ready and willing someone will ask for assistance. It also protects sponsees from feeling forced to work the program. If the two of you decide to work together, gift your new sponsor a copy of this book. How they sponsor you might not agree with everything you’re now reading, so simply follow your new guide. But by speaking a similar language as offered by this book, there will be more agreement than disagreement, and you will grow more quickly.

There is one caution you’ll hear about in meetings. It’s usually suggested you find a sponsor of the same sex. Even if you don’t initially think someone is physically attractive, that can change. One usually becomes very close to their sponsor, often closer than to anyone else

in their life. I personally broke the rule for my second sponsor and the dividends were tremendous, but I think it was by far the exception instead of the rule. There can be important disadvantages. An important advantage is one gains interesting insights from the opposite sex on sexual questions or problems. Simply use caution.

You might not be aware of how to find a meeting. If you live in a larger metropolitan area, check your phone book or Google ACA. If it doesn't describe the type of meeting you prefer, call Alcoholics Anonymous and tell them what you want. If you live in a more rural area, your best bet is starting with AA for information.

Don't be afraid to drive 30-60 miles to attend a meeting. This might even be less intimidating because of the increased anonymity. If all else fails, share this book with several people you know and start your own meeting. It only takes two. AA will provide you with the basics, even if you're starting an Adult Children group, or pursuing any other direction. The earlier descriptions of meetings in this book also provide guidelines for use.

One last suggestion. If your emotions result in periods of high anxiety or perhaps depression, now is a good time to check with a doctor. A chemical imbalance can destroy rational thinking and even prevent you from making the most of your program.

Summary

This is Step Two, the *hope* step. We came to believe that Another could restore us to sanity. We can't do it alone. That is a program fact. If one still tries, they will only be trying to fit new ideas into a confused ego belief system. The objective of the program is not knowledge, but peace. So we require some assistance.

This step is the gateway to a different way of life and a new way of thinking. It's impossible to describe the mind shift from worry, problems, and frustration to one of peace. The closest thing I had experienced in such a shift of gears was becoming fluent in French. When someone learns a language well they think in that tongue and even dream in that language. They can easily shift from one to another, just with a thought switch. Today we tend to speak and think ego. But we

want to become fluent in another, the language of the heart. The thought process is simply different.

You are hopefully encouraged by the potential you now see. You're now better aware of the methods available to you, and of many practical tools for growth. I pray you God-speed in your pursuit of the truth.

Suggested Actions:

- Try to consciously replace the word “help” with “assist” in your conversations. Or simply state the action involved.
- Make a conscious effort to say “I choose to” instead of “I should” in your conversations.
- If you're complimented, simply start saying “Well thank you, I really appreciate that.”
- Go out of your way to ask someone you know for information on how to do something, instead of trying to do everything yourself.
- When asked to do something you don't really want to do, simply say, “I'm sorry, but I would prefer not to.” (Don't rationalize.) Another possibility: “I'm not sure, let me get back to you.” (To provide time to formulate a response.)
- Unless you're already a compulsive shopper, buy something special for yourself.
- See the Appendix for helpful affirmations for these and subsequent steps.

Step 3: Commitment

So they committed themselves to the will of God and resolved to proceed.

- William Bradford

In Step One we made an important decision. Instead of pretending “we knew,” we decided that we really didn’t and that *humility* was the way. This was proven by the failure of our own attempts to become happy and contented. We looked everywhere and tried everything, and it simply didn’t work. Some things seemed to offer hope for a time, but in the end we still felt alone and unsatisfied, tired, and often angry. We decided that our attempts to control or to change the world and everyone in it to our way of thinking, were unsuccessful. But instead of feeling failure at such attempts, we sensed a new freedom. We were no longer responsible for other things and other people. We became *humble* enough to try another way.

In Step Two we gained *hope*. We found that hundreds of thousands of others were following a path that if used appropriately could produce peace and joy. They were the proof. We also learned how powerful the mind is, and that we had free choice to simply choose differently. We also received several practical ideas on how to start treating ourselves with the additional respect we deserve. We became excited about working on the only entity over which we do have control, “I”.

These decisions might not have come easily. After all, our old beliefs, habits, and stimulus-response mechanisms had been reinforcing themselves for many years. Nevertheless, we became willing to try.

But it’s now time to make one of the greatest decisions we’ll ever make: To move from involvement to commitment to a new way of life.

This might appear to create two problems. The first is trust. We have often been disappointed by earlier bouts of faith that were only followed by disappointment. Our parents might not have provided the love we expected, society might not have appreciated our talents, our abdication of important responsibilities to our government weren't deserved, business associates cheated us, a marriage partner or lover betrayed us... we've even disappointed ourselves.

The second problem is we will be asked for our commitment to a program with nine more steps we don't even understand yet. This is another purpose of this book: To help you understand and be more successful at working the program. It does work and is a loving program. But the final choice is yours. You do have free will. You can still choose to wait. Let the peace, love and joy in your life today be your guide. Let's discuss trust. The earliest and perhaps most powerful influence on our ability to trust came from our parents. Were we always free to say what we thought and express how we felt, all in the complete safety of their unconditional love? To one degree or another, it's extremely rare to come from such a home.

Instead, we were uncertain if our actions, thoughts, and words were appropriate. The sheer size of those 18 foot monsters was also intimidating. And even when we thought we were doing the right things, sometimes these gods got upset or impatient and became angry. Maybe they even yelled at us or hit us. Even more confusing, for a couple years we thought we were part of these creatures. We didn't even know we were separate from them. So when these giant gods were guiltling us, we were in fact shaming ourselves. This assumes we were even bonded to begin with and if not, lived in constant fear, feeling alone and totally vulnerable.

Until now we've talked mostly about dysfunctional families. It's now time to describe complete functionality. The *perfect parent*:

- Has no expectations of us
- Never takes and always gives
- Makes no child special
- Never meddles in our lives and guarantees free will
- Never tells us what to do unless we truthfully ask

- Never commands, but only guides
- Is infinitely patient and gentle
- Never judges us when we err
- Is always available
- Is infinitely and unconditionally loving
- Wants the absolute best for us
- Demands nothing on our part
- Teaches us to love ourselves and others

This explains why virtually everyone is an adult child. No mother or father can fully pass this test. But our parents were only our biological, not our perfect parents. Because what we have described above is your only true parent, that most people call God or Higher Power.

Could you fully trust such a parent? Step Three asks us to do this:

***Made the decision to turn our will and our lives over
to the care of God, as we understood Him.***

If we thought Step Two was difficult, this sounds like a lot more than could be expected of anyone. Especially “you know who.” But as we break down this step, it becomes much less ominous.

First, it only asks us to make the decision, to make the commitment. After all, if we were to actually do what seems to be implied, there wouldn’t be any need for the next 9 steps! Someone seems to be asking “Are you sure you want to do this? If so, I will help.” And He will. All we have to do is make the commitment - when we’re ready and willing.

The second part talks about our will. What is our will? It’s Ernie the Ego. It’s the total belief system we have made. We discussed this concept in detail in the section on denial. The ego is all the insanity we’ve made, complete with all its idols or special relationships...all those things we believe in some way are our salvation. But the implications are much more vast than a puny personal will. Few would argue the concept of mass or collective unconsciousness...that minds communicate, often without words. If one assembled all the egos in the world, and all the insanity they represent, we are left with a very accurate concept of the devil himself. But the devil, for many people, is not some entity fighting

for our souls, or someone to whom we're given if we lead a "bad life." Instead, it is the personal or combined parts of us that separate us from our Higher Power.

An idol is a false impression, or a false belief, some form of anti-Christ, that constitutes a gap between the Christ and what you see.

- A Course In Miracles T-29.VIII.3:1

Picture any part, or the total, of the agony and confusion that results, and we have the very essence of hell.

When [the ego] becomes overtly savage, it offers you hell.

- A Course In Miracles T-13.IV.1:7

The great puzzle is starting to come together. But rather than saving the world, we are only asked to relinquish our part in the insanity. We are simply given the free will to choose what to do with our simple role in the chaos, what to do with our ego alone. What do you choose? Do you want heaven or hell; love or fear; peace or war; the solution or the problem? Do you want to keep what you have made? But we recall that the ego is not our true Self anyway. It's simply the part that makes us feel lonely, unloved, and incomplete. Do you want to keep this?

The third part "as we understood Him" gives us the freedom to define God in our own way. It doesn't dictate. During the early period that I was totally avoiding any reference to religion, I used my own "designer God." It was a composite of Sandy, a yellow retriever I had as a child, and my first grade teacher - a huge, laughing, warm lady that really thought I was it. A combination of those two entities were the closest thing to unconditional love I could think of. And that satisfied the rules of the program. Once I came upon the above definition, however, I was quick to accept that God with total abandon. Regardless of how you define your Higher Power, from here on we will tend to use the term God. Atheists might simply think in terms of a wise and loving mentor.

I was once amazed at the freedom Twelve-Step programs allow in

defining our own God. Until it finally struck me why. It hit me like a thunderbolt one day when working with one of my sponsees. We were working Step Three, and discussing this very thing. I had commented that God created us in His own image. And Kevin responded, “and we promptly returned the favor.” That was it! Before that point I was pretty sure that it was my parents and not God who created my body, so it didn’t make a lot of sense to characterize Him as a bearded gentleman. But if we believe God created us in his own image; and if we have any concept about ourselves; then God is just like us! Our view of our selves, *right or wrong*, exactly determines our concept of God.

If we are steeped in guilt, we see a world of sin and suffering, and god must be the destroyer. If we are steeped in fear, we see a frightening world, and god must be punitive, someone to be feared. If we are joyful, we will see a perfect world, and God must be the Creator of all that is good.

But I cannot take credit for the prior paragraph, because I discovered that someone already had constructed that entire interpretation. It was again our friend, Dr. David R. Hawkins. He constructed a chart of ascending self-beliefs, ranging from death and oblivion at the bottom, to knowing we’re one with our Creator at the top.

By being honest with ourselves we can see exactly where we are in the ascending scale of understanding and truth. At the bottom we have death and oblivion. As we progress upwards, we move from hell towards heaven. And during your search for peace in the program, you can progress as high as you want. But only when you’re ready.

How Does God Work?

If we are to make this commitment, it would certainly help to know this. What are we in for? The above description of the perfect parent goes far in describing how we, His children, will be treated. And if that is what He is, we would fully expect Him to want us to love each other, ourselves, and be joyful. But until we fully decide that’s what we want to give, and thus receive, He won’t interfere.

Great disagreement, and even war, is often the result of man’s

attempts to rationalize creationism, astrology, evolution, and reincarnation. In fact, I believe they are all true...in certain respects.

God certainly creates. There is little doubt to that. But there will be confusion for some time on exactly what He created. If He endowed us with His infinite power, the collective minds of the world could make virtually anything, including the universe itself...or at least its meaning. This would explain many aspects of physical creationism, and perhaps we are the cause. Anyone who has studied physics knows that one cannot even observe the atoms which comprise all matter without affecting them. It's now widely acknowledged that everything is affected by our thoughts about them. This is why we now have double-blind testing. Simply believing in an outcome can produce the results the researcher is trying to prove.

Astrology and religion seldom mix well. But if this is the case, why is perhaps the greatest library on astrology found in the Vatican? Astrology might be the greatest tool we have to try and explain the enormous harmony He established in the worldly plane of what we might have helped create. If He is the perfect parent, would He establish some order to our universe to limit how much damage we can do? I don't believe astrology dictates predeterminism. Because this would interfere with our free will. But perhaps astrology is like the leash on a puppy, to keep it from wandering as far as the dangerous street. Jesus was also born exactly at the beginning of the Age of Pisces and his coming was predicted by astrologers. And if the Age of Aquarius recently began, exactly 2000 years after His birth when using today's calendar, what might now happen? Are we growing towards love, or towards something that must eventually pass? Every year we humans discover something amazing. In early 2016 researchers even finally proved and measured the gravity waves that Einstein predicted. This is getting exciting...

If our true Selves are eternal and perfect, as implied by past life regressions and near-death experiences, the concept of reincarnation could even make sense in certain respects. And if that is true, we must re-examine our concept of body. Could the body only be like the shell that sea creatures crawl into for a time, only to be discarded when no longer useful? Or is our infinite power even capable of producing a shell when we want? Still to be discarded when no longer useful? But there is a twist to this concept. It's obvious with DNA and genetics that the

body has a certain generational memory of its own. Is this of the Spirit or ego? If the latter, evolution of the physical body also makes sense. It is difficult to really tie down reincarnation, because it involves concepts based on time and space (which aren't present on the existential plane). But I find it utterly fascinating that all the major concepts of life on earth might all be true, in certain respects.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we didn't judge others for teaching creationism (of spirit at birth)? Or, the teaching of evolution (of body and all other physical manifestations of life)? Or, the teaching of the possibility of past and future lives? (Are you certain where your spirit came from and goes to, or whether it occupied or will occupy another physical form?) We could accept the teaching of astrology not from the standpoint of predeterminism, but as a gently blowing and predictable wind that results when the gravity waves of any two physical bodies influence each other. Only the most intransigent of minds could deny the existence of cyclical influence of astronomical bodies on electrochemical entities, like our brain/body. Consider the possibilities, my brother, of searching for the similarities in and the potential coexistence of, many paths to truth, all concepts of harmony, and a system so perfect that we can't screw it up (even if we can cause ourselves a lot of pain when we don't understand how it works). Not allowing such an approach only results in judgment of things that can never be proven in this lifetime, the unconscious self-condemnation that results, and an inability to forgive.

In the end, we can only guess about the perfect system He has created. When our spiritual awakenings begin, however, we will start to capture glimpses of Perfect Order. Sometimes it seems our concept of how God works and our definition of Him are strictly the results of our own thinking. And this glorifies the free will each of us has, and places no limit on what we will find in our personal quests. Perhaps it's appropriate we don't know exactly how God truly works, because we can't even handle acceptance:

You cannot even give a blessing in perfect gentleness. Would you know of One Who gives forever, and Who knows of nothing except giving?

- A Course In Miracles T-14.IV.8:6

We don't know what love is, because that is what we are. But worldly definitions of love are sad in comparison to true Love. One tiny drop of the real stuff would literally blow our minds. So on a practical basis we can only try to love our God the best we know how, and to bless our brothers by accepting them and always wanting the best for them. In fact, we ARE our brothers. By loving them, we receive love. By forgiving them, we understand we are already forgiven...as long as we continue to dream we need forgiveness. But in Truth there might be no final need for believing in forgiveness, if God never condemned us to begin with.

Doing His Will

We still need some help in learning what to do, in order to reach peace. "Let Go and Let God" is an old and revered program saying. What this means is to set aside our demands of how things should be, and as a result, find out what God has in mind for us. When we set aside our "knowing" and our special relationships, if only briefly, when we ask to know His will, we will be answered.

As we start to do this, it is often difficult to envision becoming dependent on anything, including a Higher Power. Because the world calls this slavery, and teaches the opposite. And slavery entails pain and hardship. To escape, many feel we must nail ourselves to a cross and hang our heads in sorrow.

Do not make the pathetic error of "clinging to the old rugged cross." I do not call for martyrs but for teachers.

- A Course In Miracles T-6.I.16:3

Pain can only be experienced when we mourn the loss of special relationships. Peace comes gently. So it is only our tiny wills and puny egos that prevent us from achieving glory. When we hook into that infinite power, we can do anything that promotes harmony...resulting in miracles. Only as long as we decline are we tying our own hands. Or in the words of Joseph Campbell "We're standing on a whale, fishing for minnows."

This does not mean we sit back and let Him do everything. A perfect parent assists us any time we ask, but does not do everything for us either. There's a very important reason why He won't interfere in our lives. It's again because of free will. We are simply His instruments of love and forgiveness, as long as we're in this world. We simply set aside our way, our will, and seek His will. We have to do the footwork, and decide to do it. The program also says "If nothing changes, nothing changes." The timing is up to us, on when to make the commitment. He has the plan to produce peace, at any time we're willing to listen.

It is for the same reasons He doesn't "fix" all the war and famine in the world. Some would even use such facts to prove there is no God. But these are things *we* produced, and the perfect parent doesn't interfere. Man makes war, so only he can stop it. And with the abundance in this world, we can easily solve the famine and starvation problem any time we choose to set our own wills and greed aside. But what about disease and death itself? We've already discussed the power of our minds, and that disease could also largely be of our own making. And if we're eternally protected and innocent, death itself becomes simply an enigmatic curiosity. We also made fear.

But why hasn't God answered all our prayers? Isn't this additional proof He doesn't exist? We must carefully reconsider what we've been praying for. We must first truly want what we're praying for. It's not a matter of wishing or hoping or simple begging. Praying involves true desires of the heart.

Secondly, we must pray for something that will truly benefit us. How often do we pray for special relationships and new idols? Would the perfect parent grant a knife, razor blades, or matches to a young child? Or provide something that further separates the parent from the child? But even then, sometimes if we pray hard enough and long enough for a special relationship, it will be granted. Just to show us that it still doesn't bring us happiness or salvation.

Third, receiving the objects of our prayers must not increase our fear. Miracles do not have limits or degrees of difficulty. But their sudden manifestation could scare the hell out of us. In the end, even if all these things are satisfied, we must still recognize the answer. And the response can be in ways we're not aware. Perhaps it's simply the introduction of

another person into our lives who has an answer or a lesson. Realizing these things, we will often have difficulty knowing what to pray for. Most of my prayers ask for peace, love, joy, understanding and, in particular, learning how to forgive. I never demand how that is to be achieved, which would often involve some type of special relationship. Most of the time my prayers ask to see something differently.

The perfect parent doesn't yell at us, but speaks patiently and softly. This makes it all the more important to step aside from our idols and special relationships that distract us, to produce the quiet to hear His voice. Only when we let these things go do we have true freedom. Or as the song says "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose." Only then do we gain everything. And trying to force a response doesn't seem to work very well either. The best approach seems to be a gentle letting go on our part. The dawn does not come with clatter and noise, or great effort. And even when we pray and pray again, we're the one talking. How often do we meditate...to get still enough to hear the gentle whisper of His answer?

The Holy Spirit's Voice is as loud as your willingness to listen. It cannot be louder without violating your freedom of choice, which the Holy Spirit seeks to restore, never to undermine.

- A Course In Miracles T-8.VIII.8:7

As our awareness increases, we become aware of how little damage we can really do. We become struck with wonder by the perfection of the system He has established. When we wander, our bodies, other people, and events remind us. Things go wrong. When we choose correctly, our harmony grows. Our true being is totally innocent and eternally protected. He has given us the Holy Spirit or our Higher Power to provide the answer any time we require a decision. And the answers always produce a win-win situation for everyone involved. Our Father has never left us, we have simply left or forgotten Him. And all we have to do is remove the obstacles, our investments, our idols, our special relationships, to again see Him. This is what Step Three asks.

The Laws of God

Some will consider that already presented as too simple, others too difficult. Still others demand exact rules to live by. The establishment of rules or laws can easily create controversy and is perhaps the greatest source of conflict between the different beliefs and religions of the world. God's laws are simple. He only wants us to teach love, peace, and forgiveness in total humility, never forgetting His will instead of ours.

Just for now, however, three spiritual guidelines might be of assistance to virtually anyone. It is not appropriate to:

- Take another's freedom
- Harm another or their possessions
- Make someone less in another's eyes

These are very clear and also recognize the attributes of God. It must be assumed that He would like us to emulate Him, so anything we do must not disagree with how He operates.

The taking of another's freedom implies intrusion on a brother's free will. A perfect parent doesn't do this with us, so it doesn't make sense for us to do this with others. Everyone's particular path is slightly different. Because everyone's ego is different. As a result, we will never know what is appropriate for a brother. This means we must never try to change another, until we are perfect ourselves. And once we are perfect, we would never want to. Even the Bhagavad-Gita says it's an immoral act to try and teach someone something before they're ready. But, we argue, shouldn't we make laws to protect each other? Whether it be to prevent suicide or even legislate that people must wear their safety belts? The person who commits suicide is a Lost Child of God and doesn't know who he really is. His calls for love seemed unanswered by his brothers. But that person is not taking another's freedom by such an act. Safety belt laws intrude on one's freedom. But this doesn't mean a parent cannot model such behavior for their children. Example is always the best teacher, and purpose, again, is all important.

Harming someone or their possessions is very similar. It also serves to make illusions real. And again, what are you teaching when this is done?

Making a person less in another's eyes involves judgment. When we gossip to John about Mary, especially in her absence, we are painting *our* picture of Mary's past in John's eyes. It will affect his opinion of this individual, without even meeting her! As we will soon see, the past doesn't exist. But we're certainly doing our best to create one by such an action. In a practical sense, the only thing worse than judgment is pre-judgment. On a larger plane, every decision we make alone is murder and idolatry. We are killing one alternative and making a special relationship, an idol, out of the other. And we must never confuse the worth of someone with what others think. Including our own worth.

*Your worth is not established by teaching or learning.
Your worth is established by God.*

- A Course In Miracles T-4.I.7:1

But in the end, it's very difficult to *not* do something. This includes behaviors, addictions, compulsions, and thoughts themselves. It's both preferable and easier to do only this: Love.

Summary

With this better understanding of how God seems to work, and what we're asked to do about it, we see a great puzzle coming together. All the problems and turmoil, peace and joy, and the conditions for each, start to make sense. All the things outside us, particularly our relationship to them, cause all the problems. The alternative is what is inside us. This is where peace and love are found. In fact, it is where God abides. And given the power of our collective minds, perhaps we've even created everything outside us. Inside us, inside that hologram, is the total and only real universe.

In the words of Joseph Campbell, the conscious mind is only a secondary organ, and only thinks it's running the shop. Quietly waiting inside our unconscious mind, perhaps we can call it the superconscious, is our true self, our spirit. As the last century's greatest interpreter of the cosmic, comparative religion, and the spiritual he also points out that the meaning of life is not important, but it's the experience of being alive. "What's the meaning of a flower?"

But we're still faced with the decision "What do we want, and do we want it truly?" Do we want to use the power of our essence to miscreate illusions or to create the beautiful?

Every loving thought is true.

- A Course In Miracles T-12.I.3:3

One evening during meditation I clearly envisioned heaven in exactly these terms. I saw that heaven is only a back-to-back uninterrupted string of loving thoughts. But we insist on using our wills to interject darkness between those loving thoughts. And darkness creates chaos. We've allowed our special relationships, our anger and hatred, to control our lives. But Step Three simply asks us to make the decision to gently turn over our will and our lives to the care of God, as we understand Him. A sponsee once told me "I've let other things and other people, including my own delusions, control my life for a long time. Why not give God a chance?"

But in the end it's not important to try and figure out God. And the program states that it doesn't make any difference what our God is, as long as it's something greater that's beyond ourselves. Perhaps it's only the combined love of the other people at the meetings we attend. We can call it harmony, all or All, collective unconsciousness, or All That Is. Perhaps it's the electricity that drives our appliances. I now call it spirit, God, and Holy Spirit. It doesn't matter. God has no ego, so He doesn't mind. He doesn't even demand you understand Him. He only asks that you accept Him, and not reject Him.

Whether we envision it or not, there is a grand orchestra playing out there. And there is great harmony in their song. But assume only one person is deaf to the melody, or doesn't even know there's a band. This doesn't change the song, but imagine the magnificence of opening the ears of all, and their joining...

The concept of God that I've described here is my belief. There's an old saying in Twelve-Step, "Take what you want and leave the rest." But if my path assists you in some way, it's yours.

One last reminder. Step Three only asks for your certain commitment. "Made the decision" is the most important part of this step. In

many ways, this step “sounds” like the most difficult. This is not the case. I’ve seen program people get stuck on this step for months, even years. Perhaps it’s because one feels unworthy of proceeding because they realize they haven’t yet “turned it over.” The remaining steps show us how to do this. This step is simply a decision to do it, of what we truly want, when we want it.

*If you want to be like me I will help you, knowing
that we are all alike. If you want to be different I
will wait...*

- A Course In Miracles T-8.IV.6:3

Nevertheless, it’s time for your unequivocal decision. You might want to make an appointment with yourself to make this serious commitment between you and your God/Higher Power. Become quiet and still, and reach deep within your heart to the very depth of your being and spirit. Feel the merging of that spirit with your God. Because they are of the same unseen essence. This combining of pure innocence is your right and your destiny.

*Once to every man and nation
comes the moment to decide
In the strife of Truth and Falsehood,
for the good or evil side;*

- J. R. Lowell

But now is also the time to start living your life “One day at a time.” Of course we will make mistakes, and we will choose to keep many things for a while longer. Simply be gentle with yourself, while opening the door ever so slightly to allow another way. Regardless of whether you’re still drinking, smoking, worrying, or whatever, anyone can decide not to do something for the next five minutes and only love. It is only these special relationships that prevent you from “staying in the light.” If difficult (particularly if you’re in deep depression), simply picture yourself giving off all the love you can muster. Go to a meeting and simply love somebody. Accept the hell out of them and let your heart

nearly explode with wanting the best for them. This might involve no words whatsoever. Let your light shine. Love is a funny thing. The more we give, the more we get.

If you can do this for five minutes, you can do it for an hour. If for an hour, you will even soon be able to do so for one day. But now He is walking beside you. He has taken your hand to gently lead you towards peace. Simply because you've accepted Him.

Suggested Actions:

- The ego always speaks first. In an uncertain situation, just like grandma suggested, count to 10 before acting or responding. Or delay your decision.
- 90% of what we worry about won't even occur. When you catch yourself worrying about something, take one active step only to keep the undesirable event from occurring.

Step 4: Evaluation

...question everything you learned of yourself, for you who learned amiss should not be your own teacher.

- A Course In Miracles T-11.VIII.3:8

We've now developed the humility to admit our ways simply weren't working. We became willing to try another way, and realized that we can't do it alone. We also made the important commitment to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood Him. We became aware of truths that belie randomness, unless we chose not to see.

We started living one day at a time to be vigilant to our commitment and to increase our awareness. This doesn't mean we're already becoming well and wonderful, because we've just begun. So we must never forget humility. By the same token, we must never feel guilty about repeating some of our old behaviors of which we're not particularly proud. If we wait to be perfect before progressing to each new step, we won't need the subsequent steps. It's simply that we choose not to keep our special relationships. Remain hopeful and willing, my brother. The end is near. By now our willingness to trust in something greater than ourselves has probably grown to the point that our fear is also greatly reduced.

If the foregoing is not true for you, it might be preferable to wait before continuing. If you feel hurried, just keep attending meetings until you're ready. By now you've been keeping your eyes open for a sponsor, and if one has not been chosen, some extra effort now to find a guide will soon pay great dividends.

In fact, you will require a sponsor for the next step, number Five.

This is because you will share your entire evaluation with him or her. Incidentally, you might be tempted to concentrate only on those things bothering you in the evaluation that follows. This will not work. A sponsor is not a psychoanalyst who will fine tune your distorted frequencies and send you on your way. They will even refuse to do the next step with you until a complete inventory is finished.

But even for this Step Four, he or she might have a preferred way for you to do your inventory. It might be frustrating to again do this work in a different format, so you might want to wait until you have a sponsor before doing the work that follows.

Step Four is:

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

This step also might appear ominous to many. But we've found in the previous three that what sounded difficult or fearful was not. Once we realize what's really involved and the purpose, each becomes much easier.

I've noticed that the biggest problem people have with this step is confusion between observation and judgment. Our Higher Power doesn't judge us, so there's no reason to judge ourselves. What we're really doing in our evaluation is identifying patterns. Nothing more and nothing less:

*I've never seen a pig fly;
I've never seen my father cry.
My mother insists on being right;
I cringe in fear at the thought of a fight.
I always have too much on my mind;
with others it's very hard to be kind.
With authority figures I tend to wilt;
when others criticize I experience guilt.
I've always been very big on pride;
with others I seldom see their side.*

*The center of the universe tends to be me;
I'd rather control others than let them be.*

So we don't even have to think in terms of good or bad, right or wrong, as we write our inventory. It's often more enlightening to focus on those patterns normally considered inappropriate. But always resist the temptation to condemn or judge yourself. It's also helpful to think in terms of what you've done in the *past*. And the past is dead.

*Just stand aside and watch yourself go by,
Think of yourself as "he" instead of "I".*

- Strickland Gillilan

This might be the first time we've ever taken a close look inside ourselves. It was always easier to pretend our own problems were only temporary, or perhaps we only saw their end results. And the ego is wonderfully adept at rationalizing our past actions or thoughts. "I wouldn't have yelled at the guy, but he was such a jerk!" It was much easier to concentrate on the shortcomings of others, and to try and fix or judge them. But now it's time to take a hard, cold look at the only thing over which we have any control - "I". And instead of finding fearful things inside, we will only find ways to better understand ourselves and grow.

*You are indeed afraid to look within and see the sin
you think is there...What if you looked within and
saw no sin? This "fearful" question is one the ego
never asks.*

- A Course In Miracles T-21.IV.1:3

This step is important, because we want to fully identify our ego, our will, so we can more completely turn it over. In other words, we want to paint a good picture of "it".

*No one can escape from illusions unless he looks at
them, for not looking is the way they are protected.*

- A Course In Miracles T-11.V.1:1

In most cases, one only experiences two practical problems with their evaluation. The first is trying to differentiate between cause and effect. For example, "Do I experience anger because of guilt, or does anger produce the guilt?" For now it doesn't matter. Your sponsor and the rest of this book will lovingly assist you in understanding the important. Remember, this is not a psychoanalysis program. All you need for now is a simple but complete format to identify the patterns that were present in the past.

The second problem is the ego is present in both the conscious and subconscious mind. It's easier, if we have the honesty to observe it, to work with the conscious part. But the unconscious can often be observed only by the symptoms or patterns that result. But again, simply by following a reasonable format we can gain great insight as to what's going on beneath the surface. Your sponsor and/or your Higher Power will also assist in observing this area.

In fact, the core of most of our fears and guilts lies within our subconscious. But these things will not come out and be released until certain conditions permit. It's necessary to become more aware of our real Self; begin to realize that the true part of us is totally innocent; and to find another person or Higher Power in which we can find the unconditional love and safety to allow disclosure of the resulting patterns.

As you do your inventory, rest assured that *you will not come up with anything new*. You could never have invented something others haven't experienced. For example, how many people haven't masturbated, or really lost their cool with children or other loved ones, or lied or cheated? Even the incidence of sexual abuse and incest is very high. The only reason you might be reluctant in writing down an event or pattern is this: Like everyone else, we tend to compare our insides with others' outsides. In other words, everyone has their secret thoughts and idiosyncrasies, those thoughts and actions that occur behind "the green door." But few share them with others. So we think most of these people are well and wonderful, while we focus on those secrets we think only we possess. In a meeting I once heard the statement, "The only thing I want out of this program is to become as happy as most other people appear to be."

So it's time to do our inventory, to start our discovery. Remember,

only look for patterns. Don't judge right or wrong. What you come up with is really OK.

The Twelve-Step Inventory

There are many ways to do an inventory. I found the following to work very well for me. Your sponsor might suggest a different approach, but this format will go far in helping your guide assist you.

It might first be helpful to return to the original discussion of denial when we listed several typical special relationships (addictions/compulsions). List those that involve your patterns. It might be interesting to list them in order of priority, from the most to the least bothersome. Or you might want to briefly evaluate each from 1 to 10 in order of their importance in your life.

Your sponsor will also be assisted by knowing something about the patterns of your family. So if you also indicate which members of your family exhibited those special relationships on the list, this will also speed understanding.

The following is a list of traits that man has wrestled with since time began. The list is long, but the typical ego does a pretty good job at hitting most at one time or another. Insanity has no limit, so you might be able to think of some additional items important to you. It's suggested you start a notebook, and make a journal, writing each of the following at the top of a page, followed by the blank page for notes.

Then, one by one, go through and list specific examples or events that each has manifested with you. Remember to be specific. The result is a series of brief one or two sentence examples of each pattern. It might appear that this exercise will take months. Two or three sessions of sincere, honest effort will cover the great majority of what you can possibly remember. Between sessions, try to notice additional things to add that you might think of, or even do.

If you have a lot of trouble thinking of examples, it might help to go through the list with a loving family member, or better yet, someone else who is also doing this step. But use extreme caution in deciding to do this. This is because we often let others determine our worth. Our worth was long ago established by our Higher Power, regardless of what our ego has

since made. Also, someone who is distrustful will see others as distrustful, and if they're into control, will see others as controlling, etc. So try to avoid this, but don't rule out the possibility. You might try a couple items only, to determine the type of response from someone. But you must eventually decide if it makes sense or not. Your "blessing brother" might be very helpful in this task, as will ideas and observations at ACA meetings.

Once you've exhausted those things you can remember, it can be very helpful to then add at the end of each entry which parents or guardians exhibited the same patterns. We tend to model our parents in one of two ways. Either we repeat the same patterns (tyrant) or do the exact opposite (rebel).

Patterns

False Pride	Worry
Lust	Over-Sensitivity
Fear	Jealousy
Distrust	Guilt
Dishonesty/Inconsistency	Ingratitude
Intolerance/Judgment	Indifference
Lack of Gentleness	Control
Pessimism	Irresponsibility
Defensiveness	Despondency
Greed	Indiscretion
Impatience	Insincerity
Faithlessness	Self-Righteousness
Closed-Mindedness	Self-Pity
Gluttony	Fantasy
Envy	Aimlessness
Anger	Resentment
Procrastination/Laziness	Non-Assertiveness

The above have opposite traits. Make a list of your major attributes that correspond to each, and how they have manifested. So as not to create an endless monster, you might want to focus on the ones you're particularly endowed with.

A few other items will complete your inventory. Next answer the following questions:

1. When I'm not working or spending activity time with family members, I spend a good deal of my time doing the following three things:
2. When I have the extra time, and when I'm alone, I love to do the following three things:
3. I was the most proud when the following three things occurred:
4. The three most important things people should do or be are:
5. The three things I hate most that people do are:
6. The three following were the first time I remember sex was discussed, referred to, or in any way suggested by an older person:
7. My three earliest, most stressful situations I remember were:
8. The three things that I felt most ashamed of were:

You've now taken a closer look at yourself than most people would even think of doing. It's suggested you keep your journal in a safe, secure, and confidential place. It is your anonymous inventory, and your privacy must be fully respected. There is only one person who has a right to fully discuss your inventory with you. This is your sponsor. He or she will probably ask you, after Step Five, what you want to do with it. Some people gain immense relief by burning it. Others would like to keep it for future reference. The choice will be yours.

Suggested Actions:

- Buy an inexpensive watch with alarms, and set those alarms for random times during the day. Or use your cell phone. When alarms go off, note what you're doing or thinking about and your feelings.
- Keep a note pad or journal handy wherever you go, and make notes on items to add to your inventory.

Step 5: Acceptance

The ego analyzes; the Holy Spirit accepts.

- A Course In Miracles T-11.V.13:1

Countless songs are sung, books written, and statements made about love. But the fact is we have enough trouble simply accepting our brothers, let alone trying to love them. If love has anything to do with wanting the best for another, and accepting them for what they are and are not, you will soon receive total love for perhaps the first time in your life.

The Fifth Step is:

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

When we do this with an accomplished sponsor, we will simply hear “My brother, I have been there too. You are innocent. Feel free to choose again.” When we share what we have found from our inventory with God, ourselves, and another, we would expect something totally different. We would first expect God to somehow condemn us for what we reveal. This, of course, assumes we could have hidden our thoughts from Him to begin with. There are no secret thoughts, and they all produce effects. But when we share them with the Perfect Parent, we know from our description in Chapter 3 that there is unconditional love regardless of what we do.

We have already gained an increased sense of acceptance from program meetings. Because of crosstalk rules, we were free to express anything without comment by others. When others shared, we might not

have agreed with them, but we didn't say anything. We simply let them be. We replied with a quiet love...with a simple acceptance...

It might even be difficult to closely look at inventory items ourselves. This fear might have complicated, or even prevented us from doing, a complete inventory to begin with. But as long as we try to fool ourselves, that lack of harmony or outright discord will produce misery for us. As in the preparation of your inventory, and now your sharing it, assuming the role of a casual but persistent observer will again pay wonderful dividends. But to think of sharing all our "bad things" with another person still sounds like a lot to ask. Our parents always taught us to tell the truth, and there were occasions that when we did we were punished. There were also times we shared deeper thoughts or desires with others, and were only judged. Why would this time be any different? A sponsor is only repeating the loving understanding he received from his sponsor, and his sponsor before that, when they shared their inventories.

There is another critical reason for doing this with someone else. If we don't have the trust to share our hearts and "secret thoughts" with one other person, how could we possibly place our total faith in our Higher Power later? As we grow in humility, faith, and courage, this is an important weigh station on our path to peace. It is, of course, necessary to carefully choose the person with whom we share our inventory. It must be someone who will obviously maintain our confidentiality and anonymity, and who won't pity us. We have several options. It might be with the sponsor who has taken us this far. When possible this would be preferable, because this will provide them even more insight when assisting us later. But it could also be a close friend, counselor, or clergy person. It might even be someone we never knew before and will never see again. Simply remember that you will not share your inventory in order to be "fixed." Just follow your heart.

The wondrous benefits of humility will also shine through when we take this step. We will find that pride was cutting us off from our brothers. But mutual humility will attract two people like the most powerful magnets imaginable. Pity and self-debasement won't do it, but humility will. We are simply setting aside our masks and sharing our true insides. Without judgment.

It might be tempting to be only partially humble, only sharing

certain things with our sponsor. Perhaps one expects the sponsor to take the information, do a quick fix, and send us on our way. That's not the way it works. This is sometimes attempted in psychotherapy. But remember, this approach doesn't involve therapy, but spirituality. Use full disclosure. This doesn't mean we won't think of additional things later, and one can always come back and repeat this step for that item. But be as complete as possible.

In pursuing acceptance it's typical to pull out our deepest, darkest, most wretched pattern, only to hear our sponsor say "Yeah, that was in my inventory too." The two will often laugh together at how much they had in common. You will never have invented anything new.

What if you looked within and saw no sin?

- A Course In Miracles T-21.IV.3:1

It's often helpful for the sponsor to assist their sponsee in reclassifying items into "buckets" for an easier summary later. Knowing something about the influences in one's life assists in doing this. When I shared my inventory, Alan did this for me, and I wrote these items in a different colored pencil to the left of each entry. I later combined each into what became six major categories, for the primary things happening in my own life. I came up with lack of acceptance/emotions, people-pleasing, spoiled/no boundaries, sex, greed, and what I called "tiny." For the latter, I was a very small kid with glasses. Physical fear was therefore an issue. This is a good example of something that only existed for a period. As a freshman in high school, I was the shortest kid in my class, including the girls, except for one girl who had polio. When I graduated, no one in my class was taller. But in my early years it was certainly a factor, and this continued to silently influence my belief system for decades.

I then wrote a one or two page summary on each of these major "buckets," listing contributing factors and the effects. Sometimes when I get stuck in a problem, I can go back and quickly work through it using one of these summaries. But it's usually easier to simply give my sponsor a quick call.

I would also like to share one funny thing that happened when we

did my Step Five. We were going through each item in my notebook, and Alan was giving me a brief word or two for clarity or putting it in the right bucket. We were doing fine until I shared one particular item, which I no longer even recall. He said, "Hmm, that sounds like laziness to me." Procrastination might have been a better term. Nevertheless, I bristled.

By now I easily admitted I was a raging workaholic, so I sure as hell wasn't lazy! We chatted about it for a while, and I continued to defend. We'd worked together for several weeks, and were very good at sharing how we really felt and what we really wanted. I finally said, "You know, I'm not sure I want to do this any more right now. I'd like to go home and think about this, and we can finish up later." Alan asked, "How do you feel?" I said, "Well, I'm tired and my eyes are even getting itchy." He laughed in a warm way and said, "That's amazing. When I don't want to look at something my eyes get itchy too."

He then added, "Look. This is no big deal. God and I won't judge you for anything in your inventory. We're just looking at a bunch of stuff you're going to turn over later." Within five minutes, I was actually making an inside joke of it and laughing with Alan about it. Not in a self-deprecating way, but because it didn't matter! From then on, it was like a cat playing with something new, or a young child exploring something out of curiosity.

*...in each the other saw a perfect shelter where his
Self could be reborn in safety and in peace.*

- A Course In Miracles T-22.I.9:8

In meetings one often hears the statement "You're only as sick as your secrets." Shame comes from the fear of being found out. When we can dredge up all of the garbage we can find from our conscious and subconscious, and share it with God or Higher Power and another, it starts to melt.

*When you feel guilty, remember that the ego has
indeed violated the laws of God, but you have not.*

- A Course In Miracles T-4.IV.5:1

When arranging to share one's inventory, it's necessary to schedule plenty of time with the sponsor - time that won't be interrupted by phone calls or other distractions. My sharing, and most I've conducted with my sponsees, have taken about four hours. It will take more or less time, depending on how detailed the sponsee's inventory might be. I strongly recommend against doing it in more than one sitting.

It might also be helpful to begin the session with a prayer, asking for absence of judgment on everyone's part, and a request for understanding and a different way of seeing things.

Although not necessary, if one relates parental patterns with sponsee's patterns, there is often a 180 degree correlation. In other words, patterns will generally be repeated, or the parent's patterns will be completely rejected in favor of the opposite trait. For example, a seminary student could easily come from a family with no morals at all (a rebel reaction).

It's strictly optional, but there is a fun little exercise that can be used with strengths. Depending on how close and trusting the relationship with your sponsor, it might be preferable to explore this one on your own. It's called the "Radio Dial." I learned this approach from a Dr. Paul Mok. While I was living in Switzerland and working for Caterpillar, he was flown over from the states to conduct management training for us at a beautiful little resort at Crans-Montana. He explained how his "Radio Dial" concept was developed. He was at a seaside resort and getting close to a new approach he was developing. He finally hit on a very enlightening concept. It was a derivative of yin-yang theory...a strength, when taken to an extreme, becomes a weakness. And vice versa.

The problem he was researching was how to determine potential weaknesses from personnel interviews. After all, an interviewee is not going to admit they're unorganized, over-controlling, etc., but will instead only discuss strengths. When he received this lightning bolt of awareness, he became very excited and had to try out his theory. He was invited to a party that night, and arrived an hour early because of his excitement in testing his idea on someone. Other than the hostess, only one lady had already arrived. He started talking to her, told her he was a psychologist, and wanted to know if he could test a new theory. The light-hearted response accompanied by a grin was "Only if I don't have to lie down for it."

He simply asked her about her greatest strengths. She thought for a moment, and said "Well, I'm extremely well read and also very interested in people. I know a lot about many things and enjoy sharing that knowledge with others." She then added a second item. "My friends also tell me I keep a very neat house. It's never dirty or messy."

Paul asked her if he could suggest some of her related weaknesses, and she agreed. He postulated "Your friends think you're a little nosy. You always have an opinion about anything, and get involved in people's lives whether they want you to or not." "Also, people think you're picky. Particularly around the house everything has to be just so, just your way or no way at all." She came to a quick boil and snapped "You've been talking to my husband haven't you!" She twirled around and left the party. Before it even got started. With other such inquiries of newly-arriving guests, eventually everyone was almost glued to the walls, trying to distance themselves from this psychic shrink standing in the middle of the room.

Now obviously one can use this in a loving playful way as well, but I think you get the idea: Take any strength, and crank the radio dial up to full tilt with it, to suggest possible weaknesses. The most creative people probably won't be the tidiest or the best at details. People who are really in the now won't be much interested in the future or planning. Perfectionists and detail people wouldn't normally be expected to come up with creative ideas that will change the universe, etc., etc. Don't get hung up on this idea, but you can have some fun with it.

But again, don't confuse this step with psychoanalysis. This is not the objective nor the process. By closely looking at cause and effect it's simply easier to understand your will and how it works, as opposed to that of your Higher Power. By sharing these things with your sponsor it's easier for them to guide you later if and when something starts to reappear.

In the prior chapter, you also answered eight questions as part of your inventory. The first two strongly suggest literal special relationships. Very common answers are: Watching TV, drinking (beer, soda, etc.), smoking (whatever), planning/intellectualizing (about work, worry, etc.). These are direct indications of potential compulsions. The third question helps quantify false pride, which is the opposite of humility.

The fourth and fifth questions help identify fears or more special relationships. (Those exhibiting dislike of something often exhibit very similar characteristics. For example, if I'm controlling, I'll be irritated by those who try to control me.) The last three help identify particular sources of guilt, and those guilts must be dissolved.

After sharing your inventory you will experience a great relief in many ways. What you thought were nasty secrets were not rare or even uncommon. They are shared by untold millions of other people called human beings. Everyone's ego collection will be slightly different, but everyone carries around this bucket of secrets and behavior patterns. One can often determine the nature of a person's goodies by their eyes, the way they carry their bodies, and by the size of the masks they wear. One's eyes will burn right through you or never meet yours. Some people's shoulders are slumped by the weight of the perceived shame in their bucket. The hard-core counter-dependent wears the heaviest mask possible, to hide or deflect the fear inside.

After your own sharing, you will see others in a totally new light. To those you once saw as weak, you will be more tempted to offer your hand. All they need is acceptance and appreciation, just like you. If you have problems with authority figures, simply know that they too have fears and secrets. If not, they would be totally humble. The most beautiful woman or handsome man you encounter will harbor internal fears, weaknesses, or loneliness. Blow anyone's mind by simply making a safe place for them to share their thoughts or errors, without judgment. Just as your sponsor accepted you.

Another's patterns will be a little different from yours. Don't attack the ones you don't share, while harboring your own unique set of patterns. Simply choose again. The end of judgment is close now. Judge not, lest ye be judged. Not by God, but by yourself. Forgiveness is the greatest need in the world today. And each of us must learn it, before the certainty of going home together.

Your relief will be enormous once you know you really count and now belong to a new and select fraternity. It's called the brotherhood of man. When I finished my sharing I felt so confident, humble, and equal that I wanted to share all my patterns with everyone. My sponsor advised that it was up to me, but I certainly didn't have to. He suggested

that if I did, it might be preferable to only do so at meetings. Others might not understand. To this day, I have no reluctance to share that I'm a Twelve-Stepper with anyone. But if they want to know more, they'll have to hear it in meetings, or now read this book. But I now know that regardless of what others think of me, it doesn't matter. My worth was established by God, and no one can change that. Including myself.

Step Five offers enormous potential for a miracle. Having experienced total acceptance and unconditional love for perhaps the first time, you might literally feel your heart roll over. Depending on how centered your sponsor might be at the end of this exercise, and how willing you are to accept something wonderful, don't underestimate the power of this step. Simply let go of those things you think you've made, and remember your true Self, your light. Judgment is no longer. The judgment day has come and gone for you. And in the safety of a loving brother you have seen the truth: "Dear Child of God, you are truly innocent and without guilt." Years of pain and the many tears of self-condemnation and sorrow have been replaced with...tears of joy.

Suggested Actions:

- When others say something you disagree with, try to more often simply smile with no response at all. Notice the different way you feel and how they might react. Contrast this with trying to change their minds or saying the same thing you always do about the topic at hand.
- The next time you're tempted to tell a white lie to "protect someone," or otherwise be dishonest, tell the truth and see what happens, and how you feel later.

Step 6: Courage

*You cannot choose your battlefield,
The gods do that for you,
But you can plant a standard
Where a standard never flew.*

- Nathalia Crane

In the last chapter we shared all the horrible things about ourselves that we could think of, and our brother simply said “Me too.” We learned our true selves were not guilty, but innocent. Our ego had broken every law that any God ever made, but our true eternal selves didn’t. We stood before the court of God, the court of man, and our own court of self-condemnation, and the case was simply dismissed. We only heard, “choose again.”

It’s now time to muster our courage before taking what is the most important step. In the next chapter we will take all the things we uncovered and truly turn them over. All of them. We don’t know what to keep. He will, returning our loving thoughts and anything else we still need to do His will.

What you perhaps thought to be only another self-development or self-psychoanalysis book wasn’t. We’ve certainly learned many enlightening things about ourselves - what we do and in some cases why we do them. But the latter is simply a bonus. Because we can’t figure it all out on our own. And the best sponsor or the best psychiatrist in the world can’t do it either. We’re taking it to the top, to Someone who knows what to do with it.

After we “turn it over” in the next step we might have to go back and do some additional work in a couple areas that didn’t “take.” Most will

find this necessary. If so, most of the work will have already been done, because we were complete in our inventory. It's there to go back to, when and if needed. But could you imagine the enormous task of trying to wade through all that garbage, even with a sponsor, and trying to make sense of it? It would even be difficult and protracted with a therapist.

Back in Nebraska we used what is called a manure spreader. But we never emptied a full load with a shovel. You take the machine out, start it up, and watch that stuff fly. There always remains a few chunks or smears, but it's easy to clean up when most of the goodies are gone. We'll use the same technique, by turning over everything that's loose. Only then do we go in with a scrub brush and pail, and zero in on what's left.

But we must first do the Sixth Step:

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

This might sound like an easy task. Of course we're willing to get rid of all our harmful patterns! But are we? To get the job done we must shift gears into even higher levels of willingness, humility, and faith.

First, we must accept the fact that most of our patterns have some type of payoff, or we wouldn't repeat them. We said before that special relationships either help us get what we want, help us to avoid feeling, or help us to feel. But it's time to become more specific.

As examples, most of us exhibit some level of people-pleasing, guilt, and worry. All three debilitate us, and come together in something called public speaking. This is often rated as the second greatest fear, ranking only behind that of death. I've had many years experience with Toastmasters International, and have served as Club President, Area Governor, and District Governor within that organization. One can clearly see all three of the above, people-pleasing, guilt, and worry, as members prepare for and give speeches:

A people-pleaser has enormous difficulty in a presentation. Person-to-person, they can become anyone the other person wants, just like a chameleon, so that people like them. But put them before thirty or forty people, and the situation is a bit more complex. How can they avoid upsetting someone in the audience? One way is by always choosing "safe"

topics, which would also bore the ears off a dog. But the stress level is still extremely high. This keeps the speaker from being their own person, and standing up for their true thoughts and convictions. It prevents them from discussing anything important, taking any risks, or growing. The greatest payoffs of people-pleasing, therefore, is one doesn't have to take risks, doesn't have to change, nor take responsibility for anything. Without being responsible, one can blame everything on others, and stay a reactor instead of becoming an actor on the stage of life.

Guilt also restricts a speaker for the same reasons. If I say something controversial, someone's feelings might be hurt. Then I would feel guilty. And we end up with the same boring speeches. And if I become too successful a speaker, I might feel guilty you have not achieved the same levels, and feel bad about that. Even if I gave a great speech, and you congratulated me afterwards, I might demean its value and not justify your positive feedback, because "I'm not worthy." This feeling of guilt and unworthiness prevents us from shining our true light. Guilt also prevents people from becoming officers in clubs. It's easier to complain about how things are run, shifting responsibility to current officers, to transfer the guilt to them. Guilt is based on the past, so it prevents us from concentrating on the present, particularly if change might occur - creating the risk of producing even more guilts. So the payoffs again allow us to avoid change and not take responsibility. Pity can also attract attention.

A speaker will often agonize for hours, first to come up with a topic, and second, to put all the notes together and practice it. Worry allows one to avoid doing. It's seems easier to worry about a problem than to tackle it. One can also use worry as the justification for not doing something, avoiding the risk of action. Separately, we can prove we're "caring people" by worrying about others.

With years of experience, I now personally use the following rules for my speeches: 1) If I can't develop a subject that's challenging or insightful, I won't give a speech. Why tell people something they already know? 2) At least two people in the audience should disagree with something about my speech. Again, if everyone agrees with me, why talk about it? 3) Immediately before speaking, I remind myself that I'm not

responsible for people's reactions. Today I experience no anxiety before a group, even on live television.

There always seems to be a payoff for each of our patterns. It's not necessary to know what they are, but in processing change it can be helpful.

As we become fully prepared for the next step it usually helps to visualize how things will be without our current patterns. If anger is a pattern, we can try visualizing other people as Children of God who truly have most of the same imperfections we do - people who need love and acceptance. If pride is a pattern, what would it feel like to admit we don't know, or to be humble and simply state how we feel about something? If defensiveness is a pattern, what would it feel like to simply smile without responding when someone says something we don't agree with? If greed is a problem, what would it feel like to give something to another, regardless of the value, just for the hell of it? (Remaining totally anonymous in this giving creates an outrageous feeling of giddiness.) Paying it forward is similar. Or we could buy ourselves something we could really use, that would make us feel better about ourselves (if we're not compulsive shoppers already).

One thing I usually ask sponsees as they prepare for their Seventh Step is "If you turn over everything and it totally works, what will you have left?" Think about this for a minute... The answer, of course, is spirit. What we're talking about here, in effect, is ego submission or ego death. This might cause some anxiety among some, but one is again fully protected in two ways.

First, we must remember the conditions for the granting of prayers. No prayer will immediately be answered if it creates undue fear on our part. We will be gradually moved into our new space if we find rapid change uncomfortable.

Second, I've noticed the speed and magnitude of change with people to be comparable to the degree of strife in their lives. A former prison inmate, for example, who has felt extreme anguish in his life, might have a positive experience that would make most people's hair stand straight up. I had one friend such as this who once was literally blown through a doorway with the power of His love. Their magnitude of negative

emotions simply prepares some people for greater positive emotions, allowing rapid change.

The greatest benefit will be an even greater sense of freedom. One's sense of choices will begin to fully blossom. Peace is the greatest attribute. We no longer feel the need to blame others, but start to realize that most everything we experience or manifest in our life is influenced by us.

Co-dependents will start to gain strength, and take more responsibility for their own lives. Counter-dependents will become more gentle and less controlling. One by one all of us greatly reduce our involvement in the lives of others and begin to focus on our own.

Those working on a specific special relationship program, like quitting drinking or taking other drugs, might be disappointed without a good Step Seven. But upon final analysis the purpose is not to quit drinking, that's the easier part. The real objective is to step out of ego, where the perceived lack of love and the motivation to abuse one's self is located. If one doesn't do a pretty good job of turning over the whole thing, it's normal to simply find other special relationships taking the place of the one being resolved.

What we will actually be doing is turning over our past and its extension into the future. The past is the only place that guilt, shame, and regrets can originate. And the past is gone. One can look anywhere they want, but it won't be found - unless we insist on recreating it. And the future never arrives, but can only be imagined. But belief in the future is the only way we can be affected by current attention to worrying, wishing, hoping, fear, and shoulds. The only thing that truly exists is the now, which is also the closest thing to eternity we can experience in this world.

To fully prepare for Step Seven, however, we must sharply increase our trust and faith. The two help us confront risk. There are two types of risk, negative risk and positive risk. With negative risk, failure becomes problematic. With positive risk, failure isn't a problem, and growth is the payoff. Your sponsor will be the most helpful if you have problems in this area. I remember my sponsor helped me prepare by having me walk around with my eyes closed, trusting only the sponsor's directions.

Another exercise to grow our trust and faith, which can also be a lot

of fun, is something I call “Wussy Night.” I developed and applied this idea before becoming involved with the program. Let me explain. Trust is closely related to control. If someone must control everything, they have little trust in others. This can be a tricky problem in virtually any marriage or with most significant others. Which of the two is in charge of what, and when? With Wussy Night there’s no question.

When this idea was developed, I was living with my fiancée. Both of us were Tauruses, which created real control questions. We talked about it and agreed to exchange Wussy Nights. Here’s how it worked.

When it was my turn to be in charge, I was the Wusser and in charge. She was the Wussy, and wasn’t. None of the kids could be around from 5:00 p.m., when it started, until 10:00 the next morning, when it ended. We arranged for the young ones to be with their dad. Next, neither would be working the next day. It also wouldn’t make sense for the one in charge to make the other responsible for expenses, so the Wusser picks up any costs.

Here’s the most important part: The Wusser can plan anything or demand anything of the Wussy, and the latter is expected to comply. The Wussy can always say no, but this is not expected. The success of the entire evening is determined by how few times the Wussy says no. If nothing is declined, the Wusser probably isn’t being very creative. If there were several “no’s,” either the requests were inappropriate or the Wussy wasn’t sufficiently cooperative or didn’t have enough trust.

“You know who” will be fixing dinner, being ordered to run around and make popcorn, and doing any driving. Depending on whose turn it is to be in charge, one might well be attending a wrestling match that only he is crazy about, or going to the opera, which is only favored by her. It’s critical to *exchange roles* for different evenings, of course, and mustn’t become a lopsided affair. This is wonderful therapy for the harried business owner, who must constantly make decisions. All they have to think about when they’re the Wussy is “What do you want me to do next?” This is a wonderful exercise in trust. And when I was not in charge, I felt a wonderful feeling of no responsibility. I didn’t have to decide on anything. But one is still always protected. When really necessary, one can still decline.

I’ve shared this idea with friends who have applied it with their entire

family...including the kids. How often were you lovingly “in charge” of the whole family as a kid? Psychotherapists find it fascinating. Lovers find it outrageous.

This is a wonderful frame of mind to approach Step Seven. Turn it all over and follow His will, but if we’re fearful or aren’t ready for something, we can say no and wait until we’re ready to relinquish it.

The courage necessary for the next step is comprised of humility and faith. It might be appropriate to review Chapter One and to remind yourself of the humility you developed for completing that task. You no longer want those things that detract from a full life. Also review Chapter Three when you developed the faith to turn your will and your life over to the care of God. Remind yourself of the last chapter when you had the faith to share all your secret thoughts and deepest “sins” from your inventory with a loving sponsor. And the result? Where you thought there was fear, you found acceptance. It was OK, and instead of crying in shame, you laughed. If there were tears, they were tears of joy.

Your asking in the next step will be answered by perfect gentleness. Your Higher Power is totally accepting and only asks for your one unequivocal call for assistance. You will have expected some degree of judgment, and only found freedom, Light and Love.

Suggested Actions:

- Ask someone you don’t know for information on how to do something.
- Exchange “Wussy Nights” with someone, or trade “total evenings” with a friend who has also read this book

Step 7: Correction

Happy is the man whom God correcteth
- Job 5:17

It's time for the single most important action in our quest for peace and rebirth. We began this whole process by first developing the humility to look at what we created and the results, and decided there must be another way. And that we couldn't do it alone. We then made the commitment to turn our will and our lives, our belief system, over to the care and power of God, as we understood Him. We then identified our patterns, of what our personal will represented. By sharing this with ourselves, God, and particularly another, we were amazed to find we had nothing to fear, that it was all right. Our "sins" simply became strange ways we acted or interpreted the world. This greatly increased our faith and courage. Finally, we became ready and willing to have God remove these patterns. Now is the time to actually do that "turning over." Step Seven says:

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

We will do this humbly, not out of humiliation because we're worthless, but in order to finally recognize the beauty and power of our true Self. We are not asking to have certain things removed, but everything that prevents us from realizing our magnitude. This is because we don't really know what to keep, what is true or false, or what we need in order to do His will.

*Give the past to Him Who can change your mind
about it for you.*

- A Course In Miracles T-III.7:8

When asked humbly, He will take the past we don't need, along with its patterns, and return our loving thoughts. We are simply getting out of the way, allowing Him to decide for us. This is the humility of a child, who knows he doesn't understand and asks. It will only be more difficult for those of us who are no longer children and have had more time to make an "adult-erated" complexity called an ego.

As we turn this over it is possible to experience some fear. After all, our ego has been building momentum for years and thinks it is the universe. Our ego might depart bitching and screaming, or with a gentle whimper. This depends on our investment in our ego and its special relationships. It also depends on our growing faith in our only true Perfect Parent.

Regardless of whether you do this step on a mountaintop, at the seashore, or are suddenly taken by a feeling that "now's the time," the following might be helpful.

I usually suggest my sponsees make an appointment with themselves for doing this step. You will have a special time that will work best for you. Perhaps it's after church on Sunday. Maybe it's at 6 am on a Saturday morning. Make sure you arrange to be alone, so you're free to laugh, cry, or whatever might be appropriate. If you have one by now, you'll probably want to have your Teddy Bear handy, which clearly represents that child who is asking for help and release. Don't forget to silence the phone.

It might be helpful to review your inventory summary, to remind yourself of some of the things you want to turn over. But remember that was not a complete list, and sometimes what we think is "bad" is still needed for a reason we don't know. Then center yourself, and get things slowed down so you can fully experience what happens and not be distracted. There is a wonderful Course In Miracles tape that I find wonderful for getting into a personal space. Perhaps you've chosen a soothing New Age meditation tape to get into yourself. Some incense and some candles might add a nice touch. By now you've developed

some of your own tools to assist in your centering. It might give you courage to arrange with your sponsor to pray for you at that time.

I chose to do this step on New Year's Eve, 1988. I knew everyone would be out doing their own thing, and I could be alone. By that time drinking certainly wasn't of interest anymore either. I rented two movies on videotape to get into the evening, arranged my candles, readied some meditation tapes in the stereo, and settled in. I didn't set a specific hour, because I sensed I'd know when it was time. For me, absence of seriousness and a light-hearted, even humorous, vein strikes a cord. The way it turned out, I never even got to the candles and meditation tapes.

About three hours into the evening I was watching a movie - *Born In East L.A.*, believe it or not. I had stopped the movie tape to get some Pepsi. Halfway into the kitchen the clock struck midnight...I experienced a very strange sensation and froze right in my tracks. It was time...

I simply sat down and asked that everything be turned over. The first thing I noticed was fireworks, until I gently remembered it was New Year's Eve. But it still seemed like the whole world was celebrating my rebirth. And it started coming on. The Light and Love started growing, and became extremely strong. The Light in particular became overpowering. I finally couldn't handle any more. I remember consciously deciding to keep certain things for a while, and shut it off.

Everything was going so well, that I went in and lay down, to see if I could get a dialogue started. I asked several questions. And I received answers. The voice was very subtle but clear. The last question I asked was "Jesus, can I see your face?" There was no response. I asked again. Again no answer. So I figured the session was over and got myself together again. My Step Seven was done. I eventually returned to my movie and restarted the VCR. And there, right on the television screen... was the face of Jesus...

If you've ever seen that movie, you know the part I'm talking about... when Paul Rodriguez' character thought Jesus' picture was talking to him. Could all this and the several other things have been a coincidence? Think what you will. For me, it was not. When I saw that wonderful face I was struck by the fact that heaven is here, anytime we're truly ready for it, and wherever we wish to see it. But as long as we're not gently seeking

heaven, or are maintaining an ego fog with its special relationships to obscure it, we think it doesn't exist.

I will come in response to a single unequivocal call.

- A Course In Miracles T-4.III.7:10

Never underestimate what your Step Seven will produce. You might be struck by a thunderbolt, or sense nothing. But never place expectations on your experience. Heaven does not come with expectations. Simply throw yourself into the arms of God...

Lay before His total sanity all your hurt, and let Him heal you.

- A Course In Miracles T-13.III.7:4

The reaction you receive will be based on the humility of your asking, how badly you truly want what you request, your faith in your Higher Power, and how much He knows you can take at one time. Even if one has no great sensations, and senses no change, He will be working. With vigilance and footwork by you from that point on, your peace and serenity will begin to surge.

*And the night shall be filled with music,
And the cares, that infest the day,
Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs,
And as silently steal away.*

- Longfellow

Many make plans to totally change their routines after this step. It helps to break up stimulus-response. We are always more aware when situations and events are new.

In the past, a few of us might have found it pretentious when people changed their names. Does anyone remember Lew Alcindor or Cassius Clay? If this helps remind you of the most important decision and point in your life, and to whose will you have committed, go for it.

If we've ever thought about developing and diligently working

affirmations, now is the time. If there was ever a time for daily or hourly prayer or meditation, now is the time to start. If we've ever thought about, but postponed, concentrating on one day at a time, start now. If it takes one hour at a time or ten minutes at a time, so be it.

The old ways of the past are breaking loose, or even gone. When we lose something, even if it's not good for us in any sense of the word, we will feel different. Something is missing. Fill that void with your inner child, your spirit, with the Love of God.

Nevertheless, some of us might find it necessary to do some grieving. Most people aren't very proficient at doing this. It's important to understand how this works, and the stages involved. When necessary, I've benefited from a description of this process from Melodie Beattie's *Codependent No More*:

The first stage is denial. Rather than feel and move through the emotions, we find distractions or even refuse to recognize or accept what's happened.

The second stage is anger. It might not even appear to be directed at anything or anyone in particular. There was certainly some kind of unfulfilled expectation or guilt. But the ego has lost something, is upset, and tries to make someone else feel guilty about it.

The third stage is bargaining. We try to rationalize the situation with deals or promises, or agreements with ourselves, others, or even God.

The fourth stage is depression. Nothing else has worked, and we're finally feeling the feelings. But what is often considered despair is but one minuscule step from the total humility it takes to simply accept.

The final stage is acceptance. We've faced the facts, felt through the feelings, and finally become as comfortable as possible with something different from what we expected or desired. We have regained our freedom, our life.

One can bounce around between the first four for extended periods, even years. Depending on how well we learn these phases and practice moving through each, we can become very proficient at handling loss. Any loss. We can use it to quickly run through a hurt. We can apply it to avoid extending unreasonable expectations with a lover, spouse, or friend. Divorce and even death can be dealt with in the same manner. When we really get good at it, particularly by reminding ourselves how

our eternal spirits are forever protected by our Father, we can quickly accept anything. Was any eternal damage done? Then simply detach with love.

Congratulations on the completion of Step Seven. You have, in every sense of the word, achieved or at least begun your wonderful rebirth. Many Christians refer to this step as repentance.

*I've shut the door on yesterday
And thrown the key away -
To-morrow holds no fears for me,
Since I have found to-day.*
- Vivian Y. Laramore

Suggested Actions:

- Get in the habit of responding differently when people say “How are you?” Instead of “Fine” and other trite responses, try “Hi” or “It’s good to see you.” Or simply state what you’re doing or what you’re thinking.
- For increasing periods of time, decide not to do something that does not serve your new freedom, your new life.
- Start treating your inner child better. This might include buying something you’ve put off but need, doing more fun things, etc.
- Starting with 30 minutes and working up to one hour, spend quality time with one of your kids, your cat, your dog (even if you have to borrow one), being there only for them, simply connecting.
- When you feel upset or particularly guilty, check to see if you’re reacting to a “should” imposed by another, society, or yourself.

Step 8: Responsibility

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.*

- W. E. Henley

We've now completed our most difficult step. We've excused our past, and the future with it. There will still be some cleanup with those things that didn't fully "take." But on a daily basis we're now building a new life. The past no longer dictates the now or creates expectations for the future.

Past guilts are no longer as important, or are even gone. Without guilt, we are more accepting of others. We can simply let them be. And we no longer have as much guilt to try and place with them. This reduces anger. We also find it much less tempting to blame or judge others, simply because we've chosen to accept responsibility for our own lives. Resting in the total safety of our Higher Power, our fears are dissolving.

But we're also probably aware of a few chunks and smears that remain. Now is the time to focus completely on what is left. We have numerous tools to use, even if it requires starting at Step One and moving through each step for that item only. The most valuable will be continued repetition of the last step for that pattern.

Some types of change require extra work. Much like learning how to type, play a guitar, or producing beautiful art, many things take practice, practice, practice. But even what we thought was impossible, happens.

With some things, we might have to go cold turkey. But one day at a time, or five minutes at a time, we can do it. Again, changing

related routines can help. Even if temporary, a different or new group of friends can be helpful - particularly those also in the program. Or perhaps we can substitute one habit for a healthier one for a time. Most of the more severe habits usually have monetary costs. This provides opportunities to pay ourselves financial rewards for discontinuing a habit, or giving away the proceeds (without expectations). More than anything, however, prayer, meditation, and repeated specific Seventh Steps will be the most successful. One exception: Do not pray for patience. Prayers asking to see something differently and for willingness can pay great dividends. But rather than concentrating on not doing something, simply concentrate on loving and accepting. Whether it involves your own body or other people. If you experience anything but love and joy, there must have been a judgment or attack on something or someone.

Just be gentle with yourself as you pursue your new way of life. You've come a long way and have made enormous progress. You deserve gratitude, from yourself. Anything good for you today, is a gift to yourself tomorrow.

The rest will now be easy, compared with what has already been done. But this assumes we have, again, sufficient humility. We've set our own pasts aside, and our own blackboards are quite clean. But our names remain written on the blackboards of others in our life. We must also deal with these pasts. When Step Eight has been completed, we will have:

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

Harm might be difficult to define for most. We could have done something with words, attitudes, deeds, or even financially. We will find out later that, on a higher plane of the mind, even our thoughts can do the job. But let's not worry about the latter for now.

We are simply taking responsibility for being a cause in the matter. We're not taking responsibility for how the other person acted or why, that's none of our business. We're only recognizing how we acted or reacted in an inappropriate manner.

*And the best and the worst of this is
That neither is most to blame,
If you've forgotten my kisses
And I've forgotten your name.*

- Swinburne

This involves a *direct* amends. In few cases is it appropriate to apologize to someone different, even a priest. This can be verbally or by letter.

One of the best ways to develop a list is to determine with whom we've been angry in the past. Did any of that anger leak out in any way? If we can think of ways it did, or if we still harbor any anger, we have an amends to make. If another had become angry with us, this person too deserves an amends.

The very important reason is as follows: *Anger is an attempt to make someone else feel guilty.* We have tried to get rid of our guilt by giving it away. But as with love, that's how we keep it! So somewhere in our mind, if we manifested anger, we still have a little guilt bubble. The ego won't help in finding it, and probably rationalized our action. "He was a real jerk," or "She fully deserved it." When we do an amends, we release that guilt.

*What you acknowledge in your brother you are
acknowledging in yourself, and what you share you
strengthen.*

- A Course In Miracles T-5.III.3:5

It's now time to develop our list. It usually includes former marriage partners, current spouses, the kids, someone at work, our parents, or anyone else. It also includes ourselves.

Next to each name, note some brief reminders of how you were possibly inappropriate. Was there any conflict or disagreement? Now is not the time to rationalize whether or not harm was done. We will often feel "That shouldn't have bothered them." or "They'd said or done things much worse to me than what I did." If in doubt, add the name and note the items. Remember, this is for our own sanity. We want to be happy, not "right."

There are several guidelines for doing amends. Most we will discuss in the next chapter. The most important one we must do now, in order to prepare, is this: One cannot perform an amends to anyone if we still harbor anger against that individual. If we are still trying to make them feel guilty, the amends will not release the remaining guilt in their or our own minds.

This is also a wonderful test to determine what did not “take” in the last step. Let’s assume we’ve decided to make an amends to someone. We look at what we might have done, and indicate it. We then step back and look at our feelings about the individual. Perhaps we felt betrayed, based on our previous expectations. Or we notice we’re still angry because of something we think they did, or maybe we felt they were trying to control us. This means we still have a control issue ourselves, or perhaps we must also again look at our old false pride issue.

The reason for this is clear if we’re willing to look at it. Anything someone says or does to us will not bother us if we can’t relate to it. We won’t defend anything that isn’t true. For example, someone says “You’re a purple elephant!” This will not bother us because we can’t relate to it, and we might even laugh. But if we’re a little overweight, even such a preposterous statement as this might ding a guilt inside us.

We defend the most vehemently what is true. Many years ago I was dating a beautiful young lady named Barbara. She was a Taurus, like me. (Why do I find so many Tauruses - to remind me of how I think?) We were talking about something we disagreed on, and I simply made the comment, “You’re just stubborn.” Her quick response was: “No I’m not!” Perhaps I was surprised by what she said, but I didn’t say anything, I just looked at her. She paused, looking back at me. And within just a few seconds a big beautiful smile started growing on her face, and she finally laughed and said: “Well, I guess I just answered myself.”

*You think you hold against your brother what he
has done to you. But what you really blame him for
is what you did to him.*

– A Course In Miracles T-17.VII.8:1

Our brothers are wonderful and precise mirrors that help us see

ourselves. If we totally love ourselves, we will see nothing but love in other people. If we are controlling, we will see others as trying to control. If we can't trust others, we are not trustworthy. Taken further, we create all our experiences and feelings. No one else is responsible for them. When we feel hurt, we simply didn't get our way or what we wanted. And it's never what another "does to us," but our *reaction* to it.

But regardless of how advanced we become, and how much self-esteem or self-awareness we develop, brothers will still act towards us in insane ways. These are *calls for love*. If we don't take it on, defend, or try to change another, we are setting up the condition for a miracle. In Barbara's example, I was a stubborn Taurus too. But for some reason I didn't respond that time, I didn't defend/attack. Because of that, she for an instant questioned her own belief, and saw something differently. Compare this to me trying to convince her she was stubborn. It wouldn't work. Instead, that episode became an inside joke with us. We would laugh and joke about us being stubborn, because it no longer mattered. We simply accepted it. This is love.

This brief story about Barbara is an extremely simple, but precise, example of a *miracle*. A miracle is a "correction." Something that once was, or something that was once believed, suddenly shifts... (In Twelve-Step circles, they are often referred to as BFOs, or "Blinding Flashes of the Obvious.") Illusion, confusion, or fear suddenly become love and laughter.

Silence, as a response, can be truly golden. I remember the most powerful example of silence I've ever experienced. Many years ago we called a top management meeting with one of our European Caterpillar dealers, who was represented by the owner and all top managers. Their practice of pricing replacement parts at very high levels was not only losing them market share and millions in lost parts sales, but was also starting to negatively affect new product sales. I went first and presented the facts, based on a customer survey. Our Area Sales Director then projected the effects of this practice, on future lost business. Their elderly Comptroller blurted out "We've been pricing parts this way for years, and there's no reason to change now!" Elton looked up at him, didn't say a word, but simply looked at him. For what seemed like much longer than usual. There was nothing but silence. Elton finally looked down at

his notes and continued. I carefully watched that Comptroller, and he was fidgeting around, looking at others for support he didn't get...and really started thinking about what he'd said. He was already questioning his own belief system.

The alternative would have been getting into a knock-down drag out argument of whether he was right. That would have likely resulted in nothing positive. In fact, more defending would have fortified his original belief. A fact was simply stated, that did not need defending. And the seed for change was planted. Only when we let people go will they often change their mind. How else can one deal with insanity?

Anytime we feel unfairly treated, or hurt by another, we must believe in purple elephants. We had created a debt, placed an expectation, on how another should behave. Would we want others to determine how we should behave and how we should think? We had also thought we could be hurt, this perfect and eternal Child of God. What was happening was the other person simply reminded us of our perceived guilt, represented by one of our own patterns. And we defended, either by becoming angry at them or ourselves (producing a catalyst for illness). We must instead see such brothers as our saviors, helping to remind us of our insane thinking. A more rational response would be throwing ourselves at their feet in gratitude.

Teach no one that he is what you would not want to be. Your brother is the mirror in which you see the image of yourself as long as perception lasts.

– A Course In Miracles T-7.VII.3:8

Humility also helps us deal with this anger. All we have to do is remember our own inventory, which proved we were far from perfect! And what happened when we shared everything with our sponsor? We weren't judged, we only received acceptance and love. Would we prefer to remain angry at another, having judged their inventory?

Some things are more difficult to forgive. Among these are rape, incest, and murder. We have certainly done none of these things! But again, it wouldn't bother us if it didn't strike a cord. We destroy miracles and love every day when we don't forgive a brother. We commit murder

every time we make a decision outside His will, killing one option, and making an idol - a special relationship, of another. Always ask the question: "Was any eternal damage done by this brother?" I was once asked by a sponsee, "I'm confused about this. Let's assume someone raped and killed my daughter. Should I do an amends to him?" Because he was basically Christian, my response was simple: "What would Jesus do?" For this particular religion, he was the model of how God would like us to act. And Jesus proved that when we know who we really are and that we are perfectly protected, we can love the greatest of our enemies. We don't even have to fear our own "death." Jesus forgave even those who crucified his body, and returned to prove it wasn't important and/or provide an example of how we will also be resurrected.

Some might respond "But Jesus is our Savior, our God, not like us!" If this were true, why did he come? Was God bored or feeling devilish and decided "I think I'll send J.C. down to show them a few tricks. That should blow their minds." It only makes sense if we look at Jesus as an elder brother who remembered (or learned) his lesson perfectly well... someone who served as a model of what we truly are, how to act, and what to do. He taught perfect forgiveness. When we're angry at or resent another, it is we who suffer. It's something we can't afford. So by first dealing with our anger before doing an amends, we are first forgiving our brother. This, combined with the amend itself, allows us to know we are forgiven.

*Whenever you deny a blessing to a brother you will
feel deprived...*

- A Course In Miracles T-7.VII.1:1

As we learn this, we act differently, creating less conflict. We do fewer things that require correction by forgiveness. Detachment is closely related, and until we perfect the process of forgiveness, is very useful. I was well into the program before I understood the meaning of detachment. My sponsor and I were working on this together one day, and I was describing how I detached from a situation. By the look on her face and some of her questions, I could tell I might be mistaken. She finally asked me, "What do you call detachment?" I replied, "It's letting

go of the other person or situation, not getting involved.” She explained how that sounded more like apathy or suppression, and went on to explain that it’s impossible to detach without love.

She then asked for an example, and I chose the most difficult I could think of. During that period I was frequenting a fast food place, writing and working on my program. It seemed easier to do this by getting out of my most familiar environment. The day before, I encountered a situation that troubled me. A couple with a beautiful little girl assumed the booth next to me. The child had done little, but she was receiving the worst verbal abuse I’d heard in some time. Annie asked me, “How do you detach from that situation?” After some thought I said, “By first recognizing I was not responsible for the events, and then to accept them all, perhaps looking upon them as Children of God who don’t yet understand, but will in their own time.” She smiled her usual smile of agreement.

The most personal amend is to ourselves. In this respect it might be easier to think in terms of an inner child. Part of our unconscious is a suppressed area, that resembles a child that wasn’t given the respect deserving of a Child of God. It’s fearful and uncertain, and feels guilt or shame. It’s necessary to make a gentle, loving place for that little kid to come forward in confidence. It’s an entity to whom we must make amends.

After all, we’ve been pretty rough on ourselves at times. We’ve suppressed feelings, shoving them down to that little guy. We’ve treated our bodies poorly. It would even seem that we often paid more respect to others than to ourselves. It might be necessary to deal with any self-anger or self-condemnation as well, before doing personal amends. Much of this probably came loose when we shared our inventory. Now is the time to make sure we’re not keeping any secret thoughts or guilty feelings, even if it takes another quick Fifth Step with our sponsor, followed by a Seventh Step to turn something over.

You might develop other ways to treat yourself, and this inner child, with more respect. Because it’s difficult to identify with this part of ourselves, some buy Teddy Bears to remind them of their inner child. What have you done lately for your little kid?

Suggested Actions:

- Start using the term “I” instead of “you”. For example, “I feel this way about something” (the reaction to what someone said or did), instead of “You did such and such.”

Step 9: Forgiveness

But to forgive our enemies their virtues – that is a greater miracle, and one which no longer happens.

- Voltaire

We're almost home. We've forgiven our own past. But we've written "I hate you" on others' blackboards of time for them to see and remember. We changed our mind in Step Seven, and no longer think that way. Or at least we decided we didn't want to keep those thoughts. Now is the time to erase those blackboards, releasing others from their reactions to our past actions. This releases us, because our minds are truly connected. Our rebirth started in Step Seven, and will now be completed. After making amends to and forgiving others, we will have totally dealt with the past. From then on it's only a matter of keeping the past clean with periodic housecleaning, and vaulting into unfettered spiritual growth.

We will have completed Step Nine when we've:

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

This first reminds us we must do direct amends. Unless it's not possible. We can't complete our forgiveness to ourselves and the other by telling a different person. It must be direct. I was once talking to a friend who had been working the program for almost three years, and we were discussing amends. I was amazed to learn that she had done her amends with dead letters that weren't even mailed! Step Nine hadn't been completed.

It's also necessary not to do so if someone might suffer as a result. Perhaps our former spouse is remarried, and their husband or wife

wouldn't understand. Particularly if there are no children to necessitate ongoing contact, this might be a valid exception. Our sponsor will be a valuable guide to help us determine if it's appropriate in such cases.

Or perhaps we've broken an implied agreement, without the other person knowing. Examples of this might be when we gossiped about another, or cheated on our spouse. This might open an explosive can of worms. In these cases it's perhaps preferable to do that part of our amends to the person without being specific. For example, "I believe I've judged you." Or, "I haven't acted in a loving way and have decided to do differently." But in both cases behavior changes on our part *must* accompany this action, or we'll simply find we're again stuck with the same guilts, imprisoning ourselves anew. Again, our sponsor can help us decide.

There are some important guidelines on how to do an amends. We've already discussed dealing with all anger first. If we don't do this, an amends means nothing.

*Withhold forgiveness from your brother and you
attack him.*

– A Course In Miracles T-23.III.2:5

Another rule is never refer to the fact you're doing this because the program says to. Don't even mention that you're doing Twelve-Step work. It mustn't sound like a homework assignment, but something we've chosen to do out of total free will and true sincerity.

Be specific. Broad generalities aren't very humble or sincere. We want to dig right in and carve out those specific guilt bubbles. Once we've said we're sorry for as many things as we can remember, it's then all right, and even preferable, to include a blanket amends for other ways we might have been inappropriate.

Don't rationalize actions. There isn't any room for "only ifs, buts, and becauses." Don't even imply any reasons or situations that might have led to our actions. We did something, period. For example, if we apologize for yelling at someone because we were drunk, this removes our responsibility for the action and places it on the booze. This can also

open a Pandora's Box on discussions revolving around the rationales, and whether they are true or appropriate.

Never refer to any of *their* actions or behavior, except in complimentary fashion. If we do, we're making them partly responsible for what, when, or whether we did something. An example might be "I got angry when I thought I was being controlled." This implies their control produced your response. What they did isn't important. Our reaction and subsequent actions are.

Never ask for, and even totally avoid mentioning, forgiveness. This implies they should respond, and creates an expectation, a debt. Instead only use terms like, "I was inappropriate," "What I did wasn't called for," "I apologize," or in most cases a simple "I'm sorry."

Finally, never expect, even in your mind, a reply or a certain type of response. This also creates an expectation. We're simply taking responsibility for our part, to erase our guilt. Even perfect amends can possibly result in a renewed attack on their part. We're not responsible for their reaction! If they want to try and continue a war, that's their choice. We've simply called a truce and said "My attacks were senseless, I'm sorry. I quit this war without winning or losing." If they again attack, there will be no enemy left to fight. In most cases, if there is a response, it will tend to be very loving. Miracles are often a result of this process. But don't expect anything.

For written amends, we often feel a little funny about very short letters. If so, this is a wonderful time, perhaps the last opportunity, to comment on their attributes, the nice things about them, or what we learned from them. Dig deep into your heart. But again, never refer to any growth you've experienced as a result of their negative behaviors. (Even if that behavior was the reason we started our program and began growing.) Until we get some practice, it's usually easier to start with the easiest amends first, particularly when written. It's easier to write amends, because we can compose and re-compose, even sharing our first letters with our sponsor before sending them. Verbal amends are a little more difficult, because we often won't know how to respond to the other person's reaction. The less said the better. Or simply say you felt it was important to take responsibility. My first three amends involved a brief letter and a check. Financial amends are often appropriate. It

might be preferable to save amends to children for near the last. This is because we will probably want to develop some humility and some practice at being specific and clear. They will also tend to be verbal, and therefore more difficult.

It might be hard to even visualize an amends letter. The following is only one example comprising all of the guidelines offered earlier involving a former spouse:

Dear _____

It seems like some people continue to influence our lives, even when they're no longer an active, daily part of them. I wanted to let you know you are one of those people.

Now, however, I realize I wasn't always appropriate in my actions toward you. I was greedy with my time, always hurrying to drink beer after dinner, seldom helping with those things that had to be done. But you did them anyway. I'm sorry for that.

I also made decisions on your behalf, like that new business venture, without consulting you. That was inconsiderate.

I also became very angry on occasion, like when we were deciding on the house, and that too was totally inappropriate.

I wasn't able to provide the love you wanted and deserved. In fact, I didn't know how to love. I can also think of times I was controlling and otherwise unfair. And I'm sure there were other ways I was inappropriate that I don't even recognize today. For all these things and during those times I acted like a jerk, I apologize.

You certainly brought many attractive things into our relationship, and I'm a better person as a result of that. You were patient, gentle, and very insightful, just to mention a couple things among the many.

I just wanted to let you know these things, and that I harbor no resentments, because you did nothing to deserve such a reaction on my part.

I wish the best for you and hope life unfolds beautifully for you.

Sincerely, Bob

P.S. It's not necessary to reply to this letter, and obtaining a response was not my purpose in writing.

In some cases, a direct amends isn't possible because we no longer know where the person lives. In such a case, I still recommend an amends letter. Send it to their last known address, or even to that city. For example, Jane Simpson, New York City, NY. Do not indicate your return address on the envelope or letter. This way you won't know for sure if it was delivered or not. Remember, you want to place no expectations on a response, or the lack of one.

Parents are particularly difficult. Too often we can think of the many ways we wish they had treated us differently. We often have some degree of anger towards them, but can think of no ways we harmed them. Anger can even be a gross understatement in cases of heavy verbal or physical abuse, or particularly incest.

*He drew a circle that shut me out
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win.
We drew a circle that took him in.*
- Edwin Markham

But as long as we maintain that anger, we are the ones who suffer the most. Even worse, as long as we blame our parents for anything, we're making them responsible for what we are, how we feel, or how we act. This prevents us from taking responsibility for our own lives, blocking change and growth. Is revenge or anger worth this? Would we rather be right or happy?

*You stand beside your brother, thorns in one hand
and lilies in the other.*

– A Course In Miracles T-20.I.2:6

Also never underestimate the amount of guilt or disappointment our parents feel for not having done a perfect job of raising their kids, or being more successful in life. Everyone has regrets, particularly in the raising of children. And if there is any guilt at all, the focus will tend to be on others' lives, instead of their own. The kids, even if they're fifty years old, are usually the most handy recipients of opinions and advice. But we now have total control over our reaction to what they do or say... including a simple smile.

Children are usually the best teachers. They've had fewer years to become "adult-erated." In most families, when real healing and forgiveness occurs, it's usually the kids, even if "fully grown," that step forward first. This is an opportunity few of us would want to miss. When an amends letter, per se, doesn't seem appropriate, I usually suggest a good old-fashioned "love letter." The same rules apply. The following example might provide some ideas for parents:

Dear Mom and Dad:

Rather than a typical letter, I wanted to share some things I've been thinking about. It seems the older I get the more clear certain things become. For example, I'm amazed I survived as well as I did as a kid. With my (friends') kids, the frustration with the little critters can really get intense, and anger can't always be avoided. We make serious errors, and experience guilt about them. And kids are so restricting! Raising a family has to be the toughest job in the world, and one people don't get any training with.

So I'm starting to realize how difficult it must have been to raise me. I remember times when I was a real little hellion, bitching and screaming, wanting my own way. It must have been frustrating, and what could you do!

Even when I was older, I'm sure there were times that I seemed uncontrollable. But I'm starting to think different about control. I've even more recently tried to change some of the things the two of you do. I have no right to do that.

In fact, if love is wanting the best for the both of you, and accepting you just the way you are or are not, then I'm prepared to love the hell out of you both. Just accepting people seems to be the thing to do, and also the easiest. So I don't care what you do or what you've ever done, it's really OK. I can still love you no matter what. I wanted you to know that.

I really appreciate all you've done for me. To go into all the ways would make a whole new and much bigger letter. But I simply wanted to let you know what I'm feeling in my heart for you.

All my Love, Bob

Forgiving ourselves, because there isn't a distinct entity involved, isn't as straight-forward. But it needn't be difficult. This amends is, nevertheless, extremely important.

We've already discussed the concept of the inner child as the one being harmed. The damage was done anytime we stuffed our feelings as a child and even as an adult. We just kept piling garbage on that little kid, rather than feeling the feelings. It often helps to let that little kid try to release as many of those stuffed feelings as possible. This process was one of the more memorable in my own program. After doing the rest of my amends, I met with my sponsor for this purpose. Annie was a warm, gentle, loving lady that made this possible.

She slowly worked me into a feeling level, and then asked me to let it all out. "Becoming my inner child" in her arms, I told of all the unfair things I'd experienced. I sobbed, cried, and really expressed all those things that were stuffed over the years. There was a great deal of relief following that session. Although there are many potential problems with a man having a woman sponsor, I believe this is a clear benefit. A

woman's energy, combined with those natural maternal instincts, definitely aids this dumping process. I certainly wouldn't say it's impossible for two men to do this, but it would seem less likely.

If difficult or inappropriate for the man, this might be a wonderful time to arrange a couple sessions with a woman counselor specifically for this purpose. I first tried it with a Teddy Bear, and I simply couldn't get into it.

Once the dumping process has been completed, it's still very appropriate to actually do an amends to one's inner child. One technique is to write a letter to that little kid, again with the most sincerity and feeling possible. Apologize for all the ways one has ignored that entity, dumped and stuffed feelings on it, and abused the body. Let this sink in and then have "the little kid" reply with a letter written in the opposite hand. These scrawls might simply say "It's OK," or "You did the best you could," or whatever. Let your inner self determine your little person's response. Having a childhood picture handy will help get into the feelings.

From then on, of course, we must be increasingly vigilant in how we treat ourselves. We might truly deserve some new clothes, have maximum motivation in quitting smoking or otherwise abusing ourselves, start a workout program, or a million other ways of giving ourselves the respect deserved. If we've considered cosmetic surgery, now might be the time to do it. Not for others because they might find us more attractive or desirable, but for ourselves only.

Simply doing our other amends and greatly ridding ourselves of so many guilt feelings will also greatly benefit the health of our inner child. For this reason, it might be preferable to do personal amends last.

The following was my amends letter to my inner child:

Dear Bobby:

In your very youthful eyes of innocence, I sense bewilderment and fear. You might even think this world is totally mad. I am responsible for that and I'm sorry.

I expected perfection from us, in this dream, this illusion, which constantly changes. The fear of failure was unbearable. I severely judged us, as witnessed by my

judgment of others. In an attempt to defend us, I only succeeded in attacking others or you.

I did not teach us to play. I tried to teach it was not OK to cry or feel. I allowed the shoulds of society to try and dictate to us what was right or wrong.

I tried to control our environment, which placed upon us the burden of constant judgment. I developed few boundaries, to protect you from the insane thoughts and actions of others.

I tried to please others so they would like us, while ignoring you and your right to be happy. I was not assertive, in telling others what we wanted, which caused me to resent others when expectations were not realized.

I tried to teach greed, that to share meant loss. This prevented us from getting by giving.

I developed compulsions and many special relationships, which prevented us from feeling and caused even more resentment for me.

I tried to teach you that you were unloved and unappreciated, by example.

In my insanity, I thought I was your creator. And when I didn't love and nurture you, that was my thing, not yours.

If love is accepting you as you are, and wanting the best for you, I could not have shown love for you.

But please know that I never did establish your worthiness, and never could. God did. Know that you are not separate from others, as I tried to teach, but equal to and one with all God's children.

You no longer have anything to fear, including death, because as Spirit you are forever protected and eternal.

The past is gone, and the future but imagined. So rejoice with me in your rebirth, in the now. You are innocent and without guilt, dear Child of God. You are free to simply be.

Learn no more from me, but from your true parent,
God himself.

I set you free to experience your true peace and joy.
Be love and shine your light on the world.

I am sorry for all my insanity.

Your Ego, Bob

*Across the fields of yesterday
He sometimes comes to me,
A little lad just back from play
The lad I used to be.*

- T. S. Jones, Jr.

After completing Step Nine, our past is clean. We've done a thorough job of removing as many harmful patterns as possible, and have corrected those many guilts caused by treating others inappropriately. We've now reached rebirth in the strictest sense. We become mistaken only when we choose to pull some of that past into the now, or project it into the future. Simply choose again, my brother.

We will do this. Some special relationships will resurface or simply persist until we're fully ready to change our minds. Simply be gentle and patient with yourself and start truly living one day at a time. For those persistent behaviors, we will want to quickly go through each of the steps for that area only. But we will succeed. There is no turning back now.

Suggested Actions:

- Start noticing the positive, and what you agree with, rather than what is "wrong" or different.
- Go out of your way to compliment people, reinforcing what they do well, rather than what they do "wrong."
- We all take too much for granted. To a friend or family member, say "You know, I'm really glad to have you as a friend...I really do love you...or, I really appreciate your help with..."

Step 10: Vigilance

The condition upon which God has given liberty to man is eternal vigilance.

- John Philpot Curran

Growth often does not occur in massive quantum changes, like one door slamming shut while another opens. More typical are steady movements, with periodic consolidations or pullbacks. One could even argue that the most sustainable change is slow but consistent.

One thing is certain. Whether our ego dissolves in sharp movements or in a more steady manner, errors will occur. The system is so perfectly constructed, we have three wonderful ways of knowing when we've chosen incorrectly:

- We don't feel at peace or things go wrong
- We get sick
- We have disagreements with others

When we don't feel at peace, we've erred. Perhaps we feel anger, and have tried to make someone else feel guilty. Perhaps we are disappointed, having created expectations on another person that weren't fulfilled. We might experience fear or anxiety because we forgot who we were, and how safe we are, eternally protected by our Father.

If problems occur, we must be again trying to control the uncontrollable, creating expectations and insisting something be as or where we wanted it.

If we get sick we must be angry. But instead of taking our anger and guilts out on another, we internalized them, attacking our own body.

If we are having problems with others, we must have chosen judgment against a brother, instead of thanking them for reminding us how we're thinking.

Once we've done our housecleaning, we must be vigilant against messes again developing. A little bit here and there can build up and threaten our peace. Step Ten reminds us of this vigilance:

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

Often others will be involved, and a rapid amends will set things straight. The longer we delay forgiveness, the more the agony will fester, destroying our serenity. All we need do is quickly repeat Step Nine each time. The same rules as before apply for these amends.

...does not require that you have no thoughts that are not pure. But it does require that you have none that you would keep.

– A Course In Miracles T-15.IV.9:1

Perhaps an old behavior will start to reappear. Or our increased awareness might remind us of something we haven't already identified. Depending on the item, we might simply concentrate on that area only by returning to Step Seven. It might be necessary to start again at the beginning for others. But this time we will move quickly because that's a road we've successfully traveled before.

More than anything we must constantly, at least every day, remember our firm decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God. We're now on the path of a different way of life.

Often we will be faced with decisions and not know what to do. More and more we will get into the habit of asking our Higher Power, "Please decide for me." The answer might be clear, some people hear a little voice, and others simply have a warm feeling or inclination to do something. The answer comes in many ways. If roadblocks continue to appear, maybe that path doesn't make sense to begin with. At one time in my life I looked for bigger or more hammers to force situations that

didn't work. Today I more quickly set things aside, assuming something wasn't meant to be or the time wasn't appropriate. Continuing to try, try, try isn't always the best choice.

On other occasions, we will know something is wrong and can't figure out the reasons why. Rather than spending a great deal of time letting our remaining egos play a never-ending game, it's much easier to say to oneself "I'm not at peace, I must have chosen incorrectly." Followed by "Higher Power, let me see this differently." Millions of people ask this before they go to bed, and then forget about it, so as not to disrupt their rest. Then in the early morning, when our minds are open and clear, the answer will often come. My father often applied this technique, particularly when he was working as a carpenter. Sometimes he couldn't see how something should fit together. He would simply think about the question before he went to sleep, and the next morning would know exactly how it worked.

Peace is our objective, not knowledge. And the more we can stay out of the past and future and in the now, the more we will feel centered and in harmony.

The happy learner will choose an even more productive approach. It seems they actually run around looking for problems, the solution to which speeds their growth and understanding. They seem to go out of their way for the opportunity to find people who think they "erred," just for the loving opportunity to overlook the mistake they think they made. This is healing. But both are uplifted.

But others, having gained so much from the program, will see everyone needing a program and needing to be fixed, and try their best to get them onto the same path. This involves expectations and perhaps violation of free will. Disappointment will result.

In meetings one often hears the phrase "And more will be revealed." I'm amazed at how differently this is interpreted. Some take this as just another pain or grief to deal with. Others consider this one of those instants of "Oh, wow! That's what that means, or that's how that works!" Be a happy learner. Change is normal in this world. This even proves what isn't important or what doesn't even exist. Only the eternal doesn't change. And "problems" are only an opportunity for learning and forgiveness.

Suggested Actions:

- Again set your cell phone/alarm watch for random times during the day. When the alarm sounds, quickly check to see if you are harboring even minor resentments. Do a quick Step 9 with the individual involved.

Step 11: Seeking

Learning is the eye of the mind.

- Thomas Draxe

The path hasn't always been easy, but we've come such a long way. We've glimpsed the light, and it grows ever stronger. We're almost home.

We've gently but decidedly set the past aside, and have found that concerns over the future went with it. We are left with the now, the only time that matters.

From the now we are centered and acutely aware that every instant offers the opportunity for rebirth, something fresh and new. Or in the words of Ram Dass, "We go to sleep millions of times, every instant we're not reborn." In the now, free from past and future, it's impossible for guilt, regrets, worry, or fear to even exist. Because the past and future do not exist, are nowhere to be found. In the now there is only peace, love, infinite power and healing. That tiny instant also contains the light we glimpse with increasing regularity.

Seeking is our new vocation. What we learn allows us to stay ever longer in the now. This is done through prayer and meditation. With a fresh open mind we thus learn more truth, become more aware, and better know His will for us.

We have already discussed prayer, and have learned that we must really want that requested, that what we want must truly benefit us, and that its granting cannot increase our fear unreasonably. It's also important to not dictate exactly how our needs will be fulfilled:

*When you decide upon the form of what you want,
you lose the understanding of its purpose.*

– A Course In Miracles T-30.III.2:9

Instead, ask for the end result. This might be comfort, assurance, peace, joy, etc. And remember that most true things can be gained by giving them away.

Until we better learn what to ask for, two basic prayers are provided. The first is the Serenity Prayer, and is used in some fashion by all Twelve-Step programs:

*God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference.*

The things we cannot change, of course, are anything outside ourselves. This includes events, things, and other people. We are asking for the serenity to simply accept, that is to love, anything outside ourselves. We are also asking for the courage, that is the humility and faith, to change the things we can. This is the way we think. The wisdom comes from the Holy Spirit, who is always ready to decide for us or to help us see things differently - in the only true way, when no one loses.

The Lord's Prayer is the second basic prayer. It makes no difference if we believe in Christianity or another basic and true precept, once we understand what it means. Early in my Twelve-Step work, I was so opposed to "isms" that I refused to say that prayer at the end of the meeting with the others. I simply didn't understand it.

"Our Father, who art in Heaven" simply distinguishes between our biological parents and our True and only Parent. "Hallowed be thy name" recognizes our reverence to God, and that He is sacred and holy.

"Thy Kingdom come Thy Will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven" says that we pray for the doing of His Will and will work towards the establishment of His Kingdom here on earth. And that Kingdom be as in Heaven, and it is already here when we open our eyes to it.

“Give us this day our daily bread” says that we pray He provide us in the now Love, the knowing of His perfect protection, and the ability to accept and do miracles.

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” asks that we be freed of guilt by forgiving our brothers...judging not, lest we feel judged (by ourselves).

“And lead us not into temptation” asks that we not yield to special relationships.

“But deliver us from evil” asks that we be freed from the ego.

“For Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, forever and ever” recognizes that He and His is the Way, our true and only Source, our salvation and perfect completion, eternally.

The Eleventh Step suggests that we:

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

This greatly simplifies what we ask for. All we want is to know what loving things He wants us to do, and the willingness and power to do it.

We are also asked to use meditation. It seems that through prayer we often do a lot of asking. But meditation allows us to do the listening, for the answers. In the West we are not well advanced in how this is done. There are numerous ways to meditate, and everyone must determine what works best for them. Nevertheless, most techniques have several things in common.

The time one chooses to meditate depends on the individual. Most people are most clear and open and closest to their Higher Power in early morning. We will often sense a harmony and clear-seeing in the time immediately prior to or upon awakening. If one sleeps very deeply during this time and finds it extremely hard to wake up, it might be due to fatigue or body blockage that exercise and/or better diet can help solve. Or one might in some way fear life. It is said that people who have trouble going to sleep subconsciously fear death and those who can't wake up fear life.

Another commonality involves one of numerous ways of adjusting the body so energy can easily flow through it. The back is usually straight, with only the hands potentially crossed. Lying down usually promotes sleep, which is not the objective.

Once the body is fully relaxed, one of two focuses are used. The first option is to concentrate on only one neutral thought or idea or ritual, which prevents the mind from thinking about the means to “achieve” something. Mantras, similar to humming, can also set up vibrational centering in the body. I think cats do this best when they purr. One can also simply concentrate on their breathing. In fact, some say heaven is potentially located at the end of every breath.

The second technique is to try and think of nothing. Answers and essence lie between our thoughts and not in them. Truth can’t be told but only experienced, and is beyond thought.

The Truth and His Will can sometimes be heard as whispers, warm feelings of appropriateness, or inclinations to do something loving. His Will often comes to, or more specifically through, the open mind via spontaneous questions or statements in the presence of others. Detailed plans are infrequent, because of the flux of free wills among brothers. It’s like a massive word processing program, being updated every instant for potential miracles by the Holy Spirit, based on every one of our decisions. The answer could be a situation or event. Or more commonly, the appearance of someone new in our life.

Ram Dass described this process in an interesting way. He talks about a Book. Some aren’t aware that one even exists. Those who are aware of the Book still might not know they are the actors within the script. The most advanced know there is a Book, that we can change It, but we can’t write It. In other words, only the Holy Spirit best knows what comes next, but we are the instruments of those changes.

Getting in touch with His will, we start to realize that there are no problems, only lessons. And we seem to repeat the same lessons over and over until we get the message. We divorce one jerk, only to find another rushing into our life with the same lesson. We quit drinking only to become over-eaters...the message being that nothing outside ourselves, regardless of how attractive the special relationship might appear, will truly satisfy us.

In retrospect, what seemed like problems in the past were really growth and learning opportunities, dead-end streets, or untimely actions. Perhaps the loss of a spouse came only because it was time for us to end dependence and a time for self-expression and freedom. A destructive relationship turned out to be the last straw and got us started on a growth path. That angry coworker was simply reminding us of our own guilt and resulting anger. And that promotion we lost was not in the plan for His will. Everything has a purpose, and we are always in the right place at the right time.

It can be difficult to “turn things over” and sometimes equally tough to see the resulting answer. The ensuing limbo can even create anxiety for some. In 1988 I seriously considered departing the ranks of the self-employed business owner for the simplicity of working for someone else. To turn it over I simply placed my name with various employment agencies and let it go, to prevent from trying to force a situation that might not be appropriate. The answer was obvious that I continue in my current direction with my own firm. The last job possibility that surfaced appeared perfect, but I was denied the position. Instead of being disappointed, I was excited to learn what this would have prevented me from doing later. Perhaps in better assisting others...or even writing this book?

I guarantee that true prayer and practiced and open meditation will piece together the entire puzzle for you. All “problems” will finally make sense, and the perfection of the system that He established will become clear. This is the hint of true knowledge, instead of “learning.”

I’ve been extremely blessed to have loving brothers who shared their enlightenment. Combined with my own work, prayers, and meditation, a wonderful picture unfolds. If the following speeds your search for the truth, accept it with love:

Problems and Guilt Explained

The infinite power of our true self causes any of our thoughts to be immediately transferred to the minds of others. A loving brother, Margaret, once “asked” why a relative treated her as almost invisible. The answer was “You don’t want involvement with her.” That relative was simply doing what Margaret’s mind truly wanted!

We've all seen examples of this. Two different people can walk into a room and others will have totally different reactions without any words being spoken. My sponsor Annie, for example, can enter a room and virtually everyone will be attracted to her like bees to honey. One can almost see her powerful white aura of love. There are no secret thoughts. But another can enter the same room and the reaction of others will be totally different, without any words being spoken.

But people still have a choice in their response to the other's thoughts. A brother that believes in guilt could refuse a joining, even with someone like Annie, continuing to separate because of fear. This blocks miracles.

*[The ego] dictates your reactions to those you meet
in the present from a past reference point, obscuring
their present reality.*

– A Course In Miracles T-13.IV.5:4

If an original thought were unloving (not based on acceptance), we have made a judgment and committed murder...killing one concept and making something else special. This creates a tiny guilt bubble. Whether the thought was otherwise expressed or not.

Now possessing guilt, we try to give it away, by making another feel guilty. This thought or overt action manifests in anger. Anytime we possess guilt, we are fearful of another seeing this guilt. Anger also serves as a deflection or distraction to prevent our own recognition of this guilt. Because of no secret thoughts, this is basically impossible.

So if we try to throw this guilt on another, the thought or behavior manifests in anger. If we don't throw it on another, anger is taken out on the body, increasing our own insanity or producing illness. The type of illness that results is a wonderful indication of the type of guilt or fear, as identified by Louise Hay in *How To Heal Your Life*.

When received by another, this anger can only be treated in two ways. If the anger is closely enough related to a guilt bubble or wrong belief in that mind, *and their ego responds*, anger will be returned in thought or action. (The receiver can't be reminded of, or want the other to see, that guilt/untruth.) The result is defense or an outright attack. In thought or action.

*Understand that you do not respond to anything
directly, but to your interpretation of it.*

– A Course In Miracles T-12.I.1:4

This *witnesses* the original guilt in the giver's mind as real. And the ego chalks it up as another "truth." The guilt bubble becomes an untrue belief of condemnation.

But if the receiver's spirit responds, only love will be returned. And that love dissipates the original giver's guilt bubble! This is forgiveness. This is healing...is the miracle. Particularly if we ask our Higher Power for help at that time to *witness* it.

But thousands of times every day, with every decision we make, guilt bubbles are produced. They cause few problems, however, until they are witnessed by others and thereby turned into "true" condemnations inscribed on our own tablets of the past. As we grow older, our warehouse of insane illusions and delusions becomes huge. But our spirit knows the truth and is in disagreement with the ego's dictionary of illusions. Conflict, insanity, and physical problems result.

This corresponds to the concept of Karma. "Bad Karma" is simply guilt that will try to be passed to others with overt anger, or even angry thoughts. Forgiveness destroys the guilt or "bad Karma."

To avoid looking at this conflict, special relationships grow. They help us avoid experiencing the pain involved with this atrocious cistern. Or they offer some supposed relief or happiness by distraction. This explains alcohol or other drug addictions; worry, work, and fear compulsions; or any other countless insanities. Any special relationship is a denial of conflict. When we are unaware of a special relationship, we are in denial.

Enter the miracle worker, the teacher of love. Their spirit, instead of the ego, answers. And only love is returned. And that love dissipates the original giver's guilt bubble! This is forgiveness. Instead of judging, they simply accept – or overlook. With love. They refuse to believe in guilt, illusions, and fear. When another tries to project guilt or fear, they only return acceptance and love, dashing the guilt and associated fear. When another tries to project illusion or insanity, or says "I'm sick," they do not try to convince differently, but only smile and ask the Holy Spirit

to intervene with the answer. Without receiving additional *witness* to illusion, another will, just for an instant, question their interpretation of “truth.” In this instant the Holy Spirit rushes in to complete the correction, the miracle. Because any two minds are truly joined, the miracle worker also receives this burst of love. The miracle worker, the “sin-eater,” thereby gains and receives sustenance from this steady diet of love, their daily bread.

Remember too that any expectation creates a debt. And because one’s unconscious mind knows this interferes with another’s free will, another guilt bubble is produced. The disappointment that results witnesses the guilt, establishing the same chain reaction.

The ego analyzes and the spirit accepts. Imagine the contrast. When one is in ego the mind is frantic. Day after day we’re in chaos, constantly asking “What does this mean and what do I do about it?” This is repeated many thousands of times a day! The energy consumed in this constant process is staggering. Is it any wonder we become tired, angry, depressed and potentially sick? As we grow older, the ego has more and more trouble fitting a constant flow of additional information into its insane construct of its model of the universe. The pain and conflict produced, conscious or unconscious, is not without limit. We eventually arrive at “I give up, it’s no longer working.” And another potential teacher of love is born. Because until one reaches humility, few teachers will intervene, to protect your free will.

Contrast this chaos with the life of the miracle worker. They no longer have to react to the insanity of others, or try to change them. They simply accept. They no longer believe in the past with its pre-judgment, guilt, and regrets. It is gone. They no longer believe in the future, with its worry and fears. It is gone. They are centered in the now, in peace. And when uncertainty starts to surface, when the past or future gently tug at their sleeve, they simply say “I must have chosen incorrectly. Holy Spirit, decide for me.” Nine times out of ten, a way of forgiving will be provided. They are living in the Will of God.

This makes it sound like we are Gods. In Truth, we were never separated from our Creator. This is more readily recognized outside the Western world. When one individual greets another in many Eastern cultures, that little forward dip with closed palms is not a temporary

loss of balance. It's simply a greeting to another manifestation of God. And God did create us in His own image. He granted us His power and ability so we too could create. The only difference between us and God is knowledge of who we are, and the fact that He created us and not vice versa. We can use that ability and power to create or mis-create, and we always have the free will to decide between the two.

We are not bodies, but a loving thought forever in the mind of God. And infinite love cannot be contained in a body indefinitely.

God is so far removed from our insane beliefs, He can't even identify with our untrue beliefs and most of what we do. Let alone condemn us for it. To watch over us while we dream we're not in the Garden of Eden, He gave us the Holy Spirit.

He even sent many spiritual leaders out of that realm of the Holy Spirit, to try and understand our dream and model truth. These are called by many names, including Jesus. A virgin birth was arranged to avoid the contamination of genetics. Jesus might have even been a little confused for a period. But he persevered and remembered the truth. The only true difference between us and our Elder Brother Jesus, is he has no ego.

We can do our best to figure out God, but the ego prevents most rational analysis. God and heaven can't even be described in words, but can only be experienced. We must, instead, concentrate on our purpose within this worldly plane: The creation of loving things, and forgiveness. This is done by simply accepting with love, overlooking the "error" of another.

You cannot even give a blessing in perfect gentleness. Would you know of One Who gives forever, and Who knows of nothing except giving?

– A Course In Miracles T-14.IV.8:6

Simply accepting our brothers keeps us in the now. The willingness and efforts in fully blessing a brother show us heaven on earth. Earlier we discussed a "blessing brother." When two equals seek only the truth and God's will, they can more easily experience what is called a holy relationship, instead of a special relationship. Each sees the other as having

the exact same interests and choose to join in mind. When two minds join, this is proof we aren't really separated. Heaven is the experience that results, if only for that holy instant. Never again will either mind consider itself as truly separate and, having experienced heaven, both become true miracle workers to spread this Kingdom.

The "Accidental Miracle"

We've mentioned miracles on several occasions, but what is involved might be vague. I've already described the "simpler" kind with Barbara. Another true example might clarify even more. Permit me to share one of my first fully-recognized and very powerful such episodes. I call it my "accidental miracle."

A friend I'll call Mike was having serious problems. He was one of these people who would kill themselves to reach enlightenment. When I saw him, I found he had taken not one, but three tabs of LSD. The first accidental thing I did was not judge him for doing such a thing. I simply accepted. That night I was at peace, and simply more aware that I wasn't perfect, so I couldn't judge. His agony made this much easier. He told me, "Bob, I'm in such deep despair. I just don't want to be here anymore."

We talked for a while. Or rather he talked and I mostly listened. I was simply there for him. I didn't try to fix, as if I'd even know what to do. Even though he was obviously suicidal, for some strange reason I felt absolutely no fear for him. I was somehow certain that he was eternally protected and even suicide couldn't change that.

In fact, I had to leave for a couple hours to hold a monthly meeting with all my investment clients that night, and it couldn't reasonably be changed. This might sound insensitive, but a rare and total lack of fear allowed this. But I did prefer he not be alone during that time. So I finally said, "Brother, I love you, but I've got to leave you for a couple hours. I don't want you to be alone, so I'll leave you in the hands of the Holy Spirit." (Back then, these were not normal words for me.)

I said this...and instantaneously the phone rang. Mike said, "You don't have to answer it, I don't want to see anyone." I answered his phone. Another good friend was calling and said, "Is Mike there? I was

wondering if I could stop by.” I simply said “Come on over right away. I have to leave and he’ll be here.” Miracle number one.

I got back from my meeting and the conversation was pretty down-beat. He was getting worse. She left and we continued to talk. Mike said, “Bob, this is getting worse. I’m in this deepening spiral of despair, and there’s no bottom to it.” The rest of the evening I didn’t talk a lot (which is often rare for me). But what I did say I didn’t think about, it just came out...like it wasn’t even me talking. I replied in some amazement to myself, “Mike you’re not feeling *despair*. The tiny difference between what you’re experiencing and total *humility* is a tiny jump in faith. That is the only thing preventing healing.” I was refusing to even agree he was “sick!”

He continued to think he was for a time, and finally I asked, “Don’t think of what you are or even believe what you think. What do you truly want?” He said, “I only want to be happy.” I said “Would you settle for peace, love, and joy?” He thought that was a good idea.

I said “Go lie down on the sofa,” and he did. I said “OK, you’re so close to perfect humility. Tell the Holy Spirit you want peace, love, and joy, and then jump across that little gap with the faith that He’ll give it to you.” “Now you will feel what you call despair leaving, replaced by humility, and finally peace, love, and joy.” I continued to talk him back up, and after a few minutes he came up and out of it.

He finally said, “Wow, I’m OK now.” I said “Don’t quit now, keep going higher.” I remembered my chickening out when I had my first spiritual awakening, and had regretted it. I figured he deserved a good shot too. So we kept going even higher. He finally quit as well, but a healing, a second miracle or correction had taken place that night. I call this an accidental miracle, but it became obvious that everything was perfectly in place, without any apparent preparation (except by Him?). I think seven requirements for a miracle were simply present that night.

First, there was absolutely no judgment or planning on my part. Only love/acceptance. *Second*, he was as humble as any human being I’ve ever seen. He was ready for another way, like the alcoholic who hits bottom so hard you can hear it in Nebraska. (I think the absence of humility prevents 99% of miracles.) *Third*, and I would typically show at least serious concern, there was absolutely no fear for him or anyone

that night. *Fourth*, I saw him as an equal brother, wanted the best for him, and told him so.

Fifth, we asked for what was wanted, someone to be with him, and later, in his asking for peace, love, and joy. It was not specified how this would happen, which would create expectations, but only the end result was requested. *Sixth*, I asked for the Holy Spirit, and then let Him work. First to provide for his being alone (a companion), and next by letting Him work through me to remove the “despair.” *Last*, and I think most importantly, I refused to believe my brother was even sick. I wasn’t playing games or pretending, or his mind would have known it. I simply didn’t make it real for him, seeing humility when he saw despair.

To believe that a Son of God can be sick is to believe that part of God can suffer. Love cannot suffer, because it cannot attack.

– A Course In Miracles T-10.III.3:1

In retrospect, everything was so perfectly in place, I would have been surprised if a miracle had not occurred.

For those insisting on coincidence, another result provided proof a bona fide miracle occurred. That was my payoff. The one offering a miracle receives as much as the one receiving it. The very next day, all day long, I never touched the ground. I experienced perfect clairvoyance (clear-seeing), perfect certainty, and was floating in perfect peace. I had a first date with a young lady that night, and it was fantastic, probably because that love just kept flowing well into the night. I even remember mentioning to Christie what had happened and how I felt. For some reason we never had another date that remotely came close to that evening. Any guesses why? Old ego slowly crept back in again.

Such are the dividends of love. But most of us have enough trouble even accepting miracles. As we grow, we will surely develop the humility, faith, and awareness to not only accept them, but see opportunities develop to offer miracles. Miracles occur naturally. Only when they don’t happen has something gone wrong. In the meantime, however, we must simply continue our vigilance at maintaining and increasing our sense of peace, our freedom in relieved responsibility.

Frequent prayer and meditation will further our learning of the truth and increase the frequency of “now” moments. In the daily bustle of life thousands of these opportunities escape us. Constant vigilance is required. As our faith grows and we turn over even more of our wills, relinquishing more of our old belief system, one helpful tool is suggested. It’s called the “no decision Sunday.” With little preparation, we can learn to live one entire day doing nothing but His will. This means no planning, impatience or expectations that day, only complete acceptance and extension of love. Listen for and feel the answers.

Another practical way to increase this vigilance is by random reminders during the day. Several inexpensive watches now have five or more alarms that can be set for various times every day. Or use a cell phone. When an alarm reminds, take that opportunity to briefly observe what you’re thinking. How am I feeling right now? What am I doing? Is there a way to accept someone in love, offering forgiveness? How am I treating myself, my inner child? This can be used to determine if we’re having loving thoughts and practicing new, healthy patterns. If we’re thinking attack thoughts or are slipping into an old pattern, simply choose again.

Such times can also remind us if we’re learning from the wrong individuals or trying to teach the wrong things to the wrong people (or at the wrong time).

Many become frustrated in trying to determine whose will/belief system they’re following at different times during a typical day. There will initially be periods of both. For example, many of us have jobs that virtually demand judgment, sometimes of other people. That’s simply today’s society. But we can reduce our *investment* in the results of what we do during any part of the day. Nevertheless, during certain parts of the day, it’s easier to not try and change others, to simply accept and love, or to accept or do miracles. At first it might even be necessary to schedule periods of peace.

Simply be gentle with yourself. For example, there are certain periods of my own day that I realize require judgment. It’s almost as if I say “OK, Holy Spirit, I’m going to do some ego stuff for awhile. I’ll get back soon.” I then “chop some wood and carry some water,” but am always impatient to get back to my peace.

But eventually we will learn to introduce peace, forgiveness, and acceptance into all aspects of our daily lives. This often involves greatly reducing our investment in the expected outcome involving things, events and people. After all, our spirits are eternally protected, and even when we err the only true loss simply involves time.

Each of us is our brother's savior. Anytime we choose to forgive we are working miracles and blessing that brother, and ourselves. Every time we choose defense and attack, we are imprisoning our brother, *and ourselves*. Learn from your brother and God, and teach only love, for that is what you are. The battle is over, there is no one left to fight. Just be and love, yourself and others...until you realize you are your brother, even if only for an instant.

Suggested Actions:

- Treat yourself to more frequent quiet times, without outside interference, noise, etc. These might have to be scheduled.
- Instead of saying "I'm sick," start saying "I think I have...a cold, etc."

Step 12: Sharing

The only things we can keep are what we give away.

- Louis Ginsberg

Up until now we've correctly focused only on ourselves. We learned some time ago that "I" is the only thing over which we have control - or the right to control. This mind frame has served us well. It prevented us from taking on the feelings of others. Instead, we concentrated on taking responsibility for our reactions to others.

This new detachment gave us freedom to act and choose, or simply be. It also prevented us from "fixing" and "helping" others, particularly when they really didn't want our interference. Some people still enjoy high-drama lives, and many others are actually addicted to pity...you'll know when they're truly ready. By narrowing our focus to ourselves we also became free to simply accept others, instead of becoming enmeshed in their illusions. This detachment also provided us the room and the time to carve out a new way of life for ourselves. Particularly during a time our little child was only starting to again peer out.

It's now time to shift that focus. But ever so slightly. We now share what we've learned with others. This does not mean that having become well and wonderful, we can now control and change others. The difference is more subtle. We now simply *become witnesses* to our new way of life. A true teacher doesn't tell others what to do, but is the model that provides the example. What we think and believe is clearly reflected in what we do. When we think one thing and do another, we are lying to ourselves and others, bearing false witness.

Sharing and witnessing the wonderful things we've learned are also acts of gratitude. God doesn't require our gratitude, He doesn't have an

ego. But we and our brothers need this. God's teachers also recognize their needs are the same as that of their brother. And by overlooking our brothers' errors, we are also keeping ourselves debt-free.

What are we teaching? Judgment or forgiveness? Do we see our apparently weak co-dependent brothers and apparently egotistical counter-dependent brothers simply calling for love? And what do we learn from our own teaching? Based on what we do, we are teaching every second of every day. Teach only love.

The most important reason to share, is this is how we keep anything. Don't forget these lessons:

To Have, Give All to All (T-6.V.A)

To Have Peace, Teach Peace to Learn It

- A Course In Miracles T-6.V.B

When we teach love, our brother sees what is true and witnesses that truth back to us. This makes it real to us. What do you want? If you want love (acceptance), give it away. If you want to keep guilt, try to give it away with anger.

*Teach him that, whatever he may try to do to you,
your perfect freedom from the belief that you can be
harmed shows him that he is guiltless.*

- A Course In Miracles T-14.III.7:3

When and how do we share the truth we've learned? At all times and in every way possible. As long as we don't preach, and only witness what we are.

We might first be tempted to give back some of what we gained within the program that provided it. Others within Twelve-Step groups are also searching for peace or they wouldn't be there.

In volunteer organizations there are always many ways to give. Within step programs, simply sharing during the general meeting will often be useful for newer members, and sometimes older ones as well. By now one has likely chaired several meetings, which allows a more

complete sharing of one's experience, strength, and hope. Meetings always need secretaries to run meetings, among several other duties. Your assistance is always greatly needed. And don't forget the newcomers. Remember how you felt when attending your first meeting. Simply approach such people and accept the hell out of them. Never by preaching about the program, but by simply making them feel welcome and accepting them, and answering any questions they might have. Wisdom is most often taught by silence and demeanor, and a smile...not words.

Sharing As A Sponsor

The most valuable and concerted thing we might do is serving as a sponsor to others. Our own sponsor will probably serve as one model to use, and perhaps this book will help you prepare for performing this extremely loving service. Particularly if we've completed Step Nine, we have much to offer a sponsee. But someone might ask us before that. Again, our sponsor can help us decide if we're ready. But if in doubt, give. The other person obviously sees something in us they want. And if it were not there, it wouldn't be seen.

The pupil comes at the right time to the right place.

– A Course In Miracles M-2.4:4

I use several guidelines, some of which might be helpful. We've already discussed the man to man and woman to woman issue, and how I broke the rules. But my most important guideline is to never offer myself as a sponsor. Rather, the other person always takes the first step. For me, this is a test of willingness. If someone is ready and willing, they will ask. There might be exceptions, but it's suggested one be careful about this. After half-heartedly trying to work with three sponsors that didn't work out for me, Alan offered to work with me and that relationship was wonderful. But I suspect his offering was the exception instead of the rule.

A good understanding between the two at the outset is very important. It's difficult to change in midstream. I first meet with a potential sponsee to determine if the relationship seems to be a good match. I usually ask what they want out of the program, what they expect from

me, and their current understanding of the program. If a quick psychological fix is desired, the program can't offer it. If their ego wants a friend, and they want to simply add a step program to their mass of information gained from countless other books, the program can't help much. The truth offers peace, not knowledge.

If they want to go as far personally and spiritually as humanly possible, one has a happy and hungry learner whose growth and potential are virtually limitless. For these individuals, I usually suggest they also obtain *The Twelve Steps for Everyone* by CompCare to use as a basic program source book to work with together. It doesn't focus on any particular special relationship like alcohol, overeating, or even adult children characteristics. I find this valuable because a particular addiction or emotion is only the symptom or manifestation of low self-esteem. This reference permits working on all special relationships and their causes in one fell swoop. I consider this book the most simple and best reference for Twelve-Step work that's available.

If someone is hungry for the spiritual, I usually suggest they obtain *A Course In Miracles*, to see if it fits their needs and to possibly study while they work the program. This course is a spiritual path instead of a religious or sectarian approach. Although it is Christian in nature, it comes from such a high level that those from other faiths accept it readily. It was even perfect for me, a former agnostic. When someone asks me what it is, I usually say it's a Ph. D. in Twelve-Step. Countless people who successfully work the twelve steps with a sponsor move into this course to continue their spiritual pursuit.

I also establish with the sponsee, if we decide to work together, various ground rules. We first establish a regular meeting time. I like to meet weekly at the same time when possible, and I set aside one day a week for sponsoring, Friday. This provides predictability for me, and continuity for the sponsee. When one gets together only occasionally, focus and attention can suffer, and the sponsor tends to forget pertinent things about the sponsee. Even if the student is working on the same step for a few weeks, they always have things to "clear," problems to discuss, and great insights they want to share.

I always suggest they start a journal. I encourage them to take a few notes when we meet, to remind them of what we're concentrating

on, and to list tips in handling situations they have the most difficulty with. I also encourage the writing of situations that develop outside our sessions, whether positive or problematic, to discuss together. It's important to be as specific as possible and to always use particular examples when discussing any pattern.

I encourage sponsees to get in the habit of pausing before responding during sessions. I try to do the same. We're trying to get out of stimulus-response. And between the spirit and ego, the ego always speaks first. Granny was right after all, about that counting to 10 thing...

Except as a friend, I don't call sponsees - especially to remind them of meeting times. That is their responsibility and is a function of their willingness. On occasion a sponsee will miss several meetings. "Things just came up." We create all our own experiences. This normally occurs because the sponsee, consciously or subconsciously, simply doesn't want to work his or her program.

We also agree that if one of us is 15 minutes late for a session without having been notified, the other should assume a no-show, that the meeting won't take place, and do their other business. We never meet at the sponsee's home, and I prefer to meet in mine.

We agree that each of the parties can discontinue the relationship at any time. There should be no guilt in either, for deciding to do so. Alan finished Step Five with me and didn't feel he could take me any higher. So I finished the rest with Annie.

For my part in the relationship, I promise to never judge. I will not always agree with the sponsee on one of their beliefs, and will point this out or simply smile. But I will never judge them for thinking or doing anything. To this day, I have absolutely no secrets with Annie. It was because my sponsor always refused to judge me. That's heavy love.

Sharing With Others

We can naturally share our new selves with our spouse or lover. In most cases we've already made our amends with that person, and that relieved a great burden we were carrying. Our relationship has most likely been improving for some time. We probably noticed that control was a central issue. But that struggle was only a reaction to not being in control of and

loving ourselves. This doesn't mean we're wimps or dwarfs and allow our significant other to run roughshod over us. We simply more often find it natural to say things like "No thanks, I'd rather not." And smile.

As our self-love and awareness grew, we simply started accepting him or her. With this new freedom, they most likely responded in kind. Once we knew we weren't responsible for our mate's feelings and the way they acted, we actually rejoiced at this decreased feeling of responsibility.

We now make amends quickly with each other, which keeps small things from festering. Anytime there is a problem, there is an unfulfilled expectation. Either on our part or with the other person. We can only influence our own expectations.

We can also try for a holy relationship with this person. It's often easier with a "blessing brother," because there is less past standing in the way. It will require some increased awareness and spiritual growth for both to do this, but do you want to experience heaven on earth? The total joining of two minds is the most wonderful experience we will likely have on this earth. *A Course In Miracles* provides the guidelines for doing this.

Some relationships will simply end. It's not unusual for one person to grow so greatly with this type of work, that the other is no longer served in the pairing. If the healing person grows enough spiritually, the split will not likely be caused by or decided by them. I saw this phenomenon numerous times when I moved overseas. Among the couples who did the same, they would either split or grow incredibly close to each other, one or the other. Massive change will either force people apart or draw them closer together.

We can also share our new self with people outside our family. Again, this is always done with modeling. We become much slow to anger, more peaceful and serene, and interfere less in the lives of others or try to change them. When others act inappropriately with us, we no longer defend or attack as readily. We start to actually become quite effective at simply looking them straight in the eyes and gently smiling without saying a word. If we can remember to silently ask at the same time "Holy Spirit, help my brother and I," we start producing miracles. We will often be unaware of what we've offered, except for the payoffs we receive...even more serenity and love.

We actually start to spend more time around people. Because we know that this is how we increase our self-awareness. When there is anything but harmony, we jump at the chance to learn "What inappropriate pattern do I still have that this brother is reminding me of?" When we can't do a quick amends or an actual healing, some brief introspection allows our awareness to soar even higher. There was a time when my sponsor even suggested I get into more relationships: "You've simplified your life so much you're limiting your learning opportunities." There was even a later period when I was running around looking for problems, anxious to learn the lessons offered.

Remember that we are manifesting these people in our lives for some purpose. The most fascinating and fun concept we can entertain would be "Is this person part of my dream or another dreamer?" Within a hologram, with its parts being both different and the same, who yet knows?

You are now a teacher of love. And others always follow role models, appropriate or not. As more people come in contact with you, the guilt in the world will decrease and love will take its place. Consider the possibilities, my brother.

We can also share at work. If we are managers or own our own businesses, we start caring more about employees, customers, and ourselves. In running the business, we probably thought most things could only be done by us. With increased trust and decreased fear, we can start sharing our enormous burdens. With a little more training, perhaps by us, we can delegate more duties...and perhaps start working, or thinking about work, less than 60 hours a week.

Managers basically do planning and decision-making. Now that we have Someone to help us, planning becomes more of a development of choices. He can also provide us with new alternatives and help make decisions for us between those choices. I'm not sure where the idea of directing came from in managing people. At Caterpillar we were taught to involve others in the decision-making process, gain their ideas and input, and obtain their recommendations on the approach to take. But when necessary the manager still had the final decision. It's amazing what can be accomplished when you don't care who gets the credit.

Effectiveness and simplicity is gained by involving others, and “control” is never lost.

People become more important. We don’t become people-pleasers to get someone to like us, but become honestly interested in their successes and problems. When people realize you are sincere, they open up. And the manager who knows customers’ needs and problems will always be more successful.

If in our job we aren’t responsible for anyone “below” us, the situation is greatly simplified. But there can be greater fear of losing our job. That fear is virtually gone. We leave the decision of whether we should even be with that company or in that position to our Higher Power. If it was meant to be, fine. If not, we have enough additional awareness, faith, and help to identify another position that helps us to serve others even more. And once we know what we truly want deep down inside, and are not simply pushed around by all those former “shoulds,” we gain a new sense of choice and excitement.

Our attitudes at work are everything. But we don’t simply change attitudes. We change our minds about ourselves, and that produces our attitudes and behaviors. If we were our boss, we’d want people who were cheerful, confident, cooperative, communicated well, had good ideas based on a sense of teamwork, and were responsible. We can now do those things! Not because we’re forced or manipulated to do them, but because they’re a reflection of the new us!

We’re happy and have a better sense of humor because we no longer fear loss of the job and simply enjoy being around other people. We’re confident because we know we’re eternally protected. We’re cooperative because it gives us pleasure and we no longer blame others or get angry with them. We communicate well because we’re now free to share what we want or think...we’re no longer people-pleasers or controlling manipulators. We share our ideas because of our lack of fear and because we want greater harmony in the work place or with procedures. If people don’t accept our ideas, it doesn’t bother us. We’re responsible because we’ve decided we’re an important cause in the matter and no longer blame our parents, our boss, or others for what we do, which is now the best we can. And when we have a problem we easily ask for help. From another or Him.

Attitude produced the most enjoyable job I’ve ever experienced.

With Caterpillar, overseas jobs were considered the cream of employment. When management employees first join Cat, each is asked where in the world they would like to work, if given the opportunity. I indicated my first choice as Europe, just in case I was honored with the opportunity. I had given a major presentation before all the top managers in our Caterpillar Americas subsidiary. During the entire presentation I'd never seen people react so little with such blank expressions on their faces. I thought my concept had bombed. But I continued, and when finished, they actually applauded, which was never done in that kind of meeting. The head of the group then thanked me, and told me I had answered a problem they'd been struggling with for years - how to tie product sales, parts sales, and service sales together into one understandable package. Rule number one: *Never* try to guess what's going on in someone else's head. You'll usually be wrong, and drive yourself crazy in the process.

I believe that event was the major reason that shortly thereafter I was offered a job in Geneva, Switzerland, the central office for Caterpillar Overseas. Very excited, I was curious about my new boss, so I found his summary and picture in our management booklet. Al Sandberg had a big square face and a scowl that suggested he ate babies for breakfast. But I let it go and returned to my excitement about the new job and living in Switzerland.

After moving to Geneva I'd only been in the office a couple days, trying to figure out what was in the files and if it was coffee that someone had spilled into one drawer of my desk. Al came stomping into my office, threw a file on my desk and said "We need this worked up and in George's office by Thursday, OK?" George was the department manager. I was apparently a peon. But what do you do? I wasn't sure if I could work for this guy, without totally losing my sanity and all self-respect.

A couple weeks later, with that project out of the way, another large job came in directly to me via the contact divisions. I finished it and had my reply typed up. We were going to find out if this job was going to work or not. I went stomping into Al's office, threw the report on his desk and said "The dealer needs this back by Friday and George will want to see it first. Can you do that?" His jaw dropped, a look of

confusion came across his face, and his head slowly raised to look at me. After a brief pause he said, "Yeah, sure!"

On the job, Al liked things terse. And that's what I gave him. But behind that big bravado, I would find, hid a great warm heart. I don't think most people ever figured that out. Some newer guys from the states were so terrified of Big Al they wouldn't even go into his office, but sent him all correspondence in the inter-office mail. And he went to bat for me too. I remember him throwing the Accounting Manager out of his office for questioning one of my expense books, with the words, "Did I sign that? Then get the hell out of my office!"

He was later named the manager of the Northern dealer division. And Al started moving his representatives around to meet his liking. Two were fired outright, which was extremely rare at Caterpillar. He then asked me if I would accept the rep job in Paris, covering France, Belgium, and Holland. That territory included one of the largest and most sophisticated Cat dealers in the world. And there hadn't been a non-French mother tongue rep in that job in 12 years. Of course I quickly accepted. I took a one month crash course in French and within four months was even conducting training classes in French. The first year I received an Outstanding management review, the highest possible at Caterpillar.

Big Al wasn't the best manager at Caterpillar by typical measures, but most people's fears of him prevented them from getting to that soft heart. I worked hard for him, and did a good job. He also backed me up 100%. I didn't work hard because I was scared, but because of the mutual respect. We always told each other exactly what we wanted. And the other would do their best to provide it. It consumes so much energy to pull punches on what we think and say. We had a lot of fun too, laughing and drinking (a lot) together. It was the most enjoyable job I ever had. Simply because of attitude.

Sharing With Children

Sharing our new self with our children can at the same time be the easiest and most difficult thing we've ever done. There are times when we can almost see their little halos. At other times we explode with anger

at the things they do. When we become angry at kids, it usually seems related to two central issues, greed and control.

We were once kids too. And every kid has destroyed something at some time. Our reactions are often based on greed. "It will cost us \$20 to replace that vase or repair that carpet or sofa!" Is it worth destroying our sanity and create guilt in our own minds, simply because of our own greed issue? Simply decide that things will be damaged, and expect repair costs in your budget.

Control is usually the culprit. We know exactly how our kids should behave. And when they don't we get angry. Are we so perfect we even know what's always right or wrong for them? Dysfunctional behavior is typically passed down through several generations. Now is the time to break that chain. In this respect, new relationships with children go far in healing the world and ending insanity. All we have to do is accept them, and provide a safe place for them to express their feelings and say exactly what they think. This is unconditional love. The trust comes automatically. Imagine the functionality of a child who doesn't have to stuff all those feelings and thoughts down into their own little kid. And all this is not done with words that say one thing and behavior that teaches another. We can only teach by what we do. By providing the model.

Control also tends to surface in our attempt to "protect" our kids. On the spiritual plane, everyone is already eternally protected without any help from us. Life will have its surprises, and we try not to do stupid things. We will obviously take some steps to protect the kids, but we don't go insane trying to control things that are uncontrollable.

Some might fear that totally accepting children and not directing what they do or say will cause total rebellion. Children don't rebel because of freedom, but from lack of it. Functional kids won't even be interested in the many things we are now spending billions of dollars to prevent. This is correcting such problems at their cause.

Kids offer the greatest test of our new life. This is because they're so direct. Even when not truly free to talk, they will ask us why we do certain things. Often there isn't a good reason. It's therefore necessary to quickly laugh and admit when we're incorrect. Children will pick up on double values or outright hypocrisy quicker than anyone. Remember,

they're already closer to God, simply because they haven't been around as long to create as much mind litter. Honesty is the key. And consistency ensures it. Children are our best teachers, when we allow ourselves to learn.

But events will occur when the kids are expected to do one thing, when we do another. Rules are therefore necessary. Again, it's easiest to return to the three basic guidelines discussed prior: It's inappropriate to take another's freedom; harm another or their possessions; or put another person down, particularly in front of others. When we and our children are clearly aware of these things, and practice and discuss them regularly, everyone will not only understand why things are asked or decided, but family harmony will be the product.

We can also create and share loving memories. One ACA shared that despite her confusing childhood, she still remembers her father always taking her out every Saturday morning for ice cream. How often do we do such things, including playing games as an entire family? The decision to take such actions is a conscious decision to extend love. This creates *loving legacies*.

One evening at an ACA meeting a young man I'll call Richard described the possibilities. He was divorced, and there was an argument with his "ex" over who would have the young girl for her birthday. He finally agreed to have her another time, to celebrate her special day. When it was his turn, he picked her up and said, "We're celebrating your birthday. This is your day. You decide, what do you really want to do?" They went to three or four places, ate some of the most disgusting things imaginable, and did everything that little girl wanted that day. He did no planning or controlling. He didn't decide what was appropriate. She decided everything. I sat there and listened to this man describe everything, so gently and warmly. And tears of joy started running down my face. I was again hearing of unconditional love.

But we must always be vigilant against preaching. Words mean nothing. Actions are everything. In fact, we tend to resist being told anything. But when we see something we want or find comfortable, and having free will, we take it on.

We become more giving, with our time, attention, and love. But we must also be careful to differentiate between giving and enabling. Giving

involves only charity, with no expectations whatsoever. “Helping” might not appear to involve expectations. But this type of “giving,” including “giving in,” is different. And it can allow the receiver to continue insane behavior, and not take the responsibility for change...this is called *enabling*.

Giving out of nothing but gratitude will not only extend the truth, but allow us to learn. This is because what we are teaching we are learning.

Step Twelve of the program says that:

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

For some, this spiritual awakening will come in an experience we will never forget. For others it will come in numerous smaller doses of what are sometimes called BFOs - Blinding Flashes of the Obvious.

The best best way we can carry this message to others is by living and modeling it. I share with anyone in any appropriate situation that I work with a Twelve-Step program. I also describe it as a way of life that anyone could benefit from. If someone is not familiar with it, I generally share some things about it. But other than making them aware of the program, I never suggest they need it.

Once we “get” the bulk of the program, it’s impossible not to practice those principles in everything we do. Because no matter where we go, there we are...our new “us.” And now that we’ve gained such enormous insight into our decision-making process, if we haven’t already, it’s also time to start getting serious about our finances, by focusing on [“Forgive Us Our Debts.”](#) See my [Facebook Page](#) for discussion of both books, and to obtain clarifications and answers to all your questions.

We’ve now worked each of the Twelve Steps. Steps Ten through Twelve are ongoing. And periodically we go back to prior steps to restore our peace. One part of this book you’ll revisit often is the Summary, which immediately follows this final chapter. It lists very short summaries of denial and each of the Twelve Steps. I find it wonderfully perfect how each step works, and how they progress in sequence. They are obviously divinely

inspired. But I still often find myself seeing new meanings to each - more being revealed.

Suggested Actions:

- First for one day, and eventually for one week, try to speak as little as possible. It seems most of what we say involves “problems” or trying to get others to see things our way. Instead, try to simply look people in the eyes and smile, instead of responding at all. When you do speak: Concentrate on asking questions of the other, and express true interest in them alone; or comment only on your loving observations of the world around you.



Summary

Most people will completely read a book such as this, simply trying to take those things they can already agree with, adding them to what their ego currently believes. For maximum true benefit, however, perhaps after one complete reading of the book it is still necessary to actually “work the steps.” Perhaps after first becoming familiar with and internalizing the first section on denial. I then suggest you work on each chapter of the solution, spending as much time as necessary on each, before comfortably moving on to the next chapter.

One warning, however. If you only do this work alone, any true growth will be severely limited:

*Yet when two or more join together in searching
for truth, the ego can no longer defend its lack of
content.*

– A Course In Miracles T-14.X.9:6

I therefore strongly suggest you “work the steps” with another. It can be a loving brother or a sponsor. Simply concentrate on not judging one another. When you disagree on something, seek answers from a third party. The most obvious solution might be attending a Twelve-Step meeting together, choosing someone who shares, who appears to have much growth, and then talking to them after the meeting.

Below is a brief summary of denial and each of the twelve steps. When you need to quickly check one of the steps this is a handy concise reference.

Denial is overcome by first simply recognizing a problem exists. Often the problem is only recognized by the symptoms, the end results of an existing incorrect belief. If your family, finances, or relationships aren't working smoothly, you know you've chosen incorrectly. Remember, we manifest everything in our lives, using our enormously powerful but often mistaken minds. Or, simply ask yourself, am I often unhappy, or do I experience bouts of anger, loneliness, fear, or confusion? When peace, joy, and love aren't typically present, particularly if absent for more than a day, something has gone wrong. Denial is the problem, and it is seldom obvious. We now proceed to the solution:

1) We admitted, that alone, we were powerless. That our lives had become unmanageable.

This first step of the solution is *humility*. Any true change is impossible without starting at this point. Instead, the opposite, which is false pride, has taken its place. We've tried for years to figure things out our own way, and it simply hasn't worked. It's time to resign as our own teacher. But unless we totally set aside all our beliefs, not knowing which were true or mistaken, our ego will still be in the game serving as an insane coach. Instead, we revert to little children, not knowing, and become willing to ask. I can virtually guarantee you do not understand humility. Even those who are well-advanced are receiving new insights to real humility on an ongoing basis. But do the best you can, and don't delay too long before continuing. Simply decide you will return to this step several times as new situations develop - and more will be revealed.

2) Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore our sanity.

Step two is the *hope* step. We come to believe that something greater than ourselves, something loving and gentle, can restore our sanity. Perhaps it only begins with a loving sponsor who helps lead the way to peace. They will have already traveled far down the road to love and joy. Perhaps we already believe in a loving God, but were simply confused about how he operates. It doesn't matter just now. We simply

develop sufficient faith to follow someone else who will hold our hand as we proceed. Enormous hope is already provided by the hundreds of thousands who have already used the twelve steps to achieve greatly increased serenity.

3) *Made the decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood Him.*

The third step is *commitment*. We firmly decide to seek the path of truth instead of staying in the murky waters of our own ego - our personal will. The emphasis is on *making the decision to do so* - even if it only means "I'm going to give this my best damn shot, just to see what happens." This step does not involve the actual process of turning it over - otherwise we wouldn't need steps four through six. Chapter three makes this process infinitely easier, however, once we realize how The Perfect Parent operates. Judgment and fear evaporate.

4) *Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*

The fourth step is *evaluation*. We simply take a close look at all of the ways we've thought and acted in the past. In a later step we will then totally release the past, and simply choose again. In completing our inventory it's not even necessary to judge what we did or how we thought as good or bad, because we don't know. We're only identifying patterns. Nor is it necessary to determine why we did certain things. After all, our deep-seated motives are often hidden within the unconscious mind.

Neither does the process involve psychotherapy or magic, but only observation. And no one is trying to place blame on anything or anyone.

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

The fifth step is *acceptance*. We have long been accustomed to feeling some embarrassment, and even guilt or deep shame, about many of our former actions and behaviors. Now we simply take our complete inventory

and share everything in one sitting with another person, our Higher Power, and ourselves. We reveal the most vile and putrid things from our past, our darkest deepest secrets, our greatest sins, and what do we hear? "My brother, I have been there too. Choose again." You will never have invented anything new, and every ego has at some time touched on the most weighty "sins of the world." It will even appear during this step that your loving brother and you came from the same family. Where you expected judgment, you received unconditional love and total acceptance. If done with an accomplished sponsor, you might even receive a miracle right on the spot.

This is an important weigh station along the way. This is because you will soon ask your Higher Power, in total faith and trust, to take everything you don't need and return only those things you need.

6) Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

The sixth step develops *courage*. You have now developed the humility and most of the trust required to take the greatest leap of faith in your lifetime. But we must develop even more courage before we do our all-important seventh step. We do this by envisioning how it will feel to function without: False pride (change to "I don't know."); lust (instead, the ability to be truly loving and intimate); anger (not trying to make others feel guilty - simply accepting); greed (trusting our Higher Power to provide, and realizing we could live very humbly if necessary); gluttony (able to live long periods of Lent, without fear of lack); envy (rejoicing at what our brothers have been entrusted with); and laziness (being truly inspired and excited about living totally in His will, constantly looking for the miracles hidden behind any "problem").

7) Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Step seven is the *correction*, your most important step. Resting totally in the safety of your only true self (spirit), you place your entire ego in the hands of your Higher Power, asking Him to totally change your mind about your mind for you.

And you will be healed, assuming you truly want this, and assuming

you have sufficient humility and faith. And you will do this without fear. After all, this book has taught you to even view bodily death as only an enigmatic curiosity. This was proven by hundreds of thousands of brothers who describe past lives and near-death experiences. Also, Jesus was an ideal teacher, showing us how to love our brothers, raising dead bodies, and showing *by example* how we too will be resurrected. The results you experience might be a revelation that stands the earth on end, a miracle you will never forget, or simply a feeling of something different that will beautifully grow from that day forward. This is the point of rebirth. Simply go with totally empty hands unto your God.

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

With step eight you learn *responsibility*. You become willing to have played a part in any unloving thought or action concerning a brother. In the prior step your own past and future started to disappear, or even evaporated. But in what we called the past, we inscribed “I hate you” on the tablets of brothers’ memories. We become willing to erase those tablets to make our brothers’ loads lighter. We become willing to do an amends for what we might have done.

9) *Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.*

In step nine we start to actively perform the most loving responsibility we have in this lifetime: The offering of *forgiveness*. We do this by making amends to anyone we had potentially harmed. Here is how it works: No two minds are totally separated. I therefore flourish as you come to remember your eternal innocence. In what we call the past, I acted in a way that was unloving. By taking responsibility and telling you how I acted inappropriately, you are free to release your negative reaction to my action. Your wartime enemy has surrendered and you no longer have me to fight. And this tiny song of the dove of peace is heard throughout the world, particularly by me.

This even unconscious evaporation of a fearful attack thought

(forgiveness), helps us know we are forgiven. Believe me, it works. And only by doing it can you appreciate the reward. Anything worth keeping or growing must be given away. Only in this manner can we truly receive. If you are unable to release anger against a brother, or unwilling to do an amends, something didn't "take" in step seven. For example, if I slowly burn because you try to control me, I still have a control issue. If I become angry at you, I still feel guilty about something and I'm trying to "give it to you." Our brothers are wonderful mirrors of how we think.

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

Step ten involves *vigilance*. It's only an ongoing repetition of the prior step. But this time, rather than letting grievances fester, instead of letting new insanities destroy our new-found peace, we quickly offer an amends when we err. Steps ten through twelve are ongoing. And with ever more spontaneous "checkups" our awareness of a new world and our new self further increases our sense of peace, love, and joy.

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

Step eleven teaches us to continue our *seeking*. We learn how to pray and what to ask for. We develop new and more effective ways to meditate, in order to quiet our minds and bodies and thereby receive the answers. We come to more quickly ask for and receive His knowledge of what to do at any time or in any situation. If we don't know what to pray for, we can simply pray to see something differently.

12) Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

In step twelve we learn the rewards of *sharing*. Instead of preaching,

we simply begin to teach *by example*. We learn that only by giving do we receive. And we begin to apply all the truths we have learned in every aspect of our lives. If we haven't already begun, we start to assist others in following the successful path we have traveled, but only when they are ready and willing. We come to learn that we have always been teachers every instant of our lives, simply by what we do, by what we model. But now we are teaching the language of the heart and not that of the ego.

My brother, this leaves but one unfulfilled promise made at the beginning of the book you are now reading. I implied an answer to the two most important questions you will ever ask: "Who or what am I? What is my purpose on this earth?" In all fairness, I cannot answer for you. I do not refuse that you be disappointed, but in order to place no limits whatsoever on your spiritual growth. In fact, I pray to all the angels that you surpass me, so you can lead me ever higher. In other words, I simply recognize that I cannot teach you what I have not learned or better put, reveal to you more than I have remembered.

But I do offer you this. I have seen wonderful things, based on personal spiritual awakenings, and accomplished brothers have also shared their visions. A complete picture has been painted. And I now share this with you.

In Genesis it states that a deep sleep fell upon Adam, but *The Bible* never refers to his awakening. It appears we exist in something akin to a dream. But all the while we rest in eternity, where time and space do not exist. In this heaven, which is found only in the "now," we are not bound by rigid bodies, but maintain senses of "self" - a self that only differs from that of others by free will.

Fearful thoughts, manifested in special relationships (idols/attachments), are the only things that keep us in this fearful dream. If we could, but for an instant, believe we are truly innocent and free from those guilts that result from these fearful thoughts, we are immediately catapulted into The Garden for a brief glimpse. We can stay there as long as our hands are empty, but for one problem: There remain brothers who still believe in guilt, who still dream. And until all awaken, the Sonship, the total Christ is incomplete. Until then time and space appear real.

Our job, not unlike that of Jesus and other perfect teachers, is to dispel guilt in our brothers, by reminding them of their perfect innocence,

ending the need for time, and reestablishing The Kingdom that is and of our heritage.

But what am I, and what is my purpose, in this name I call myself? I AM a loving thought forever in the mind of God. My purpose on earth is forgiveness and the creation of loving things. Should this be true, you and your purpose are identical. This makes you my savior, as I am yours, in the Will of the Holy Spirit, and as exemplified by Jesus.

Should I somehow be mistaken, or I am seeing only part of a grander puzzle, please help me, and let us continue to search for truth together. I still give myself permission to change my mind. Anyone can “choose again.”

But even if I dare not tell you what you are or your true purpose in life, I do offer another promise. It is one of what was never the truth, and what is, as revealed by my current understanding of the potential of Twelve-Step, in the next section I call Contrasts:

q
u
t
t
e
r



Contrasts

It wasn't long ago that we only remembered one language - that of the ego. That tongue was often the primary way of thinking and "communicating" in the world. In fact, that language prevented us from truly communicating with our brothers. It kept us separate. Its laws were totally up-side-down as well, and the world saw confusion, chaos and even hell as the result.

But we are now becoming fluent in the language of the heart. God himself is joining in this dialogue with our brothers. As we lift our new voices together we hear the song of Heaven itself. That soft sweet song has always played, without missing a beat, but most of us weren't listening. We tried to compose something different, and amidst the clatter and distraction we became certain we were alone. In a one-man band there can be no harmony. The instruments of what we made were special relationships, idols. They alone kept us from hearing the Truth.

The contrasts are amazing. We once thought problems were a way of life. We now see them as repeated lessons, or a sign of what wouldn't work, or the opportunity to do or receive a miracle.

We once believed in shame and felt guilty. We now know our Creator never forgives because He never condemned. And by forgiving our brothers we come to know we are already forgiven.

We once felt incomplete, needy, and concentrated on getting. We now know of our abundance, and gain even more by giving.

We once crept like robbers in the night, visiting our brothers until we had stolen what we could, then vanishing again to seek out another who could provide what we thought we needed. Instead of getting, we now give freely. Whether it be forgiveness, love, or simple acceptance.

We once tried to change and fix others, and preach to them what we called the truth. We now fully respect their free wills and concentrate on changing our own minds about our minds. The decreased responsibility is incredible.

We once drove ourselves crazy with analyzing, deciding, and judging. We now know only the ego analyzes and the spirit simply accepts.

We once based our sense of worth on what others thought. We now know God established our eternal worthiness, and no one, including us, can change that.

We once placed expectations on events and other people, creating frustration for ourselves when something different happened. We now simply accept, having forgiven our debts and debtors.

We once weren't sure what we were, but called ourselves adults. We now know we are Children of God until we all unite, restoring the entire Sonship.

We once felt unloved. We now know love is what we are.

We once became angry, in an unconscious attempt to make others feel guilty. Now we thank and bless our brother for reminding us of our wrong-thinking.

We once insisted on being right. We are now humble, as little children, and prefer happiness, knowing the meek shall inherit the earth.

We were once locked in stimulus-response. We now turn to loving brothers for guidance, and to the Holy Spirit for decisions.

We once believed the past would determine our future. We are now free from the guilt, regrets, and expectations the past created, and the worries, fears, and fantasies about the future. Because both disappear in the now.

We once believed we could become sick. But no part of God can suffer. So we now know that the guiltless mind cannot become sick or feel pain. When we believe ourselves sick we now know we are not trying to place anger on another, but on the body, again choosing incorrectly.

We once thought ourselves powerless. As long as we think we are different and alone, in our own will, we are. We now know that in His will we have infinite power.

We once caused problems based on our old belief system. We now

perform miracles and correct problems and wrong thinking by allowing the Holy Spirit to work through us.

We were once invested in personal ego and the devil - the collective subconscious fear of all egos - and sought special relationships, idols. We now seek holy relationships.

We once trembled at the thought of death and unconsciously hated and feared God. We now know that He provides eternal protection and is the only true source of love.

We once talked about love, without ever knowing what it was. We couldn't even fully accept a brother. We now teach acceptance and compassion by example and perform miracles.

We once talked about God creating us in his own image, but insisted that He be in the image of what we saw in ourselves. We now know He simply is. And that we are loving thoughts forever in His mind.

We are still working on becoming totally fluent in the language of the heart. But we are now happy learners who are quickly replacing tears of sorrow with tears of joy...



Epilogue

“The Little Garden” is the only automatic writing experienced by the author. May you experience the same tears of joy in reading it as he experienced when receiving it:

The Little Garden

Brother, seek outside yourself and you will find pain. Lay down your judgment, your special relationships, your idols. They blind you to the Truth. Seek within. Only there will you find peace and salvation.

Yes, there is a Little Garden, where there is only peace, love, joy, and equality. Bring nothing with you, for if you are now first, you will be the last to enter. The first to enter are now the last. These are the children, the meek, and the humble, because they realize they don’t know, have open minds, open hearts, and ask to know The Way. Bring nothing with you, for within you will find everything.

The Little Garden is now growing quickly, and beckons you enter. For it is here. The song of Heaven sounds ever louder. But you cannot enter alone. The hand of the enemies you forgive will take yours and you will enter the ark two-by-two. You have shown your “sinning” brother that you are guiltless and invulnerable in the arms of your Father. Your perfect freedom from what he tried to do to you proved to him that he too is guiltless, and worthy of entry.

Stand quietly within The Garden and attract all tortured minds within. Reach out your forgiving hand to those who still believe in guilt

and fear. Their calls for love will be answered. But only in their own time, when they truly desire peace.

The Garden is true. Because every loving thought is true. And because there are no idle thoughts, every one of your new totally-loving thoughts will be heard by one thousand.

You may stay as long as you want, as long as your hands are empty. If you wish to regain a special relationship you must step outside the Garden. What do you want, and do you want it truly?

The butterfly is your symbol. It has cast off the ugliness of the past, of what it only thought it was, and has been reborn. Two-by-two they fly towards and into The Garden. The pilgrimage has started. Thousands are waiting to follow you. The Kingdom is at hand. Why might you delay? Do your idols, your special relationships, offer such treasures? Or do you want the Kingdom? You cannot have both.

You create the Kingdom. You lead the way to forgiveness. My brother, I need you. My sorrow is unbearable. I think I have sinned. Help me. Please forgive me, for I know not what I do. Please forgive me, so we can join hands and proceed together in total innocence.

You control Judgment Day. It is your choice. Do not fear it, but seek it. For it is glorious. On the Judgment Day, only one unforgiven brother is left standing outside The Garden. He has no one left to fight. The war is over. His innocence is proven by those who stand within. We open our arms to him and say, "Yes brother, you too are innocent." And the last chooses to come with open arms unto his God. We wipe away his tears of sorrow, and we all weep together with tears of joy, as he says:

"I choose to come too."

And Judgment Day has come. Everyone hears the glorious song of Heaven in what is now again the Garden of Eden. We all stand together in the Light. The fearful dream is over and we are Home.



Appendix

The following are several definitions of concepts that will help you better understand this book. Most are ethereal in nature and deal with the spiritual plane rather than the worldly plane. They are simple descriptions of terms often heard in meetings. These are the best understandings I have today of such terms. Tomorrow my awareness will be even higher. You too will likely graduate beyond such definitions as your spiritual truth grows.

Glossary of Terms

Abandonment Issues - Uncommon fear of being alone.

“Acting Out” - Overt manifestation of mis-creative thought.

Addiction - Stimulus-response by the ego, resulting in a highly destructive special relationship.

Affirmation - A statement that is repeated very often which helps change unconscious beliefs.

Anger - An attempt to make someone else feel guilty.

Assisting - An action that aids another and does not interfere with their free will.

Belief - A perception, which also creates anyone's reality.

Believe - To perceive, rightly or wrongly.

Cause/Effect - In truth, they are the simultaneous results of willing and miracles, separate only in terms of time and distance.

Church - The meeting of two or more in search of the truth.

Compassion - Wanting the best for another.

Compulsion - Directed unconscious effort by the ego towards a special relationship.

Debt - An expectation of any kind.

Defense - A thought or action that attempts to hide guilt or fear from others and oneself.

Denial - Process by which we ignore what is.

Depression - Sense of being deprived.

Detachment - Letting be, accepting, with love.

Devil - A conceptual entity that is not based on Truth. Often considered that which is ego or part of the total collective consciousness of egos.

Disease - An indication that guilt has been internalized.

Enabling - The result of an action that prevents growth for another. (Contrast with assisting.)

Expectation - An egotistical projection of what will occur in the "future". The source of resentments.

Fear - The opposite of love.

Fixing - See Enabling

Future - A time-based concept of what follows Now, a state which in truth is never manifested.

God - What is, the Creator.

god - Concept of a higher power that is based on concept of self.

Grieving - Different phases of the process by which one effectively deals with the perceived loss of a special relationship that ends with acceptance.

Guilt - An egotistical emotion stemming from belief in judgment (right and wrong). Compared to shame, guilt can more easily be dispelled once the “should” and spiritual consequence (none) is determined.

Heaven - A state of mind that is also the domain of Truth and God.

Hell - The domain of the ego.

Helping - An action that usually involves violation of another’s free will.

Holy Relationship - The joining of spirits.

Honesty - Absence of inconsistency or manipulation, within one mind or in communications between people.

Hurt - The feeling experienced when one doesn’t get what they want.

I - See Self

Illusion - What is not truth, what is not.

g
u
i
l
t
e
r

Invest - The process by which we commit our attention and energy to realizing an expectation.

Investment - See Expectation.

Judgment - A decision by the ego, stemming from belief that One/one can or must differentiate between right and wrong. The only ultimate difference is truth or illusion.

Know - Improper use of the verb "believe".

Knowledge - All of which is true, in its entirety.

Laws - Rules created by man to try and define, control, or judge illusions.

Learn - The process by which beliefs are developed or changed.

Like - A frame of mind based on getting or receiving something that is desired.

Love - (noun) What you are, is based on abundance.

Love - (verb) Accepting with compassion.

Meditation - Process by which we listen for answers from our Higher Power and experience truth.

Miracle - A correction, when illusion is translated into truth.

Pain - A feeling sometimes experienced when a special relationship is lost.

Past - A time-based concept of what precedes Now, a state which in truth doesn't exist.

Prayer - Process by which we ask of or enter into communion with our Higher Power.

Rational Mind - That part of accurate rational thought, which is based on data which may or may not be true.

Reason - The thought process of the rational mind.

Religion - The belief that our true essence and our Higher Power are found through following the teachings of another.

Resentment - Anger resulting from an expectation that does not manifest.

Responsibility - Willingness to be a cause in the matter.

Self - A temporal consciousness of the only entity over which we have control without His assistance.

Self-Esteem - Regard of worthiness.

Shame - An intense negative emotion stemming from guilt and manifesting in belief in unworthiness.

Soul - A term sometimes used to represent eternal consciousness.

Special Relationship - Any thought or entity pursued by the ego in its endless search for happiness.

Spirituality - The belief that our true essence and our Higher Power are found within I.

Stimulus-Response - The ego's automatic process for "thought".

Student - Anyone in search of the truth.

Suppression - Internalization of denial.

Teacher - Everyone, at all times. What is taught is either truth and love or illusion and fear.

Thought - Process of creation or mis-creation (there are no idle thoughts).

Time/Distance - Two illusions which cannot exist unless past/future are beliefs.

Truth - What is. What is not is illusion.

“Turning it Over” - The action of relinquishing our will in favor of His.

Will - A verb (only a noun when applied to ego) representing the process of creation, as practiced by God and humans.

Affirmations

The following are several affirmations you might find helpful in your growth. Use how and when they can be of most value at a particular phase of your quest. The list tends to be in order of increasing awareness and growth.

If nothing changes, nothing changes.

More of the same means more of the same.

I'm not responsible for the reactions of others.

I'm not responsible for what others think.

The more I try to control, the more I am controlled.

Changes of the magnitude of “only” can make perfection chaos, or chaos perfection.

I can accept you, and I can let you go with love.

What others receive bothers me only to the degree I can covet.

Beware of leaders who call themselves leaders.

Until Truth is the leader, it's best everyone go their own way.

I search my fears and anxieties and find truth and strength.

I seek Truth.

Serenity creates ease, internal conflict produces disease.

I can make one choice, and I will follow You.

I love you, as I love me.

Thank you for custody of all these worldly things.

Moderation and appropriateness are natural states. But we experience eternity less one by passing from one extreme to the other.

Others' imperfections bother me only as much as I possess similar faults.

It's OK.

I fear nothing, because I understand and have faith.

Faith plus humility equals courage.

I have what my belief system creates, and I get what I want. I am careful of what I want.

Robert E. Strayer

I no longer need the protection of fat.

I will give up one thing to make room for something better.

Take this, I don't know what I need or don't need.

I am manifesting this confusion. Please let me see it differently.

Anger is a loss of control. Control is impossible. So anger serves little purpose.

By releasing you I release myself.

Teach me how to forgive.

By forgiving you I know I am forgiven.

I am of you, and you of me. We are each other.

People are the mirrors by which we see ourselves.

I am innocent and free from guilt.

I receive by giving.

The Foundation for Inner Peace

To learn more about *A Course in Miracles*, I recommend you visit the website of the authorized publisher and copyright holder of the Course, the Foundation for Inner Peace: www.acim.org. While there are many excellent organizations supporting study of *A Course in Miracles*, this is the original one with the greatest variety and depth of Course-related materials, including biographies and photos of the scribes, DVDs, free access to daily Lessons, audio recordings, information about the many

languages into which the Course has been translated, and electronic versions of the Course, including mobile device apps.

The Foundation for Inner Peace is a non-profit organization dedicated to uplifting humanity through *A Course in Miracles*. The organization depends on donations and is currently immersed in translating the Course into many languages (26 to date). The Foundation also donates thousands of copies of the Course. If you would like to support more people to benefit from *A Course in Miracles*, donating to the Foundation for Inner Peace or one of the many other fine Course-related organizations would be a worthy endeavor.

The Twelve Steps of _____ Anonymous
or
Adult Children of Imperfect Parents

1. We admitted, that alone, we were powerless - that our lives had become unmanageable.*
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made the decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for the knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

The Twelve Steps are reprinted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. Permission to reprint and adapt the Twelve Steps does not mean that AA is in any way affiliated with this publication. AA is a program of recovery from alcoholism. Use of the Twelve Steps in connection with programs and activities which are patterned after AA but which address other problems does not imply otherwise.

*Different fellowships using the Twelve Steps use different wording here. It is generally stated over what we are powerless, such as alcohol, and it is stated to whom we carry this message. We use a generic wording to adapt Steps 1 and 12 to include *any* pattern or special relationship resulting from low self-esteem.

Personal Notes and Inspirations



Personal Notes and Inspirations



Personal Notes and Inspirations

