

STEP FIVE

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

Step Five required courage as well as rigorous honesty. We were beginning to practice the principle of integrity. We had written our moral inventory and were ready to share it. The secrets that some of us swore to take to the grave had become obstacles to further spiritual growth. We had to become willing not only to disclose the nature of our wrongs, but also to be quite specific and precise about them. We were uncovering the destructive patterns that resulted from our resentments, fears, and selfishness, and it was time to share them with a sponsor or spiritual guide in order to help us move beyond them.

When contemplating this step, the biggest obstacle that many of us faced was a shortage of trust. We did not fully trust ourselves, and trusted others even less. Some of us procrastinated by insisting that we could not find the perfect person to hear our inventory. Some said that we were using therapy and did not need to use a spiritual tool. For some, our excuse was that this step seemed to mirror the confessional of a religion we had earlier rejected. All of these excuses were manifestations of a lack of humility. We were afraid of letting someone else know who we really were. But it was time to take off the masks we'd hidden behind for years.

We finally swallowed our pride and met with a spiritual advisor, sponsor, or in some cases, even a total stranger. We read them our inventory and were careful not

to hold back any of our secrets. By admitting precisely what we had done that had caused us and the others around us the most pain, we earned a fresh start in life. Most of us immediately felt lighter. We found that admitting our wrongs to God, ourselves, and another human being helped to bring about a powerful personality transformation or spiritual experience. The inventory illuminated patterns of resentment, fear, and selfishness. We started to see their destructiveness. We realized, maybe for the first time, that these patterns were objectionable. Knowing this, we were free to act in new ways that made us happier and even brought joy to those around us. We started to grow away from being self-serving, and toward being of service to others.

The Fifth Step can give a recovering addict a strong feeling of social connectedness and spiritual oneness. It is a special exercise in humility. After all, it was heartening when we first discovered that actions, which had filled us with shame and guilt, could be understood and accepted by another person. So we were careful to resist the temptation to hold back special little secrets. We learned that quite often addicts can use guilt and shame to magnify character defects with a kind of grandiosity; we're not just bad, we think, we're "the worst of the worst." But more often than not, no matter what secret we shared, we found a sympathetic person who had done things very similar to what we had done. We were no longer cut off from help because of a belief that what we did was particularly and uniquely shameful. We got a chance to rejoin the human race.

We not only disclosed our wrong actions, but many of us also laid bare the things we regretted not doing or accomplishing. We dug deep into our inner being, made a

list of our past mistakes, saw the patterns emerge from them, and then admitted them. Putting our inventories on paper had helped us sort things out in our own minds. Speaking frankly about ourselves to our Higher Power and another human being expanded our self-knowledge, and relieved us of the burden of our past. A sense of belonging began to grow in us.

Without Step Five, our dedication to remaining clean would have remained largely theoretical. Just knowing our wrongs was not enough; we could easily retreat by justifying, minimizing, exaggerating, or denying them. This was very dangerous. Trying to live a clean and sober life while acting the same as we did when using is, at best, very painful. At worst, it can lead to relapse or suicide. Step Five opened a channel to the love that can heal us.

Step Five is more than just reading our Fourth Step inventory. With the help of God and another human being, we faced the facts of our lives. We took a stride towards wisdom. Through the Fifth Step, we gained a tool, which we could use to take an objective look at ourselves. With the help and counsel of another person, we could confirm our findings. We used our human faculties, the counsel of another human being, and our relationship with a Higher Power to be born anew. This was the beginning of the experience of self-acceptance.

Perhaps the most important aspects of the Fifth Step are the acceptance, compassion, and forgiveness we feel from our sponsor and from a Higher Power. The guilty feelings born in our past start to fall away. We begin to feel a closeness and an intimacy with all of creation. In fact, the wreckage of our past actually starts to feel like a resource of experience from which we can begin to learn and grow.

While listening to our Fifth Step, some of our sponsors helped us make a preliminary list of persons to whom we owed direct amends. Some left that for us to do. Our sponsors helped us to see who had harmed us, and whom we had harmed. We were freed from the kind of childish thinking that had allowed us to accept blame for the misbehavior of others yet not accept responsibility for our own actions and inactions.

This step helped us move towards sanity. It cut through our mental cobwebs like a sword and slew the dragons of delusion that had plagued us. We now find we no longer have to behave a certain way because of a resentment we acquired years ago. We no longer need to have the same kind of cavalier, selfish and manipulative attitude toward our sexual partners. We began the journey toward becoming a true friend, a valued worker, a loving sibling, a trusted child, and a nurturing parent. We knew what our fears were and why we had them. They came out of the shadows and were a matter of record to ourselves, our sponsors or confidants, and to God. We found a new closeness and connection to our Higher Power.

We thought Step Five would be humiliating, but after taking it, we discovered it to be empowering. We found ourselves again. We tapped into a well of honesty about our pasts that gave us strength and hope for the present. Doing our Fifth Step brought us into the heart of the fellowship of MA. We began to feel powerfully connected to our concept of a loving God and to the other addicts in our group. This led us to the willingness required to take Step Six.