

4 thru 9 "The Clean Up Steps." - Step 4 inventory

The Miracle of The Twelve Step Process:

4 thru 9 "The Clean Up Steps." - Step 4 inventory

{xtypo_info} "Recovery involves bringing to consciousness those beliefs and attitudes in our subconscious that are causing our dysfunctional reactions so that we can reprogram our ego defenses to allow us to live a healthy, fulfilling life instead of just surviving. So that we can own our power to make choices for ourselves about our beliefs and values instead of unconsciously reacting to the old tapes. Recovery is consciousness raising. It is en-light-en-ment - bringing the dysfunctional attitudes and beliefs out of the darkness of our subconscious into the Light of consciousness.

On an emotional level the dance of Recovery is owning and honoring the emotional wounds so that we can release the grief energy - the pain, rage, terror, and shame that is driving us.

That shame is toxic and is not ours - it never was! We did nothing to be ashamed of - we were just little kids. Just as our parents were little kids when they were wounded and shamed, and their parents before them, etc., etc. This is shame about being human that has been passed down from generation to generation.

There is no blame here, there are no bad guys, only wounded souls and broken hearts and scrambled minds."

Quote from Codependence: The Dance of Wounded Souls {/xtypo_info}

"I date my codependence recovery as starting on June 3 1986. As with any milestone, there was recovery that occurred before that - I had been clean and sober for exactly 2 years and 5 months at the point (the story of my early recovery is for another issue) - but this particular day marked a breakthrough in consciousness to a whole new level that changed the direction and focus of my life."

The Story of Joy to You & Me - Joy2MeU Journal Issue 1

Step 4 - inventory

On July 11, 1986 I had a significant breakthrough in my codependence recovery. As I explained in the Story of Joy to You & Me in the first issue of this Journal, I date my recovery from codependency as starting on June 3, 1986. On that day, I began to work through the 12 steps in order again, focusing on my childhood issues. On July 11th I was writing a new 4th step. As part of writing that 4th step, I wrote a letter to my father.

Writing has been a very important part of my recovery. I have found that it is vital for me to write about my process. Just thinking about issues does not move emotional energy - in order to get honest with myself emotionally I learned that I needed to take some action. Writing, talking, doing certain kinds of art projects, are some of the action steps that I found helped me to get in touch with the emotional energy.

Writing can sometimes be a magical process for me. I used to say that there is a Truth mechanism in my elbow some place that will cause my hand to write something other than what my mind has told it to write. That Truth mechanism was operating on July 11th when I wrote the letter to my father. I wrote a sentence that I thought was going to say "Why was nothing I ever did good enough for you." When I looked at the page what it said was, "Why was nothing I ever did good enough for me."

That was a shock - and a moment of enlightenment. I realized immediately that what I had written was the bottom line Truth. For though my father certainly has given me the message that I wasn't good enough all of my life, I had not been living in my fathers proximity for 20 years by that time. My father was not the one who was judging and beating me up on a daily basis - I was doing that to myself.

"What is so damaging about being raised by wounded parents is that we incorporate the messages we got from their behavior and role modeling into our relationship with ourselves. At the core of our being is a little child who feels unworthy and unlovable because our parents were wounded." Column: "Fathers" on web page Wounded Parents

On that day I started peeling off another layer of denial - started getting honest with myself on a new level. It was time to start taking responsibility for how much I was my own worst enemy - for how I was being the victim of myself. At that point in time, it was very difficult for me to look at my part in things because I was still giving so much power to the shame. I did not know how to take responsibility in a healthy way - what I knew, and was comfortable with, was blaming and shaming myself.

4 thru 9 the "house cleaning" steps

{xtypos_info} "As long as we are judging and shaming ourselves we are giving power to the disease. We are feeding the monster that is devouring us.

We need to take responsibility without taking the blame. We need to own and honor the feelings without being a victim of them."

"One of most important steps to empowerment is integrating Spiritual Truth into our experience of the process. In order to do that it is necessary to practice discernment in our relationship with the emotional and mental components of our being.

We learned to relate to our inner process from a reversed perspective. We were trained to be emotionally dishonest (that is, to not feel the feelings or to go to the other extreme by allowing the feelings to totally run our lives) and to give power to, to buy into, the reversed attitudes (it is shameful to be human, it is bad to make mistakes, God is punishing and judgmental, etc.) To find balance within we have to change our relationship with our inner process ."

Quote from Codependence: The Dance of Wounded Souls{/xtypos_info}

Steps 4 through 9 are the "house cleaning" steps. They are the steps that help us to start seeing the past more clearly so that we can identify our patterns, uncover our denial, and learn how to take responsibility for our lives. These are the steps that help us to clean up our relationship with our self, with our Higher Power, and with life. Seeing ourselves more clearly - in the Light of the Spiritual Truth of a Loving Higher Power - is how we change our relationship with our inner process into one that is more Loving.

This page is an introduction to working step 4.

{xtypos_info} "The Twelve Step program of AA provides a practical program for accessing Spiritual power in dealing with day-to-day human life. A formula for integrating the Spiritual into the physical. Even though some of the steps, as originally written, contain shaming and abusive wording, the Twelve Step process and the ancient Spiritual principles underlining it are invaluable tools in helping the individual being start down, and stay on, a path aligned with Truth."

Quote from Codependence: The Dance of Wounded Souls{/xtypos_info}

Working the Fourth Step

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

Even though this page is about step 4, I included step 5 and 6 above because I want to first address the shaming language in which the twelve steps - as used in AA and adapted by CoDA - are written. Step 6 actually refers to the negative side of the inventory done in step 4, so is a part of the fourth step process. (As is step 8, which is list of people we have harmed. I am going to deal with steps 4 through 9 in the next article because they are all part of the 4th step process.)

I hate the term "defects of character." There could be no better term to describe toxic shame. That is what I felt most of my life - that I was somehow defective, that something was wrong with who I am.

I prefer to refer to these "defects" as codependent behavior patterns and dysfunctional attitudes. They are part of the emotional defense system which we adapted to protect ourselves as children. They are not signs that we are defective, nor are they "wrong" as step 5 states - they are dysfunctional because they do not work to help us have a Loving, fulfilling relationship with ourselves. They are a part of the disease of codependence that we were powerless over as long as we were unconscious to them. By starting to get conscious of these behavior patterns and attitudes we start to access the power to change them. That is what step 4 is Truly about - becoming conscious.

The first time I worked a 4th and 5th step was in the 30 day treatment program where I got sober. What I heard emphasized about the 4th step was the negative side of the "searching and fearless moral inventory." The 4th step was for cleaning up the "wreckage of our past." And since I had a lot of wreckage that I was ashamed of, I thought of the 4th step as being focused on what I had done "wrong," of how screwed up and sick I was.

[Part of the reason that I saw the 4th step as a very negative self inventory was because of the shame that I was carrying. But there was also an aspect of this negativity that was due to how the 4th step was approached in Alcoholics Anonymous. Old timers in AA tended very much in those days (and many still do today), to a black and white / right and wrong outlook on the steps because of their codependence. All alcoholics are also codependent according to my

definition of codependence. The term in AA that refers to codependence is "grave emotional and mental disorders." Recovering alcoholics tend to believe that some of them have those disorders and some don't - I believe that everyone does, due to the dysfunctional nature of society. A big part of why I still attend AA meetings is to carry the message of codependence recovery to the many suffering codependents in AA.

This black and white perspective can actually be an asset in early recovery - in relationship to quitting drinking - because the issue of drinking is a black and white issue. One either drinks or doesn't drink. It can actually be very helpful in alcoholism recovery to apply the black and white thinking of codependence to the issue of drinking. "I am a success today because I haven't had a drink today," is a very True statement for any alcoholic - but it is also True that drinking is a symptom of the grave emotional and mental disorders caused by childhood trauma. As with certain other addictive/compulsive behaviors - anorexia and bulimia, sex addiction, etc. - it is necessary with alcoholism/drug addiction to get the symptoms under control before the underlying causes can be addressed. There is an old AA saying that "AA doesn't open up the gates of heaven and let us in - it opens up the gates of hell and lets us out." What quitting drinking lets an alcoholic out into is life - and in order to significantly change one's relationship with life it is necessary to deal with the childhood wounds - in my opinion.]

I was very good at doing a negative inventory - I had been doing that all of my life, judging and shaming myself. For me in early recovery, the fearless and searching moral inventory was a way to beat myself up for being defective.

But that first time that I did a 4th step, I was also assigned to do a positive inventory of sorts. I was given an assignment to write up a list of positive characteristics that I possessed. I approached this assignment, as I approached much of life in those days, out of a bravado based on the false self image of myself that I had worn as a mask to hide my shameful being. I made up a list of 30 some positive characteristics that I would present in a humorous, charming way - or so I thought. When I was asked to read this list in my therapy group, I pulled out my piece of paper and made some comment that betrayed the bravado I was approaching the assignment with - and my counselor promptly snatched the paper out of my hands. He then asked me to state 3 good things about myself. I could not. I cried. I could not think of a single positive, good thing about me. I just sat there crying out of the core shame that I felt. Crying because of the pain of knowing that I was defective.

When I worked through the 12 steps in order again after my awakening to codependence on June 3, 1986, I wrote another fourth step. I had been telling myself that the 4th step I did in treatment, when I was less than 30 days sober, was good enough for two and a half years. My awakening caused me to get honest enough with myself to write another 4th step.

I don't remember any of that 4th step now, 13 years later - except for the part about the letter to my father. Whatever I did in that July writing in 1986 opened me up to becoming more conscious of my patterns - helped me to peel away some more of my denial. Writing that fourth step changed my life for the better and opened me up to a new, deeper level of self-honesty. It was a very vital step in leading me to become willing to do my emotional healing - to getting emotionally honest with myself. Writing that fourth step was a very huge milestone in my journey home to Love.

There are a variety of ways to do a 4th step. There are many books/workbooks now available that can help someone who wants to work the steps in order - including working a 4th step. I highly recommend Melody Beattie's book on the steps (see recommended books page) - but there are many others available. Any of them would be valuable to someone new to recovery - or to someone who has been involved in the healing process but has never worked the steps per se.

As I mentioned in my article on working the first three steps, we work the steps and practice the principles behind the steps anytime we are taking some action that is aligned with healing, with Spiritual awakening, with recovery. Reading self help books, going to therapy, attending workshops, going to 12 step meetings, attending Spiritual or healing gatherings, etc. - are all ways to be actively involved in the uncover, discover, recover process.

It is extremely useful however, and can begin a great acceleration in our healing process, to actually work through the 12 steps in order, in writing. I am going to describe a way in which I would now approach the 4th step, which will include working the 6th through 9th steps, in the next article in this series - but I just want to emphasize here that I believe it can be a very valuable experience for anyone to actually work the steps in writing, no matter which workbook or guidelines one follows.

I want to end this page with another example of how the Truth mechanism in my elbow has worked at certain times. These types of Truth interventions, of "Freudian slips" as it were, either writing or talking have been a very important thing for me to pay attention to in recovery. They have pointed out areas where my focus was off, where my perspective was causing me to see things from a victim perspective instead of seeing the higher truth. They have been invaluable messages telling me where to concentrate my energy and attention.

There is a Latin term used in law that means something to the effect of "The thing speaks for itself." I don't remember the term right now but this example is an illustration is such a "thing." It came while I was doing some more work on that

4th step in July of 1986. I was doing some writing that had been suggested on the seven deadly sins (something I wouldn't use today) and was writing a sentence about each of those so-called deadly sins. Here is a sentence as I thought it in my head and commanded my hand to write it:

I feel envious when I see all of the affection other people are getting.

What I actually wrote was:

I feel envious when I see all of the affection other people are giving.

And the giving, of course, has to start with giving Love to self.

Go to Step 4 thru 9