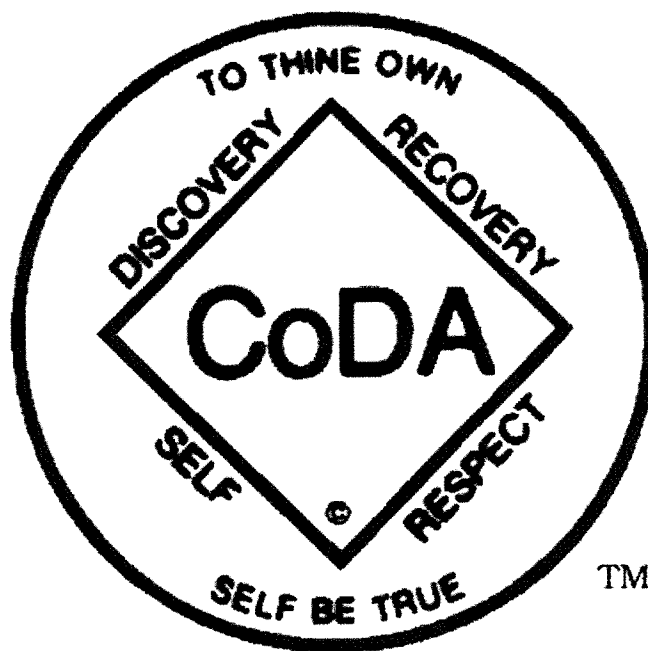
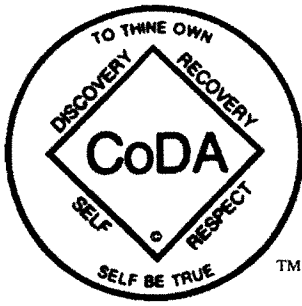


CoDA

Step Study



On the 1st Tuesday of the month, we will collectively read the step study for the current month.



STEP ONE

“We admitted we were powerless over others - that our lives had become unmanageable.”

For many of us who came to Co-Dependents Anonymous, minding other people's business had become a way of life. We might have been taught by well-meaning people that we really were responsible for the well-being of others and that our words and actions were powerful enough to change those with whom we interacted.

Having carried this teaching into adulthood, most of us have had difficulty in our relationships with a spouse, lover, child, friend, co-worker, or parent. We had made these “others” our Higher Power, defining who we were by what we imagined they thought. Determining to control, to advise, to guide others, we put off our own good -- indefinitely.

In Co-Dependents Anonymous, we are opening ourselves to a new way of thinking and living, one that offers us an end to our compulsive drive to “fix the unfixable”.

Powerlessness

Until now we had applied self-control obsessiveness, and our own clouded thinking to our problems of living. When our relationships broke down, many of us just tried harder, applying our arsenal of misinformation with a vengeance. Our self-will took many forms. We were overbearing. We were people pleasers. We conformed. We rebelled. We blamed. We hurt ourselves and we hurt others. Some of us had to go to the edge of insanity or death before we were willing to admit our powerlessness. And all the while we were convinced we were doing the right thing. Where was success?

We took a moment to reflect on the futility of trying to feel good about ourselves by focusing on the real or imagined problems of another. And we reminded ourselves that we never had the kind of power these old thoughts suggested we apply.

“But what about the long haul?” we asked. “Will I ever be free of these burdensome thoughts?”

Unmanageability

The second half of this Step reminded us of our past. Our lives had become unmanageable because we had chosen to solve problems in a way that did not work. We made our well-being hinge on the imagined well-being (or lack of it) of another.

Chances are that by the time we reached CoDA our lives were out of control. The coping skills we had relied on for a lifetime were no longer working. We were the victims of a compulsive way of behaving so subtly powerful and damaging that no ordinary means could break it. Our lives were truly unmanageable. It was at this point that our old ideas began to crumble and we became open to the possibility that there might be another way.

Our new life in Co-Dependents Anonymous began with Step One. As we became willing to say the words, “We admit we are powerless over others and our lives have become unmanageable”, we placed the key in the door to our recovery. We had given up making gods out of ourselves and others. We had made room for a true Higher Power, one in which we could eventually place our faith and trust.

In this moment I do not have to control anyone, including me. And if I feel uncomfortable with what another person is doing or not doing, I can remind myself, I AM POWERLESS over this person and I AM POWERLESS over my compulsion to act in inappropriate ways.

Having surrendered thus far, we were ready to take Step Two.

STEP TWO

"Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

As active co-dependents, we were ignorant of our connection to a Higher Power. Instead connecting inappropriately with others. We had lost two important connections in our lives — with ourselves and with a Power greater than ourselves. We were faced with spiritual bankruptcy and the absence of any hope of change.

In Step One we admitted we had no power over another. We acknowledged that focusing on others to feel good about ourselves had become a compulsion over which we were powerless. In Step Two we learned our resources alone were not sufficient for recovery. We were offered an alternative, one for which we had been unknowingly seeking, a relationship with a Higher Power and the assurance that we were not alone. Although coming to believe may have been gradual, in the beginning all we needed to attain it was the willingness to attend CoDA meetings and keep an open mind.

Step Two tells us there is hope. Little by little, one day at a time, we come to believe that we can count on the promise of a loving Higher Power. We are offered a new way of life — one in which we need not be alone.

Came to Believe

In the beginning, we came to believe by attending meetings and listening. We heard others as they described a relationship with a Higher Power. We noticed that those who

maintained a regular connection with this Power experienced what we sought — RECOVERY.

We decided that, one day at a time, we could "act as if" we had a Higher Power whether we actually believed in this Power or not. Because we were members of a Twelve-Step program, the form of this Power was left to each of us to discover. For some of us a Higher Power was unconditional love; for others, this Power was divine intelligence. Our "Power Greater" might have been nature, an image of an ocean, river or tree. Some of us chose our home group of Co-Dependents Anonymous. For others, this Power was the thought of limitless space or simply the words, "my Higher Power." The point was, that in the beginning of our time in CoDA, we became willing to entertain the possibility there was something that could do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

We were free to use any of these ideas of a Higher Power. We could borrow someone else's idea and try it for a while to see if it worked for us. What we discovered was the importance of our willingness to form this relationship.

Restore Us to Sanity

For some of us, the words "restore us to sanity" stimulated our resistance. We saw it as an affront: "I might have a few problems, but I'm not crazy!" With the help of others in the program we began to look more clearly at our own behavior. We discovered a great truth in Step Two: that continuing to act in a

self-destructive manner, no matter how well-meaning we believed we were, was insane. And once this behavior became compulsive, any belief we held that we could control it

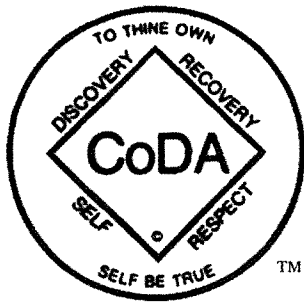
Yet there were some of us who still balked. "Weren't we taught that it's our duty to help others? We ARE our brother's keepers, aren't we? And what's wrong with wanting to please those we love — our parents, our spouses, our lovers, our children, our friends? Isn't that what life is all about?"

With the support of program friends, we examined these old beliefs. We began to wonder what price we had paid for them. Had our own instability and the lack of balance in our relationships affected our family lives, our careers, and our spiritual growth? Had we relegated our own joy and fulfillment to the bottom of our list of needs and wants?

Becoming honest with ourselves was at times painful. The reward was magnificent. As we came to believe and embrace the simple and profound truth offered in this step, the seed of humility produced by our admission of powerlessness in Step One was nurtured. We experienced a sense of freedom and hope by our willingness to have a true Higher Power. At this point our faith emerged.

In this moment, I can believe that I am never alone. I can experience the sense of freedom that having a Higher Power offers me. I can remind myself that believing is also an action, and if I am willing to practice it, one moment at a time, I will develop faith.

Having admitted our lives were unmanageable and that help could come from a Power greater than ourselves, we were ready to begin Step Three.



STEP THREE

“Made a decision to turn our will and lives over to the care of God as we understood God.”

At our wits end, many of us became willing to trust a Higher Power. Why not? Nothing we had done was working, at least not for long! Others among us felt afraid to trust this Power. What if it gave us what we believed we deserved? What if it didn't?

Upon closer examination, we were confronted with our impaired self-esteem. Were we projecting our own beliefs about ourselves onto our Higher Power who, we feared, was waiting to punish us for being so flawed? Or did we live with the omnipotent notion that we were the only ones who knew what was best for ourselves and others?

It was then we reminded ourselves that in Step Two we defined our Higher Power as being greater than we were. In working Step Three, we discovered this Power to be greater than our mistaken beliefs about who we were, greater than our distorted notions of God and greater than anything our human thinking could create.

We could ask this God of our new understanding for release from the bondage of these old ideas, one day at a time. And, if old thoughts persisted, we could continue to take the action asked of us in this Step, knowing that in time healing would occur.

Made a Decision

We set this Step in motion by coming to our first CoDA meeting. As time progressed and we attended more meetings, we listened, shared and began to feel relief. Each time we identified with a fellow CoDA member's story or a piece of CoDA literature, we were increasing our commitment to the first three Steps and our recovery. Without realizing it, we were surrendering to the wisdom and guidance of the program.

At this point we began to see our progress. We had admitted our powerlessness over the compulsive behaviors we had practiced for so long. We were beginning to believe a Higher Power could relieve them. The next step was obvious. If we believed we were powerless and that a Higher Power could transform us, why not accept it? Why not give God a chance where we had failed? Besides, what did we have to lose but our misery?

Our Will and Our Lives

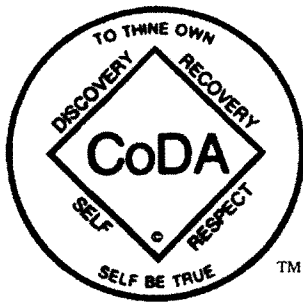
Having experienced relief from our obsession with others, some of us became complacent. We thought that having worked Step Three once, we had done our job. We quickly discovered the erroneous nature of this thinking.

Our old ideas called out to us to return to self-will. Once again, we attempted to play God in our lives and the lives of others. Old doubts sometimes challenged our new thinking. We began to believe that even though this program worked for others -- we were different. Losing hope, we questioned our ability to change.

It was this experience that led us to acknowledge that this program of recovery was not a “flash in the pan”, something nice to do on a pleasant afternoon. It represented our opportunity to live as whole human beings. And, if we wanted it, we would need the willingness to go to any lengths -- even if it meant asking God for help once more.

*In this moment I can choose my own Higher Power. I can set aside all the old beliefs about who I am **not** and be who I am -- a child of God. I can remind myself that a faith in a Higher Power becomes a faith in me, and that my recovery lies in being true to myself and to my Higher Power.*

Having made the decision, our struggle ended. We became resolved that, despite the challenges we might face, we would continue on to Step Four.



STEP FOUR

“Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”

Having followed the spiritual path suggested for us in the first three Steps, we stood on the threshold of self-discovery. The clear phrasing of the Fourth Step, **“made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves,”** gave us the perfect tool with which to begin. The language was free of shaming criticism. It said simply, Let’s take a look at ourselves as we’ve been up til now!

Most of us had spent the better part of our lives preoccupied with other people. We had scrutinized, criticized, and analyzed others and ourselves, sometimes obsessively. But this was not the basis for a searching and fearless moral inventory of anyone. It was self-will, self-abuse, and our obsession with others.

In CoDA’s first three Steps we had begun to participate in a partnership with the Higher Power of our own choosing. And it was this partnership that became our guarantee of success. Placing ourselves solely in God’s hands would mean the end of self-will and self-abuse.

There was nothing to fear from this investigation. We had surrendered to a Power greater than ourselves, greater than our shame and fear. Unless we chose to set aside our decision in Step Three, we were no longer in charge.

Searching and Fearless

The definition of those words were as myriad as they were comforting. **Searching** meant to look over carefully in order to find something lost or concealed; to come to know, to learn, to seek; to conduct a thorough investigation.

And **fearless** meant courageous, bold, and unconquerable.

If “searching” meant to look for something lost or concealed, we were really on the brink of a great adventure, the discovery of our True Selves.

But this word, “fearless” was another story. Many of us still believed it was impossible to approach this process without fear.

We were comforted by others who had felt as we had. We realized that we were not alone, that we were embarking upon this journey with God who would guide us gently along our way.

Moral Inventory of Ourselves

The first part of this Step defined the attitude we adopted as we worked it -- one that was searching and fearless. The second part of Step Four gave us our focus and direction.

This inventory would be only of ourselves, and it would pertain to our personal behavior in as many life experiences as we could recall.

The word “moral” had many synonyms. Among them were words like honest, straightforward, fair, and open.

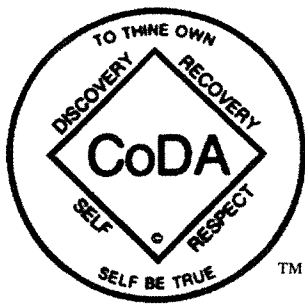
The message in Step Four was clear. This Inventory of ourselves was to be honest and straightforward, not critical or abusive.

If this was to be a thorough Inventory, we would need to list our assets and our liabilities. That meant we would have a truly balanced picture of ourselves. For some, it was more difficult to discover good points than to face shortcomings. For others, acknowledging positive qualities made the task less painful. Whatever our feelings were about this, we were encouraged to do both as each was an important aspect of a thorough inventory.

Most of us found that putting the inventory in writing was the only way out of obsessing about the past. It also helped us in getting our thoughts organized. We learned from our sponsor and other CoDA friends that there were a variety of approaches. Some had listed fears, resentments and actions taken that were related to specific people and events. Others wrote a life story. Most importantly, we were cautioned that no matter what had happened in the past, the purpose of Step Four was for each of us to become aware of our own participation in the events of our lives. It was only with this information that we could engage in a thorough housecleaning, rid ourselves of the debris from the past, and become whole human beings.

In this moment, I am willing to see myself as I truly am, a growing, unfolding spiritual being resting in the hands of a loving God. I can separate who I am from what I’ve done, knowing that the real me is emerging -- loving, joyful, and whole.

Having completed our Fourth Step, we were ready to move on to Step Five.



STEP FIVE

“Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs.”

It was at Step Five that we were offered the chance to have shame and guilt transformed into humility.

In Step One we admitted our powerlessness. In Step Two we became willing to acknowledge that our self-will was out of control. With Step Three we turned our will over to God's care. Step Four guided us to put our predicament on paper. Step Five gave us the opportunity to make another leap of faith. We would now expose our deepest secrets to God, to ourselves, and to another person.

Admitted to God, to Ourselves, and to Another

Most of us spent a lifetime fearing and often defending ourselves against exposure. “If-you-really-knew-me-you-wouldn't-like-me”, could have been our collective chorus of shame. Now, in this step, we were being asked to relinquish our protective shields.

Many of us became resistant and this resistance took diverse forms. There was passivity, “I'll do it someday”. Others were enraged, “My life is nobody's business but mine!” Many were fearful, “This organization is obviously a cult.” Some of us believed we were overworked and tired, “Wasn't that inventory I did enough?!”

At the suggestion of CoDA friends who had already worked these Steps, we decided to risk this exposure we feared in the safest possible way, with our Higher Power. By admitting to God, we were reminding ourselves that the primary element in our recovery was spiritual.

Without realizing it, most of us had lived with an undercurrent of constant tension that had sapped our energy and our joy. As we revealed to ourselves, that which we had hidden for so long, we began to experience the feelings we had long suppressed. It was uncomfortable, but not unmanageable. Some of us were surprised at the shame we experienced by just admitting these wrongs to ourselves. Encouraged by other CoDA members, we stuck with this section of Step Five and eventually, the pressing weight of what we had locked inside began to lift. This self-admission had become a vehicle for self-acceptance.

Most of us chose to share our Fourth Steps with a trustworthy and understanding CoDA member, someone who had been in the program long enough to have worked most, if not all, of the Twelve Steps. It was also important to give this inventory away to someone who was, in our opinion, living the program.

There were others who chose a listener who was a therapist, counselor, or member of the clergy, as long as they possessed knowledge of the Twelve Step process and the purpose of the Fifth Step.

It was also recommended that we avoid choosing a family member, co-worker, or the focus of our obsession.

We set aside sufficient time with our listener and chose what we felt was a safe place.

Before we took this step, we asked for guidance from our Higher Power and expressed our willingness to be open and honest.

Having completed this Step, we shared our feelings about having taken it, particularly the areas of most discomfort. Many of us felt great relief. Others wondered when all our woes would be magically lifted. Some of us felt nothing and were disappointed.

Anxious for change, many of us had to be cautioned that the purpose of this step was only to admit our shortcomings. Further action would come later. We were reminded that this was a process. It worked no matter how we felt. The power of truthfulness would be healing in and of itself.

In this moment, I will acknowledge myself for doing what was most difficult for me. I will rest in the accepting presence of my Higher Power. I know I have deepened my commitment to the journey of recovery by opening my Self and my heart to a fellow human being.

Having completed the work suggested in Step Five we felt ready to continue on to Step Six.

STEP SIX

"Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."

In Steps Four and Five we identified and admitted our patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. We looked at the ways in which these patterns affected our own lives and the lives of others.

Step Six proposed that we do more than take a difficult action or challenge a treasured belief. The message in Step Six was clear — get ready to change!

Entirely Ready

At first this concept of being, "entirely ready," seemed impossible to achieve. Many of us thought it meant we had to work this Step without fear. Once again we had put the cart before the horse. We wrongly assumed we must be free of our character defects in order to be ready to have them removed.

We were reminded that "entirely ready" meant completely prepared. Having completed our Fifth Step was a large part of that preparation. We examined this phrase more closely and found we could test it in our daily lives.

For instance, if we were in a restaurant and a waiter didn't take our order with enough haste to suit us, we had some options. We could behave in an old way.

For some of us, this might take the form of acted-out irritation or, perhaps, the silent treatment. For others, the reaction might be resignation because we were hesitant to speak up in our own behalf. What we

discovered in Step Six was a new option.

When faced with a character defect, in this case, impatience, we could ask ourselves if we were entirely ready to have it removed. The choice was ours.

If our answer was, "no," we needed to consider the consequences of that defect of ours, not only on others but on ourselves. Were we willing to continue to pay for this kind of attitude?

We began to understand that an attitude or behavior born out of a shortcoming would never give us the peace of mind we sought, no matter what those "voices-in-our-heads" said!

But what about the defects we believed we needed in order to survive? False pride, arrogance, and self-righteousness were often substitutes for poor self-esteem. Resentment seemed to bolster our boundaries against invasion. Fear kept many of us on alert for those who would do us harm. How could we ever become "entirely ready" to have these defects removed?

The answer came to us, that all of our character defects were, in some way, products of our own self-will. They were survival tools from our past, and while they seemed to provide for our apparent well-being, they were no longer enough. We wanted to live, not merely survive, and for that we would need a clean slate.

To Have God Remove All These Defects of Character

As in previous Steps, Step Six suggested we put our own wills aside and leave the work to God.

Throughout our lives, most of us had handled adversity on our terms, relying on our shortcomings to get us through painful and often complex situations. Many of us had used our Higher Power, directing this Power to do our bidding. "Dear God, make her love me!" "Oh God, don't let him leave me!" "Lord, make them give me that job right now!"

We made those prayers as honestly as we could. The trouble was our approach. Ironically, while we had come to view ourselves as flawed, our arrogance led us to think that we alone held the answer to everyone's problems, including our own. It was this distorted reasoning that had left us in such a state of unmanageability.

In Step Six we were offered a solution — to place our recovery in the hands of our Higher Power — again.

But what about this notion of turning "all" of our defects over to God? Why not become entirely ready to have God remove **some** of our defects of character?

It was suggested that we view these shortcomings as a protective shell that we had outgrown. Hanging onto them would be as self-defeating as a bird keeping some of its shell or a butterfly clinging to a bit of its cocoon. At this point in our recovery, our character defects didn't protect us at all. They were excess baggage that dragged us down, often blinding us to our potential.

STEP SEVEN

"Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings."

As a result of our work with Step Six, we were strengthened in our resolve to allow change in our lives. We had seen the damage our shortcomings had caused. Still, the old patterns stuck to us like glue. Once again, we found ourselves at a crossroads and again the way was revealed to us.

Step Seven offered us the key to the appropriate use of self-will — to call on our Higher Power for assistance.

Humbly Asked God

Our first task was to discover the true meaning of the word, humility.

Words like subservience, resignation, and timidly did not work for us. Nor did the belief that humility was a sign of weakness to be resisted at all costs.

After much consideration, we defined humility as freedom from false pride and arrogance. True humility allowed us to see things as they were. We would not instruct our Higher Power to remove our shortcomings. Neither would we beg. Instead, we would gently, peacefully ask.

Although only a power greater than ourselves could relieve us of our character defects, our cooperation was also necessary. We learned that the means to real change for us would be accomplished by forming a working partnership with our Higher Power, remembering at all times that the senior partner was not us, but God.

To Remove Our Shortcomings

Life without character defects was impossible to imagine. We wondered what we would be like without them. We decided to find out, but how? For our answer we relied on CODA members who had been down this path before us.

It was recommended that we take this Step with our sponsor or a trusted CODA friend, someone who had already worked this Step with some success.

It was also suggested that we preface our request to God with a prayer. The Serenity Prayer worked for some. Others created their own. What we did was to make a contact with the God of our understanding and, in essence say, "Here I am God, defects and all. I am willing to have you remove them as you see fit. Thank you."

When we found ourselves in the throes of one of these character defects, we could, in that moment, ask God to take it from us.

Some of us discovered we were still clinging to a particular shortcoming, afraid to go on without it. We were guided back to Step Six and once again asked for our Higher Power's direction in becoming entirely ready to have all our defects removed.

Having asked God to remove our shortcomings, many of us experienced their loss with sadness. We had never expected to grieve for what we had come to believe was detrimental to our happiness. We began to see that these "old friends" had served us well. Like a childhood life preserver that no longer fit, we put them aside. With the help of God, we were learning to swim.

In this moment, I ask my Higher Power to remove all of my shortcomings, relieving me of the burden of my past. In this moment, I place my hand in God's trusting that the void I experience is being filled with my Higher Power's unconditional love for me and those in my life.

Strengthened by the action we took in this Step, we were ready to work Step Eight.

STEP EIGHT

"Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all."

Step Eight was the beginning of mending our relationships, both with ourselves and others. It prepared us to venture out from the relative safety of the Fellowship. We would begin to interact with others in a new way.

The amends which this step got us ready to make were not merely to be apologies, as some of us thought. Rather, the amends called for in this Step included changes in our behavior.

These amends were not to be made until we were willing to face each person we had harmed and acknowledge our wrongdoing. We were guided to work each step, as written. A half-baked approach would not do the job.

Made A List

As with each element of the CODA program, there was a logical sequence for us to follow. In the first half of Step Eight we were asked to list everyone who had been harmed by our personal unmanageability. Our name came first and the reason was obvious. We had been the least able to escape from our own co-dependence, and therefore, in most cases, we received the greatest injuries. A change in behavior toward ourselves would have to come first.

If we had been physically, emotionally, sexually, or spiritually abused as children, it was especially important for us to be diligent and clear in making this list. We needed to look carefully at each of our

relationships to discover if someone else had been made to pay the price for what had been done to us as children. Again, we found that our name, while not the only one of the list, came first. Although nothing we could have possibly done as children ever warranted the abuse we'd received, what was important here, was to discover if we had harmed ourselves or others as a way of venting our rage, grief, or hurt at these past injustices.

Became Willing To Make Amends To Them ALL

Many of us discovered we had resistance to this Step. We found reasons to leave names off of our list. An infraction was thought to be too small to mention, or the person not important enough to bother with. Or we may have listed someone to whom we were unwilling to make amends. Perhaps we had done something for which we were never caught. Why rock the boat? In some cases the person might be hard to find, in other cases, dead.

Ultimately, none of these reasons worked. If a name belonged on the list, we reasoned we would find a way to become willing to make the amends.

And willingness was again our key. Step Eight was not the Step in which we would face those we had wronged. The purpose of Step Eight was to focus our attention on becoming ready to face those we had harmed. And it was in becoming willing that we got stuck. We wondered what action we could take to prepare ourselves for this new task.

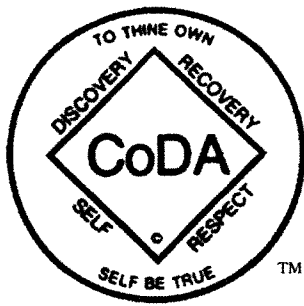
We found asking these questions to be helpful: What would my motive be in making amends to those I have harmed? Would it be to clear my conscience, to rid myself of old guilts? Or do I want to acknowledge my wrongdoings as a step in altering my behavior? Can I count on myself to avoid using this step to justify my past behavior? Am I capable of separating what I did from what was done to me?

Based on these questions, many of us expressed doubts regarding our ability to be truly willing to make amends. Some of us needed to return to Steps Six and Seven to discover what defect of character we had kept in reserve. Others had become willing as a result of truly accepting their own contribution to their troubled relationships.

This self-forgiveness would be instrumental in moving us out of our co-dependence and into healthy, whole relationships with God, ourselves, and our fellow human beings.

In this moment, I see the impossible become not only possible but real. As I forgive myself for my shortcomings, I am able to forgive others, opening the way for a true and lasting change in my behavior. Thank you God.

Our willingness to make honest amends to all those we had harmed led us into Step Nine.



STEP NINE

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

For many of us in Co-dependents Anonymous, our most comfortable role had been that of victim. We had waited years for someone, anyone, to make amends to us.

Step Nine brought us to our moment of truth. It asked us to take that particular action **ourselves**.

How we worked this Step became the measure of our recovery. The keys to success for us would be sensitivity, good judgement, and courage. Even if the words, “Higher Power”, were unmentioned in Step Nine, many of us felt this truly was the time to seek spiritual guidance.

Made Direct Amends... Wherever Possible

Because our own name was first on our list of amends, each of us had the chance to practice this important task before making amends to others. The question before us was this: How would I like amends to be made to me? Would a simple, “Im sorry”, suffice? The answer was, “no”.

What most of us wanted in the way of amends from another was to have that person acknowledge his or her part in harming us. We also wanted our feelings and our perception of the incident acknowledged. And if we were to continue in a relationship with this person, we wanted them to behave differently towards us.

If that was what we wanted from others, could we ask less from ourselves?

And so we arrived at a method of making amends -- to acknowledge our harmful behavior and the other person's feelings in the matter, and to follow that with a change in our behavior.

These amends were to be made in person wherever possible, otherwise, it was suggested that we put our amends in writing.

If we were unable to find someone to whom we owed amends, it was recommended that we remain willing until such time as that person was found. In the case of owing amends to someone who had passed away, a parent perhaps, we discovered that being of service to a person of similar circumstances was a good alternative.

Except when to do so would injure them or others

We looked at this statement in several ways, and included ourselves in the word, “others”.

We could not afford to enter into this amends-giving with expectations of those to whom we owed amends. By doing so, we could be injuring ourselves with disappointment and possibly resentment.

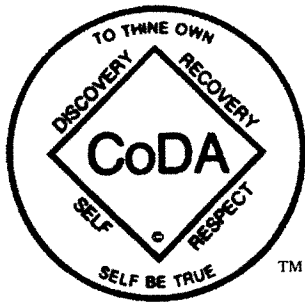
Another “luxury” we could not afford was fear of recrimination. If we were still giving others the power to harm us with their reactions, injury to us would surely result.

Some of us saw that making certain amends could result in loss of employment for us or possible imprisonment. We had families or others who depended upon us and who could be harmed by taking such action. Or perhaps we feared what we perceived as dire consequences to ourselves that could come as a result of a direct amends. In all of these cases, it was suggested that we discuss such amends with our sponsor, a trusted CoDA friend, or a spiritual advisor.

Perhaps our amends would create a “can of worms” where we thought none existed. Often this kind of amends involved promiscuity, adultery, or sexual abuse. Revealing our wrongful action could cause serious hurt or shame. Again, we were directed to discuss these difficulties with a friend or sponsor. Sometimes in these cases, our change in behavior, along with some kind of appropriate service, was the best amends possible. Often, we discovered, our fears were exaggerated and a direct amends was the best approach for everyone involved.

In this moment, I trust my Higher Power to guide me in making sincere and honest amends. In this moment, I experience my gratitude for Co-dependents Anonymous and the Twelve steps of recovery knowing that as I am willing to live this program, share the fellowship, and walk with God, I am free.

Having completed our work in Step Nine to the best of our ability, we felt prepared to move on to the final Steps of the CoDA program.



STEP TEN

“Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.”

By the time we approached Step Ten most of us felt a sense of accomplishment. We had begun to develop a relationship with a Higher Power we could understand. We had learned a great deal about our own responsibility for our past troubles. We discovered we could share our innermost secrets with another person. And we had made some amends, an action we could not have imagined prior to our experience with the Twelve Steps. We were grateful, relieved, and above all, encouraged. Maybe now, after all this work, our lives would really improve.

It was then that we were pointed in the direction of Step Ten. Some of us became overwhelmed at the thought of making a commitment to continual inventory and amends and we may have lapsed into fear and denial, eliminating this Step without even realizing it. We learned that what we needed was some time to reflect on our spiritual and emotional progress in Co-Dependents Anonymous.

In the beginning of our time in CoDA, most of us had felt alone, confused, and even ashamed, wondering why we needed a program when all we wanted was to help others, to “run the show”, or to fade into the background. For many of us, the pain we carried was overwhelming. We often felt hopeless with little chance for escape or renewal. It was in this frame of mind that we embarked upon Step One. Time passed and as we worked the Steps our approach to living changed.

The message in the Tenth Step became clear: why stop now? We had personal proof that change was possible, not only for those who had gone before us, but for ourselves as well. Just as Steps Four through Nine offered us the chance to “clean up” our past, Step Ten would be the means to maintain **continued** spiritual growth. This became our commitment to on-going, rigorous honesty.

Continued to Take Personal Inventory...

Those of us who worked Step Ten discovered several ways to approach the first portion of it. Many of us drew up a balance sheet at the end of each day or week, listing our assets and liabilities.

The form was simple, we began with what we did right. Perhaps we supported our own sense of value by graciously accepting a compliment or by requesting help when we needed it. If we set some time aside for ourselves just to have fun or if we avoided giving unsolicited advice, we jotted it down in our “asset” column.

When we made the list of debits, we were careful to examine our motives in each act or event listed. Were we acting out of fear, shame, or hurt? Or perhaps we discovered another defect of character -- a new one.

There were times it seemed we were being nagged by feelings of fear, rage, hurt, or shame with no clear explanation. During these situations we put the first three Steps into action. We acknowledged our powerlessness over this condition and affirmed our belief in God’s power to bring us to balance. Then, we asked our Higher Power to reveal what we needed to know about the situation. Usually the answer came and we could take whatever action we thought was appropriate. If it seemed slow in coming, we asked for patience and faith.

...And When We Were Wrong, Promptly Admitted It.

Step Ten seemed to suggest that we had made some progress, that we had become capable of handling our lives with even greater maturity than we believed possible. **“When we were wrong”**, reminded us that not every unpleasant situation was our doing. It suggested we could cultivate the willingness to admit our wrongs when the fault was ours and the courage to set boundaries when the fault lay elsewhere.

This action did not come easily. Many times we looked for excuses for our behavior. Attempting to rationalize or to justify our actions and motives became a defense against facing the shame we feared we would feel by appearing less than perfect.

“I can’t possibly acknowledge my wrongdoing to **that** person. I’d look like a fool.”

The agony of exposure seemed overwhelming.

There were other times when we felt motivated by our past belief that we were always at fault. Perhaps we were the object of a verbal attack and in order to bring it to a close we apologized for a wrongdoing for which we were not responsible.

"Sought through prayer and meditation to prove our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that will."

In Step Three, we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of our Higher Power. By working Step Eleven, we opened ourselves to the nourishing light that conscious contact with God provides. When we were ready, our everyday lives and relationships could reflect peace and serenity that would come from our conscious contact with God.

This Step invited us to deepen and broaden the spiritual commitment we made in Step Three. It also suggested that we avail ourselves of the opportunity to grow in our intimate understanding of our Higher Power and to learn that God's will for us truly might be.

When we first considered this Step, some of us wondered: hadn't we already learned to use daily meditation and prayer? Hadn't we already discovered a Higher Power? "I think I've been working the Eleventh Step for quite awhile now." The flaw in this rationale became obvious when we noticed that prayer and meditation were given their own separate Step, after our thorough housecleaning in Steps Four through nine. Through a deeper understanding of Step Eleven we discovered we needed to take time, regularly, for spiritual reflection. It was a method we could use in order to become aware of God's will for us and a means to find the strength to carry it out.

By working Step Eleven we were given another reprieve from our codependent thinking and behavior. We learned the difference between our will for ourselves, what we thought another's will for us might be, and God's will. We were reminded that our Higher Power was not us or another person, place, or thing. Our lives became simplified. The question that remained for us was, "Am I willing to pray only for knowledge of God's will for me, during those times when I want my will so much?"

**Sought Through Prayer and Meditation
To Improve Our Conscious Contact
With God As We Understood God ...**

In the beginning, some of us needed direction. We weren't clear where prayer left off and meditation began. It was explained to us that

listening for God's guidance.

How we chose to meditate and pray would be an individual decision. Because our conscious contact with God would be continually improving, our methods might change as we grew spiritually. Some might prefer to meditate alone. Others liked to share this time with a loved one or a group. There were those of us who combined both.

If we had no experience with prayer or meditation, it was suggested that we use the Serenity Prayer. We could take some quiet time to read and re-read the prayer slowly, allowing the meaning in each phrase to be revealed. This would be our preparation, the way in which we could bring our attention to the business at hand.

Following that, it was suggested that we ask God to empty our minds of all the noise and chatter. Some of us would focus our attention on just one part of the prayer or on an image that the prayer evoked in our minds. Others paid attention to the stillness within themselves. Each of us discovered our own way of meditating.

... Praying Only For Knowledge Of God's Will For Us And The Power To Carry That Out.

We completed the Eleventh Step by addressing the last phrase in the Step. Some of us worded this request as a question: "God, what is your will for me?" We clearly acknowledged that what we were seeking was **not** the chance to do our own will. Rather, we asked for only one thing, knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out. This would be our prayer.

As we focused our attention on this part of Step Eleven a question arose, "How do I know what God's will is for me?" This was something many of us had pondered. It became a special concern to us when we had a decision to make.

There were many opinions. "God's will for me is to be happy, joyous and free." "God's will for me is to work the Twelve Steps and to recover from my 'disease.'" "God's will for me **must** be to have this job, this relationship, this car, this experience." What we learned was that the answer for one was not necessarily the answer for all. And most importantly, we realized that no other person could answer this question for us. It was ours to discover.

path was revealed. It may not have been a dramatic experience. Rarely was a CoDA member struck by "spiritual lightning." In fact, "the message" often came in ways we least expected.

Some of us found God's will to be the way we lived our lives when we were in conscious contact with our Higher Power. Often we experienced it as the capacity, step by step, to choose healthier relationships. We may have experienced God's will as an ability to accept all the good that came our way. There were even those among us who were learning to clarify the difference between self-awareness and self-obsession, believing this new understanding to be God's will. In most cases, we found that our lives just got easier to live, even when the situations in which we found ourselves were difficult or confusing.

A few of us, in our codependence, believed we could use Step Eleven to pray for another person in our lives. Perhaps we wanted to "help" or to "change" this person to suit our own needs, believing that we knew what was best for him or her. In other cases, we had learned to pray for someone we resented, as a way of having that resentment removed. At this point, there were two important questions we needed to ask ourselves:

- 1.) "Did this person ask me for this 'help'?"
- 2.) "What does this have to do with God's will for me?"

Some of us were uncomfortable with these questions, wondering what could possibly be the harm in praying for others. We soon discovered that the purpose of this introspection was to decide if we were using the energy of prayer in a codependent way, meddling rather than praying. We discovered that a more effective way to pray for others would be to let go and ask God to take over for us. We didn't need to specify what the results for the other person should be. Rather, we could choose to think of others with love and gratitude as we released them into the care of their own Higher Power.

In the case of a clinging resentment, we were guided back to Step Seven. By asking God to remove this defect of character, (our resentment), we would be bringing the focus back to ourselves, where it belonged.

STEP TWELVE

"Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other co-dependents, and to practice these principles in all of our affairs."

It has been said that spirituality is finding your own path to God. In Co-Dependents Anonymous, we have been given four elements to use for guidance and support on our spiritual path – a Higher Power, the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, and the Fellowship.

It was the CoDA Fellowship that first attracted many of us to our program of recovery. What we discovered was a group of people who were learning to accept everyone as they were, who were interested in supporting each other through good times and bad, and who encouraged their fellow members to improve their lives. By availing ourselves of this Fellowship, both at meetings and one-to-one, we learned how others had practiced the CoDA program. We used this information to work carefully through the first eleven Steps and in the process we began to develop, or redevelop, our own understanding of God.

As time passed and each of us worked the Twelve Steps in the order they were written, we discovered we had changed. Our thinking, our actions, and our feelings were different than at the beginning of our CoDA journey. While there was still much work to do, most of us had developed faith in a Higher Power, faith in the process of Twelve Step recovery, and faith in the Fellowship. We knew it worked because we had seen the results in ourselves and in the other CoDA members.

HAVING HAD A SPIRITUAL AWAKENING AS THE RESULT OF THESE STEPS....

The first words of this step were often glossed over in our eagerness to "carry the message." Upon reflection, however, we could see that these words described the very foundation of our recovery. We came to understand that as a result of putting the Twelve Steps to work in our lives, we were transformed - and that no matter what we believed about ourselves, as long as we put these steps into action, the result would be our spiritual awakening.

Before we could share this information with others, most of us had to ask ourselves some important questions: What is a "spiritual awakening?" How do I know if I've had one?

As we worked the first three Steps, most of us

approachable and loving. We discovered that this Power could do things for us that we couldn't do for ourselves. A simple prayer:

"I place my life and will in Your care today."

often relieved our anxiety. The fact that an insurmountable problem might also be solved, usually in ways we could not have imagined, increased our faith in God and in the Twelve-Step process. Even with years of experience, most of us were still in awe of this phenomenon. Many considered this simple and profound experience the beginning of spiritual awakening.

Steps Four through Nine introduced us to ourselves. We came out of hiding and shared uncomfortable secrets with another person. We did our footwork when it came to Step Six and Seven, often not knowing what to expect. We may have agonized over Steps Eight and Nine, wondering how on earth we could face some of the folks we had harmed. When it came to making amends to ourselves, many of us took the action, even if we found it a little strange or uncomfortable.

We completed the first nine Steps and while many of us did not see major changes, we did notice subtle differences in our thinking and in our behavior. For some the change was a more tolerant, relaxed attitude about life in general. Often we had more fun, even when we hadn't planned on it. Little things that used to bother us passed without notice. We were less compelled to give advice, lose our tempers, feel defeated, or withdraw. Feeling grateful and sometimes awestruck by things we used to take for granted became the rule rather than the exception. Many of us saw this kind of change as the process of spiritual awakening.

Through the Tenth and Eleventh Steps, we incorporated this new way of living into our daily lives.

After some reflection, we realized that a spiritual awakening was not something for which we'd reached or waited; not something with which we'd be rewarded if we followed the rules and were "good." In this case, a spiritual awakening was the result of working the Twelve Steps in the order in which they were presented. Nothing could stand in the way of this but us.

....WE TRIED TO CARRY THIS MESSAGE TO OTHER CO-DEPENDENTS....

By living this program, one day at a time, we

Became the message we had hoped to carry. We shared our experience, strength, and hope with other co-dependents at CoDA meetings or when asked. Because we had faith that the recovery process worked for anyone who worked it, we were not inclined to "rescue" fellow CoDA members or others even if we felt uncomfortable with their situation. We offered support and encouragement, not advice. We understood that our way of working the steps may not be right for everyone. What was important was that it be right for us.

We were becoming humble enough to share honestly at meetings and one-to-one. When we felt the joy of our successes we shared that joy. If we were experiencing difficult challenges or feelings of discouragement, we shared those stories too, knowing what we needed to hear might come from anyone, often someone newer on the path than we were.

It was our process, what we did, rather than our personality that was the message. The way we "carried it" was by being where we could share it — with other people.

....AND PRACTICE THESE PRINCIPLES IN ALL OUR AFFAIRS

The final phrase in this step reminded us that we could not separate our spirituality from the rest of our lives. The principles embodied in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions were not the private domain of CoDA meeting rooms. They were meant to be practiced in ALL our affairs.

As we increased in our dedication to Steps Ten and Eleven, little by little, "practicing these principles in all our affairs," become more natural. Our aim was to live this way with everyone, making a special effort in relationships we found troublesome. When we faltered - in any area of our lives - we remembered that this was a program based on progress, not perfection.

We came to regard the CoDA program as a precious gift because our lives had been so remarkably improved by following its principles. Sharing this special gift with others was the way in which we could thank the Power that led us to it. And in doing this, we have continued to be repaid a thousand-fold.

In this moment, I thank God for my spiritual awakening. In this moment, I choose to live all the principles of this simple program. I know the wisdom working through me will touch all I meet with God's love and understanding. I am at peace.