

Step 8 Study guide

Version of August 20, 2019

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

"Made a list"

In Step Four and Five we first made and then explored a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. A byproduct of working these Steps thoroughly is a list of some (and often most, if not all) of the people that we have harmed. This list, however incomplete, will serve as a starting point for Step Eight.

By living the preceding seven Steps, we have come to realize that we have been in conflict not only with ourselves, but also with people and situations. Since Steps Eight and Nine are both concerned with personal relations, it behooves us to examine our personal relations, so as to extract every bit of information about our inner selves and our fundamental difficulties.

The first part of Step Eight is making a list of all persons we have harmed. What is meant by "harmed?" Simply put, harm is the result of our instincts being in collision with the well-being of others. The defects and shortcomings of the acquired false self clutter our behavior, deprive it of directness, truthfulness and simplicity, and thereby cause physical, mental, emotional, financial or spiritual damage to other people. In the process of compiling our Step Eight lists, we backtrack through our lives and make an accurate and unsparing survey of the human wreckage that we have left in our wake. The time has come to redouble our efforts to see how many people we have hurt, and in what ways.

As we ponder warped or broken relationships with other persons, the acquired false self may react. It may go on the defensive, denying the facts or justifying itself. There again it may respond with a twisted sense of power, relishing its ability to affect others and not

caring about the morality of its actions. Both responses can occur at the same time.

Fear, conspiring with false pride and shame, is liable to hinder our making the list. We must expose this negative impulse by resorting to an honest and deep search of our motives and actions. While working Step 8, we may suddenly remember forgotten events. We may also see defects so painful or threatening that we have kept them hidden from ourselves until now. A deeper understanding of our choices and character may emerge. It behooves us to apply the remedies of Steps 4 to 7 to those situations and defects whose exact nature we have now more precisely uncovered. An accurate and exhaustive survey of our past will lead us to freedom from the bondage of self.

“Became willing”

The other part of Step Eight is becoming willing to make amends to all persons we have harmed. Once again, *willingness* on our part is the key word. We are not asking for restitution at this point, only for a willingness to make things right.

Willingness has to do with forgiveness. In being willing to make amends, we are, in effect, asking other people to forgive us our trespasses. We must first start out by forgiving the people that we have harmed for reminding us of our failures and for triggering painful feelings of shame and guilt. We have run from these feelings by blaming the people involved, or by projecting our own condemnation onto them, or by convincing ourselves that our trespasses were not so grave in the end. This practice — forgiving these people their passive role in our suffering— opens us up to forgiving others their active role in causing us harm.

In summary, we carefully survey this whole area of human relations. We further uncover exactly what personality traits caused the acquired false self in us to injure and disturb others. In doing this, we ransack our memory for the people whom we have offended. We hold ourselves to admitting the things we have done, meanwhile forgiving the wrongs done us, real or fancied. The practice of

forgiveness entails a taking of responsibility, which in turn enables us to become willing to make the amends that are due. We complete Step Eight by simply being willing to make the amends, not necessarily by being ready to make any *specific* amends. The how and the when of our amends are the matter of Step Nine.

WRITING GUIDE

Answer the following questions in writing, as thoroughly and as honestly as you can. You are out to get the destructive, acquired false self and its habitual behaviors, which have been ruining your personal relationships.

1. What is your definition of the word "harmed"?
2. Do you believe that defective relations with other human beings have nearly always been the immediate cause of your woes? If so, briefly describe some of these defective relationships.
3. Are you willing to ask your Higher Power for help in working Step Eight? Pray the Step Eight prayer, or compose an equivalent one.

"Higher Power, I ask Your help in making my list of all those I have harmed. I will take responsibility for my mistakes and Be forgiving to others as You are forgiving to me. Grant me the willingness to begin my restitution. This I pray. Amen."

4. Make a list of all the people that you have harmed, including the people toward whom you react unfavorably because of a belief that they have harmed you in the past.
5. Have I included my true self on the list of persons I have harmed? Do I understand why I ought to be in the list?
6. Using the list from question 3, admit the things you have done which caused physical, financial, mental, emotional or spiritual

damage to each person on the list. Write these things beside each person's name.

7. Carefully survey the compiled list of persons and how you harmed them. Then discern what beliefs, behaviors and character defects of the acquired false self injured and disturbed them. Briefly note these factors beside each name.
8. After writing the relevant factors beside each name, check to make sure that you have already asked God to remove them. You may need to temporarily return to Steps 6 and 7.
9. Consider each person you have harmed. What are your obstacles to being willing to make amends to that person? Make sure to consider obstacles such as embarrassment, fear of being shamed, fear of loss, fear of incurring personal harm, fear of retaliation.
10. Explore your list of obstacles. Are there any recurring obstacles?
11. Consider the persons you have harmed to whom you are not fully willing to make amends. Does your willingness to make amends change after forgiving them for their real or imagined wrongs? Does it change after praying for them?
12. In what other ways can you become willing to make amends, if you are not already? Are you willing to pray to become fully willing now (as opposed to at some unspecified time in the far future)?

This material was adapted with permission from the study guides of the SA San Diego Intergroup, which in turn were adapted from materials by the Top of the Hill Group, an AA group. Their resources included Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book) and Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.