

Chapter 6

INTO ACTION (STEPS 5—11)

While Steps One through Four challenged our thinking and orientation to life, Steps Five through Nine challenge our discipline and willingness to live as we agreed we would in Step Three. Steps Ten and Eleven then provide us with practices through which we continue to grow stronger and more resilient in our recovery.

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

In the first four Steps, we engaged in reflection and did our best to align our thinking with ideas that hold the promise of a new purpose, freedom, and happiness. With Step Five, we embark on the second phase of our journey: we begin to demonstrate whether those reflections have truly signaled the start of what Dr. Carl Jung described as the “huge emotional displacements and rearrangements” necessary for full recovery. Step Five is the first true “action” step.

As we put into practice our new insights and resolutions, we create and solidify new patterns of thought and behavior. Our old habit was to turn to our eating disorders for comfort and release. Our new habit is to turn to the comfort and security of a new perspective, which we achieve through continuous practice. *Relying on the idea of our God, Higher Power, or higher purpose regularly in our day-to-day lives builds resilience.* Eventually, even in times of crisis

when we would normally have turned to our eating disorders, we will be able to rely on something else—something more meaningful—to carry us through.

Step Five asks us to be accountable. We need to admit the truth of our dysfunctional thinking and behaviors not only to ourselves, but also to others who can be objective and help us understand anything we might have missed in our Step Four inventory.

Rarely do we find it helpful to focus on what the people we identified in our 4th Step list did, or are still doing. Even in the most extreme situations, including physical and emotional abandonment and/or abuse, there is nothing we can do that will change what happened in the past. We need to learn from our experiences, but ruminating on what we may feel was a raw deal does no good; little recovery can be found in reflecting on the errors of others. Nor will we have much success working the Twelve Steps unless we are physically safe, whether the current threat is from others or ourselves. The first order of business may be to take advantage of professional help or personal support, so we can find enough safety and stability to work the Steps. We think a note of caution is warranted here, for there will always be some source of turmoil in our lives. Once we are physically safe and stable enough to work on our recovery, we should not delay in picking up and moving forward with the Steps.

Our job in Step Five is to focus on what we thought, said, and did that put us in situations where we were vulnerable, threatened, and hurt. Did we lie to ourselves or others? Did we cheat people of our time and attention? Did we complain (if only to ourselves perhaps) about how unfairly we were treated without taking action to resolve the problems? Did we nurse grudges against people who were

also struggling to make sense of life? Did we feel victimized by our social “standing,” family situations, or prior actions? Did we blame society for our reactions to what happened to us? Did we hold institutions liable for our attitudes and outlook on life?

In general, we found we relied quite heavily on other people—sometimes parents, but also siblings, other relatives, life partners, friends, and occasionally our own children—to take care of our most basic physical and/or emotional needs, when we should have been able to do that ourselves. One goal of Step Five is to expose the thinking that lay behind our unhealthy dependence on others, as well as any thinking and behavior that was objectively wrong.

Admitting Errors and Accepting Feedback:

- **Builds objectivity:** *Step Five asks us to express what we were thinking and doing in an objective way, reinforcing the habit of working on solutions instead of getting caught up in the problem. The more we practice taking an objective view of ourselves, the easier it will become, and the better we will be at this vital activity.*
- **Holds us accountable:** *Step Five asks us to expose and admit the errors in our thinking and behavior. Although we were surely hurt by other people’s neglect, attitudes, and actions over the course of our lives, Step Five focuses only on what was wrong with how we responded to life situations and how we could have responded dif-*

ferently. Thinking of ourselves as victims is not helpful, even if we have been victimized in the past. The power of our recovery lies not in our “victimhood,” but in our ability to think and act as people of conscience and courage—regardless of circumstances. As adults, we are responsible and accountable only for our own thoughts and actions. As long as we refuse to admit the whole truth about what we thought and did, we run the risk of “staying as sick as our secrets.” Accountability with a safe person exposes our errors and gives us a much better chance of addressing them consciously and deliberately.

- **Provides outside perspective:** *Step Five asks us not only to admit our wrongs, but also requires us to own up to them with one or more people who can challenge our current thinking.* Most likely, we are unable to be completely objective about what exactly is going on in our lives. Talking openly with at least one other person gives them the opportunity to point out things that we might have overlooked, either consciously or unconsciously. Many of us found our sponsors and confidants completely “nailed” things we had not recognized at all that later turned out to be our biggest impediments. Opening ourselves up to feedback gives us a better chance of fully identifying—and steering clear of—the black holes in our thinking that led us into trouble in the past.
- **Demonstrates willingness:** *Step Five asks us to open ourselves up to feedback from others in order*

to demonstrate—to ourselves and to others—that:

- We are no longer willing to stay as sick as our secrets
- We are willing to let go of the idea that we, and our experiences, are so unique that others cannot appreciate or empathize with them
- We are willing to trust at least one other person with the truth about ourselves
- We are willing to be objective
- We are willing to take responsibility for our recovery
- We are willing to change

In our experience, taking Step Five is essential for recovery.

Preparation for Step Five

Finding the right person, audience, or “recipient” with whom to share our 5th Step is important. Parents, spouses, and children might be unsuitable, because they are emotionally engaged with us and may lack the needed objectivity. They might also be hurt by what we have to say. Good candidates include other members of EDA who have worked the Steps, members of other Twelve-Step programs who have worked the Steps, therapists, pastors, or friends who have sufficient strength and wisdom to be placed into such a position of trust. It is also important that the person we ask be someone who will keep our sharing confidential.

Before asking someone to hear our 5th Step, we first recognize that we are asking a rather big favor as the time and

attention required for such a conversation is substantial. The person we plan to ask might be busy and need to make room for us on their calendar. We should be prepared to wait a bit (though preferably not more than a week or two, because we need to keep up our momentum with the next Steps). Also, not everyone is likely to be willing or able to meet with us for this type of conversation, so we make a short list of people who meet the qualifications. Then, if we are turned down, we are prepared to take this news as calmly as possible and ask someone else on our list.

When ready to share, we carefully review the first three Steps. Perhaps we feel less sure now than we did when we took them! If so, we acknowledge that we are probably a bit frightened, and we resolve to mention this to our 5th Step recipient. *We want to hold nothing back*, even though our pride is sure to be hurt by our admissions. We ask ourselves if we are now willing to take action that will bring more lasting relief from the troublesome thoughts and behaviors we experienced in our eating disorders. We bring our written 4th Step with us, along with additional paper for taking notes. Our recipient will probably take notes as well. We sit down together in a place where we are not likely to experience distractions, putting aside anything that might prevent us from focusing on the task at hand. We usually say something like the following:

To your 5th Step recipient:

I want to thank you for meeting with me today. I recognize that you are sacrificing time and energy that might otherwise have been spent with your family, on your vocation, or on something you deeply enjoy in order to help me. I am very grateful for your support.

As we have discussed, I am working on a program

through which I hope to recover from an eating disorder. Rather than using it to distance myself from unwelcome thoughts and feelings, I must now face them and deal with them directly.

In the past, feelings of fear, resentment, self-pity, shame, guilt, confusion, frustration, and despair regularly overwhelmed me and rendered me unable to work or focus effectively without resorting to my eating disorder. So, to fully recover, I have to change the way I think and respond. By talking with you today, I hope to expose the errors in my thinking and behavior and get your objective feedback, not only on what my issues were and are, but also on how I plan to act when the same thoughts and feelings crop up again.

I need to make clear to you that my job today is to focus entirely on what I myself thought and did, rather than on what others said or did to me. If I stray from that goal, I ask you to please hold me accountable and pull me back.

I have with me a set of written pages that represent my best effort at a searching and fearless moral inventory of myself. My goal today is to thoroughly review this material with you. I ask that you point out any patterns or ideas that I may have missed, either as we go along or at the end—whichever feels more comfortable to you. I hope you do not mind if I take notes?

I am ready to begin when you are.

Taking Step Five

We wait for our audience to signal they are ready. Then, we “pocket our pride and go to it,”¹ sharing our written 4th Step notes in detail. Though it is sure to be embarrassing at times, we do not skip or avoid discussing anything we

¹ *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 75.

have written or anything new that comes up in the course of our review. If we are completely honest and transparent with our audience, there will be moments of connection and recognition, even if our 5th Step recipient has no experience whatsoever with eating disorders. We trust that human beings have similar thoughts and feelings regardless of the specifics of their life circumstances. No matter how alone we may have felt, those in whom we place our trust and confidence are sure to have thought and felt the same way at various points in their lives.

When done, we explicitly ask our 5th Step recipient if we have missed anything, or if anything is weighing on them that they would like to say. If they have comments, we take notes, because we are likely to be somewhat exhausted and want to be sure to remember everything! Finally, we heartily thank our 5th Step recipient for their invaluable help and support.

Upon returning home, we take a quiet hour to reflect upon our experiences.² During this reflection, we review our work on Steps One through Four. Have we left anything out? Do we feel like we have made a solid beginning? Many of us experience strong emotions during and immediately after taking this Step. We allow ourselves to feel whatever comes up for us at this time. Perhaps we are still scared because we want to act out, or we want to act out because we are scared of the work ahead. Maybe we had expectations of our 5th Step that were not satisfied. Sometimes we are overwhelmed or disappointed by what we experienced. *At this crucial juncture, it is important that we honor the truth of what we are feeling and do not fall back into old eating-disordered behaviors.*

² Ibid., 75.

While we cannot expect that our lives will now be magically different (for there is much work left to do), we can certainly be happy that we have been able to complete such a big chunk of this challenging process. We have demonstrated our sincerity and willingness to make enormous changes in our thinking and behavior in order to turn our former misery to some good purpose. We give ourselves credit for this and allow the feeling of accomplishment to sink in.

After an hour's reflection, we take pen to paper again for just a few minutes to write down everything for which we are grateful. If we have developed a relationship with God, we give thanks from the bottom of our hearts that we know Him better.³ If we have connected with a Higher Power or higher purpose, we express our deep appreciation for the perspective and power these can bring into our lives. We might express gratitude for the patience of the person who heard our 5th Step, for new hope and new opportunities, or we might simply give thanks for being alive. Writing this list is crucial whether we feel grateful or not; we have certainly gone through an emotionally draining experience. At moments like this, putting key tools of recovery into practice is essential. We are at our most vulnerable when overwhelmed by emotions we haven't fully processed. Writing even a short gratitude list demonstrates that no matter what we are feeling, we can start to trust our growing internal strength and commitment to recovery.

If you got through your 5th Step—including the hour of reflection and the gratitude list—congratulations are in order: you are ready to move on to Step Six!

³ Ibid.

Step Six: *Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*

After taking Step Five, we are bound to experience shifts in our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the world. This could manifest as a new sense of connectedness to humanity, or increased confidence in our ability to be objective about our old ways of thinking and behaving. We may feel delighted, happy with our place in a world where we can engage in ways that feel exciting and new. On the other hand, we might think our changes have not been deep enough, forcing us to question ourselves and our ability to continue. Perhaps we are disappointed, because we secretly hoped that after our 5th Step we could go about in perfect peace and ease without having negative emotions ever again. *Whatever we are feeling, we honor it*, trusting that we are not alone in our experience.

Many of us were horrified at the idea that we must go back and repeat something like a 4th Step with every new negative thought and feeling we encounter. But challenges like these are to be expected as we make our way towards a full recovery. Our experience has been that by the time we get to Step Ten, where we deliberately address how we think and feel on a daily basis, *the process will be far easier and so beneficial that we look forward to it*. For now, we can be content to have our feelings and trust that we will recover if we act based on reliance on our God, Higher Power, or higher purpose, rather than reacting to our emotional states as if they were of central importance. We take care of basics and continue to turn our attention to how we can be useful in the here and now.

In Step Six, we again consider what happened every time we put ourselves, and our emotional states, in a position

of central importance in our lives. Somewhat ironically, we were actually weakened and diminished, since putting ourselves at the center meant we lost sight of the broader context in which our lives made sense. It also meant we were vulnerable to crippling levels of resentment, fear, self-pity, shame, guilt, confusion, frustration, and despair. These defects of character—all stemming from self-centeredness—were truly paralyzing, keeping us in a state of constant pain and misery. Focused solely on our own suffering, we were unable to be of much service to others.

When we took Step Three, we agreed to turn our will and our lives—our thoughts and actions—over to our God, a Higher Power, or service to the greater good. But our self-centered pain and fear held us back; many of our defects were still with us. This felt unsettling—even depressing—for most of us. What were we to do about these issues? That is what Steps Six and Seven are all about. In Step Six, we consider *whether we are entirely willing to face and be rid of everything that has been holding us back.*

At this point, although still afraid of change, we were pretty thoroughly fed up with our old patterns of thinking that kept us in a state of emotional turmoil. We could see how they hurt us, hurt those who loved us, prevented us from doing the right things, and kept us stuck doing the wrong things. We recalled how desperately miserable we were when we defied our natural instinct for self-preservation by acting out, over and over again, through our eating disorders. We knew we had to be rid of the defects of character that fueled these behaviors, but we were not yet sure how to go about it.

The first thing we needed to do was to recognize that our natural desire for safety, security, validation, and connection to others sometimes led us to take actions that,

in retrospect, completely undermined the very objectives we sought. To find validation, we may have been boastful or manipulative, yet we can think of no example where self-aggrandizement or manipulation obtained the desired result without an *even more* undesirable effect on our character. To find security, we may have greedily taken credit for things not our due, stolen actual money or property, or lustfully engaged in sordid affairs—heedless of the truth that doing so left us far more insecure and untrustworthy than ever. To establish what felt like safety, we may have angrily demanded that everyone honor “boundaries” that had little to do with the basic respect with which all should be treated, only to find little lasting peace or freedom through distancing—even alienating—friends and family. Angry with ourselves as well as others, we steadfastly refused to allow ourselves to consider changes that would have enabled us to recover far sooner.

As we struggled to form ideals we hoped to attain, we may have found ourselves enviously comparing our qualities, attainments, and possessions unfavorably with those of others, dimly aware that such thinking leads nowhere healthy. Most of us spent years paralyzed by fear of change, somewhat lazily repeating old patterns because they were easier than seriously contemplating alternatives and making changes. We may have dismissed ideas about what we could do to effect real changes in our lives because they just seemed too hard. Sometimes we didn’t take action because we felt deeply inferior to those around us, as if the processes that worked for others would somehow not work for us; we felt as if we were broken in a completely novel and unfixable way. Conversely, we may have looked askance at the recovery of others, dismissive of helpful ideas because we felt ourselves a little—or perhaps

a lot—superior to those who would have offered us a hand or a shoulder.

We need to carefully consider the criteria by which we determined that we were “fine” in the past. By the time we reach Step Six, we realize that quite a lot of what we thought and did before embarking on recovery was actually problematic, yet many of us still clung to old ideas because we deemed them “safe,” or less than serious. Some *troublesome character traits* may need to be re-considered, because they are not “safe” at all:

- *Pride*, because it creates barriers to authenticity and connection with others.
- *Procrastination and other forms of laziness* (including our sometimes life-long excuses for failing to take action we know is good and right), because inaction is the fastest way back to old patterns.
- *Self-righteous indignation*, because it leads to resentment and self-pity.
- *All-or-nothing thinking*, because it limits our options and forces us to cram our messy realities into rigid compartments that have little to do with life as we need to understand it to be effective.
- *Lust*, because fantasizing about and desiring attention for ourselves leads away from true love that is focused on care for other human beings. Instead, it leads to feelings of unrequited longing, to situations where we are likely to break the trust others have in us, to actions that hurt our integrity, or to some combination of the above.

- *Focusing on our own “needs” that are not universal, basic human needs*, because these only hinder our recovery. Examples include: requiring special foods when not medically necessary, demanding specific attitudes and behaviors from other people as a prerequisite for our recovery, and privileging our ambition for recognition and reward over other goals.
- *Gossip*, because it violates relationships of trust, hurts others, and lengthens the list of things for which we will later need to make amends.

Though this is not a comprehensive list, it may indeed feel overwhelming. Please understand that the purpose of Step Six is not to provide ourselves with excuses for beating ourselves up, but to ensure that we do not fall prey to the same kind of thinking that caused our troubles in the first place.

We all had difficulty giving up some of our old ideas, even when we understood how problematic they were. But resistance to change need not be a long-term impediment to recovery, so long as we abandon ourselves completely to the idea that we will do everything in our power to recover from the crippling self-centeredness that fueled our defects, understanding that these will not be removed from us without our own action.

This is the point where we move on to Step Seven.

Step Seven: *Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.*

In Step Six, we realized that many of the character defects that gave rise to our eating disorders can persist long

after we become willing to let them go. It is humbling to recognize that we can no more *will ourselves* to be free of self-centeredness—or of the vulnerability to pain and misery that it causes—than we can *will ourselves* to be free of our eating disorders. Once we can honestly admit that we cannot fix our fundamental issues by focusing on ourselves, we are ready to work Step Seven.

Before taking this Step, we will want to consider what humility really means. When we first worked the Steps, many of us mistakenly thought of humility as something more closely aligned with humiliation than with dignity, peace, and power. We may have found the idea distasteful, even distressing. Our lives up to this point had been all about striving; achieving something for ourselves; vying for validation, attention, and love; earning respect and reward.

Most of us believed that the purpose of life was tied up with personal achievement. If we managed well and worked hard, we thought we could or would end up with the man or woman of our dreams, an excellent education, a great career, a solid marriage, properly-reared children, a performing financial portfolio, an attractive home, a reputation for wisdom and humor—the list of attainments we sought was boundless! Some of us craved Olympic Gold, a Nobel Prize, a Pulitzer, or an Oscar. Still others were content to embody the ideal of the starving artist, our unappreciated genius to be recognized only after we shuffled off this mortal coil. We thought altruistic service, generosity, and charity were surely important and quite necessary if we were to be seen as a worthy sort of person. But our generosity was limited by competing selfish desires: we could either be stingy with our time and resources because we thought we needed these for ourselves, or we could satisfy our desire for recognition by working for something mainly

because we thought that it would make us look good. Before embarking on our journey in recovery, very few among us thought anonymous and selfless service would ever be an important and meaningful use of our time. Yet, while our accomplishments made us proud, they did not bring us lasting peace or joy.

In recovery, we begin to realize we had missed an extremely important point: *one cannot build a meaningful life on the basis of self-satisfaction alone.* Without depreciating material, physical, creative, or scientific achievement in any way, we know we made a mistake when we set goals in these areas for the sole reason that we wanted to accrue things for ourselves. This error, we think, is at the heart of our issues. So long as we believed self-serving goals and ideals to be worthwhile, we remained lost in the misery of our eating disorders, easily victimized and prone to resentment, frustration, and fear. We fled from ideas and activities that might have developed our character and enabled us to be more resilient. We could not form the critical relationships of trust and reliance that are necessary for recovery. We were unable to sustain anything like a reasonable perspective regarding ourselves, or the events in our lives. Ironically, we think of this as one of the positive outcomes of our eating disorders: they brought us to the humbling realization that many of our ideas and ideals—our core values—just did not work.

We think our problem was that we did not fully appreciate that all the accolades and rewards in the world would be empty and pointless without being linked to something more important and more durable than we are—a higher purpose or a Higher Power of our understanding. *The perspective that we exist (either because we were made that way, or because we have taken Step Three) to serve something outside*

ourselves now provides the foundation we need to respond consciously and deliberately to all that happens in our lives.

It turns out that humility—having a modest view of our own importance relative to things that matter in the long run—freed us to experience life on an altogether different plane. With humility, we are not called upon to defend our ideas or positions. We are much less likely to offend or take offense. We can make useful contributions without drawing attention to ourselves. We can get our feelings hurt without needing to launch a counterattack. We need not rush about; there is plenty of time. We can be thoughtful and well-considered in our responses to life's provocations and opportunities, and thus we can be far more effective and influential than ever before. We now realize that our character, integrity, and purpose matter far more to our day-to-day happiness—and our relationships with others—than any achievement we could have imagined. We begin to appreciate humility as a necessary and vital frame of reference rather than some unpleasant condition to which we must be regularly reduced.

Those of us who were still in the habit of extreme thinking were troubled by these ideas. When we considered the humble service of Mother Teresa, we recoiled. How could we, as selfish and pre-occupied with our own issues as we have proven ourselves to be, now emulate her kind of selflessness? Surely we were to continue with those aspects of our lives that had been successful, weren't we? Let us reassure you: every experience, talent, capability, attitude, and action can be put to good purpose. We are not casting aside anything of value. We are never less than before, though we can hope we may become less arrogant, presumptuous, abrasive, and impulsive. The point is that we are able to leverage all that we are and all that we do to

serve something bigger and better than ourselves. This all sounds grand and exciting—and it can be—but the process entails careful, deliberate, and humble work.

By this point, most of us had caught on to the idea that our eating disorders were actually symptoms of fundamental, underlying issues. But while we understood that our approach to life needed an overhaul, we were still unsure how we were to go about making changes that would last. We remembered that in Step Three we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God. We then recalled the difficulty and pain of facing our issues all at once when we took Steps Four and Five. When we imagined a life in which we miserably faced and eliminated all our outdated ideas, many of us rebelled. We wanted to find an easier, softer way.⁴

But there is good news. We don't need to "fix" ourselves; it doesn't work anyway! Apart from a few minutes each day spent on Step Ten, we don't waste time dwelling on issues that result from our self-centeredness, unless we are focused on how we can use them to some good purpose. Reflection is a useful tool, but rumination can lead us to lose sight of the bigger picture. We recall that self-centered fear—loss of what we already have or hope to have—seems to be at the root of our defects. So, rather than continuing to focus on ourselves, our main concern now should be how we can get out of our own way, so we can turn our attention to what matters in the long run: service to the greater good, our God, Higher Power, or higher purpose.

This is exactly where our sponsors step in to help us identify *character-building activities* that open us up to new experiences. We find we can leverage the pain of our

⁴ *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 58.

defects to good purpose, *replacing old patterns of thought and behavior with meaningful action*. If we were prideful, we can work to create capabilities in others. We can mentor young people, share our honest stories with other EDA members, and steadfastly avoid taking credit for good deeds. We find we can always credit someone else for our successes. If we were manipulative, we can have empathy for those who demand that others conform to their will, and we work to expose manipulation and dishonesty wherever we find it. If we were silent “victims,” we work to find our voice, write gratitude lists, and find reasons to compliment those around us for work well done. If we were greedy for attention, fame, or fortune, we can share our time and resources with those less fortunate. If we were jealous spouses, we can encourage our partners to enjoy hobbies and pursuits that would have frustrated and frightened us before recovery. If we were lazy in our efforts to care for others, we carefully set new, reasonable goals at regular intervals to stretch our capacity little by little. These are but a few examples of how we may, through reliance on our Higher Power or higher purpose and on the guidance of others, develop strength where once there was weakness. We stress that these new character-building activities should not be taken on all at one time. We must work diligently and patiently, not obsessively. Counsel with a sponsor is advised, so that we neither do so much that we become overwhelmed nor do so little that we remain weak.

As we work on our Step Seven exercises, selfishness will start to diminish. We take care of ourselves so that we can better serve God and/or the greater good, and we discover that what we thought were our shortcomings either turn out to be our greatest assets, or they slowly weaken like a muscle that isn't exercised. We do not need to worry

about our defects! We can let them go, and rely on our Higher Power or higher purpose to do the work of removing them while we work on strengthening our character.

Those among us who are spiritually inclined are encouraged to offer what has become known as the 7th Step Prayer:

The 7th Step Prayer

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 that 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.⁵

Others may use an **alternative statement** such as the following:

I recognize and accept that I have been living with many self-oriented concerns and issues that have held me back from cheerful service to the greater good. I now let go of worry about my shortcomings and I choose to focus instead on serving effectively and well. I trust that as I focus more on my service than on my issues, the shortcomings that stand in the way of my usefulness will diminish, and the authenticity, integrity, dedication, and skills that my service requires will grow stronger. My daily follow-through on my commitment to serve will become my strength.

We recommend you write down any form of this prayer or statement that feels right to you, so you can read it aloud daily and apply it throughout the day. This may feel awkward at first, but if your intention is true and authentic, it will inspire huge changes. You are now on a new

⁵ Ibid., 76.

and stable footing, *solidifying your recovery by putting intentions into practice.*

We encourage you to move on to Step Eight as soon as possible. We have no doubt you will start to find a new delight in life (and some of the peace and freedom you long for) through the character-building actions that are part of your 7th Step. But you are still at high risk of returning to old patterns of thinking until you have worked *all* the Steps. Having gotten this far, you have already put a lot of thought and effort into your recovery. Now is the time to see things through to completion. We are confident you will never regret the time and effort.

Step Eight: *Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.*

As the AA text notes, “we already have a list of persons we have harmed and to whom we are willing to make amends. We made it when we took inventory.”⁶

You may be a little apprehensive about starting this Step because you may still feel distressing emotions about the people you listed on your 4th Step. Please understand that such misgivings are quite normal. It is unlikely that your mind will become so trained to the new way of thinking that you will not harbor troublesome feelings ever again. But when they do come up, we put ourselves somewhere safe and consider the following question: “Do I want to continue to stay stuck in self-pity, resentment, and fear, or do I want to walk free of these encumbrances?” Hopefully, we have developed enough perspective to see that we actually have a choice!

⁶ Ibid.

In Step Four we saw how our errors created and perpetuated hurtful situations. Now we need to find the courage to change what we think, possibly more extensively than we outlined in the Resolutions column on our Step Four inventory. In Steps Six and Seven we have been practicing moving past our crippling emotions so we can take a new attitude when things come up in our daily life. Now we are being asked to consider *taking restorative action that addresses our errors of the past*.

We review our 4th Step inventory list one more time. It may not be perfect, but we leave it alone rather than trying to correct it. We have reviewed and gotten feedback when we gave our 5th Step, and now we need to move forward rather than belaboring work already completed. We will have additional opportunities to work on inventory items in Step Ten. Each day is a new beginning with a fresh set of opportunities to apply these principles.

The long form of EDA's Step Eight⁷ says, "*We made a list of people we had treated badly, no matter how they treated us. We accepted responsibility for our part and made an effort to forgive them for their part.*"

Forgiveness brought us peace, yet perhaps we cannot forgive everything. Sometimes people have treated us (and others) in ways that are simply unconscionable. In such cases, we remember that we ourselves seemed helpless in the grip of our eating disorders. At times, we felt that we had no effective choice in what we thought and did. We were powerless in the grip of emotions and unable to manage our thoughts and behavior. Now that we are asked to forgive people who hurt us, we consider that perhaps they,

⁷ Reference Appendix A: "The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of EDA" in this volume.

too, were swept away by tides of emotion and patterns of thought and behavior that they could not seem to control. We now know that we had to find a different context to get any kind of durable objectivity. This has not been an easy matter for many of us who were unsure if we could make this new perspective work for us in the long run. How difficult must it then be for others to change, when we find it so difficult ourselves? We remember that those who hurt us are as vulnerable as we are, though it may not always seem that way.

While forgiveness is critical to our own recovery, we feel it is important to point out that in cases where we were the object of, rather than the perpetrator of, serious injuries such as rape or battery, we are personally accountable for ensuring the situation is safe for everyone. In other words, if there is a present danger to others, we think it advisable to contact the proper authorities to ensure that the perpetrator is in custody or otherwise publicly tracked (if at all possible).

Making amends to people we have not forgiven may feel insincere, but doing so opens a door through which empathy and forgiveness can enter. All that is required is the recognition that other people suffer from thoughts that create pain and misery just like we do. When we feel empathy for the people on our list, even if we do not like their behavior, we may be ready to move on to Step Nine.

If willingness to make amends does not come easily, we suggest prayer. We pray for the health, success, and happiness of those to whom we need to make amends, even if it feels disingenuous at first. If we keep up this daily practice for a while, we may find we come to mean what we say.

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

The long form of EDA's Step Nine⁸ suggests, "After counsel with a sponsor, or an EDA (or other Twelve-Step group) member who has worked the Twelve Steps, we went to the people we had injured and admitted our fault and regret. Our statements were simple, sincere, and without blame. We set right the wrongs as best we could and expected nothing in return. Accountability set us free."

Step Nine in the AA text⁹ covers most types of situations in significant detail. As we go about making amends, we keep in mind the following points:

Keys to Step Nine

- We must be willing to go to any length to set right the wrongs we ourselves committed in thought, word (written or spoken), and deed.
- We should review our plan with someone who has perspective. It is altogether too easy to overlook needed action or blow things out of proportion. In cases where we behaved badly toward someone who criminally abused us, we advise talking with a trusted counselor about whether to inform proper authorities of the crimes, and then turning our attention to helping others who have been hurt as we were, rather than by making amends directly to the perpetrator. Our

⁸ Reference Appendix A: "The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of EDA" in this volume.

⁹ *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 76-84.

goal is restitution for our own errors, but making amends to people who treated us criminally could be seen as justifying or condoning the crime. To repeat: we prioritize the safety of others (those who might be in danger from the same individual) over our personal need to set right our wrongs directly with the perpetrator. In such cases, we help others instead.

- We should also review our plans for restitution to those who might be unduly affected, especially where financial amends are indicated. We have no right to deprive our families of our time and money without their consent. We must make it clear, however, that setting right our wrongs is essential to our recovery. We must put a plan into action that enables us to make full restitution, however slowly.
- We must not take any kind of arrogant attitude when we approach people we have hurt. We do not discuss our new perspective, our success so far, or anything that might unduly irk—or further injure—anyone else. We briefly explain what we are trying to do and why, no matter how vulnerable this may make us feel. We state what we did and we apologize. *We make no mention whatsoever of anything the other person said or did.* We state what we would like to do to repair damages we caused. Although we cannot expect to get it, we ask forgiveness from the person we harmed. We ask if there is anything else that we can do to make amends and listen carefully to the response. We try to agree with any terms sug-

gested, unless others must first be consulted. We thank the person for taking time to talk with us and we take our leave.

- We can have no expectations of the other people involved. Although usually the results are heartwarming and restorative of our trust in others, this may not always be the case. Our family members and spouses may not want us to approach other people with ideas about financial restitution until we have first made restitution to those at home. Some people to whom we wish to apologize may not accept our apologies or our amends. Others may not forgive us. It does not matter, so long as we have made every effort to do our part.
- We can have no expectations about how we ourselves will respond to the act of making amends. We are likely to feel vulnerable and exposed and can expect to experience rejection, remorse, and pain. We must not, however, shirk from our job now. We need to demonstrate to ourselves and to the world the sincerity of our stance. With Step Nine, we reestablish integrity and build a foundation for trust. Nothing does this so well as the humble admission of errors and follow-through on commitments to right the wrongs.

Once we have apologized and started making amends to those who are within our reach, we will indeed begin to experience the 9th Step Promises:

The 9th Step Promises

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down we have fallen, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will see that our service to God, our Higher Power, or the greater good has done for us what seemed humanly impossible. Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us—sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.¹⁰

It may be important to point out that the 9th Step Promises usually start to come to pass after we are halfway through our 9th Step amends. Due to the toll of guilt and shame, some people may not experience significant relief until they have completed all possible amends.

The good news is that the hard work of establishing our new foundation is mostly complete. Now we must build upon it, for if we don't, we will be wasting both an opportunity and the effort we have put in so far. The benefits, and all of the promises, come from *continuous reliance on the foundation we have put in place.*

¹⁰ *Alcoholics Anonymous.* (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 83-84. Substituting “we have fallen” for a phrase that is inappropriate for the current context, and substituting “service to God, our Higher Power, or the greater good” in place of language that is less inclusive.

Steps One through Nine helped us deconstruct our old ideas that did not work, outline new ones that do, and establish a foundation of trust and integrity. Steps Ten through Twelve enable us to build the sort of life we really wanted and needed all along.

Step Ten: *Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.*

Nothing keeps us out of trouble and happily engaged as well as Steps Ten through Twelve. Step Ten involves an honest daily appraisal of our situation, including a firm resolve to address outstanding issues. Step Eleven includes a daily commitment to connect with and serve God, our Higher Power, or the greater good to the best of our ability. Step Twelve provides us with steady opportunities to apply, and thus reinforce, what we learned as we gained recovery through vigorous work with eating-disordered people in our communities.

The long form of EDA's Step Ten¹¹ suggests:

We continued (and continue) to listen to our conscience. When troubled, we get honest, make amends, and change our thinking or behavior. We continue to notice what we do right, and we are grateful when engaged in right thinking and positive action.

When we are able to be deliberate and calm in our interactions with others despite our own troubles, we are demonstrating reliance on our new perspective that places

¹¹ Reference Appendix A: "The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of EDA" in this volume.

a higher value on service than on our own personal challenges and rewards. The results of taking this approach are usually excellent. Sometimes, despite the best of intentions, we get caught up in self-will. When that happens, we remember that we are all still works-in-progress. We take our limitations as they come, knowing our experiences help us empathize with others. We are grateful to be human and we do our best to find and share the humor in our problems. We take care of the basics and try to restore ourselves to balance¹² quickly, so we can return to a focus on service.

If we lose perspective, we also lose our peace and the power to stay free of our eating disorders. To maintain what we have worked so hard to develop, we suggest *setting aside some time each day to complete a written inventory*. In it, we review the events of the last twenty-four hours and we consider the day ahead. We think about where we have been troubled, felt ill at ease, or thought and did things we might want to do differently in the future. We identify scenarios that we are concerned about and earnestly think about how we want to act, instead of reacting and possibly causing more turmoil. We think about things we thought, said, or did for which we might need to apologize or make amends. We do not hesitate to admit our errors. We endeavor to set right new wrongs every day.

We are not granted freedom from making mistakes. We are granted freedom from our eating disorders, contingent on being willing to admit and correct our mistakes as we go along.

Throughout each day, we are bound to run into situations that cause us concern. Most of us are not situated such that we can readily complete a written inventory to

¹² Reference Appendix B: “A Perspective on Balance” in this volume.

sort things out as they occur. At work or home, we may not be able to go off somewhere and gather our wits. When troubled, therefore, we make a mental commitment to notice what is going on inside us so we can write about it later. If we took corrective action at the time of the disturbance, we might not need to write about the situation. Nevertheless, it can be helpful to reflect on whether and how our solutions work. Then we turn our thoughts back to the tasks at hand.

It is important to acknowledge and pay attention to our feelings, as they alert us when something needs to be addressed. Perhaps we have just made a mistake, and our best course of action is to face the issue directly. Perhaps another person has made a mistake, and we are having feelings about it. We try to avoid rash action, because in the midst of emotional upheaval, we might make a poor choice. We wait until we are able to regain perspective before responding to the situation. In the meantime, we do our best to keep calm and carry on with what really matters.

Sometimes, all that is required to regain perspective is to ask ourselves if we are taking care of basics: *Am I hungry, angry, lonely, tired, or ashamed?* We are sure to be more reactive and self-focused when we neglect to take care of our basic needs, such as adequate nutrition, safe outlets for expression, connection with others, and sufficient sleep. When we take care of basics, it is much easier to find a sane and reasonable perspective no matter what else is happening around us. Here is how some of us think about this: when we do not take care of ourselves properly, our most primal self is neglected, which causes it to emerge and selfishly demand attention. If we do not address the needs, we are gradually overwhelmed with feelings of aching neediness, resentment, and self-pity, and *our behavior becomes*

unpredictable. Worse yet, we might return to old behaviors that used to serve us (and us alone). When we take good care of ourselves, the “tiger within” settles down, and we can then utilize its strength and power to serve others (and a Power or purpose greater than ourselves) more reliably.

Some key ideas that help maintain perspective and restore balance include:

- Do *first things first*: take care of basics and then prioritize by what really matters in the long run.
- Do *one thing at a time*: this creates sanity out of chaos. The AA slogan, “One Day at a Time” encourages us to take it easy. We need not solve all our problems at once! Yet, when we become overwhelmed, even one day at a time can feel like too much for us. Doing the next right thing keeps us focused and moving forward.
- *Find the positive*: no matter how difficult our situation, there will always be reasons for respect and gratitude. It helps a great deal to remind ourselves about what is going right in ourselves, our loved ones, our colleagues, society, and the world.
- *Find the humor*: life is short and lives are precious, but our responses to life’s challenges are often hilarious. Holding a perspective that allows for humor can reduce shame, allowing us to talk about our experiences in a way that neither minimizes nor dramatizes.
- *Be an adult*: Ask others for input and make your own decisions. Then be accountable for your decisions and keep your word.

- *Deal with problems directly:* when anxious, get outside, do something that focuses attention on your physical senses, pray, or meditate.¹³ Then deal with the problem head-on.
- *Get open with others:* honesty restores integrity. We build trust with ourselves by being authentic with others. And, as the saying goes, we are only as sick as our secrets.
- *Be kind:* Make an effort each day to be kind to someone who may not expect it, express appreciation, or follow up with a friend who may be struggling. It is easier to maintain perspective when we remind ourselves that others, like ourselves, need support. Small things can mean a lot!
- *Be flexible:* Develop willingness to look at things differently. Recovery is not rigid.
- *Do the work:* Thinking about perspective and balance can be helpful, but we have to do the work of taking care of ourselves. Then we can focus on how we can be of service. The Steps do not work through osmosis!

In our daily inventory, we reflect on what we felt throughout the day. We honor these feelings and allow them full expression. We think about situations where we

¹³ Activities that focus attention on our physical senses can mean anything that feels good to you: walking in the sunshine or the rain, petting a dog, mowing the yard, gardening, building something, repairing or cleaning a car, housework, hugging and physical intimacy, hitting a ball with a bat or a tennis racquet, martial arts, singing, drumming, playing other musical instruments. It all helps!

might have let our emotional states or self-centered thinking prevent us from doing the right thing, and we think about what we would want to do differently in the future.

While our daily inventory should include a review of situations and ideas that evoked strong, negative responses (e.g., resentment, fear, self-pity, guilt, shame, confusion, frustration, despair), as well as consideration of what we could have thought or done instead, we think that wrapping up each session with a respectful and appreciative reflection on what is going right is absolutely essential. Especially in early recovery, it can be easy to slip back into negative thinking. If this happens, we are unlikely to keep up the practice of Step Ten unless we change: an unbalanced inventory usually feels terrible! Therefore, we encourage spending roughly equal time reflecting on what we have done well and what makes us happy. Along these lines, we recommend a *brief daily gratitude list*. Realizing how much we sincerely appreciate and love those around us can be surprising; it quickly becomes a delight to express every day how much we care about the things that matter. Thinking about what gives us joy helps us to increase it, not just in ourselves, but also in others. After writing about gratitude for a few minutes, we turn our attention to actions we can take—small goals we can set for ourselves—that help us grow as human beings, such as character-building exercises or anonymous acts of kindness. This helps to prepare us for our daily practice of Step Eleven.

Once we have begun incorporating Step Ten into our daily life, we gradually begin to realize we have ceased fighting anything or anyone—even our eating disorders. We are seldom interested in behaviors that had formerly seemed inescapable. We no longer want to waste our time so selfishly! If tempted, we generally recoil as if from a hot flame.

With time and practice at this Step, we react sanely and normally to life's provocations, and this is usually effortless. A new attitude toward food and body image materializes without any focused thought or effort on our part. It just comes! That is an amazing thing for most of us. In full recovery, we are not fighting ourselves, neither are we avoiding temptation. We feel as though we had been placed in a position of neutrality—safe and protected. We have not even “sworn off.” Instead, the problem no longer exists for us. That is our experience so long as we consistently rely on God, our Higher Power, or higher purpose to direct our vision, thoughts, and actions—and continue to take our personal inventory.¹⁴

Step Eleven: *Sought through prayer and meditation to improve 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 out.*

Step Eleven challenges all of us—religious, spiritual, agnostic, and atheist—to push past our limitations and get into action. It prepares us to face the day with renewed commitment and resolve to do our best, as we strive to be of cheerful service to those around us and to God, our Higher Power, or the greater good—whatever that may be for us. While there is no one right way to do this, we find that a daily discipline is well worth the effort. Each day, when thinking about the twenty-four hours ahead, we consider our goals from the 10th Step inventory. We think

¹⁴ *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 84-85. Entire paragraph paraphrases text.

about how our activities can positively affect those around us and what we can do that matters in the long run.

Those of us who practice a particular faith or religion often find ourselves able to connect more strongly than ever to the ideas that we knew and trusted all along. As a result of working the Steps (which allow us to sweep away the debris that had been blocking us), we are finally able to live according to the faith we always knew was right for us.

Those of us who do not come from a tradition or practice of faith need not find Step Eleven especially problematic. We remind ourselves that “God” in EDA literature can mean the Deity, a deity, a spiritual entity of one’s own understanding (a Higher Power), or a non-spiritual conception (a higher purpose), and we remember that *reliance on any one of these ideas can provide the perspective we need to find balance, peace, and freedom.*

No matter what ideas we start with, Step Eleven reminds us that we derive the power of perspective from focusing on something, or some One, greater than ourselves. Some of us simply care for ourselves so we can be free to turn our attention to causes that matter to us. Some of us understand God as the power of love. Some of us find joy and peace through recognizing and dedicating our lives to God as we understand Him from the Bible, Torah, or Qur’an. Others of us leverage Eastern meditation practices, building on every effort to love, honor, and respect ourselves, because we believe that God lives within us—as *us*. Perceiving of ourselves as beings of love, we find meaning and joy in bringing that sacred gift to everyone we meet, and into everything we do. Taking this position frees us to care for ourselves, and others, with great kindness, compassion, and dignity.

Whether we practice formal prayer and meditation, or practice conscious reliance on a higher purpose, our

understanding will likely evolve over time. Step Eleven encourages us to start with whatever conceptions we trust, and work mindfully and deliberately to explore how we can use the power of these ideas in our day-to-day lives. Step Ten helps us establish integrity: we learn to be true to ourselves through our daily inventory. Step Eleven then helps us establish and grow our relationships of trust, whether we start with trust in God, in the power of love, or in the idea that we can organize our time and energy to serve a purpose about which we care deeply.

Step Eleven asks us to seek conscious connection with a source of power so we may turn our attention to carrying out whatever is required of us each day. Regardless of our position on matters of faith, all of us have come to understand that we are here to serve others. We think it helpful to consider what service really means. A good example is the following prayer from St. Francis of Assisi (also known as the 11th Step Prayer):

The Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi¹⁵

Lord, make me a channel of thy peace;
that where there is hatred, I may bring love;
that where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of
forgiveness;
that where there is discord, I may bring harmony;
that where there is error, I may bring truth;
that where there is doubt, I may bring faith;
that where there is despair, I may bring hope;

¹⁵ There are many versions of this prayer. To the best of our understanding, the AA *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* could be the original print version of the prayer that includes the line “For it is by self-forgetting that one finds.” We have added “self-fulfillment,” because “finds” suggests an object. We could have substituted “meaning,” “hope,” “joy,” or “peace,” but “self-fulfillment” seemed to fit best.

that where there are shadows, I may bring light;
that where there is sadness, I may bring joy.

Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be
comforted;
to understand, than to be understood;
to love, than to be loved.

For it is by self-forgetting that one finds self-fulfillment.
It is by forgiving that one is forgiven.
It is by dying that one awakens to eternal life.

The format of the prayer or affirmation does not matter, provided we are willing to reflect on it—or something like it that works for us—on a daily basis. Atheists and agnostics might use an **alternative statement**:

As I practice reliance on a way of thinking that enables
me to find peace and perspective, I now seek to make
use of my emotions and my circumstances to serve the
greater good:

that where there is hatred, I may bring love;
that where there is wrong, I may bring the power of for-
giveness;

that where there is discord, I may bring harmony;
that where there is error, I may bring truth;
that where there is doubt, I may bring reason;
that where there is despair, I may bring hope;
that where there are shadows, I may bring light;
that where there is sadness, I may bring joy.

I will find more strength and peace by seeking
to comfort rather than to be comforted;
to understand, than to be understood;
to love, than to be loved;

For it is by taking care of basics, and then turning our attention to what we can do for others, that we find meaning and purpose;
it is by forgiving that we find freedom from victimhood;
it is by letting go of attachment to our emotions that we find perspective;
it is through surrender to serving the greater good that we find peace.

When some of us first read the Prayer of St. Francis, we had difficulty believing in its veracity, for we had not yet experienced the promised outcomes first-hand. Perhaps you think the ideas sound noble, but remote. It may help to remember that one purpose of Step Eleven is to connect lofty ideas to our daily realities. When we take care of our own basic needs, and then make a concerted effort to put into practice the unselfish ideas expressed above, we soon see for ourselves that *the process does work*. It doesn't have to be remote! Step Eleven means committing oneself to action: we take care of basics so we can do the next right thing that helps others. As we keep this up, we find that love—our passion for what is good and right, or our love of God—is the driving force in life, and in recovery. Our willingness to put the power of our love into serving something greater than ourselves makes life worth living.

On awakening each day, we think about our opportunities to bring God's vision or the vision of the greater good into all of our activities. If we practice Steps Ten and Eleven on a daily basis, we will go out into the world at peace with ourselves, ready to be of service. We find ourselves thinking about others in a caring way we had not fully appreci-

ated before. Our capacity to be genuinely helpful expands as we look for ways to bring peace and joy to others. Just as working the prior steps clears away the obstacles to a relationship with God, our Higher Power, or our higher purpose, working *Step Eleven enables us to form deeper and more authentic connections with everyone*. We are able to love people exactly as they are—without unreasonable expectations—when our peace and power comes from something greater than ourselves.

Working Step Eleven can consistently resolve even the most complicated relationships and enhance our most intimate ones. By relying on a power or purpose greater than ourselves to frame up our experiences, we can embrace the physicality of our bodies, the power and intensity of our emotions, and connections of trust—free of fear—with deep love, joy, and delight that had never seemed possible for us before. We can be free at last.

Our daily practice of Steps Ten and Eleven help ensure that we do not overlook any serious matters. We have not come this far to be blindsided by unanticipated situations we had not anticipated. We can get through anything, one thing at a time, if we keep in mind that weathering today's experiences without resorting to old patterns will put us in a position to be helpful to others who may face the same issues later on. Throughout the day, as we feel agitation or doubt, we pause and search or ask God for the right thought or action. We remember we are not running the show; we are here to serve. We may repeat "Thy will be done," reflect on the idea that peace comes from humble service, or commit ourselves anew to experiencing life on life's terms—many times a day. We are then in much less danger of excitement, fear, anger, worry, self-pity, or foolish decisions. We become much more efficient. We do not tire

so easily, for we are not burning up energy as we did when we were trying to arrange life to suit ourselves.¹⁶

Making immediate use of these newfound insights is important, for it is through sharing our new strength with others that we develop an appreciation for just how amazing a transformation we have had. We need to further cultivate our newfound integrity to ensure that we do not revert to old patterns of thinking and behavior. In the context of our entire lives, we have been practicing our new reliance on a Higher Power or higher purpose for a relatively short span, so we need as much practice as we can get! The next chapter, “Working with Others,” describes exactly how we can best insure ourselves against a return to eating-disordered ways as we continue building a strong and vibrant life of purpose and joy.

¹⁶ Adapted from *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 88.