

Steps Eight and Nine:

Steps Eight and Nine are not discussed separately in the Big Book. They discuss one action—making amends—which is broken down into two parts—being ready to make amends to everyone we’ve hurt, and only making amends if we won’t hurt other people, including those we’ve already hurt.

These are the action steps which actually bring us recovery from compulsive eating. They are the steps which remove our character defects and allow us to become different people—recovered people, people full of hope who are able to transmit that hope to the compulsive eater who still suffers.

The Big Book’s instructions are simple. First we make a list of people we had harmed and figure out what harm we’ve done them. We made that list, the Big Book says, “when we took inventory” (page 76). Then we make those amends unless to do so would injure them or others. Really quite simple.

Types of Amends:

What kinds of amends are there?

Direct Amends:

The Big Book—through examples—lists three kinds of direct amends.

- The first is **eyeball to eyeball**—“I am sorry for what I have done.”
- The second is **restitution**—“I will make up for what I have done.”
- The third is **taking the public consequences**—“I will make known to other people what I have done.”

Each of these is discussed by detailed example twice—the first time to describe the nature of the amends and the second time to discuss how to deal with situations in which others might be hurt by making that amends.

The first amends—*eyeball to eyeball*—is described from the bottom of page 76 to the middle of page 78 with the example of confronting a person face to face and apologizing for our side of the action. That same amends is then described from the harm-to-others perspective from the bottom of page 80 to the middle of page 82 with the example of whether or not to tell a spouse of an extra-marital affair.

The second amends—*restitution*—is described on page 78 with the example of debts; and then

described from the harm-to-others perspective on page 79 with the example of paying alimony to an ex-wife with the result of harming the current family.

The third amends — *public consequences* — is described from the bottom of page 78 to the top of page 79 with the example of willingness to go to jail; and then described from the harm-to-others perspective on page 80 with the example of making up for a lost reputation.

When you think about it, these are the only three kinds of direct amends. You go directly to a person and apologize and/or make up for the harm you’ve done; or if the harm you’ve done has had broader consequences, you have to make broader amends.

Living Amends:

The Big Book discusses living amends from the middle of page 82 to the middle of page 83. Here the concept is that direct amends simply aren’t enough for people with whom we have had long-term relationships; they don’t need apologies or restitution—they need a new person to have a relationship with.

Amends we cannot make:

And on page 83 the Big Book discusses amends we can’t make, and promises us that if we are ready to make them, that is good enough.

The Big Book provides two basic rules for making amends. The first is that if they are possible to make, we must make them or else we will not recover. The second is that in making our amends, we sweep our side of the street off and don’t deal with the wrongs others have done to us. (I’ll deal with variants of that issue a little later in this chapter.)

Filling in the Form for Steps Eight and Nine

The Steps Eight and Nine Form available on the web site and following this chapter is pretty self-explanatory.

First you write down the names of persons (and institutions) you have harmed.

Second you figure out what harm you’ve done them.

Third, using the three kinds of direct amends and living amends as a guide, you work out what kind of amends you could possibly make to make up for the harm done.

Fourth, you ask yourself whether making those kinds of amends would injure other people, including the person you've harmed. If the answer is yes, you don't make the amend; but perhaps you can think of alternative amends that might be made that could at least mend some harm. If the answer is no, that making those amends would not harm others, then you should make the amend.

Although not in the Big Book, the form also contains those well-known OA/AA columns of "Now, Sometimes, Never", so you can figure out a priority for making the various amends you have to make. If you do the amends in the "Now" column, you will find it so fulfilling that the amends in the "sometimes" column end up in the "now" column and the amends in the "never" column end up in the "sometimes" column. And so on. That's the experience of those who have made amends. Although they seem to be scary, they are ultimately overwhelmingly satisfying. The more amends you make, the more you want to finish them, because you feel much closer to your higher power than ever.

Simple amends are those that are very clear, just like the Big Book examples. You lied to someone—you apologize. You stole money or caused economic hardship—you pay it back. You harmed a person's reputation—you restore the person's reputation.

The complex amends:

What about the difficult ones?

Let's take a common area of concern for many OAers I have met—the person who has in fact been very badly dealt with by another person—perhaps sexually or physically abused or, less intensely, betrayed. What have our Steps Four and Five taught us about any harms we have done to that person?

Remember that our own character defects are selfishness, dishonesty, self-seeking, and fear. Have those character defects harmed the person who has harmed us; and if so, how?

If you recall our discussion of Step Four, one fact that we faced is that the more a person has harmed others, the more that person has become less capable of being a human being.

Remember that we prayed for that person to have what we wanted out of life—and when we prayed for that person to have serenity, to be able to love and to be loved, to have good relationships, to feel at peace, we knew suddenly that that person could

have none of those things because that person had done horrible harm to us and perhaps others.

So what harm have we done to them?

At the very least, we expected them to change, we hoped for them to change, we thought they were capable of being more than they were.

An amends for that is to stop having high expectations of them, to stop thinking that they could change, to treat them with pity and compassion, NOT to let them continue harming us by our trying to re-create history, and NOT continuing to feel fear and guilt about what occurred. They should not be able to continue to harm us!

And then there's another possible aspect.

For many of these people, we were silent when we should have been speaking the truth. We should have stopped what they were doing BEFORE it got worse. (Of course we realize this looking back. We don't blame ourselves for what we did or didn't do at an earlier time. We are looking to see what we COULD have done so we can make sure that things like that don't happen in the future.)

So a possible amends might be an apology for not having stopped them in time. It might also be stopping that person from doing harm to others by going public.

I have a friend who found it necessary to tell her relatives who had children about the sexual abuse she suffered from a relative who was still around and still spending time with the children of those relatives; she felt that was the least she could do to try to prevent that person from doing harm to himself or others.

On the other side, I have a friend whose amends to her sexual abuser was to let him alone—he was old and decrepit and was, in her eyes, pitiful. He could do no more harm to himself or to others.

So we have to think about whether or not going public in some way would cause more or less harm for that person. It's a question of balance. If we wanted to stop a child from stepping off a cliff, it might be necessary to grab his/her arm in a way that could cause a broken arm.

Amends we can't make:

There are amends, though, that we can't make because they would directly harm other people.

Our OA 12 & 12 gives a great example—something like, “Hello, Mom? Listen, I hated you for 20 years and I just want to apologize for that. I love you now.” There’s an example of an amends that would hurt, not help, the person to whom it is made. It’s similar to the Big Book’s example of not telling a spouse of an extra-marital affair if the spouse doesn’t know about it.

There are many such situations. In my own life, there are some ex-girlfriends from many years ago to whom I would like to apologize. But what right do I have to enter into their lives now, after not having spoken to them for that length of time? Or to remind them of something they might have forgotten? Might it not be harmful to them? What right do I have to do something for my own benefit that might harm them?

I have consulted with sponsors over the years, and have concluded that it would be selfish of me to speak to them out of the blue in that way. If I’m ever in a city where one of them lives, I might phone and see if she wanted to go for coffee and then perhaps get a feel for whether or not it might not be harmful to apologize. But the fact that I’m ready today to apologize makes me clean—I’m not the kind of person now who would do what I did so many years ago!

Or another example: I used to gossip about a particular person, making fun of his/her foibles. Through Step 4 and 5 I realized how selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, and frightened I was in relation to that person. The direct amends that could be made is to say, “Look, I told true stories about you that have held you up to ridicule among your peers. I’m sorry. I won’t do it again.” But that person doesn’t know I gossiped about him/her.

I’ve decided, again after consulting with sponsors over the years, that it would be harmful to apologize. But what I do do is no longer gossip about him or anyone else, and if I’m in a situation where people gossip about him/her, I say something like, “I used to gossip about him/her, but I no longer do, because I think that kind of gossip makes fun of someone who is not well and I don’t think it’s right to make fun of people who are not well.”

Those are examples of amends we could make but shouldn’t make.

What about amends we *can’t* make—people who are dead, for instance? There are many suggestions, of course, ranging from just being serene because we know we’re ready to make amends, to having imaginary conversations with them, to doing

symbolic things like writing them letters and scattering the pieces to the winds or going to their gravestones. What works for one person may not work for another.

Living Amends:

Living amends are just that. It is not sufficient for me to say to my wife or my children, “Oops, I wasn’t such a good husband or father. Sorry.” I have to BECOME a better husband and a better father. This requires working through those areas where I was not a good husband and father and making certain that I’m doing what I should be doing. I’ve been working on this a long time, of course. I’m not a perfect husband or father, and I don’t always know what the right course of action is. But I’ve learned to do more things around the house, to think more of others, and I hope that I’ve been able to show—not to say, but to show—that I’m a better person than I was.

Step Eight Prayers:

The Big Book gives us Step Eight prayers.

If we’re not willing to go to others and make amends, the Big Book suggests on page 76 : “If we haven’t the will to do this, we ask until it comes.”

And on page 79:

Reminding ourselves that we have decided to go to any lengths to find a spiritual experience, we ask that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be. We may lose our position or reputation or face jail, but we are willing. We have to be. We must not shrink at anything.

So our prayers are clear: “God, give me the will to do this. God, please give me the strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be.”

The questions will be asking you to give examples of working out difficult issues and figuring out what the amends should be for other people’s benefits.

One thing I know for certain.

If we have done Steps Four, Five, Six, Seven, to the best of our abilities, and have worked out the harms we have done and are ready to make the amends for those harms, then our motives will be as pure as

they can be, and what we say or do for the other person will BE the right thing to say or do.

And I believe the reverse is true—that if our motives are not pure, if we think of ourselves and hope that if we make amends the other person will apologize for what he or she did, that we'll get that promotion, that we'll get credit for doing the right thing—then what we say or do will NOT be the right thing to say or do. It is a matter of the right attitude.

The Big Book tells us, at page 83, what our attitude must be:

We should be sensible, tactful, considerate and humble without being servile or scraping. As God's people we stand on our feet; we don't crawl before anyone.

Now that attitude comes from one major spot. It is that we are trying to be rid of the things in ourselves, our defects of character, which block us from our higher power, and we realize that without making amends it will be impossible for our defects to be removed. We won't be removing them—that's the miracle from our higher power—but we will be taking the actions necessary to have them removed.

When we realize this, making amends becomes a matter of extreme urgency. Remember that until we do this, we are not freed from the foods we know cause our cravings. We may have temporary release, but it cannot constitute the recovery we're seeking until we have begun working these steps.

More than that, we see that having those defects of character removed by making the amends means

An example of false humility:

In a small town in Russia in the late 1800s, in a small synagogue, the congregation is praying to God during Yom Kippur—the highest of all holy days.

The rabbi gets up and says, "God, before You I am nothing, I am nothing," and falls onto the floor.

The richest man in town gets up and says, "God, before You I am nothing, I am nothing," and falls onto the floor.

The town beggar gets up and says, "God, before You I am nothing, I am nothing," and falls onto the floor.

The rich man whispers to the rabbi: "Look who thinks *he's* nothing!"

that we are becoming entirely DIFFERENT people from who we were. We are NOT the people who did the things we are making amends for. We can be reborn. That is why we stand on our feet and don't crawl before anyone. "Yes, I used to be like that, but, God willing, I am no longer like that." What peace that brings!

Amends to myself?

Note, by the way, that neither the Big Book nor the steps themselves ever talks about making amends to ourselves, which is often said in OA meetings. The only amends we make to ourselves is to have our higher power remove those character defects which stand in the way of our usefulness to our higher power and to our fellows. That's the "only" amends—but it's a huge one. To have those character defects removed is to place us in direct relationship with our higher power. There is no greater amends.

We often hear people talk about "the biggest amends I have to make is to myself". But that really comes down to people saying, "I have to learn to say 'no'" or "I can't run myself ragged without taking time for myself"—quite commendable concepts. But if you look at the Big Book approach, which is to focus on others rather than ourselves, you will see how this concept of an "amends to myself" is consistent with what's been discussed above.

Of course we have to learn to be honest and to say no, because many of us have been enablers and people-pleasers who have said yes for the wrong reasons and have thereby allowed other people to harm us, others, AND themselves. If we make amends to them by not being enablers and not being people-pleasers, we've said "no" but we've said it for the right reasons—to help others, not to be nice to ourselves. And if we run ourselves ragged, then what use are we to the compulsive eater who still suffers?

Of course we have to take care of ourselves; we are messengers of the greatest message in the world—recovery through the Twelve Steps. So we have to take care of ourselves to make certain that others can hear that message.

But the FOCUS is on helping others and making amends to others, and not on ourselves.

The Promises:

And the Big Book FINALLY gives us really good promises. We haven't had great ones up to now (Step Three—an effect will be felt; Step Four—we have learned about our character defects; Step Five—some better ones—we will feel at peace and ease; none for Steps Six and Seven). Halfway through Step Nine come the Promises (page 83), which many of us know well. (By the way, people keep trying to find Twelve Promises. There are three different ways of finding them. I'm giving my favorite way.)

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through.

[1] We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness.

[2] We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it.

[3] We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace.

[4] No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others.

[5] That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear.

[6] We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows.

[7] Self-seeking will slip away.

[8] Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change.

[9] Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us.

[10] We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us.

[11] We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us—sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly.

[12] They will always materialize if we work for them.

These are true promises! Look how they promise nothing about our environment or our financial

situation or anything practical. What they basically say is that we have had a spiritual awakening that has made us into different people; we are now able to learn from the past instead of dwelling on it in misery; and we can live in the present with serenity and love. It is precisely the promise of the Appendix on Spiritual Experience: we have had “a profound alteration” in our “attitude to life.” What marvelous promises they are! And they do come true.

The “Hidden” Promises:

Now, with the promise of a spiritual awakening halfway through Step Nine comes the fulfillment of the promise made to the compulsive eater in Step Two—that the miracle will happen and our trigger foods and eating behaviors will no longer tempt us. Here are the Hidden Promises, found on pages 84 and 85:

And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone - even alcohol. For by this time sanity will have returned. We will seldom be interested in liquor. If tempted, we recoil from it as from a hot flame. We react sanely and normally, and we will find that this has happened automatically. We will see that our new attitude toward liquor has been given us without any thought or effort on our part. It just comes! That is the miracle of it. We are not fighting it, neither are we avoiding temptation. We feel as though we had been placed in a position of neutrality - safe and protected. We have not even sworn off. Instead, the problem has been removed. It does not exist for us. We are neither cocky nor are we afraid. That is our experience.

This is what we've been waiting for! This is why we joined OA in the first place. The mental obsession/insanity has been released from us. We're finally sane!

I recently ate one of the most memorable meals of my life. Every single piece of every single dish was cooked to perfection. I actually savored each bite of the asparagus spears and the baby carrots served with the entree. I put my fork down between bites. Simple but exquisite tastes filled my mouth.

It's not hard to compare this experience with what eating used to be like before I achieved this sanity. Sure, my first bite might have given me the same kind of pleasure as my first bite of the asparagus spear. But the rest of my eating was an attempt to

recapture the initial pleasure. There was a kind of desperation to my eating. My cravings forced me to continue eating until nothing was left, even if I never recaptured the initial pleasure.

No, eating before I finished Step Nine was not a happy experience!

Conclusion:

Done the Big Book way, this has taken us only a few weeks or months. We've pushed on from Steps Five through Nine quickly, and we have got our relief before our mental obsession overcame us and we returned to our trigger foods and eating behaviors; and now we're released from that mental obsession so we are protected. This is great joy! Those are REAL amends to ourselves!

Questions:

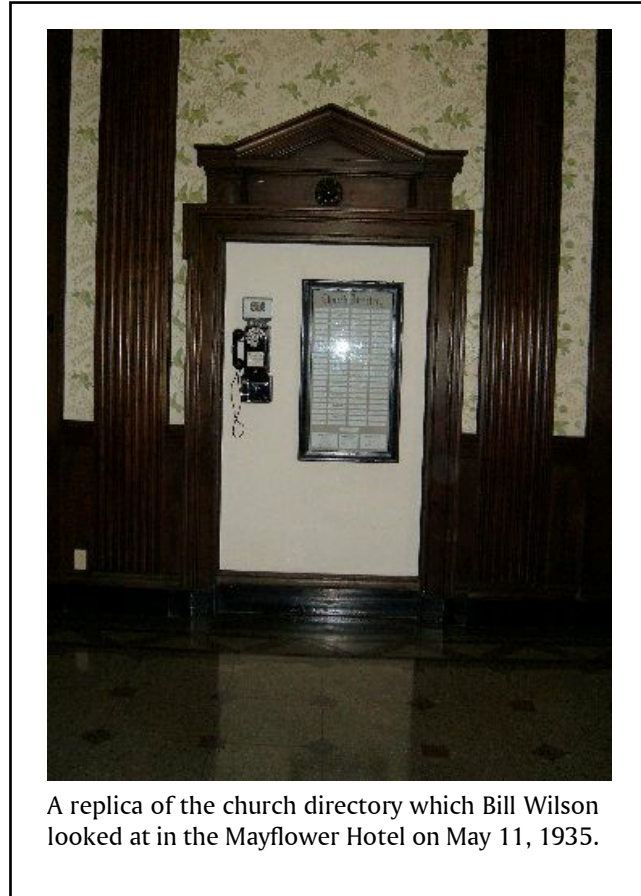
Here are some questions:

- For those of you who have made amends, what were your greatest worries before you made those amends, and did any of those things matter after you made them?
- If you have been silent about harms done to you, do you see how that silence has harmed those who did harm to you? And if so, will relieving that silence help those who did harm or not?
- Are there, or have there been, amends you felt compelled to make which potentially placed others at risk of harm, but which you felt overall were better to do for their sake than not to do?
- For those of you have done your amends, have the Promises and the Hidden Promises come true for you? Describe it.

The Hidden Promises come true but the Big Book cautions us on page 85: "That is how we react SO LONG as we keep in fit spiritual condition."

In the next chapter, therefore, we'll study the first and the second of the three steps that keep us in fit spiritual condition—Steps Ten and Eleven.

The next page is a simple form for Steps Eight and Nine.



A replica of the church directory which Bill Wilson looked at in the Mayflower Hotel on May 11, 1935.

At www.oabigbook.info you can download the Step 8 & 9 form and fill it in on your computer using Adobe Reader.

Clear Data

STEP EIGHT AND NINE LIST

This form is not taken in its entirety from the Big Book, but is a useful guide. Fill out the form directly from the saved copies of your Fourth Step Inventory worksheets. Complete all Amends marked in the "Now?" column. When done, move the items from the "Sometime?" column to "Now?" and the "Never!" items to "Sometime?" You'll find that the Nevers have turned into Sometimes, and the Sometimes into Nows. Continue this process until you complete all items on your Ninth Step.

Name of person harmed:	Harm done to that person:	Possible Amend(s) for that harm (Apology, Restitution, Public Acknowledgement, Living)	Will this Amend harm that person or anyone else?	Now? <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime? <input type="checkbox"/>	Never! <input type="checkbox"/>
			Yes No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			Yes No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			Yes No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			Yes No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			Yes No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			Yes No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			Yes No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>