

# You and your sponsor – steps 4,5, 6 &7

“... We beg of you to be fearless and thorough  
from the very start.” *Chpt 5 BB*

This small pamphlet is **a private document** reflecting the experience, of two sober members of AA. We hope it will encourage you, spur you on towards the goal of freedom from the bondage of self. To experience the joy of living that for a recovered alcoholic comes from reliance upon God as you understand *Him* and the practice of the 12 steps. The material contained herein is not intended to replace or supplant the careful reading and re-reading of the Big Book.

Those views will be in text coloured blue.

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## 1. Sponsorship

The simplest explanation of what is a sponsor? is given in the pamphlet Q and A on sponsorship. (we recommend that you obtain and study this pamphlet. Interestingly, it does not give information about what a sponsee needs to do.) Extracts from this pamphlet...

“In AA sponsor and sponsored meet as equals, just as Bill and Dr Bob did. Essentially the process of sponsorship is this: An alcoholic who has made some progress in the recovery program shares that experience on a continuous, individual basis with another alcoholic who is attempting to attain or maintain sobriety through AA”

“... We find that we need constant, close support as we begin learning how to live sober. So we select an AA member with whom we can feel comfortable, someone with whom we can talk freely and **confidentially**”

“... Sponsorship is yours for the asking. We urge you *do not delay*. alcoholics recovered in AA want to share what they have learned with other alcoholics. ... Sponsorship responsibility is unwritten and informal, but it is a basic part of the AA approach to recovery from alcoholism through the twelve steps.”

“...A sponsor does everything possible, within the limits of personal experience and knowledge, to help the newcomer get sober and stay sober through the AA program.”

**Every sponsor is necessarily a leader.** The stakes are huge. A human life and usually the happiness of a whole family hang in the balance. What the sponsor does and says, how well he estimates the reactions of his prospect, how well he times and makes his presentation, how well he handles criticisms, and how well he leads his prospect on by personal spiritual example ... well, these attributes of leadership can make all the difference, often the difference between life and death. We thank God that Alcoholics Anonymous is blessed with so much leadership in all its affairs.” (*12 concepts for world service*)

We would add the view that your sponsor is responsible to you not for you! and that your sponsor will always pray for you.

## 2. What does a sponsee need to do to ensure his success in working through the steps in this sponsor/sponsee relationship?

Chapter 5 in the BB tells us:

“If you want what we have and are willing to go to any lengths to get it then you are ready to take certain steps...”

“.... Of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty...”.

And from the Spiritual appendix:

“ We find that no one need have difficulty with the spirituality of the program. *Willingness, honesty and open mindedness are the essentials of recovery. But these are indispensable*”.

So if you are honest with yourself and your sponsor you are on your way to a new life. You will avoid the pitfall of “people pleasing” – that is being emotionally dishonest with your sponsor which generates resentment and will cause the sponsee/sponsor relationship to fail.

In general your sponsor will ask you to take those actions as listed in the pamphlet Q&A, and in addition to :

- A. reaffirm steps 1-3 each morning
- B. Read Just for today card and/or 24 hour book
- C. Study BB and 12&12 up to step 7
- D. Email thoughts and feelings (or otherwise as agreed)
- E. Attend home group without fail
- F. Help other AA's
- G. Attend weekly(or fortnightly) sessions with your sponsor
- H. Communicate with other alcoholics by telephone or email, not text.
- I. Thank God at the end of the day for your sobriety.

Finally your sponsor will offer you suggestions in private, relevant to your state of life. *The confidentiality referred to in the section on sponsorship must also be binding on you.* What you and your sponsor discuss is private and is **not** to be shared at AA meetings or with anyone else. Your sponsor will have you under her wing, you will have her loyalty and her care.

Therefore if you exercise honesty, open mindedness and willingness your personal adventure into sobriety will be beyond your wildest dreams, you will be rocketed into that fourth dimension of existence by the time you have completed the first nine steps.

***If you are dishonest, tardy, argumentative and visibly unwilling - then the only person who will suffer will be you. Ultimately the sponsor of such a person will have little choice other than to direct their energies elsewhere.***

### **3. The Basic Texts**

Bill was the principal author of Alcoholics Anonymous (the Big Book) (1939) and later (1952) wrote the volume Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. ***These are the two central books in AA thought. Everything else in the programme hinges upon reading these two works over and over again,*** because those who do so find in them an ever-fresh source of new insights.

## 4. Step four

Step Four - "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

Chapter Five in the BB needs to be studied very carefully. For although the emphasis in this pamphlet is on the life story approach the importance of the contents of chapter five cannot be over-stated. For instance the examples given in the list show how we are terribly affected by Pride and one of its offshoots - fear. "We reviewed our fears thoroughly. We put them on paper, even though we had no resentment in connection with them....". BB chapter 5.

"So when A.A. suggests a fearless moral inventory, it must seem to every newcomer that more is being asked of him than he can do. Both his pride and his fear beat him back every time he tries to look within himself. Pride says, "You need not pass this way," and Fear says, "You dare not look!" But the testimony of AA's who have really tried a moral inventory is that pride and fear of this sort turn out to be bogeymen, nothing else. Once we have a complete willingness to take inventory, and exert ourselves to do the job thoroughly, a wonderful light falls upon this foggy scene. As we persist, a brand-new kind of confidence is born, and the sense of relief at finally facing ourselves is indescribable. These are the first fruits of Step Four." 12&12.

Today in AA there exist various schools of thought and practice in regard to this step. Our experience is that you be guided by your sponsor. Many have tried the three columns suggested in the BB, indeed the value of this method is immense. Some go for five columns and very intricate work sheets. Some declare that they had hundreds of items, pages and pages, others that they sat and looked at the columns and could not begin. Even others declare that reading out their list of resentments has ensured that 'they never had a bad day sober'. The whole subject of workbooks has become a major industry. It is our experience that all too often simply reading a list of resentments in a couple of hours does not fit the alcoholic for long term sobriety. Reality will become too much for him again when emotions, not dealt with, surface - which they will. Sadly we know of relapses along these lines.

Regarding this preparation for cleaning house have confidence in your sponsor, the time you have spent so far working together should have shown you that this AA member knows what she is doing. You will have been doing some writing and thereby looking at your actions, thoughts and feelings 'today' and hopefully benefiting from the lights they produce in discussion with your sponsor.

So forge ahead and write a life story, this technique will include all your defects of character, all those people that you were resentful towards and much, much more. This method does more than the BB 'list' suggests, not less and the effort involved will not be wasted. We were not bad needing to be good - but sick and needing to get well, the moral inventory is simply about the truths of our life.

Perhaps above all else we are creatures of 'feelings', the word *emotional* appears in the BB and the 12&12 45 times, most tellingly in step four thus ***"by discovering what our emotional deformities are, we can move to their correction" 12 &12.*** So write speedily do not re-read, ask God the grace to be honest, pour out on paper all those feelings. You will have put on paper all those emotions and incidents that were the forerunners of your stockpile of resentment. We have memories like elephants, we never forget and we never forgive. When you stop writing after any given period ask God the grace to come back into the moment. Do not relive your fourth step, do not attempt to analyse what you have written, do not sponsor yourself. If you are in doubt that your method of writing is on the right track, ask your sponsor to read a page or two and check that there is sufficient information.

So when this is finished you will have on those pages all the emotional detritus that needs to be cleaned out. We are sure you will have been fearless and courageous; following the example of your sponsor for your life depends upon it. Nothing is original, it will all have been done before.

Do remember the profound simplicity of Dr Bob

*Trust God*  
*Clean House*  
*Help Others*

**5. Step Five**

Admitted to God, to ourselves and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs:

“This brings us to the Fifth Step in the program of recovery mentioned in the preceding chapter. This is perhaps difficult, especially discussing our defects with another person. We think we have done well enough in admitting these things to ourselves. There is doubt about that. In actual practice, we usually find a solitary self-appraisal insufficient. Many of us thought it necessary to go much further. We will be more reconciled to discussing ourselves with another person when we see good reasons why we should do so. The best reason first: If we skip this vital step, we may not overcome drinking. Time after time newcomers have tried to keep to themselves certain facts about their lives. Trying to avoid this humbling experience, they have turned to easier methods. Almost invariably they got drunk. Having persevered with the rest of the program, they wondered why they fell. We think the reason is that they never completed their housecleaning. They took inventory all right, but hung on to some of the worst items in stock. They only *thought* they had lost their egoism and fear; they only *thought* they had humbled themselves. But they had not learned enough of humility, fearlessness and honesty, in the sense we find it necessary, until they told someone else *all* their life story” *BB*

[An excellent description of our need to trust in God and clean house is also given in Step 2.](#)

“...The fact was we really hadn't cleaned house so that the grace of God could enter us and expel the obsession. In no deep or meaningful sense

had we ever taken stock of ourselves, made amends to those we had harmed, or freely given to any other human being without any demand for reward. We had not even prayed rightly. We had always said ‘Grant me my wishes’ instead of ‘Thy Will be done’. The love of God and man we understood not at all. Therefore we remained self deceived, and so incapable of receiving enough grace to restore us to sanity...” **Step 2** 12&12.

Of course standing on the threshold of this step you will have some apprehension - but no doubt your sponsor will already have asked you to share the event that you dread the most of any living soul knowing! Also remember that you are admitting to God first, to yourself second and to your sponsor third the exact nature of your wrongs and the good news is that sponsors do not retain the intimate details... God effaces them from the mind. Sponsors retain only an overview, a sense of knowing you well.

So what will you gain from reading out your life story rather than just a list of resentments.?

The life story will give the full backdrop to all the events of your life in a context that is not possible from a simple list. There is much less place for your ego to hide, therefore less places for your alcoholism to hide. Less chance of dishonesty. Fear, that great bugbear of the alcoholic will be rooted out from its hiding place, whether your rock bottom was very bad or your rock bottom was high, (we knew a lady once who came into AA after leaving her gloves on the London Tube, that was her rock bottom.) This step will work for you if you are rigorously honest. The danger of sponsoring yourself is averted, utilise don't analyse (especially for those around a long while and/or still struggling with step one).

As you read and discuss things, your sponsor will be compiling a list for you from what you read out, this will form the basis of the schedule of ‘your wrongs’, all of which stem from the seven character defects that we all suffer from.

Pride is excessive belief in one's own abilities, that interferes with the individual's recognition of the grace of God. It is the defect from which all others arise. Pride is also known as Vanity.

Envy is the desire for others' traits, status, abilities, or situation.

Gluttony is an inordinate desire to consume more than that which one requires.

Lust is an inordinate craving for the pleasures of the body.

Anger is manifested in the individual who spurns love and opts instead for fury. It is also known as Wrath.

Greed is the desire for material wealth or gain, ignoring the realm of the spiritual. It is also called Avarice or Covetousness.

Sloth is the avoidance of physical or spiritual work.

[The BB describes very beautifully what can happen](#) “We pocket our pride and we go to it, illuminating every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past. Once we have taken this step withholding nothing, we are delighted. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our creator...”

And from the 12&12 “Provided you hold back nothing, your sense of relief will mount from minute to minute. The dammed up emotions of years break out of their confinement, and miraculously vanish as soon as they are exposed. As the pain subsides a healing tranquillity takes its place...”

[At the end of your life story your sponsor will discuss thoroughly all the points that have arisen. You will see that you can ask and receive forgiveness from God as you understand Him and move on to the next steps. You have the material now that will enable you to immediately take step six and seven.](#)

## 6. Step 6 and 7

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character and - Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

You may take the text straight out of the BB on this. It is very simple and explicit.

“ Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet for an hour, carefully reviewing what we have done. We thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know Him better. Taking this book down from our shelf we turn to the page which contains the twelve steps. Carefully reading the first five proposals we ask if we have omitted anything, for we are building an arch through which we shall walk a free man at last. Is our work solid so far? Are the stones properly in place? Have we skimmed on the cement put into the foundation? Have we tried to make mortar without sand.

If we can answer to our satisfaction we then look at *step six*. We have emphasised willingness as being indispensable. Are we now ready to let God remove from us all the things we have admitted are objectionable? Can He now take them all – every one? If we still cling to something we will not let go, we ask God to help us be willing.

When ready we say something like this “My Creator I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen” We have then completed step seven.”  
*BB.*

The above will be carried out at your sponsor’s home. We believe that these steps are taken like this once only, we are basically giving God permission to sort us out, the attitude they invoke, the willingness and disposition, this is what we need each day as we go on to garner the virtue of humility and acceptance. For:

“ ... the attainment of greater humility is the foundation principle of each of AA’s Twelve Steps...” 12&12 step 7

Your sponsor will ensure that before you go home you are sound and secure and quietly grateful. Be careful with your new found condition, stay close to God and your sponsor.

## **7.Honesty/Dishonesty (taken from the Little Red Book Hazelden)**

“Those who do not recover through the help of our program are usually men and women who will not give themselves to the program and who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. *BB*.

Dishonesty requires little further comment. It has no place in our program. It must be eliminated if we are to succeed at all.

Honesty with yourself, God and your fellow man is the keystone in the AA bridge that spans the alcoholic chasm to permanent happy sobriety.

Without honesty the AA program would become an inconsistent hypocritical way of life. It would become antagonistic and negative to recovery. The practice of dishonesty in any form helps to tear down the alcoholics defence against that first drink which he will eventually find himself taking, if he cannot be honest with himself...”

## 8. Assets and liabilities

### DAILY MORAL INVENTORY

#### **Liabilities**

##### *Watch for*

Self pity  
Self justification  
Self importance  
Self Condemnation  
Dishonesty  
Impatience  
Hate  
Resentment  
False pride  
Jealousy  
Envy  
Laziness  
Procrastination  
Insincerity  
Negative thinking  
Vulgar, immoral  
Fear  
Trashy thinking  
Criticizing

*Eliminate the negative*

#### **Assets**

##### *strive for*

self forgetfulness  
humility  
modesty  
Self valuation  
honesty  
patience  
love  
forgiveness  
simplicity  
Trust  
Generosity  
activity  
promptness  
straightforward  
positive thinking  
high minded, spiritual  
courage  
clean thinking  
Look for the good

*accentuate the positive*

*Whose Responsibility?*

“An A.A. group, as such, cannot take on all the personal problems of its members, let alone those of nonalcoholics in the world around us. The A.A. group is not, for example, a mediator of domestic relations, nor does it furnish personal financial aid to anyone.

“Though a member may sometimes be helped in such matters by his friends in A.A., the primary responsibility for the solutions of all his problems of living and growing rests squarely upon the individual himself. Should an A.A. group attempt this sort of help, its effectiveness and energies would be hopelessly dissipated.

“This is why sobriety—freedom from alcohol—through the teaching and practice of A.A.’s Twelve Steps, is the sole purpose of the group. If we don’t stick to this cardinal principle, we shall almost certainly collapse. And if we collapse we cannot help anyone.”

*We Cannot Live Alone*

All of A.A.'s Twelve Steps ask us to go contrary to our natural desires; they all deflate our egos. When it comes to ego deflation, few Steps are harder to take than the Fifth. Scarcely any Step is more necessary to long-time sobriety and peace of mind.

A. A. experience has taught us we cannot live alone with our pressing problems and the character defects which cause or aggravate them. If Step Four has revealed in stark relief those experiences we'd rather not remember, then the need to quit living by ourselves with those tormenting ghosts of yesterday gets more urgent than ever. We have to talk to somebody about them.

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We cannot wholly rely on friends to solve all our difficulties. A good adviser will never do all our thinking for us. He knows that each final choice must be ours. He will therefore help to eliminate fear, expediency, and self-deception, so enabling us to make choices which are loving, wise, and honest.

1. TWELVE AND TWELVE, P. 56
2. GRAPEVINE, AUGUST 1961

*We Need Outside Help*

It was evident that a solitary self-appraisal, and the admission of our defects based upon that alone, wouldn't be nearly enough. We'd have to have outside help if we were surely to know and admit the truth about ourselves—the help of God and of another human being.

Only by discussing ourselves, holding back nothing, only by being willing to take advice and accept direction could we set foot on the road to straight thinking, solid honesty, and genuine humility.

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If we are fooling ourselves, a competent adviser can see this quickly. And, as he skillfully guides us away from our fantasies, we are surprised to find that we have few of the usual urges to defend ourselves against unpleasant truths. In no other way can fear, pride, and ignorance be so readily melted. After a time, we realize that we are standing firm on a brand-new foundation for integrity, and we gratefully credit our sponsors, whose advice pointed the way.

1. TWELVE AND TWELVE, P. 60
2. GRAPEVINE, AUGUST 1961

*Only God Is Unchanging*

“Change is the characteristic of all growth. From drinking to sobriety, from dishonesty to honesty, from conflict to serenity, from hate to love, from childish dependence to adult responsibility—all this and infinitely more represent change for the better.

“Such changes are accomplished by a belief in and a practice of sound principles. Here we must needs discard bad or ineffective principles in favor of good ones that work. Even good principles can sometimes be displaced by the discovery of still better ones.

“Only God is unchanging; only He has all the truth there is.”

*Self-Respect Through Sacrifice*

At the beginning we sacrificed alcohol. We had to, or it would have killed us. But we couldn't get rid of alcohol unless we made other sacrifices. We had to toss self-justification, self-pity, and anger right out the window. We had to quit the crazy contest for personal prestige and big bank balances. We had to take personal responsibility for our sorry state and quit blaming others for it.

Were these sacrifices? Yes, they were. To gain enough humility and self-respect to stay alive at all, we had to give up what had really been our dearest possessions—our ambition and our illegitimate pride.

*Move Ahead*

To spend too much time on any one alcoholic is to deny some other an opportunity to live and be happy. One of our Fellowship failed entirely with his first half-dozen prospects. He often says that if he had continued to work on them, he might have deprived many others, who have since recovered, of their chance.

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“Our chief responsibility to the newcomer is an adequate presentation of the program. If he does nothing or argues, we do nothing but maintain our own sobriety. If he starts to move ahead, even a little, with an open mind, we then break our necks to help in every way we can.”

1. ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 96
2. LETTER, 1942

*Behind Our Excuses*

As excuse-makers and rationalizers, we drunks are champions. It is the business of the psychiatrist to find the deeper causes for our conduct. Though uninstructed in psychiatry, we can, after a little time in A.A., see that our motives have not been what we thought they were, and that we have been motivated by forces previously unknown to us. Therefore we ought to look, with the deepest respect, interest, and profit, upon the example set us by psychiatry.

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“Spiritual growth through the practice of A.A.’s Twelve Steps, plus the aid of a good sponsor, can usually reveal most of the deeper reasons for our character defects, at least to a degree that meets our practical needs. Nevertheless, we should be grateful that our friends in psychiatry have so strongly emphasized the necessity to search for false and often unconscious motivations.”

1. A.A. COMES OF AGE, P. 236
2. LETTER, 1966

## **10. Where willpower comes in. A Letter from language of the Heart by Bill May 1962.**

There has always been a lot of confusion about this matter of exerting the will. When the Twelve Steps say “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol...” we assert what has always been a fact about that malady – namely, that a frontal attack by the will on the desire to drink almost never works.

This hard fact is the premise upon which we must start – the recognition that actual lunacy cannot be subdued by straight willpower. God knows drunks have tried hard enough to do just this and have generally failed. Nobody would expect much result were every kleptomaniac to take the pledge not to steal. Respecting stealing, the kleptomaniac is as compulsively nutty as he can be. Though this compulsive condition is not so generally recognised in the alcoholic, because drinking is socially acceptable, it is nevertheless true that he is just about as crazy. Therefore our first step is realistic when it declares that we are powerless to deal with the alcohol hex on our own resources or will.

But even AA’s first step asks for willingness – the willingness to admit that our willpower is not going to work head-on. But that is only a starter. All of the rest of AA’s twelve steps require both willingness and willpower. They certainly deal in religious and moral values.

For example we must acquire the willingness to take a moral inventory. This much accomplished we then must needs muster the gumption to actually do that. We can become willing to believe in the efficacy of AA’s twelfth step – carrying the message to others. But if we are aroused from sleep at 12 o’clock at night to make a Twelfth step call – well the actual making of that visit may call for a considerable amount of willpower.

Another example: It is especially required of the atheist and agnostic that he become open minded on the subject of God. This seems to require a considerable exertion indeed. If then we suggest he address himself to

whatever God there may be, in meditation and prayer, he usually finds this takes a lot of discipline to do, even as an experiment.

The net result of willingness and will, as applied to the life problem in general, does eventuate in a release from the desire to drink, thereby getting around any heavy exertion of willpower on the alcohol problem itself. Precisely why this release comes to most of us is totally unexplained. We *are* restored to sanity provided we condition ourselves for the gift of restoration – or, to put it in religious terms, to the inflow of God's grace which results in the expulsion of the obsession.

Nor does it seem to matter how we define God's grace. We can still claim if we like that we have tapped a hidden or unused inner resource. We don't need to actually define just where that came from. Or we can believe as most of us finally do, that we have tapped the resources of God as he exists in us and in the cosmos generally. None of us can presume to know exactly how this is.

Of course I do not mean to say that no willpower respecting the alcohol problem is ever to be used. During my first couple of years, I had two or three severe temptations to drink. But having practiced the AA program pretty faithfully, I was fully able to see the consequences of so doing at the time I was tempted. The usual blinding rationalisations were not present. I had been restored to sanity respecting alcohol. I nevertheless had to make a choice. But under these conditions it was not hard. And the choice did require a certain modicum of willpower, or of willingness to choose rightly.

I think this exercise of the will is appropriate and necessary during the interval in which one is developing a general release from the problem. But a general and complete release is quite possible after considerable practice of AA's program. I know because I have been under enormous emotional strain since AA started. I had a neurotic depression that lasted from 1943 until 1955, one from which I never fully surfaced. About three years of this was suicidal. But the release from alcohol had been so thorough that I was never tempted during this long siege to resort to drink.

So this is the substance of the AA party line as I happen to see it. But please be assured you don't necessarily have to see it the same way. Plenty of people differ with me and yet remain sober. Nevertheless the experience of most of us seems to back up what I have said. Those who try to work the program in other ways, and who succeed by so doing, are in my belief, staying dry the hard way. AA's orthodoxy, if it can be called that, is merely what the majority experience suggests. You can still take your pick!

- For God:
1. Admitted hopeless
  2. Got honest with self
  3. Got honest with another
  4. Made amends
  5. Helped other without demand
  6. Prayed to God as you understand Him.

Over  
Bill W.  
Apr 1953  
~~Original AA  
Steps~~

**Original AA steps**