

## Step Eight

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

*Each of the previous Steps asked us to look within ourselves. Step Eight asks us to look outside ourselves, specifically toward the people we have harmed. With a humble heart and the recovery tools of the last seven Steps to aid us, we begin the process of seeking willingness to make amends. There is great wisdom in amends being a two-step process in which we first identify the amends and then develop the willingness to act. Step Eight provides us with time to contemplate the harms we have done to others along with space for a change of heart, thoughts, and behaviors. We ask our Higher Power to remove obstacles to willingness, such as resentments, fears, rationalization, and justification. Doing the work of this Step softens our hearts and makes space for forgiving ourselves and others.*

Our work in Step Four gave us the first glimpse of those we may have harmed. Many of us chose to use our Step Four findings as the starting point for our Step Eight list. We applied ourselves with honesty and humility as we added each name to our list. Having seen the healing changes this Step made in the lives of others who worked it before us, we felt encouraged. We had seen their attitudes and behaviors change. We had heard them share their lightness of spirit and the improvement in their relationships with others. We moved forward with hope that we could also be restored to sanity.

There were many ways to create the list. For some, it was simply handwritten. For others, it was a detailed spreadsheet with rows for people's names, a column for harm we had done to them, and a column for our level of willingness to make amends (e.g., now, someday, or not yet willing). Some of us asked our sponsors or others who had worked this Step for input on what had worked for them. With this wealth of information we created a method that worked best for us.

No matter how we constructed the list, it became a powerful tool. As we looked at each name, our Higher Power helped us become conscious of the harm our actions, thoughts, and behaviors had caused ourselves and others. Perhaps by being dishonest, selfish, self-seeking and frightened, our boundaries had become weak or non-existent. We may have become enmeshed in a victim, rescuer, and perpetrator dynamic that was addictive, compulsive, and out of control. Whether we caused harm inadvertently or purposefully, we acknowledged that our choices and behaviors had hurt others and ourselves.

Although Step Eight asks us to do the difficult work of accepting responsibility for our harmful actions and behaviors, we heard that one of the great purposes of this Step was to free ourselves from the guilt and shame we carried about our mistreatment of others and ourselves. With this in mind, we endeavored to be gentle and to exercise compassionate accountability for ourselves.

Prior to recovery we may not have been aware of how our character defects manifested in our relationships and dealings with others. What we thought were tools, options, or solutions may actually have been our faulty coping skills. Lashing out or retaliating may have been all we were capable of in certain situations. Punishing ourselves for this would actually work against the purpose of this Step. Instead, with the support of our sponsor, this Step brings us the opportunity to be accountable for our past **and present** actions **and** to free **ourselves** from the burdens of guilt, shame, and regret.

One of the biggest challenges many of us faced was being willing to make amends to those who had harmed us—especially if the harm to us felt far greater than the harm to them. Defensiveness, **pain**, wounded pride, judgment, and resentment toward such people blocked our willingness and stood in the way of our spiritual growth. Justification, rationalization, and minimizing came into play.

We recognized that these faulty defense mechanisms diverted our attention away from healthy remorse and from humbly seeking the spiritual gifts that willingness and acceptance bring to us. We realized that Step Eight is about healing ourselves, not exonerating others from their part. In our effort to move forward, we sought to detach from the other party's harm and focus on our part. Our part may have been a small portion of the overall harm that occurred in our interaction, but it was still our responsibility. By focusing on our part, we found healing and freedom from **the impediments of anger, blame, and resentment**.

Uncomfortable feelings and fears may have caused us to hesitate **taking** this Step. **Some of us were** tempted to stray out of the present into futurizing or “what if” territory. We reminded ourselves to stay within the scope of what was asked: to make a list and become willing. **All this Step required of us was that we become willing; no further action was asked.** We set aside concerns about outcomes or the possibility of facing the persons to whom we needed to make amends and kept our focus on the current Step. **With our Higher Power's help, we faced** any mental or emotional blocks as they arose. We trusted the process and had faith we'd be provided all we needed as we prepared for Step Nine.

Sponsors played a crucial role in helping us discern where we had been overly responsible for others by taking on unearned guilt or responsibility for harms we didn't cause. They helped us right-size our part and let go of issues that didn't belong to us. **Sponsors also helped us to recognize where we had avoided mentioning an issue or person to whom we may owe amends.**

Our list would not be complete without adding ourselves to it. Our Fourth Step revealed how we had harmed ourselves. For many of us, acknowledging and accepting this was harder than facing the harm we had caused others. We may have neglected ourselves, put ourselves in harm's way, ignored our needs, or acted against our values. We may have blamed and shamed ourselves for things we did not have control over, **such as** abuse or **harms** that were done to us when we were children. We may have ignored our Higher Power's will for us. Our health, peace of mind, and self-respect **may have** been

harmed. We accepted that it was appropriate and in fact vital to add ourselves to our Eighth Step list.

As we looked at our self-harm, we tried to be gentle. We stayed focused on self-acceptance, compassion, and forgiveness. If we were to free ourselves from the weight of our past behaviors, we had to accept and forgive our shortcomings and character defects. We also kept our eyes on the mental, emotional, and spiritual freedom this work could bring.

The wording in the Step, “became willing,” indicated a *process* in which a spiritual surrender or change of heart was needed. *Willingness* would lead us to detachment from the other party’s injustice or wrongs toward us. We would move towards acceptance of their humanness and imperfections, and release our resentments and pain.

We recalled times when we’d made amends **unwillingly**, out of obligation or to keep the peace, but it wasn’t heartfelt or genuine. Such amends gave us no relief. **Sometimes, we even** felt worse, and resentment and anger **grew**. We compared that to a time when we’d made heartfelt amends and considered how that felt. We realized that a willing heart unencumbered by anger and resentment could give true, genuine amends. We sought to find that place within us for each person on our list.

We asked our Higher Power for help with willingness. Perhaps there were people on our list to whom we were already willing and eager to make amends. Yet there were others with whom we still struggled, so we asked our Higher Power simply for the willingness *to be willing*. In such instances, **some of us** found it helpful to look with fresh eyes at those more challenging people on our list and to see things from their perspective. We sought to accept them as they were. We began to feel compassion and empathy toward them. Those feelings were indications that we were becoming willing. From this place we could feel resentment toward them slip away, and peace and forgiveness take its place. We felt a weight lifted from us.

As a result of our work, we experienced the change of heart we would need in order to make true amends. The priceless wisdom of this process became clear as we prepared to reach out and make reparations to those we had harmed.

### **The Gifts of Step Eight**

*Our work in Step Eight gave us hope **that we could** shed our old resentments, heal old wounds, and lead an intentional life -- one in which we avoid harming others or creating new resentments. We were confident that we had prepared **ourselves** to be able to set matters right and make amends to all those we had harmed, including ourselves. We were ready for Step Nine.*