

HIGHROAD TO HAPPINESS

The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

A fundamental interpretation of the twelve steps of recovery dedicated to all A.A.'s everywhere, especially to the men and women who have just accepted this way of life, and to those who still wander in the darkness of alcoholic despair in the hope they too will join us in our sobriety, happiness and peace of mind.

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Step Number Four Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

A successful business concern periodically conducts inventories. They check up the stock on hand, quantity, quality and movability. The fast moving products that produce a profit for the concern are restocked. Those that lay on the shelf gathering dust from year to year are gotten rid of as soon as possible, to be replaced by items that will make the company a better concern for having them in stock.

As we in AA approach Step Four, we too are checking the stock on hand, taking stock of ourselves. Like the business concern, our lives have...been unsuccessful because we are carrying too much dead stock that weighed us down.

The Alcoholics Anonymous program is a positive program; it offers suggestions, it gives something to do, and now is the time to knuckle down and bring to light the dead stock, character defects that caused the thinking (that) our drinking was a symbol of. We are honestly and humbly checking our assets and liabilities, physically, mentally and spiritually. Our success with this Step, as with the program, depends on our

honesty, humility, sincerity and thoroughness.

We are not merely turning over a new leaf; we are opening a beautiful new book in our lives. When we turn the direction of our lives over to a Power greater than ourselves we threw the old book away. Yes, we threw the old book of our lives away, but some of the stories, pictures and thoughts that were part of that book remain in our minds to haunt us, so we begin now to weed them out.

In going all the way with this step we should remember it takes courage. Courage to see ourselves as we really are. So we square our shoulders, take a deep breath and again do the unpleasant-face facts. We delve down deep into our innermost selves and bring our for inspection-ourselves, as we really are. Listing our faults and good points under a single ledger plan of liabilities and assets we proceed with our task. Most of us I believe, tackle the liability side first because when we honestly and thoroughly check up they outnumber the assets side many times over. All of us think, regardless of how bad we have been, do have some good points. Very few, perhaps, but some that we can hang onto and start to cultivate and develop. They will help us to...a better life.

Thus, in this step we bring before us our character defects that we are to avoid—weed out (and also) our good points that we are to cultivate. We list under liabilities all the lying, stealing and cheating that we have been guilty of. We spend much time and go deep into our extreme selfishness. We are all guilty here. All the loved ones we have hurt, friends and acquaintances we have driven away by our drinking, the resentments we have built up. We were resentful at people who were trying to help us. We felt they didn't understand our problem. They tried to reason with us, and being trapped, we became resentful. By our egotism and self-centeredness we stepped on others' toes, and when they retaliated, we immediately got sore and resentful. But in reality, weren't we at fault? Wasn't it our egotism and self-centeredness that caused others to strike back? Yes, we became resentful. Living a life filled with resentments leads only to unhappiness and frustration. Because by it we shut ourselves off from the source of strength that guides us on our way.

Going on, we listed our intolerance, fear, anger, impatience, self-pity, discouragement and any number of other faults that most of us have when we undertake this, our first general inventory. It is well, I think, to ask ourselves some questions at this point.

We always considered ourselves tolerant perhaps, but are we? Are we tolerant of other people's ideas, their little actions, their opinions? Or do we dislike everyone who doesn't always agree with us. Do we dislike them because we don't like their looks? Are we tolerant of other people's creeds and races? Are we fearful? Are we afraid to face realities? Do we run away through fear rather than face an unpleasant task? Do we shun people because we are afraid?

Do we become angry easily? Do we have a bad temper? Do we become sorry for ourselves? Discouragement is a danger signal not to be taken lightly. It often creeps in if we drop our guard momentarily. The more questions we ask ourselves the longer our liability list appears, but also the better we begin to feel about it. We feel now we know where we stand, and with the help of God we can do something about them.

On the asset side, if we are honest, most of us don't have to do much writing but perhaps we have been humble, tolerant, generous or patient. If we have we list them.

Having completed our inventory we look it over and it seems a momentous task to overcome these faults. If we had to do it by ourselves it would perhaps be impossible, but let's not forget we are no longer alone. We now have a Director

who will guide us; we merely go along His way. The elimination of our character defects are necessary if we are to gain the full rewards of the AA Way of Life.

Cultivation of honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love through the help of God seems a sound, sensible policy to follow in ridding ourselves of our faults.

The Brighter Side Group of Waterloo, Iowa wrote "High Road to Happiness". They wrote this 20-page guide to the Twelve Steps in the late 1940's or early 1950 (the pamphlet is undated). It is of significance, because it is yet one more written confirmation that the Fourth Step inventory taken by the early A.A.'s consisted of an Assets and Liabilities Checklist rather than the Three Column Inventory found on page 65 of the "Big Book". It also shows that the Oxford Group Four Absolutes of Honesty Purity, Unselfishness and Love were still an integral part of the A.A. program ten years after the "Big Book" was written. www.backtobasics.com