

# AN APPROACH TO THE FOURTH STEP INVENTORY

The purpose of a searching and fearless moral inventory is to sort through the confusion and the contradiction of our lives so that we can find out who we really are. We are starting a new way of life and need to be rid of the burdens and traps which have controlled us and prevented growth.

As we approach this step, most of us are afraid that there's a monster inside of us that, if released, will destroy us. This fear can cause us to put off our inventory or may even prevent us from taking this crucial step at all. We need to remember that fear is lack of faith; and now that we have found a loving, personal god to turn to we no longer need to be afraid.

We have been experts at self-deception and rationalization; by writing our inventory we can overcome these obstacles. A thorough written inventory will unlock parts of our subconscious which remain hidden when we simply think about or talk about who we are. Once it's all down on paper it's much easier to see, and much harder to deny our true nature. Self-honesty is one of the keys to our new way of life.

The only way to get clean is to stop using and the only way to take an inventory is to sit down and do it. Many specific inventory methods have been used successfully by our members. This inventory method has worked for some of us and can work for you if you'll follow through. Remember, you cannot write a bad inventory - only a better one, and you can write too little - but never too much.

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. You will need a pad of lined paper or a theme book, a pen, and a good dictionary.
2. Sit at a table or desk to write, make sure you have plenty of room and that you will not be unnecessarily interrupted.
3. In going through this guide look up the definition of any words that you do not know the meaning of.
4. When you are actually writing, leave a wide margin so that you can add or comment later.

5. Try to write down what comes to you first and don't edit your inventory.
6. Don't worry about spelling or neatness; your inventory should be readable but it doesn't have to be a work of art.
7. Do not erase or obliterate anything you write.

Strike out "wrong" words or errors with a single line that can be read through.

8. If something "pops" into your head when you are working on something else write it down or make a note on a separate sheet so that you can return to it later. Then get back to what you were doing before.

9. You are writing your inventory for you. At this point the fifth step does not exist. Write down everything, even the things that you are unwilling to share. You can always take out something later, but by writing it down at least you will have a chance to see it more clearly.

10. Write until you have nothing left to write. Your inventory will probably take more than one sitting to write. Try to stop at the end of a section and start again as soon as possible.

I. Begin your inventory by taking the first three steps in writing: what do they mean to you and how do you work them.

- a. Admit your powerlessness in writing and discuss how your life is unmanageable.
- b. Write about the "Power greater than yourself" that you have come to believe in, and what you hope this power can do for you.
- c. Write about your decision to turn your will and your life over to the care of God, and make this commitment in writing.

II. RESENTMENT is the way most of us have reacted to the past. It is the reliving of past experiences again and again in our lives. The more often you have relived an event or gotten into "should have" and "if only" then the more significant that event probably is.

- a. Write about each incident in your life which you have had to relive in your mind at some later date. This includes both "good" and "bad" experiences.
- b. Write about past actions that you would change if you had the opportunity.
- c. Write about any events in your life which you feel caused a change in you.
- d. Write a dictionary definition and at least three sentences on each of the

following feelings as they applied to people, places, things and ideas.

self-pity greed

pride lust

contempt intolerance

hatred apathy

jealousy inertia

envy selfishness

dishonesty

III. ANGER is the way most of us have reacted to the present. It is our reaction to and denial of reality.

Write about the things that make you angry, irritate you, or make you feel uncomfortable. What are your "buttons" and how do they get "pushed"? Are there any key words, phrases, actions, or situations which are sure to "set you off"? The following is a list of some of the things that we often react to with anger. Some of these will apply to you and some will not. Use this list as a starting point and to get you thinking in terms of anger.

being criticized

being contradicted

being ignored

being kidded

practical jokes

being laughed at

being gossiped about or talked about

being called names (stupid, fat, skinny, asshole, bitch, whore, bastard, etc.)

being touched

being stood too close to

being praised

IV. FEAR is the way we have reacted to the future. It is our response to the unknown, a fantasy in reverse. Write at least three sentences on each of your fears - past and present (especially those you think are irrational or those which you think no longer bother you). The following is a list of fears. Some of these will apply to you and some will not. Use this list as a starting point and to get

you thinking in terms of fear.

people principles God  
insanity death police  
punishment institutions jails  
authority rejection asylums  
acceptance failure success  
self-assessment honesty religion  
insecurity accidents animals  
snakes spiders insects  
the dark heights disease  
cancer heart attack obesity  
starvation hospitals drugs  
impotence misconduct sex  
marriage discipline rape  
being disliked moral codes gambling  
responsibility hurting others stealing  
past crimes justice pain  
ego deflation inferiority obsessions  
public speaking claustrophobia attack  
suffocating sarcasm other races  
water mistakes desire  
pride

V. SEX is an area in which most of us have had problems. One of our old timers sometimes refers to us as "lovers in distress" and this is certainly true. Most of us carry a burden of false shame and false guilt because we have tried to live up to an unrealistic or false moral code.

- a. Write about your "perfect" relationship (casual affair, lover, or spouse) and how your actual relationships have lived up to and fallen short of this ideal.
- b. Write about your sexual fantasies whether or not you have acted them out.
- c. Write at least three sentences about each of the following sex related acts or desires that apply to you or that you have strong feelings about. Use this list as a starting point and add any others you can think of.

adultery rape sadism  
incest masochism pornography  
prostitution molestation voyeurism  
homosexuality animal sex teasing  
inter-racial sex masturbation

indecent exposure sexual jealousy  
oral sex group sex abortion  
sex "aids" fetishes

drug abuse as a sex act

sex relations or acts which you feel are abnormal or unnatural

VI. ASSETS must also be considered if we are to get an accurate and complete picture of ourselves. This is very difficult for most of us because it is hard for us to accept that we have good qualities. We each have a combination of assets and liabilities and through this program we try to eliminate the negative and accentuate the positive.

a. Write about each event in your life when you did something good without expecting anything in return.

b. Write at least three sentences on each of the following assets of character. Use this list as a starting point and add any other assets that come to mind.

being clean sense of humor love  
open mindedness willingness humility  
God awareness friendship modesty  
self-acceptance self-honesty patience  
honesty w/others forgiveness simplicity  
serenity courage trust  
faith acceptance generosity  
positive action caring promptness  
self-supporting sharing gratitude

VII. Answer the following QUESTIONS in writing.

1. How do you see yourself? What is your self-image?
2. What do you want to be when you grow up?
3. What do you want out of life?
4. What things have you done for acceptance that you really didn't want to do?
5. What things did you do while you were using that you find yourself unable to do today?
6. What can you do today that you couldn't do before?
7. What are your fantasies and dreams (other than sex)?

8. What is your definition of freedom?
9. Have you intentionally left anything out of your inventory?
10. Are there any events written in your inventory which never actually happened?
11. Is there anything else you can think of that specifically helps to make you, you?
12. What fears and problems have occurred in the process of writing this inventory?
13. What is your definition of surrender?
14. How do boredom, isolation, and loneliness affect you and how do you deal with them?
15. When is your N.A. birthday?

Anyone who has some time in the program and who has worked these steps will tell us that the Fourth Step was a turning point in their lives. Ultimately we find out that we are just human, with the same fears, longings and troubles as everyone else. One of the greatest benefits of the N.A. program is discovering that we need never be alone again. Others have felt as we feel. Others have failed where we failed. They are here now in strength of the Fellowship, ready and eager to help us.

This Fourth Step can be a wonderful adventure, reviewing our past performance and our present behavior to see what we want to keep and what we want to be rid of. No one is forcing us to give up our misery. This step has the reputation of being difficult. In reality, it's quite simple.

As recovering addicts, we now have the right to reach for levels of greater comfort and we can reach them by getting a handle on what we've been doing wrong. If we want to feel good, we have to stop doing the things that make us feel bad.

We are not going to be perfect. If we were perfect, we would not be human. The important thing is that we do our best. We use the tools available to us and we develop the ability to survive our emotions. We do not want to lose any of what we have gained; we want to continue in the program. It is our experience that no matter how searching and thorough, no inventory is of any lasting effect unless it is promptly followed by an equally thorough Fifth Step.