

STEP FOUR

*Made a searching and fearless
moral inventory of ourselves.*

After we became honest enough to take the first step, open-minded enough to take the second, and willing enough to take the third, we were ready to confront Step Four. We have observed what happens to those who resist this step. Some marijuana addicts will not follow the suggestion to do this step, or to do it promptly. Some of them stop coming to meetings and start using again. Others keep coming back, but their spiritual awareness does not grow. They recount the same experiences, express the same emotions, and suffer the same pain. Nothing changes for them; they appear to be stuck. We learned that as long as we resisted taking our inventory, we put our sobriety and our lives at risk. Just as denial once stopped us from seeking recovery, defiance, shame, and fear can hinder our spiritual growth. Once we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to a Higher Power, it was imperative that we do just that. After all, the faith we acquired by taking Step Three meant very little if we did not follow it with immediate action.

The disease of addiction impaired our ability to know ourselves and to be true to ourselves. Regardless of our way of life, our denial about our disease coupled with a lack of self-awareness kept us in an endless loop where we practiced the same destructive behaviors again and again, while always expecting different results. Step Four is a fact-finding process meant to put an end to this interminable cycle by identifying those facets of our character that

blocked us from a relationship with a Higher Power. Step Four required courage.

Some people believe that our instincts have been given to us by a Higher Power and exist for a purpose. A desire for material, emotional, and sexual security insures our survival as a species. As addicts, we allowed our healthy instincts to get out of control. These feelings drove us, dominated us, and ruled our lives. They became warped and exaggerated. The pursuit of these desires caused pain and suffering to the people in our lives. They, in turn, reacted-and we ultimately resented it.

We all had our own patterns to find. Sometimes, with the help of our sponsors, we found there were certain similar threads woven through many of our lives; we were not terminally unique. We indulged ourselves in fruitless searches for people and outside factors we could blame for the spiritual emptiness of our lives. We alternated between blaming ourselves and blaming others. We were often quite childish. Our ability to experience emotions was impaired. We held on to resentments about the past, which prohibited us from embracing the present and living our lives to the fullest. Some of us were full of remorse and could not forgive ourselves for making mistakes. That is, we would not accept our humanity.

We were full of fear. Those fears stopped us from doing what needed to be done. Some of us were delusional; we lived in a private world that no one else shared. Perhaps we considered suicide, were otherwise depressed, or found ourselves unable to interact with other people. Maybe we were desperately lonely. For many of us, our self-pity became anger at the world for mistreating us and, for some, this anger escalated into rage. Some of us lied, cheated, and

stole in a vain attempt to fulfill our desires for material, emotional, and sexual security.

Within the fellowship, we found that many of us had done the same kinds of things, had felt the same, and had experienced similar thoughts. We were compulsive, obsessive, and could not express the full range of human emotions. Full of fear and resentments, we identified with those who were still in the same place, and wanted to follow those who had found the way out.

Taking inventory is not a thinking exercise; it is a writing exercise. By getting our experiences on paper, we began the process of shedding our resentments, remorse, and fear. We discovered the patterns of behavior that had allowed us to be needlessly hurt or which we had used to harm others.

Did our anger, fear, belligerence, defiance, and denial combine with our disease and lead us to hospitals, jail cells, or gutters? Were we derelicts who were unable to support our families or ourselves? Were we functioning as marginal members of society, stuffing our feelings, and becoming furtive, neurotic bundles of unexpressed emotions? Were we quick to blame society and our fellow human beings for our woes? Were we hypocrites who justified engaging in an explicitly illegal activity? Were we full of tremendous insights, but unable to follow through with the vast projects we envisioned? Were we creatures of appetite using other drugs, alcohol, sex, food, or other people to try to wrest satisfaction out of the world? Were we talented people with fantastic potential who, even if we found success, could not savor it? Regardless of our career triumphs or artistic achievements, did we feel unfulfilled? And even though we had many social relationships, did we

feel a lacking, an emptiness? Were we egoists forever seeking approval?

When we put pen to paper, the answers to questions like these began to appear. We began to realize that the injuries and offenses against us, real or imagined, had kept us mired in fear and anger. We began to see our part in what had happened to us. We gained a new understanding about those who had harmed us. We saw that they were often spiritually sick or misguided, just like us. We found that we had had a role in some of our supposed misfortune. A rigorously honest inventory showed us that we might have stepped on the toes of others in a misguided, drugged, and self-centered quest for happiness and fulfillment. Thus, we gained insight into our relationships.

Many of us were afraid to start this process, but we finally became so uncomfortable that we had to do something. At this time, we sought guidance and direction from our sponsor. We did not have to take this journey alone. We asked our Higher Power for the willingness, strength, and courage to look at ourselves honestly, fearlessly, and thoroughly. We did this each time we sat down to write, whether it was one time or several. There are many ways to do the Fourth Step. It is not an autobiography. One suggestion follows.

First, we made a list of our resentments. We listed our resentments of people, places, things, and principles. Next to that we wrote why we had each resentment. We then wrote down how it had affected us. Did it affect our self-esteem or our personal relationships? Maybe it had affected our material or emotional security, or sex relations. Were our ambitions (social, physical security, or sexual) threatened?

After that, we had to do some real soul searching. What were our own wrongs and mistakes? Where were our faults, shortcomings, or defects? What was our part in each resentment? Were we selfish or dishonest? Had we been self-seeking or frightened? Had we been inconsiderate? Remember, this was our personal inventory. We had to disregard the other side and look only at our own part. We had to be rigorously honest with ourselves and admit our shortcomings on paper.

We did the same thing with all of our fears. We listed the fears, and then why we had each one. We wrote how each fear affected us, and our part in it.

Next, we reviewed our sexual conduct, making a list of our partners and determining in which relationships we were selfish. Whom did we harm? Whom did we use? Whom had we taken advantage of? What did we do? What could we have done instead? How did it affect us? We were thorough in all of this.

We then listed any other moral issues that did not seem to fit in the previous categories, including times we lied, cheated, stole, or harmed others. We also listed any secrets that we had not mentioned so far. Experience has taught us that we are as sick as our secrets.

After we listed and analyzed our resentments, we began to realize that they no longer had as much power over us. We began to see that the negative traits and behaviors we had practiced, and may even have once enjoyed or regarded as pleasurable, would no longer work in our lives. It became possible to face our fears with the help of our Higher Power. We knew what we were afraid of, and why. In the instant that we faced our fears, we began to overcome them. After we took stock of our

relationships (both sexual and otherwise), we began to look at these relationships differently and with less selfishness.

Once we had written down everything that we had been unwilling to deal with for so long, we were finally free to look at what was right in us. For many of us it was just as important to list our positive assets and attributes. Many of us discovered that we had low self-esteem. We learned that we are neither all bad, nor all good. We are simply human.

The Fourth Step opened windows for us. We rediscovered the many people who had helped us along the way and gained a new appreciation for our loved ones, friends, spiritual guides, and teachers. We began to transform our fears into faith and started to find a new way to love — unconditionally. Our attitude of denial and defiance began to change into an attitude of gratitude.

Some of us did not get it all the first time, so we did other inventories as more memories surfaced. There is nothing wrong with that. Taking inventory is a process we can repeat. However, once we began to look at our attitudes and behaviors with energy and honesty, we found the process to be more joyful than difficult. The pain of doing the Fourth Step was a lot less than the pain we would have held on to by not doing this step. It pays dividends beyond any that can be anticipated.

After writing our Fourth Step, we discovered both a new appreciation of our strengths and an acceptance of our weaknesses. We re-read our inventory. Sitting alone, we reviewed it carefully. We asked God to help us find any important things that we might have left out. We made certain that our admissions were thorough and honest. We were ready to take Step Five.