

STEP NINE

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

The Eighth and Ninth steps were our efforts to bring ourselves into harmony with the world around us. We carried out the housecleaning that, so far, had been essentially inward and reflective.

We made amends, one at a time, with care and compassion. Taking a name from our Eighth Step list, we reflected on the nature of the harm done to that person. Now was the time to try our hardest to put ourselves in the other person's shoes concerning our past interaction with him or her. What was it like to be on the receiving end of our poor behavior? How was that person's view of the world or personality altered as a result of what we have done? Did our actions cause another to lose trust in people in general? We asked ourselves how we might have had a negative influence or impact on others.

Usually, this reflection stirred an eagerness to set matters right. Seeing things from another's perspective conjured up a sudden and uneasy awareness of the pain or disappointment our actions had caused. Although these feelings made our amends heartfelt, we could not let them lead to morbid reflection and remorse. That kept us from the positive path of action that is the focus of this Step.

The best antidote for morbidity was a calm and open manner and straightforward attitude. We put our newly found awareness of the nature of the harm done in the background and, praying for guidance, asked our Higher Power for the best way to amend the injury. We asked around the fellowship and found other people who had dealt with similar amends. We consulted with our sponsors. We trusted that our Higher Power would direct our thinking as we proceeded.

Contacting the person harmed, we explained that our addiction to nicotine was in abeyance through our practice of the spiritual program of Nicotine Anonymous. The program stresses that we put right the wrongs we have done in the past and repair relationships with the people we had harmed. And that is why we were here.

We went on to explain in appropriate detail the harm we felt we had done. While this did not instantly remedy matters, its long-term effect was powerful. If we had caused a material loss to the person we offered to make restitution. However most often the harm was emotional and spiritual in nature. Where emotional damage had been done, we apologized and stated that we were now trying to live honestly and in harmony with others.

Saying we were sorry was often not enough. Sometimes the person we were talking with was skeptical, especially if we had remorsefully made apologies in the past, promised changed behavior, and then simply gone back to our old ways. Changing our actions and making living amends was necessary. Living our amends meant acting and doing the healthy, loving things to others that we had previously promised. Apologizing for past negative actions and stopping them in the present was not enough; we now had to take positive personal actions toward others and strive toward establishing the correct relations with everyone we come into contact with. Long-term reconstruction of relationships comes through consistent behavior over time.

We also remembered to take our inventory and not take the other person's. We talked about what we had done, not of what the other person had done. Even if we firmly believed the other person had contributed to 90% of the problem and we had caused only 10% of the problem, we talked only about the 10% we were responsible for. We were only there to clean up our side of the street. If the other person, in the spirit of reconciliation, talked of their actions, we simply listened and thanked them for their comments. We did not judge, criticize, or argue.

The person being approached may have responded with anger and not forgiveness. However, we did not try to make them see our point of view. We accepted their feelings and expressed that we hoped in the future they could forgive us, and left it at that and in the care of our Higher Power.

We made sure we did not make amends in any way that would cause further harm or pain to the person affected. We did not reveal secrets that felt good for us to confess but which might cause pain to the other person. We avoided emotional dumping that selfishly gave emotional release solely to ourselves.

Often our self-centered behavior caused discomfort or harm to groups of people or to individuals who had passed through our lives anonymously. These people had endured our cigarette

smoke in confined spaces like elevators, or saw our discarded cigarette butts along a pristine mountain trail. In these cases many of us found that we needed to make amends to the world in general. We sought ways to repay the world for the harm we had done. This could take the form of volunteer work with environmental groups, service in Nicotine Anonymous, or other less formal activities that are of service to people.

In certain cases we could not make direct amends to the people we had harmed. Perhaps they had died or we had lost touch with them, or they refused to see us. In these cases we found that the "amends to the world in general" concept worked. If we had been a poor daughter or son to a now deceased parent, we took actions toward others who were in similar situations to our parents; we adopted, helped and loved a senior citizen. If we could not communicate to the person harmed, we made a living amends to someone with whom we could interact.

In our explanation of what we were doing we usually mentioned Nicotine Anonymous and how it had brought us to the current situation. However, our purpose was not to explain our program or our newly found spirituality. If talk of program and spirituality made others uncomfortable we did not press those issues but got down to the business of making amends.

It takes time to make amends. We learned patience through the process. It takes courage and a willingness to proceed in principle on a course of action when we cannot predict the outcome. We learned to plan our course of action, to carry it out with determination, and to accept whatever result it brought. We proceeded in the knowledge that this worked not only to keep us free of nicotine, but also to help us achieve a new rapport with others and to reduce our sense of loneliness and isolation.

Having done the best we could to restore the emotional and material security we disrupted in those we harmed, we began to see the world in a new light. We knew now that our individual actions radiate more broadly in the world than we had ever imagined. As a result of our admission of our powerlessness over nicotine, we came at last to understand the real point of our power. In this pursuit, we gradually discovered that our knowledge and tolerance of others had increased and our place in humanity had become, for the first time in our lives, truly comfortable.

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