

## Step Four:

I think you'll find that Step Four the Big Book way is really very simple and very fast, much simpler and faster than many of the Step Four methods that are popular in OA.

Last chapter we discussed Step Three. We learned that from the Big Book perspective, it is simply making a decision to go on with the Twelve Steps. "This was only a beginning," the Big Book says on page 63. And it says further, on page 64: "Though our decision [Step Three] was a vital and crucial step, it could have little permanent effect unless AT ONCE followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us."

In Step Two we learned that our Higher Power, which is deep down within us, was blocked off from us ("obscured", the Big Book says) because of calamities, pomp, and worship of other things (page 55). In Step Three we made a decision to place our will and our lives into the care of our Higher Power. What we have to do now is to be rid of those things in ourselves which have been blocking us from our Higher Power. When we get rid of the things that block us from our Higher Power, we will find that our Higher Power enters into our lives. The task at hand is to get rid of the blocks.

Step Four BEGINS this process of unblocking. It is NOT, however, the entire process. That process is Steps Four through Nine. The Big Book promises recovery by the end of Step Nine. And by virtue of Steps Ten and Eleven, that process continues through our entire lives.

That Step Four is not the entire inventory process is made clear by the discussion on pages 64 and 65. "Therefore, we STARTED upon a personal inventory. This was Step Four."

The Big Book compares our personal inventory with a business inventory. It says that the purpose of a business inventory is "to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade." In a business inventory, we look at the good and the bad of our business—what sells and what doesn't sell, what's in good shape and what's in bad shape.

As the Big Book points out, *one* of the objects of a commercial inventory "is to disclose damaged or unsalable goods, to get rid of them promptly and without regret." And the Big Book says, "We did

exactly the same thing with our lives. First, we searched out the flaws in our make-up which caused our failure."

This makes clear, I think, that the purpose of the Step Four inventory is NOT to look at BOTH the good and the bad of our lives, something that many Step Four inventory processes suggest.

No, the purpose of the Big Book way of doing an inventory is *solely* "to disclose damaged or unsalable goods" (Steps Four and Five) and "to get rid of them promptly and without regret" (Steps Six, Seven, Eight, and Nine).

Thus the inventory process is Steps Four through Nine. This will become significant when we discuss Step Ten.

Note that at the end of the discussion of Step Four, the Big Book says that we have made "an inventory of [our] grosser handicaps". It's very clear that in Step Four we deal with the big problems, and that we leave the refining for Steps Ten and Eleven. The Big Book continues to push us to do the steps quickly so we can reach recovery.

### Overview:

Let's start with the overview. The Big Book suggests that in Step Three we were "convinced that self, manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us" (page 64). The Big Book has three aspects of self that it wants us to look at.

The first is resentments, and we'll deal with them in this and the next chapter. We will find, I think, that a resentment is, in its broadest sense, the concept that "the past didn't go my way".

The second aspect of self, which we'll deal with the chapter after next, is fear. We will find, I think, that a fear is, in its broadest sense, the concept that "the future won't go my way".

The third aspect of self, which we'll also deal with the chapter after next, is sex conduct. We will find, I think, that the purpose of dealing with sex conduct is to figure out how we should handle the most difficult of relationships in order to have good relationships of every kind.

So the Big Book's ordering of Step Four is basically dealing with the Past, dealing with the Future, and then learning how to live in the present with other people. It's very simple and very powerful!

At [www.oabigbook.info](http://www.oabigbook.info) you can find examples of filled-out forms which might help you fill out your forms. You can find these examples in the Appendices to this book as well.

## Step Four—Resentments:

So let's start with resentments — what the Big Book calls “the ‘number one’ offender.” (page 64)

What is a resentment? It is something on our minds that we resent. Now “resentment” is broader than “anger”. It includes anger, but it goes much farther. Its Latin roots mean “to feel over and over”, and it's best described as anything that's living rent-free in your mind, things that you regret, things that anger you or that frustrate you, things that you wish had happened or hadn't happened, the what-ifs or if-lys of our lives.

You can consider a resentment as something or somebody that you're angry at because it occupies your mind. In a sense, then, you're angry at people to whom you've done wrongs, because your guilt continues to occupy your mind. That sense of resentment allows you to broaden the concept of anger beyond the dictionary definition.

In one way or another, a resentment, then, is that what happened in the past just didn't go your way. It's what we discovered in Step Three—that we want to be in charge, and that life hasn't gone our way.

The first instruction the Big Book gives is to list “people, institutions or principles with whom we were angry” (Page 64). It is true that the Big Book uses the word “angry”. I can only suggest that listing people, institutions, or principles that you resent (or that you are “angry” at because they occupy your mind) is very very helpful.

*People* are people. You make a list of people who are living rent-free in your mind.

*Institutions* are institutions—groups of people.

*Principles*, however, are not defined in the Big Book and are not easy to define. I find that it's very helpful to consider “principles” as meaning “ideas that seem to be true that bother me”. Here are some examples:

- I'll never get thin.
- There will always be terrible suffering in this world.
- I can never eat french fries again.
- Life sucks, and then you die.
- People ignore me.
- I'll never amount to anything.

- This program will never work.
- I'm fat and ugly and unlovable.
- No one understands my pain.

Don't put yourself down—but do put down principles *about* yourself that bother you. That will give you true insight into issues relating to you.

## Filling out the resentment form:

### COLUMN ONE:

The first instruction is simply to make a list. If you use the form available on the web site, you'll see that each form has room for three names of people or institutions or principles. Since the second column is going to have much more writing on it, if you know that a particular name or institution or principle is going to have a lot of writing in the second column, you could reserve a whole page for that particular item.

Making this list is relatively simple. The question is “what is on your mind right now?” It's not “what has been on your mind in the past?” Therefore you're just putting things down that you're conscious of, not things that you think you should put down. You may have had some traumatic things happen to you but have put them to rest and don't think about them. If that's true, why put them down? We're just putting down what's affecting us now.

I've put down very serious items, like my wife and my parents and my children, like Hitler and certain politicians and murderers, like ex-girlfriends and the man I trusted who lied to me, and very minor things, like people who don't spell words correctly or that person who cut me off at the intersection.

I also put down people I've harmed, because I continue to think about that harm and feel guilty about it, and that's a resentment as well.

I have found that if I write my list in an evening I will remember some more things in the morning.

### COLUMN TWO:

The second instruction is to ask “why we were angry” (page 64), or what “our injuries” were (page 65). An example is given at the bottom of page 65 for what we write in this column. We are to write

# The "BIG BOOK'S" Way to Be Rid of Resentment (pages 63—67)

INSTRUCTIONS:	Affects my: (3)	Core Character Defects (4)
<p>Study from the bottom of page 63 to the end of page 65 and then follow its instructions: a) List all people, institutions and principles (Column 1); from <b>top to bottom</b>. b) List all "causes" (Column 2), <b>top to bottom</b>. c) Do all six instincts in Column 3 from <b>top to bottom for each "cause"</b>. d) Consider the first three columns carefully. e) Then, complete Column 4 from <b>top to bottom</b>.</p> <p><b>I'm resentful at: (1)</b></p>	<p><b>DO NOT FORGET THIS!</b></p> <p>each person who has harmed you or someone and say "_____ is spiritually sick." Don't forget to say the Resentment Prayer (Lines 3-5, page 67), "God, please help me show _____ the same tolerance, pity and patience I would cheerfully grant a sick friend" for each and every person who has harmed you, themselves or someone else in Column 1 prior to starting Column 4.</p>	<p>"Putting out of our minds the wrongs others have done, [use fold lines to cover Columns 2 and 3] we resolutely looked for our own mistakes. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened? . . . [D]isregard the other person involved entirely. Where were we to blame? . . . When we saw our faults we <b>listed</b> them. We placed them before us in <b>black and white</b>. We admitted our wrongs honestly and were willing to set these matters straight." (page 67)</p>
<p><b>The causes: (2)</b></p>	<p>Selfish: Dishonest: Self-Seeking: Frightened:</p>	<p>Selfish: Dishonest: Self-Seeking: Frightened:</p>
<p><b>The causes: (2)</b></p>	<p>Selfish: Dishonest: Self-Seeking: Frightened:</p>	<p>Selfish: Dishonest: Self-Seeking: Frightened:</p>
<p><b>The causes: (2)</b></p>	<p>Selfish: Dishonest: Self-Seeking: Frightened:</p>	<p>Selfish: Dishonest: Self-Seeking: Frightened:</p>

**Clear Form**

**THE BIG BOOK'S WAY OF REMOVING FEARS (PP. 67 & 68)**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** **a)** Study from the bottom of page 67 to the bottom of page 68 in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. **b)** Complete column 1 (listing whom or what I am fearful of), **from top to bottom**. **c)** Complete the remaining columns from **top to bottom** for each fear in column 1. Remember that “we are now on a different basis; the basis of trusting and relying upon God. We trust infinite God rather than our finite selves. . . . Just to the extent that we do as we think He would have us, and humbly rely on Him, does He enable us to match calamity with serenity” (page 68).

I'm fearful of: (1)	Why do I have the fear? (2)	Where was my trust & reliance? (3)		Did self reliance work? (4)		Fear Prayer: "God, please remove my fear and direct my attention to what you would have me be?" (5)	What would God have you be? Write out your answer to that question for each and every fear listed. (6)
		Infinite God	My Finite Self	Yes	No	COMPLETED FEAR PRAYER?	
		Infinite God	My Finite Self	Yes	No	COMPLETED FEAR PRAYER?	
		Infinite God	My Finite Self	Yes	No	COMPLETED FEAR PRAYER?	
		Infinite God	My Finite Self	Yes	No	COMPLETED FEAR PRAYER?	
		Infinite God	My Finite Self	Yes	No	COMPLETED FEAR PRAYER?	
		Infinite God	My Finite Self	Yes	No	COMPLETED FEAR PRAYER?	
		Infinite God	My Finite Self	Yes	No	COMPLETED FEAR PRAYER?	
		Infinite God	My Finite Self	Yes	No	COMPLETED FEAR PRAYER?	

# THE BIG BOOK'S WAY TO "SENSIBLY OVERHAUL" OUR OWN SEX CONDUCT (Pages 68—70)

**INSTRUCTIONS:** a) Study from the bottom of page 68 to the end of third paragraph on page 70. b) Fill in Column 1 from top to bottom. c) Do Column 2 from top to bottom. d) Fill in each of the remaining columns from top to bottom. Do not work across the page from left to right. Don't forget the **Sex Prayer** ("God, please mold my ideals and help me to live up to them") on page 69, and the Big Book's **Sex Meditation** ("God, please show me what to do about this [each] specific matter") on page 69. "The right answer will come if we want it". This will shape a "sane and sound ideal for our future sex life" (page 69). Be sure to restudy what happens if we "fall short of the chosen ideal and stumble" on page 70. Be sure to continue to pray the "Earnest" prayers from page 70 (on the right hand side of this page) for ongoing guidance, strength, sanity, and the right ideal. **Clear Form Data**

Whom did I hurt? (1)	Where was I (2)	Did I arouse: (3)	Where was I at fault, what should I have done instead? (4)	Was each relation? (5)	Sex Prayer Page 69(6)	Sex Meditation Page 69(7)	The Earnest Prayers page 70
Selfish:		Jealousy?		Yes	"God, please mold my ideals and help me to live up to them."	"God, please show me what to do about this [each] specific matter"	We earnestly pray for:
Dishonest:		Suspicion?		Yes			The right ideal
Inconsiderate:		Bitterness?		No			Guidance in each questionable situation
				S E L F I S H	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Selfish:		Jealousy?		Yes	"God, please mold my ideals and help me to live up to them."	"God, please show me what to do about this [each] specific matter"	Sanity
Dishonest:		Suspicion?		Yes			The strength to do the right thing
Inconsiderate:		Bitterness?		No			If sex is troublesome, we throw ourselves the harder into helping others.
				S E L F I S H	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	We think of their needs and work for them.
Selfish:		Jealousy?		Yes	"God, please mold my ideals and help me to live up to them."	"God, please show me what to do about this [each] specific matter"	This takes us out of ourselves.
Dishonest:		Suspicion?		Yes			It quiets the imperious urge, when to yield would mean heartache.
Inconsiderate:		Bitterness?		No			
				S E L F I S H	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

short and to-the-point description of the various things that put these people or these institutions or these principles in our minds. We need to write only enough so that we know what we are talking about. We're not filling out this second column for anyone but ourselves.

Let me give some examples.

Beside Hitler, for example, I can put:

- responsible for the deaths of millions of people
- furthered the cause of anti-Semitism
- is still a hero to some people
- created conditions that created problems for my growing up

Beside an ex-girlfriend, for example (and this is ONLY an example!), I could put:

- didn't love me enough
- used me
- I used her
- that one day when . . .
- I still think of her
- if only . . .

Beside the institution of government, for example, I could put:

- doesn't accomplish anything
- I don't get involved enough
- people are still suffering

Beside the principle of "I'll never get thin", for example, I could put:

- I'll never be attractive to the opposite sex
- I'll die early
- I'll waste those pants I've been saving for ten years!
- I don't want to give up food badly enough

You can see the kind of things we fill out in the second column. The object is to have as many points as possible, but there's no need to go into any details on each point.

### COLUMN THREE:

The third instruction is to ask ourselves "Was it our self-esteem, our security, our ambitions, our

personal, or sex relations, which had been interfered with?" (page 65). (You'll note at the bottom of page 64, a similar set of categories, but with "pocketbooks"—wallets or purses—instead of "security".) The resentment form has separate sub-columns for each one of these concepts. As well, because the example at the bottom of page 65 has "fear" in that third column as well, the form has a separate sub-column for fear.

Self-esteem means how I feel about myself. Security means how safe I feel, including financially safe. Ambitions means what I want out of life. Personal relations, sex relations, and fear, are obvious.

So for each one of the "causes" (column two) we put check-marks where each one of these sub-categories has been affected.

Using the Hitler example above, for instance:

- *responsible for the deaths of millions of people.* Doesn't affect my self-esteem and sex relations, does affect my security, my ambitions, and my personal relationships, and is associated with fear.
- *furthered the cause of anti-Semitism.* Does affect my self-esteem, security, ambitions, personal relationships, and is associated with fear; doesn't affect my sex relations.
- *is still a hero to some people.* Doesn't affect my self-esteem, my personal relations, my sex relations; does affect my security, my ambitions, and my fear.
- *created conditions that created problems for my growing up. . . . etc.*

Using the "I'll never be thin" example above, for instance:

- *I'll never be attractive to the opposite sex.* Affects my self-esteem, ambitions, personal and sex relations and fear; doesn't affect my security.
- *I'll die early.* Doesn't affect my self-esteem, personal or sex relations; affects my ambitions and fear and security.
- *I'll waste those pants I've been saving for ten years!* Affects my security (pocketbooks), but doesn't affect anything else.
- *I don't want to give up food badly enough. . . . etc.*

So you can see that filling out these sub-columns involves some thinking about each particular point in column two and how it is affecting me.

The Big Book says about this process: “We went back through our lives. Nothing counted but thoroughness and honesty” (page 65).

I don’t know how long it will take each one of you to do this, but it shouldn’t take a very long time. Even if you end up with 200 names of people and institutions and principles, and even if you put down four or five points about most of them, and ten or twenty points about some of them, that’s not going to take more than a total of ten or fifteen hours. Granted, you may want to take some time to do this, to think about things, but the object is to write down what’s on your mind, not what’s lurking in your sub-conscious mind. Column one is naming; column two is venting; and column three begins an analysis.

#### EXAMINING CAREFULLY WHAT WE’VE DONE:

Now here’s what the Big Book says after we finish these three columns. “The first thing apparent was that this world and its people were often quite wrong” (pages 64 to 65).

It is truly an amazing feeling after filling out these three columns to see how many check-marks we have put down. We begin to see that the most important things about ourselves—how we feel about ourselves (self-esteem), how safe we feel (security), how frustrated we feel (ambitions), how we relate to others (personal relations), how we relate sexually to others (sex relations), and how fearful we are—are being controlled by other people and institutions and abstract concepts. No wonder we’re not happy. And no wonder we eat. The Big Book says:

It is plain that a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness. To the precise extent that we permit these, do we squander the hours that might have been worth while. But with the alcoholic, whose hope is the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience, this business of resentment is infinitely grave. We found that it is fatal. For when harboring such feelings we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit. The insanity of alcohol returns and we drink again. And with us, to drink is to die. If we were to

live, we had to be free of anger. The grouch and the brainstorm were not for us. They may be the dubious luxury of normal men, but for alcoholics these things are poison. (page 65)

How true those words are! Any life—alcoholic or compulsive eater or not—which includes deep resentment tends to futility and unhappiness, because we waste time that we could have used for something else. But for us compulsive eaters, deep resentment is absolutely fatal, because “we shut ourselves off” from our higher power, and we go back to eating. We have to be free of anger/resentment, that “dubious luxury of normal men”.

As you fill the form out, I think you will begin to see how brilliant and how deep it is. (I showed it to a psychiatrist once who was overwhelmed by it.)

- First column, we just list on paper things that are bugging us.
- Second column, we write out why they’re bugging us.
- Third column, we begin to see how the things that are bugging us are actually killing us. People who did us wrong continue to harm us. People we did harm to harm us. Ideas that we have are killing us. No wonder we’re blocked off from our higher power!

You can see how this form gives us hope. We’re moving from the things that BOTHER us to to the things that are BLOCKING us from our higher power! There’s hope just around the corner! As the Big Book says at page 65, this list holds “the key to the future”!

#### Questions:

Here are some questions. The whole of Step Four is answering questions, of course.

- What’s on your mind that’s bugging you?
- Are the reasons that these things are bothering you affecting much of your life? Do they affect how you feel about yourself, how safe you feel, how frustrated you feel, how good or bad your relations (personal or sexual) are, and how full of fear you are?
- Can you see that these things are blocking you from the sunlight of the spirit?

## Resentments Continued:

Last chapter I discussed the first three columns of the resentment form. These are the columns actually depicted on page 65 of the Big Book. Many people (including me for the first six years in the program) assumed that those three columns are the only columns in the resentment form.

In fact, there is a fourth column, and it turns out that this fourth column is the most important one of all! The first three columns are actually simply PREPARATIONS for the fourth column.

### The essential Fourth Column:

Let's remember that the purpose of Step Four is to identify those parts of ourselves which are blocking us from our higher power. We have decided, in Step Three, to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand God. That decision means that we have to discover what defects of character block us from our higher power. The fourth column of the resentment form is in fact our analysis of those defects of character.

### Dealing with things that bother us:

But before we can look at our defects of character, we have to deal with all the things that bother us—those aspects of the past that haven't gone our way.

The check-marks in the third column are very effective graphic representations of our paralysis. And they help us to convince ourselves that the things in our past which bother us—our resentments—have the power to kill us, because so long as we felt our resentments, the third column showed us that we felt badly about ourselves (self-esteem), we felt unsafe (security), we felt thwarted and frustrated (ambitions), our personal and sex relations were deeply affected, and we were full of fear. How could we live life positively if these very deep emotions were being controlled by how we feel about the past?

The Big Book tells us that we should go back to our list, "for it [holds] the key to the future" (page 65). If we can master our resentments, then we can look at our own flaws.

Our biggest problem is, of course, with people who have wronged us, people who have done things which we wish they hadn't done. If we can't over-

come our resentments against them, we will not be able to see our part, our flaws.

Here the Big Book gives very cryptic but clear instructions:

This was our course: We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick. Though we did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed us, they, like ourselves, were sick too. We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. (pages 65-66)

What does it mean to say that the people who wronged us were, "like ourselves", also sick? What is a spiritual sickness?

### How do we treat people as spiritually sick?

We excuse people all the time. We understand it and often instantly forgive people who have neurological disorders (like Tourette's Syndrome) or brain tumours, or who are in constant pain, if they snap at us or insult us. We realize that it isn't really their fault. Things are going on inside them that make their reactions to life beyond their control. If I were in constant pain, I think I'd be pretty grouchy most of the time.

Can we not look at people who have wronged us as being in spiritual pain? Let's look at the history of the people who have wronged us. Can we not see somewhere in their upbringing, or in their life experiences, or in how they relate to other people, that they are sick?

How many people who have committed sexual or physical violence were themselves recipients of abuse? How many "bad" parents were themselves the product of "bad" parenting? Don't many people do bad things for reasons which they think are valid? Isn't there a sickness to be seen in those people?

And what right do I have to be righteous? Haven't I done bad things for reasons which I thought were valid? Maybe not as bad as these people, but in reality, they're not so much worse than I am.

Page 552 (third and fourth edition) of the Big Book contains a suggestion for dealing with resentments we find overwhelmingly difficult to overcome. The suggestion is that we pray for those we resent that "everything you want for yourself be given to



them—their health, their prosperity, their happiness”; that we do this whether we want to or not.

The amazing thing about this suggestion is that it requires us first of all to figure out what we want for ourselves. When I did this, I realized that what I really wanted for my self was serenity, a sense of usefulness, an ability to love and to be loved.

And when I prayed for the people I hated, something hit me in the face—that wonderful blinding flash of the obvious!—and that was that none of the people I hated were serene, were useful, or were able to love and to be loved. They led lives based on fear or mistrust of other people. They were cruel or dishonest or hurt others (including me). How could they ever have serenity? How could they ever be useful? How could they ever love or be loved? Even if they thought they were happy, they were living superficial and sad lives.

Thus the more harm they did in this world, the more they cut themselves off from the sunlight of the spirit, the less human they became, the more harm they did to themselves.

That is spiritual sickness. That is pitiful. I began not to hate them but to pity them. Certainly I hated what they had done, not simply to me but to others. But I saw that every wrong move they made, every hurt they created, was a nail in their own coffin as well. They did harm to themselves by doing harm to others.

I was thus able to deal with such difficult people on my list as Hitler and others who have been responsible for horrible deeds in this world. By the time they committed all those deeds, they had rendered themselves so sub-human that it seemed impossible for them ever to regain their humanity. The things they did were horrible; and the “things” they became were horrible too. You can’t blame a dog or a cat for doing damage in your house. And these people were more like animals (not that I’m saying that dogs or cats could do what these people did!) than like humans.

As well, I was and am willing to admit that I am not perfect! I clearly have a spiritual sickness—the Big Book has convinced me of that. That spiritual sickness consists at the very least of my wish to be in charge of life, and my everlasting frustration that life hasn’t gone my way and is likely never to go my way.

The author of the story “Freedom from Bondage”, where the page 552 resentment prayer is found, gives credit in a talk she gave in 1973 in Oxnard, California, to an article in *Liberty* providing a condensation of Norman Vincent Peale’s book, *A Guide to Confident Living*.

By definition that’s a spiritual sickness! If I’m willing to understand myself, then I have to be willing to understand others.

So these few sentences from the bottom of page 66 to the top of page 67 really helped change my attitudes to people who had been controlling my life because of the things they had done to me or to my loved ones or to humanity in general. I was able to look at them as extremely damaged people, and to feel pity and sadness for them. In effect, they had become “beneath contempt”.

Moreover I began to see something that will become extremely important for the fourth column of this resentment form. If I accept that the more harm they did to me or others, the more harm they did to themselves, then I am forced to accept that allowing them to continue to do harm allowed them to do harm to themselves. Thus I began to get an insight into the character defect of dishonesty, which I’ll talk about in a few paragraphs.

So we look at these people (column one), “their symptoms” (column two), “and the way these disturbed us” (column three). We find that these people were sick too. And we’re given a prayer to say. “We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend.” There’s the prayer: “God, please help me show \_\_\_\_\_ the same tolerance, pity, and patience, that I would cheerfully grant a sick friend.”

### Our four defects of character:

Now that we have said that prayer about each person on our list who has harmed us or others,

On page 67, after providing the instructions for Step Four, the Big Book goes on to suggest ways in which we deal with people who bother us in the future:

“When a person offended [the original manuscript actually said “next offended”] we said to ourselves, ‘This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done.’”

As well, the Big Book suggests ways of dealing with these people in the future—avoiding retaliation or argument. Neither this prayer nor these suggestions are part of the Step Four instructions. They are guides to living.

we're ready to look at our own mistakes. Here are the Big Book's instructions (page 67):

Referring to our list again. Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened? Though a situation had not been entirely our fault, we tried to disregard the other person involved entirely. Where were we to blame?

So the instructions on the form are pretty literal. To put out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we fold the paper over to cover columns two and three, leaving us with columns one and four.

### Covering up columns two and three:

Why do we cover up columns two and three?

It's not simply because the Big Book tells us to put out of our minds the wrongs others have done us, and that's what's in columns two and three—at least for those people who have done us wrong.

It's because we must now focus on where we were at fault. That requires a look at the *entire* relationship between those people, principles, and institutions listed in column one and ourselves. What columns two and three represent is not the *entire* relationship, but simply the *particular* issues that came to mind when we started upon our inventory.

Now that we've been able to accept those who have wronged us as spiritually sick, now that we're focusing on our own contributions to the problems, we are entering a new way of looking at things. That requires us to cover up columns two and three.

We don't forget about the matters that might have appeared in columns two and three. Very often—but not always—those matters will surface in column four. *Sometimes*, however, those matters will have disappeared and completely new and striking insights will surface.

So we cover up columns two and three and then look at the people, institutions, and principles, on our lists (column one) and ask ourselves four simple questions: Where have I been selfish? Where have I been dishonest? Where have I been self-seeking? Where have I been frightened?

### Definitions:

What do these words mean? This is the best I've come up with.

### SELFISH:

*Selfish* has already been defined very broadly by the Big Book in its discussion of Step Three. Selfish means not only what the dictionary says it means—wanting things my way for my own purposes or comfort—but it also means something broader than that. It means wanting things my way period, regardless of my motives. (See the discussion of Step Three for more details.)

### DISHONEST:

*Dishonest* certainly means telling untruths, lying, defrauding, deceiving. And the recipient of the dishonesty isn't always another person. It can be me! I can be fooling myself about reality.

Beyond that, for a people-pleaser like me, another aspect of dishonesty is "not telling the truth when the truth should be told". If I continued in a relationship, for instance, in which harm was being done to me (and I've been in some destructive relationships, although nothing even close to the kind of abuse I've heard described in the rooms of OA), or if I've seen injustices being done and said nothing (and that's happened much more often), am I not being dishonest by not speaking the truth, by not saying, "Wait a minute, this is wrong!"?

There may be understandable reasons for doing this, but isn't that a character flaw; and isn't that ultimately dishonesty too?

So there are three kinds of dishonesty: telling untruths to others, telling untruths to myself, and not telling the truth when the truth should be told.

### SELF-SEEKING:

*Self-seeking* is more difficult to define. The Big Book rarely uses it. A dictionary will use the word "selfish" to describe "self-seeking", which isn't really helpful to us. My best understanding of the word comes from breaking it down: "Seeking my self" in others. It's like self-esteem. How does this person, institution, or principle in column one define how I feel about myself?

We can also understand it by asking whether with this person or principle or institution it was all about us or whether it was about the other. In that context, self-seeking is putting our sense of selves forward. It's also not being considerate of others, because we're thinking of ourselves.

I've found those concepts to be very helpful questions to ask, so that's how I interpret the word "self-seeking".

## **FRIGHTENED:**

*Frightened* asks us how and why we felt any fear in relation to the people, institutions, or principles in column one.

Those are the four character defects the Big Book discloses with respect to resentments. We'll see that no more are added by the fear and sex conduct parts of Step Four. We can see now that these four character defects completely define our problem.

## **Applying the definitions:**

**Selfish:** I'm selfish. At the very least, I wish the people, institutions, or principles that I set out in column one just didn't exist or hadn't happened or hadn't done to me what they did or I didn't do what I did to them. I just wish the past was different. I wish people hadn't died or got sick. I wish people didn't suffer as they're suffer. I wish the world were a better place. That's selfish, the Big Book way—I want my way rather than what is. But I will also find that there is much of me that is selfish the dictionary way. I wish that the people, institutions, or principles in column one hadn't happened because of the pain or the humiliation or the lack of security or the bad relationships or the bitterness or the guilt or the . . .—in other words, I wish that these things hadn't happened because they don't make me feel good. And I wish that the people, institutions, or principles in column one would be different so I could feel happier, so I could be acknowledged as the great person I really am, so I could make lots of money, so I could buy things for my own comfort, so I . . .

**Dishonest:** I'm dishonest. I haven't accepted that some people aren't capable of acting any differently than the way they did. I don't speak up when I should for fear of hurting people's feelings. I haven't left relationships that were harming both myself and the person who was harming me because I thought I could change the person (as if I were in control!). I have told stories about other people (gossiped) because I wanted people to like me and not to like them, or not to have good feelings about them. And I have also told untruths to myself, persuading myself that the past could be different, that certain people could change if I only did this or that, that somehow people who did me harm were conscious of what they were doing or were really making rational choices instead of just doing what they learned from their own sad experiences. And I have also told untruths to others.

**Self-seeking:** And self-seeking? Wow. I have let so many people and situations define how I feel about myself. I have sought after a definition of myself in others. If you like me, then maybe I'm likable. If you don't like me, then you're probably really smart, because you can see below the surface. One bad evaluation out of a hundred is the one that I focus on.

**Fear:** And full of fear! Afraid that people will find out what I've done. Afraid that people won't respect or like or admire me. Afraid that I won't get what I want. Afraid I'll lose what I have. Afraid of confronting someone. Afraid for my life.

It's worth mulling over all these ideas and applying them to your situation.

## **How the Steps give us back our lives:**

One (inaccurate) criticism of Twelve Step programs that we hear a lot is that the Twelve Steps teach us that it's all in our attitude, that we are to blame for misfortunes that happen to us. I don't think that's true at all.

The Twelve Steps certainly provide us a way of getting out of being a victim. But they also, through their emphasis on rigorous honesty, teach us that we must be honest in our dealings with others.

That means that we say to people that what they're doing is wrong; and we say that not just because they may be hurting us or others, but because they're hurting THEMSELVES! It's our duty to tell the truth when the truth should be told.

Although I have never suffered the kind of abuse that other OAers have suffered, I have had the privilege of sponsoring a number of people who have suffered tremendous abuse, sexual and physical, both as children and as adults. They have all confirmed the concepts contained in this discussion of Step Four.

As children, most of them were, of course, silent. Or as abused spouses they kept in the relationship far longer than they should have. They don't look at the past with guilt and beat themselves up for not having spoken up earlier. (As children, they might not have been believed anyway!)

They simply look at the past as something for them to learn from, so that they won't be victims again. And their "amend" ultimately turns out to be something positive, sometimes a change in themselves and their approach to problems in the future, sometimes disclosing things that they feel should have been disclosed. But they become different people as

a result, and that is what the steps are all about. We'll talk more about that when we discuss Steps Eight and Nine.

I hope you can see how freeing this approach to resentments is.

## Overview:

In **column one** we start by just listing them. This serves a useful purpose. We get things out of our minds and onto a paper; this in itself will at times get rid of the resentment.

Then in **column two** we list all the particulars about why they're on our mind, and we thus get to analyze what exactly is going on; that in itself yields interesting results. Sometimes when we put this down on paper, we realize how some of the reasons are silly, and they begin to leave us.

Then in **column three** we see how all those things that bother us are affecting us to the core—how we feel about ourselves, how safe we feel, how frustrated we are, how our personal and sex relations are suffering, how full of fear we are. The checkmarks are graphic illustrations of how we are completely enslaved to our reaction to life!

These first three columns show us why we are in the grip of compulsive eating. How could we possibly think we could be so sane as to remember constantly that we can't eat certain foods? No, we're just full of frustration and self-pity, and that's what's killing us. As long as we're filled with frustration and self-pity, our minds can't be clear.

We need to be full of a higher power, but instead all these things that we resent have become a higher power to us. We have to be rid of them.

We have to deal with those people who have done us harm. We do that by understanding their own sickness and praying to give them the same tolerance, pity, and patience we would cheerfully grant a sick friend.

Now, in **column four**, we're finally ready to look at our own part. We analyze each one of the people, institutions, or principles we resent in light of our own character defects. And we begin to see tremendous patterns that have clearly affected us and our lives. We begin to see how we have harmed other people, EVEN those who have harmed us. We begin to see where we could change!

## Questions:

So some questions:

- Are you spiritually sick? How?

- Are you able to look at people who have harmed you as spiritually sick? In what way?
- If you're trying page 552, exactly what do you want out of your life? What would you like for yourself?
- Do those people who have harmed you have anything like what you want to have for yourself?
- Do you see your selfishness, dishonesty, self-seeking, and fear? What patterns do you see in your relationships with others in that regard?
- Do you see how these four character defects are blocking you off from the sunlight of the spirit?

Those of you aware of Joe and Charlie, the AA Big Book scholars and experts, will see some differences between the Step 4 described here and their suggested Step 4. They acknowledge that they go beyond the Big Book's instructions and incorporate ideas from AA's 12 & 12.

Joe and Charlie define "resentment" almost wholly in terms of anger, and therefore their resentments list does not contain things that would be on a resentment list if you accept, as I've been taught, that a resentment is something I wish were not on my mind—a much broader concept.

Thus Joe and Charlie have a fourth form—harm done to others—because using their definition of resentment, the harm I have done to others wouldn't be a resentment.

My experience has been that if you use a broader understanding of resentments, you don't require a fourth form.

There's another aspect as well. The Resentment form isolates our four main character defects—selfishness, dishonesty, self-seeking, and fear. The Fear and Sex Conduct forms *begin* with those defects and bring us to another level—how to act properly. The Fear form asks us what God would have us be in relation to our fears. The Sex Conduct Form deals with selfishness and dishonesty (and with self-seeking as being inconsiderate of others) in particular relationships and asks us what we should have done instead in order to act properly from now on.

The Big Book's approach to fears and sex conduct, therefore, is quite different from Joe and Charlie's approach. Not to say that it's better or worse, but I think it's important to show the differences. My experience is that if you do Step 4 as honestly as you can, it doesn't matter HOW you do it!

## Step Four—Fears:

If resentments are basically “The past didn’t go my way”, then fears are basically “The future won’t go my way.” You cannot feel fear about something that has happened in the past. Fear is always an emotion that comes from imagining what will happen and not wanting that to happen.

The Big Book at page 67 says that fear “somehow touches about every aspect of our lives. It set in motion trains of circumstances which brought us misfortune we felt we didn’t deserve.”

The instructions are pretty clear, and the form makes them even clearer.

### Filling out the Fear Form:

First “we put them on paper, even though we had no resentment in connection with them” (68).

#### Column One:

So we set out all the fears we have, including those we discovered in the resentment form, both in column 3 (where we asked whether fear was involved) and in column 4 (where we asked ourselves where we were frightened), as well as fears that didn’t make it to the resentment list because we didn’t think about them all the time.

I have put down some standard fears—fears of death, of pain, of financial insecurity, of something bad happening to loved ones, of not being happy, of not losing weight—and fears relating to individuals on my resentment list—fear of telling someone something that should be said, fear of following through on a particular decision that might affect others, fear of political conflict or social or economic or geographic disasters. I’ve put down all kinds of fears. I simply listed them, nothing more.

That’s *column one*. I fill out all of column one before I go on to column two.

#### Column Two:

Then the Big Book says “We asked ourselves why we had them.” (page 68) So I asked myself why I had each fear. I did this in point form. It was fascinating and instructive. To figure out WHY I had a particular fear meant I had to analyze it.

That’s *column two*. I fill out all of column two before I go on to column three.

Why have I been afraid of death, for instance? Not simply because of annihilation, but also because of concern for those I’m leaving behind, concern about pain before death, concern about the unknown, curiosity for what will happen afterwards. Each one of these things tells me a great deal about myself.

If I have to tell a friend something that I don’t want to tell but feel that I should, my fear is not simply that I will lose a friend, but they’re also that I may be wrong, that my friend will suffer, that I’ll be misunderstood, that others may hate me.

If I worry about my daughter’s future, my fear is not simply that she won’t be happy, but (as I’m honest with myself) that I may feel forced to support her, that I won’t have grandchildren, that her fate may somehow make me look like a bad parent.

So the more honest I am in the analysis, the more I discover that some of my reasons for fear are quite understandable, and some are quite self-seeking and selfish, and some are simply stupid! This is in itself a learning experience.

#### Columns Three and Four:

But the Big Book has more instructions.

It asks us to acknowledge that “self-reliance failed us” and that “we are now on a different basis; the basis of trusting and relying upon God.” (page 68)

The form does this by setting out two questions.

*Column three* is whether we were placing our trust and reliance upon infinite God or our finite selves. Hmmmm. I wonder what the answer to that is going to be? We put a checkmark under “My finite self” for each of the fears we have. I fill out column three for each of my fears before going on to column four.

*Column four* is whether relying on ourselves worked. Hmmmm. Wonder what that answer is too? Of course it didn’t work. If it did work, I wouldn’t have these fears! We put a checkmark under “No” for each of the fears we have. I fill out column four for each of the fears before going on to column five.

### Column Five:

Now comes *column five*. The Big Book says: “We ask Him to remove our fear and direct our attention to what He would have us be.” Here is the simple prayer, and column four just provides us with a box to check that we’ve said it: “God, please remove my fear of \_\_\_\_\_, and direct my attention to what you would have me be.”

### Column Six:

And *column six* requires us to put down what we think that God would have us be. This requires some meditation, and the meditation will yield great rewards!

This is a brilliant prayer. Note it’s not “what you would have me do”, but “what you would have me be”. Here we are getting an insight into ourselves. It’s not a question of *action* (what God would have me *do*); it’s almost always a matter of *attitude* (what God would have me *be*) which may or may not result in action.

The answer is very often “to be the best I can be under the circumstances”—to be the best father, to be the best friend, maybe even simply to BE rather than to worry or spend my time thinking about useless fears. Or it could be as simple as “to be a person who doesn’t worry about these things”!

Whatever it turns out to be, you get a real sense of purpose and direction, which in turn relieves you of fear. And that is the promise we’re given at page 68: “At once, we commence to outgrow fear.”

### Overview:

Fear destroys and paralyzes us and keeps us from being the best we can be. Concentrating on and saying the prayer shows us the nature of an amends to be made by helping us focus on the future in the most constructive, rather than destructive way.

We have been able through this form to separate the reasonable fears from the silly ones. This in itself provides the springboard for removing even the reasonable fears. We REPLACE those fears with acceptance, which is then followed by a sense of direction. Given this reasonable concern, what is the BEST I can make of it? What would my higher power have me be?

If I undertook a risky task, for instance, I would start off with a reasonable fear that I might fall and hurt myself. But that would be accompanied by other unreasonable fears that accompany my fear of hurting myself—for instance that when I fell, my head would hit a jutting out spike and render me completely brain-dead, and my wife and my children would go to ruin taking care of me, and then they would fall into deep depressions and end up committing suicide, and so on and so on. You know what it can be like when we dwell on the worst!

So I would be able to separate the reasonable from the unreasonable fears. In so doing, I would then be in the position, when I prayed to know what my higher power would have me be, in taking my reasonable fear of falling and balancing that against the importance of doing whatever the task might be.

Assuming that it was important to undertake that task, the answer to the question, “What would God have me be?” would be to be a person who takes significant precaution and care, but who resolutely undertakes the task because it must be performed.

On the other hand, my prayer might be answered by a realization that I should be a person who doesn’t undertake unimportant tasks that risk my health!

So fears become things we accept and take into account in figuring out what we should be and do.

No wonder the Big Book promises that “at once, we commence to outgrow fear”. You will be amazed by how simply this form deals with our fears.

Fear is one of the four character defects isolated by the Resentment Form. We have now outgrown one of our character defects. The Sex Conduct Form will now show us how to live our lives without the other three character defects.

## Step Four—Sex Conduct:

If resentments are “the past didn’t go my way” and fears are “the future won’t go my way”, then why does the Big Book discuss Sex Conduct next? I think there’s a simple answer.

The true purpose, the Big Book tells us, of the Sex Conduct Inventory is to try “to shape a sane and sound ideal for our future sex life.” (page 69)

The purpose of the Sex Conduct Inventory, therefore, is not to deal with our past sex conduct issues. We’ve dealt with them, if they bother us, under resentments. Nor is its purpose to deal with any sex conduct issues we’re worried about in the future. We’ve dealt with them, if they bother us, under fears.

The purpose of the Sex Conduct Inventory is to figure out how to have a sound relationship right now, in the present, by analyzing out what we did wrong in the past and what we should do in the future, and to deal with the remaining three character defects of selfishness, dishonest, and self-seeking (inconsiderateness) by helping us understand from our past mistakes how we can have relationships that are unselfish, honest, and considerate.

Another key to understanding the Sex Conduct Inventory is to understand the meaning of that phrase. Back in 1939, “sex” did not simply refer to physical sexual activity. It had a broader meaning. It referred to relationships in which there was some physical attraction, but not necessarily the physical activity we now call “sex”.

If we look at the most complex relationships we’ve ever had, we will invariably find that (aside from family) among those relationships were ones in which there was some physical attraction between us and the other person, and the physical attraction was probably unbalanced—one of the two was more attracted than the other. Our physical desires can easily overpower any kind of good thinking, as many of us have experienced.

(Just an aside here. Although we often hear that men generally want physical sex more than women, my experience in talking to so many women in OA is that many OAers—whether men or women—want physical sex more than their significant others. It’s an aspect of “wanting everything on the plate”, just a general hunger for things. Of course, there are quite significant exceptions to this generalization.)

So if we could figure out what we did wrong in some of our most complex relationships, and know what we should have done, then we have a guide to acting in ALL of our relationships, even with acquaintances or friends. That’s why I think the Big Book talks about Sex Conduct. If we’ve dealt with the past in the Resentment Inventory and the future in the Fear Inventory, it’s now time to learn how to live in the present. To live in the present requires us to know how to have real and honest relationships with people. To have real and honest relationships with people, we examine those relationships we’ve had which were most difficult and learn what to do better in the future.

With that introduction, we go to the instructions in the Big Book, which are all found on page 69. The Big Book points out that “we all have sex problems. We’d hardly be human if we didn’t. What can we do about them.” Here are the instructions: “We reviewed our own conduct over the years past. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, or inconsiderate? Whom had we hurt?”

### Filling out the Sex Conduct Form:

You will see on the form that there is a column for writing down “whom had we hurt”, and good advice is simply to fill that *first column* out first. I listed my wife, of course, and many, but not all, of my ex-girlfriends, and a friend I jokingly flirted with, and someone to whom I was strangely attracted but had no real interest in and was very awkward around .

Then the *second column* is where we write where we had been, in relation to the person we put down, “selfish, dishonest, or inconsiderate”. Selfish and dishonest retain their meanings, I think, from the resentment inventory—“wanting my way” for selfish and “not telling the truth when the truth should be told, or telling falsehood to others or myself” for dishonest. (Note that we’re *starting* where the Resentment form *ended*.) Inconsiderate is simply not thinking of the other person’s feelings or interests – being self-seeking.

Then the Big Book asks, “Did we unjustifiably arouse jealousy, suspicion or bitterness?” That’s the *third column*, and we fill that out for every person on the list. I find that I don’t always check any of those boxes, but I do consider the question carefully each time.

Then the Big Book asks, “Where were we at fault, what should we have done instead?” So that is the *fourth column*—what I should have done instead.

And we fill that out for every person on the list. Patterns immediately emerge. For most of my past relationships, for example, the answer was pretty consistent: I stayed in the relationship longer than was healthy for both me and my ex-girlfriends, and I should have left it earlier on and in a more honest way. For my wife the answer is that I have thought of my own interests, and that I should always love her more and think of her needs more. For the friend I flirted with, I was hurting her and her husband, and I should simply stop flirting with her. For the person I was awkward around, I deprived her of a potential friend.

The Big Book says, “In this way we tried to shape a sane and sound ideal for our future sex life.” THAT’S the whole point of this exercise—to know what we did that was wrong, and to know what we should have done instead.

Then the Big Book says, “We subjected each relation to this test—was it selfish or not?” And that’s the *fifth column*. Again, selfish has to be looked at in the broad sense that was discussed in Step Three. We check that out for every relationship.

And then we have the Sex Prayer and the Sex Meditation. The Sex Prayer is: “God, please mold my ideals and help me to live up to them.” The Sex Meditation is: “God, what should I do about each specific matter.” And we say that prayer and that meditation for every person on the list. The Big Book promises us: “The right answer will come, if we want it.”

This is a pretty simple form, but it’s a very powerful one. We can now extrapolate from our most difficult relationships to all other relationships. We find that our basic approach has to be loving and tolerant and giving; we find that we can’t assume too much about other people’s intentions or actions; we find, in short, that in some of our most difficult relationships often the greatest barrier has been ourselves.

We have also learned from our mistakes in past relationships how to have relationships without the character defects of selfishness, dishonesty, and self-seeking. Thus we have now dealt with all four character defects through the Fear and Sex Conduct Forms, and we see how we can live our lives without those character defects!



## Step Four: Conclusion:

We have now completed our Step Four Inventory from the Big Book's perspective.

It was pretty simple. We filled out some simple forms and learned a lot about ourselves. No matter how many people, institutions, or principles appear on our resentment form; no matter how many fears appear on our fear forms; no matter how many people appear on our sex conduct forms; it doesn't take a very long time to fill them out.

The total amount of writing probably would never exceed 20 hours, and is probably more like 10 hours; but it's probable that you would space those hours out over a few weeks. But if you haven't completed the forms within about six weeks, then either you are incredibly busy with emergency issues (because doing Step Four has to be a major priority—if you don't do it and finish the steps, you will relapse, and to relapse is to die!), or you're procrastinating.

This isn't the place to compare this method of doing Step Four with others; and if you've found a different method that works for you, then there's no reason other than curiosity to try this one. But if doing Step Four has been such a difficult task for you because your current method or your sponsor's method of doing Step Four has you writing for weeks and months and years, then this might be worth trying. I have certainly never found it to be anything less than overwhelming. And it's always short!

The advice of my first sponsor has stayed with me: "Just finish it! It'll never be perfect. So just get this one done so you can recover! After you recover, then you can do more and get more insight.

Note that on page 71 the Big Book suggests that Step Four is simply making "an inventory of your GROSSER handicaps". Now grosser in this context doesn't mean "ewwww"; it simply means "cruder" or "bigger". Step Four is about identifying the BIG character defects. Refining things comes later on, in Step Ten, after we have recovered.

So just get the form done! If necessary, make an appointment to do Step Five just to give you the impetus to finish Step Four.

### The Step Four promises:

The Big Book gives us promises on page 70. They're not overwhelming ones, but they do serve as a

checklist for us to see if we have done a good Step Four:

If we have been thorough about our personal inventory, we have written down a lot. We have listed and analyzed our resentments. We have begun to comprehend their futility and their fatality. We have commenced to see their terrible destructiveness. We have begun to learn tolerance, patience and good will toward all men, even our enemies, for we look on them as sick people. We have listed the people we have hurt by our conduct, and are willing to straighten out the past if we can.

### Questions:

Now some questions:

- Do your fears prevent you from thinking clearly?
- Do your fears sometimes get you into more trouble rather than less?
- Take an example of a fear that appears to be reasonable (fear of wandering around in a dangerous part of town, for instance) and set out the reasons you have that fear. Did any of your reasons for having that fear turn out to be unreasonable or self-serving?
- Take an example of a fear that appears to be unreasonable (sudden illness of a cautious healthy loved one, for instance) and set out the reasons you have that fear. Did any of your reasons for having that fear turn out to be reasonable?
- What would your higher power have you be in relation to those two fears?
- Have your most difficult relationships been those in which there has been an imbalance of physical attraction?
- Have any of those relationships affected your ability to have relationships with other people even when there has been no issue of physical attraction?
- Take an example of such a relationship and set where you were selfish, dishonest, and inconsiderate.
- What should you have done instead?