

## Steps Five, Six, and Seven in one day!

You may ask how we can discuss three steps in one chapter? The reason is that the Big Book actually has us do Steps Five, Six, Seven, and even Eight, on the same day.

If you look at the history of the Twelve Steps, you will find that before the Big Book was written there were only six steps—the equivalents of Steps One, Four, Five, Nine, Eleven, and Twelve. Naturally the six steps were handed down from one AAer to another, and there were a lot of unspoken parts to each of the steps. Bill Wilson added the other six steps because the Big Book was going to be read by people who had no one from AA to help them through the steps, and he wanted to make certain that there were no loopholes. So Steps Two, Three, Six, Seven, Eight, and Ten, were added. But the essence of the steps was contained in the original six steps. (You can see this from page 263 of the 4th edition [292 3rd edition], and from the AA publications *AA Comes of Age* and *Pass It On*. I also discuss it in more detail in the Chapter on Step Three.)

We're used to spending a great deal of time and effort thinking about Steps Six and Seven because we read the steps as being equal and we have two major pieces of literature—the OA 12 & 12 and the AA 12 & 12 giving equal number of pages to each step. And if doing that works for you, then I do not suggest making any changes.

I have, however, met many people who have bogged down at Step Six because they don't feel that they are really really ready to have a particular character defect removed, and/or have bogged down at Step Seven because they keep waiting for their character defects to be removed BEFORE they go on to Steps Eight and Nine.

The Big Book's approach is clearly different, and I recommend it to you if you're having trouble doing the steps using other methods, or if you just want a quick and powerful way of recovering from compulsive eating.

The Big Book's approach is very simple. In Steps Four and Five we identify the character defects that block us from our higher power. In Steps Six and Seven we acknowledge our readiness to have those defects removed. And the defects are removed through the actions taken in Steps Eight and Nine.

I'll be discussing Steps Eight and Nine together since they go best together.

## Step Five:

The Big Book discusses Step Five from pages 71 to 75.

### Why?

Pages 71 and 72 are taken up with discussing WHY we have to do Step Five.

The answer is ultimately pretty simple: "If we skip this vital step, we may not overcome drinking [compulsive eating]." (page 72) The Big Book explains this in some detail. It is important, it says, in completing our housecleaning. If, as we found in Steps Three and Four, our problem is one of ego, of self-will, then we have to learn humility—that we aren't and can't be in charge of our own life, let alone the world. People, they say, who don't do Step Five, "had not learned enough of humility, fearlessness and honesty, in the sense we find it necessary, until they told someone else ALL their life story." (page 73) We live, they say, a double life in which we pretend to be someone we're not. "We must be entirely honest with somebody if we expect to live long or happily in this world." (pages 73-74) Page 74 deals with choosing the person we will share our story with.

Aside from the very basic notion of "confession is good for the soul", there are other good reasons as well, not listed in the Big Book. We find that we aren't alone—that the person with whom we're sharing understands us and can probably match every one of our actions with one of his or her own. And we also get insight and feedback that might help us understand ourselves—neither taking ourselves too lightly or too seriously.

### Who?

We must remember that the Big Book was published when there were no more than one hundred AAers in the entire world, so the Big Book tells us how to find someone. Later on, in the chapter *Working With Others*, the Big Book tells us that once we have recovered, we can sponsor people and be the person with whom they do a Step Five (see page 96).

The criteria are simple: “It is important that he be able to keep a confidence; that he fully understand and approve what we are driving at; that he will not try to change our plan” (pages 74-75).

I have found that doing my Step Five with an OAer has been tremendously powerful. OAers understand me. Not only do they fulfill the above criteria, but they also perform another important function: they are able to say, “I’m just like you.” Not only have I learned humility, but I have found out that I am not alone. OAers or other Twelve-Steppers can give us that extra ingredient which is so helpful for us isolated and self-pitying selves.

## How?

The Big Book then gives us instructions for meeting with the person to whom we tell our story: “We explain to our partner what we are about to do and why we have to do it. He should realize that we are engaged upon a life-and-death errand. Most people approached in this way will be glad to help; they will be honored by our confidence.” (page 75) When I do Step Five, I tell my friend how important it is that I do this step, how serious I am about the process.

The Big Book’s instructions on actually DOING the step are not very detailed. Here they are: “We pocket our pride and go to it, illuminating every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past” (page 75). That’s it. Exactly what are we supposed to do?

I can only give you my experience, based on the nature of our Step Four done the Big Book way, and using the forms which are available at the web site above. I have found this way to be extremely powerful and—added bonus!—quite efficient and relatively brief.

I take the Step Four Resentment form as folded over, with the name of the person, institution, or principle (column one), across from where I have been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, and frightened (column four).

I read off the name, perhaps give a short identifier or explanation of the name, and then read off what I have written in the fourth column. I invite my friend to probe my responses, to see if there are other things I might write down and didn’t think of. I go from name to name.

What I find is that after a few sheets it gets pretty repetitious. I see how my selfishness, my dishonesty, my self-seeking, and my fear, have permeated

my entire life, and how I have created virtually identical patterns in so many different situations, and so many different people. I am able, at times to say, “Well, these next three people on the list are exactly the same, so I can take them all together.”

Note that we spend no time in talking about the wrongs that others have done to us. This is NOT an opportunity for venting. We are working on what’s wrong with us. We might identify some wrongs the others have done in brief in order to assist the person listening to our Step Five to give us some feedback, but if we spend too much time identifying those wrongs, then aren’t we really taking the inventory of the other people and not of ourselves?

Then I take the Step Four Fear form and read it across the columns. “Here is one fear [column one], here are the reasons I have it [column two], I placed my trust and reliance upon my finite self [column three] and it didn’t work [column four], and I said the Fear Prayer [column five].” I then discuss briefly exactly what I think my higher power would have me be in relation to that fear.

Then I take the Step Four Sex Conduct form and read it across the columns. “Here is a person I hurt [column one], here are the ways in which I was selfish, dishonest, and inconsiderate [column two], I aroused suspicion, but not bitterness or jealousy [column three], what I should have done instead was \_\_\_\_\_ [column four], the relationship was selfish [column five], and I said the sex prayer [column six] and the sex meditation [column seven].”

Although this may seem mechanical, in fact it is not. With my friend listening and thinking with me about what I might have missed out and telling me that he or she is very similar to me, I feel as if my innermost self has been revealed.

But you can see how little time it need take. I’m not telling my life story from womb to today. I’m not answering a bunch of questions in enormous details. I’m not detailing the wrongs that others have done to me. I’m focusing on my major defects of character and sharing them with another human being.

## Promises!

The Big Book makes certain promises at the end of this part of Step Five. If we do not feel these promises, then we have almost certainly left something out, either in Step Four or in Step Five. Here are the promises as found on page 75:

Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. We

can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Creator. We may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now we begin to have a spiritual experience. The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will often come strongly. We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe.

In point form:

- Are we delighted?
- Can we look the world in the eye?
- Can we be alone in perfect peace and ease?
- Have we begun to feel the nearness of our Creator?
- Have we begun to have a spiritual experience?
- Although not promised, perhaps we're feeling that the drink problem has disappeared.
- Do we feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe?

The first time I did this part of Step Five these promises did not come to me. My sponsor suggested I redo Step Four and then do another Step Five. I did that, and the promises still didn't come to me, so I did another Step Four and another Step Five, and then another.

The amazing thing was that each time I "redid" Step Four I discovered new resentments and new fears (and occasionally new sex conduct issues), so I could tell I was going deeper.

After the fourth Step Four and the fourth Step Five these promises came true. It was an amazing experience.

## Not yet finished!

But Step Five isn't yet finished. We've admitted to ourselves and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs, but we haven't yet admitted them to God. The Big Book tells us to go home and "find a place where we can be quiet for an hour, carefully reviewing what we have done. We thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know Him better" (page 75). So we review what we've

written—we look at all our filled-out forms again. Then we have a prayer: "God, thank you from the bottom of my heart that I know you better." Then the Big Book tells us to study the first five steps and ask our higher power "if we have omitted anything" (page 75). Have we done what has to be done? Have we said what has to be said?

If the answer is yes, and it will probably be yes, then we go on to Step Six that same day. If the answer is no, then we go back and figure out what we left out in either Step Four or Step Five.



The cover of the March 1, 1941 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post* which brought enormous publicity to AA.

## Step Six:

Doing Step Four and Five the Big Book way, we have realized that we have four major character defects, all stemming from our wish to have our own way.

- We are selfish—we basically want our way, whether for good or bad or a mixture of reasons.
- We are dishonest—we don't tell others or ourselves the truth about reality.
- We are self-seeking—how others react to us defines how we feel about ourselves and we think of ourselves and not others.
- And we are full of fear.

Out of these four major character defects we have constructed any number of behaviors that create problems for us—a tendency to isolate, or to gossip, or to live in a fantasy world, or to manipulate others, or to have bad relationships with others, or to be full of anger, or to be paralyzed by fear, or to be full of lust or gluttony or pride or sloth or greed or envy, or to feel exceedingly sorry for ourselves—or a combination of many of these! But all of these behaviors come down to the four character defects.

Are we ready to have our higher power remove these four major character defects? My experience tells me that you will be if you do Step Four the Big Book way. You won't want to hold on to selfishness, dishonesty, self-seeking, and fear, when you realize how they have truly harmed your life.

Again, it's not the purpose of these essays to compare the Big Book method of doing Step Four with others, but there is a tremendous advantage in understanding these four major character defects rather than thinking that you have 40 major character defects. You're much more willing to give up four huge ones than 40 of varying significance!

Many inventory methods will list things like "gossip" or "lust" or "gluttony" or "cheating" or "lying" as defects of character. These things appear to me to be actions, not defects. A defect of character is something that gives rise to wrong actions.

That's why I like the Big Book's approach to Step Four. I have certainly gossiped. But in and of itself gossiping was not my character defect. I did it because I was selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, and frightened.

The Big Book promises NOTHING at Step Six. Our higher power is not going to remove our character defects at Step Six. The promise of that will only come halfway through Step Nine.

So if you're ready to have your higher power remove these four major character defects, you're on to Step Seven! (If you're not, you say, "God, please help me be willing to remove my character defect of \_\_\_\_\_" (page 76). Then go on to Step Seven anyway! Why wait? Recovery is just around the corner.)

## Step Seven:

You say the prayer on page 76 of the Big Book.

My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen.

A brilliant prayer. We get to keep some of the minor symptoms of those defects of character which DO NOT stand in the way of our usefulness to our higher power and our fellows. We may have those (I have many of them – interests that occasionally turn into obsessions, for instance).

But it's simply a prayer. The Big Book is very clear about this. There are NO promises for Step Seven either. You just say the prayer and then you're ready for some action!

## Overview:

Steps Six and Seven are simply way-stations on these steps. They are moments in time, right after our Step Five, when we consider where we have come from and where we are going to. The removal

Many OAers, of course, spend much more time on Steps Six and Seven, and recover very powerfully. Some have found the discussions in the AA 12 and 12, or the OA 12 and 12, to be very helpful.

It's not the purpose of this book to argue one way or the other. It's clear, however, that the Big Book's approach is that Steps Six and Seven are done relatively quickly. If you experience relapse while spending time on Steps Six and Seven, maybe you should try to do them as quickly as the Big Book suggests.

of our defects of character comes only when we take action.

The Big Book says: "Now we need more action, without which we find that 'Faith without works is dead.'" Then it talks about Steps Eight and Nine, which we'll talk about next chapter.

## Questions for Steps Five, Six, and Seven:

Some questions:

- Do you recognize the importance of sharing your character defects with another human being? Why is it important to you?
- What do you expect from the person who is going to hear your Step Five?
- Will you be open to that person's asking you questions, providing you with feedback?
- What do you think about the proposition that the behaviors that many of us have understood to be "character defects" (the Seven Deadly Sins, gossiping, etc.) are really symptoms of the four major character defects?
- Can you take something you thought to be a character defect and relate it to the four character defects (selfishness, dishonesty, self-seeking, and fear) discussed by the Big Book?
- Does doing Steps Six and Seven the same day as you do Step Five bother you?
- Why does it bother you? Is it simply because you think you should spend as much time on those steps as all the others? Because you've been told you should? Or because you think something may be missing? If so, what?

The Big Book suggests that we do Step Eight the same day that we do Steps Five, Six, and Seven. But we'll discuss Steps Eight and Nine together in the next chapter.



Dr. Bob Smith