

## **Ninth Step**

### **Communication**

Our consistent actions communicate everything anyone observing us needs to know about what is going on in our hearts. Way too often, we are directed by our sponsors to go to the people we have harmed, spout off some scripted words that may or may not be what is really in our hearts. Subsequently, we don't follow it up with action that shows that we really meant what we said. Either because it was never in our hearts to begin with, we relapsed with the addictive substance/behavior that we struggle with or we simply went back to our old behaviors, sober or not.

The impression that we have most likely left with the person we made the amends to is that not only does AA not work, but more importantly, spiritual principles don't work. Think about how this affects our primary purpose, since these people that we're attempting amends with are also our brothers and sisters and may need AA or spiritual principle in their lives sometime in the future. Are we nudging them in that direction or away from it?

Once we've identified what is truly in our hearts and what it is that we want to express to these people, I believe we should communicate this with our "consistent actions" 100% of the time...occasionally this will include some dialogue, but it should always include our consistent actions first.

### **Primary Purpose**

The primary purpose for all of the steps and traditions, in my opinion, is to fit us to be of maximum service to God through effectively helping others. In this respect, the first step states the dilemma...that I have one dilemma...I am blocked from an absolute, undeniable knowledge in my heart, that there is a loving Power that exists, that I cannot explain, that will allow me to live a life, virtually with minimal fear. In other words, lack of "the awareness" of the Power is my dilemma and my delusional thinking tells me that if I can only manage the worldly things of my life well, then I can somehow satisfy that emptiness in my soul, that yearning for God and Love, with these things of the world...human powers, false Gods, false idols, etc. I am blocked from a God that has all knowledge and all power, which alleviates me from the need to believe that I have, or even need, any knowledge or power. The solution, as stated in the second step, is that only an awareness of a Power that is too big for the human mind to comprehend will truly satisfy this yearning in my soul, with sufficient substance, that will solve my problem.

The rest of the steps show us how we will accomplish getting to that solution. This ultimate primary purpose never gets trumped by any other activities that any individual step suggests. The traditions are laid out the same way. The first tradition states the dilemma; the second states the solution and the rest show us how to attain the solution.

### **Content of the Amends**

There are two concepts which are typically familiar to us:

1. God will only do for us, what we cannot do for ourselves.

2. God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.

God will not do for me what I can do for myself. The “peculiar mental twist” causes me to not be able to see “what I can do for myself” or “the things that I can change” because I am so caught up in what everyone else is doing. I can see what everyone else appears to be doing and I can see my sex conduct. So I list these things that I can see in the fourth step, share in the fifth step with someone else (preferably my sponsor), he/she helps me see the fact that I have a part in these things. Then with some more reflection and willingness expressed in the sixth and seventh step, now I can write my part down in the eighth step.

This peculiar mental twist that I have requires me to always talk with someone else first, before I take any action in the ninth step. Even if it’s only for good habit forming purposes, I should always, particularly when I’m new at this, talk to someone before doing anything. There is one thing that is available to every man, woman and child on this planet, but will never be available to me...this is a clear, objective perspective of my life. My perception of my life will always be clouded by my plans, designs and desires...usually driven by hundreds of forms of fear. Your perception of my life is not clouded by those things and my perception of your life is not clouded by those things, so we can do together what neither of us can do alone.

This eighth step list is a fluid document. I add names to it, as I grow and as more gets revealed.

I have items other than the harms I’ve caused written down on my eighth step list. These items are concerning my past undesirable behaviors, even when no one was hurt and examining past experiences to see what I could do different if I had to do it over again.

This examination process helps me identify my habits and tendencies as I continue to address the things that might be within my power to change and not only to learn and grow, but to help me understand what happened in principle so I can be more effective in helping others. I identify and take action toward the ideals I have set for my future. I should identify realistic goals and not be so focused on the actual achievement of them that I forget to enjoy the journey. I should ask God to guide me and give me a grateful heart as I grow in the ideal direction I’ve set for myself. Using these steps for this purpose, as well as righting the wrongs I’ve done, will help me stay excited about my life and the direction it is going, but just as important, will allow for better effectiveness in helping others, mostly by the example I set for them as they watch me, even when I don’t know they are watching.

Also on my eighth step, naturally, I have written the harms done to others. There are some harms that I won’t be able to set right. I should leave them on my list for two reasons...one, so that I don’t ever forget and therefore hopefully won’t have to repeat it and two, in case circumstances change, I’ll be able to set these things right.

## Making the Amends

I believe the verbal amends is the "most recklessly used tool" in AA. The seriously unfortunate part about it is that in most cases the recklessness is by direction of the sponsor. The person recklessly using the tool is simply following the sponsor's direction. Poor sponsorship is detrimental to the primary purpose of AA as a whole. I realize that this statement is easily seen to be self-righteous, however, it is my personal observation and until someone can convince me otherwise, I feel that it is necessary to point that out to the reader.

Some "disclaimers" or "general practices" for amends are as follows:

(Don't adopt rules that are so rigid that you don't leave room for exceptions and subsequently leaving no room for the hand of God.)

1. "I'm sorry" is not part of this principle...they know that we're sorry...we've always been sorry. We want to focus on what we can do to make this right. "I'm sorry" can be expressed in a lot of ways. Don't simply avoid the words "I'm sorry"...avoid the whole concept. Focus on what I can do to fix what is broken and if you ever need me for anything in the future, if you let me know and if it's within my power, I'll do the best I can to be there for you.
2. Verbal amends, if used, should be made "face-to-face" if at all possible. We can use the phone or email, etc. to establish contact to make appointments to meet, but the verbal amends itself should be made "face-to-face"...with very few exceptions. One example of an exception would be if the person is afraid of me...out of respect for them, we might consider making the amends on the phone or in a letter.
3. Please talk with someone before making any amends...preferably the sponsor who has heard your fifth step. We want to make sure that we're not delusional. At the very least, talk to someone who is on the same spiritual path. Stay away from therapeutic type people who will want you to confront and blame others.
4. I cannot clear my conscience, at someone else's expense. Do not make amends that could possibly cause more harm in doing so. When we do things that will keep me from being able to help a particular person, now or in the future, I'm causing harm...I'm compromising my primary purpose.
5. I am only cleaning up my side of the street. Don't say or do anything that would cause them to get defensive or to imply that I am accusing them of anything.
- 6.

Some amends should not include talking with these people at all...two examples are as follows:

- 1.
2. Maybe I have caused so much harm in someone's life that just leaving them alone is in order.
3. If we were romantically involved with someone, contacting him or her now could jeopardize a current relationship they might be in.
- 4.

Some amends might include just not talking with them at this time, but I might be able to sometime in the future. If the harm I caused was a long term behavioral thing, and I'm not sure that I can change the behavior immediately, then I might want to show them over time, that my behavior has changed, and then talk with them some time in the future, but

only after my consistent actions have shown them that I've changed. It's mostly a credibility issue...maybe my credibility is already in question, or even more important...if I tell them that I am going to change, and then continue the behavior, not only will my credibility suffer, but possibly the credibility of Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole or the credibility of the possibility of a spiritual lifestyle for them someday. This person might come across some people in the future that could use AA, and I don't want to tarnish the reputation of AA for those people either.

A typical amends should include:

1. Who I am (Skip this if that is obvious)
2. What I am doing...i.e. I am in Alcoholics Anonymous. One of things that I have to do, in order to ensure my sobriety, but more important, to ensure that I don't ever have to be the kind of man/woman that I used to be, is I have to try to set right any harms that I've done to others (Skip this if that is obvious)
3. What I think I've done – "What I believe I've done to harm you is ...." (Keep this general if the specifics will cause them to re-live unfortunate memories)
4. At this point one of, or some kind of combination of both of these would most likely be appropriate:
  - a. What can I do to make it right?
  - b. I can't change the past...but if you ever need me for anything in the future, if you call me and if it's within my power, I want you to know that I intend on being there.
5. At this point...you need to "be quiet and listen". You don't have to agree with what they say, but you need to listen to what they have to say. You don't get to debate them, you don't even get a turn to talk. This will keep you from thinking about what you're going to say when it's your turn...cause you're not getting a turn. You just need to listen. If you can follow this simple direction the following has a good chance of happening:
  - a. We see that our perception of what happened is not always their perception of what happened. For the record, neither perception is reality, they're just our perceptions which are changing by the minute.
  - b. We typically see that this selfishness (that we didn't even know we had) has absolutely no bounds.
  - c. We also see that our problems really are of our own making...because the problem typically gets removed at this time, or within or short bit of time. It just leaves...we don't even know exactly when it happens.
  - d. So now this theory that they offered me in the third step, that became my experience in the fifth step, now gets driven deep down into my heart in the ninth.

These people that I am making amends to are my brothers and sisters. My primary purpose is to remove the things that are blocking me from being able to help them, or at the very least, get into position to help them if they ever decide they want my help.