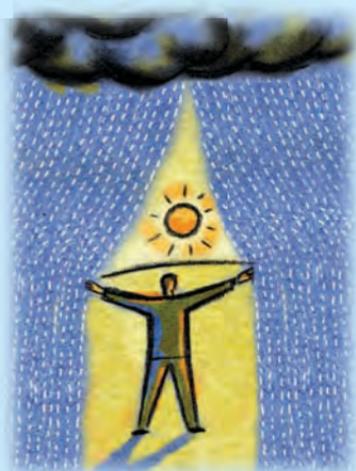


12

Hidden Rewards of Making Amends



Finding Forgiveness and Self-Respect
by Working Steps 8-10

Allen Berger, Ph.D.

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ALLEN BERGER, PH.D.

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Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Berger, Allen, 1952-

12 hidden rewards of making amends : finding forgiveness and self-respect by working steps 8-10 / Allen Berger, Ph.D.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-61649-446-9 (softcover) — ISBN 978-1-61649-494-0 (e-book)

1. Alcoholics—Rehabilitation. 2. Twelve-step programs. 3. Interpersonal relations.
4. Alcoholics—Family relationships. I. Title. II. Title: Twelve hidden rewards of making amends.

HV5278.B46 2013

616.86'106—dc23

2013007705

Editor's note

Some names, details, and circumstances have been changed to protect the privacy of those mentioned in this publication.

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16 15 14 13 1 2 3 4 5 6

Cover design: David Spohn
Interior design and typesetting: Madeline Berglund
Developmental editor: Peter Schletty

Dedication

This book is dedicated to William C. Rader, M.D., my first clinical supervisor, who taught me to trust my intuition and the value of authenticity in the client-counselor relationship. To Walter Kempler, M.D., my mentor in Gestalt therapy, who taught me the power of the present moment as the focal point of therapy, and how to confront someone and honor his or her dignity at the same time. To Tom McCall, my sponsor, who taught me the importance of being open, honest, and willing. To Bill B., who was my close friend and fellow traveler at the Kaneohe Marine Corps Air Station. And finally, this book is dedicated to my clients, who gave me the privilege of joining them on this sacred journey and who have helped me grow as a person and as a therapist.

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Introduction

When you sit alone, quiet and free from distractions, are you at peace with yourself? Are you truly happy with how you are living your life? Are you deeply satisfied with how you behave in your relationships? Are you at peace with how you treat coworkers, friends, and family?

If you give yourself permission to be rigorously honest with yourself, and I mean gut-level honest with yourself, what happens? What comes into the foreground of your consciousness?

Most of us avoid this level of soul searching, this true-speaking and honest self-reflection. Why? Because we really don't want to feel our pain or our disappointment with ourselves. We don't want to face our dissatisfaction with ourselves. We don't want to admit that we aren't at peace with ourselves, that we are discontent with how we are living our lives.

None of us wants to admit that we've disappointed ourselves! So we avoid ourselves. We run away. We trick ourselves into believing that we are someone we aren't. We avoid facing ourselves honestly and openly. We believe that we are the fabricated-self that we have constructed to meet life's challenges.

Finding the courage to be rigorously honest would help us

develop the best possible attitude toward our relationship with ourselves, with others, and even with life itself. We would learn from our experiences and set upon the path of realizing our full human and spiritual potential. We would accept ourselves, support ourselves, and grow according to who we really are: our *true-self*. The true-self is purely you. It's the real you. Not the you that was altered by negative childhood experiences, not the you that was shaped by the anxiety about not belonging or not being loved or accepted, and not the you that was changed by our culture. It is the you that you were meant to be.

Unfortunately we rarely have the courage to face and deconstruct our *fabricated-self*, or *false-self*. The false-self or fabricated-self is a facade we use to disown our real feelings and manipulate our relationships with others. It's who we think we should be. It's who we think we need to be to relieve the pressure generated by the anxiety that we won't be loved or accepted. Our culture, our families, and even our own psyche conspire against our efforts, against taking this journey, against a gut-wrenching honesty. As M. Scott Peck (1978) pointed out in his book by the same name, this is the *road less traveled*.

The good news is that there are some pathfinders in our midst—people who have taken the road less traveled. They took it not because they possess some exceptional virtue in their character that we don't have; rather, they had to take that road or they would die.

I am referring to the millions of men and women who are in Twelve Step recovery. Their addiction induced a crisis that forced them to face themselves honestly. They reached a critical point in their lives that demanded change. They had to find a better way to live—or else! They were motivated to take certain steps to develop the best possible attitude toward themselves and life. They learned how to achieve real peace of mind and emotional well-being. They worked the Twelve Steps. Here are the Steps they took:

The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

- Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
- Step 2: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- Step 3: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
- Step 4: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
- Step 5: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
- Step 6: Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
- Step 7: Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
- Step 8: Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
- Step 9: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
- Step 10: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
- Step 11: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
- Step 12: Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs. (*Alcoholics Anonymous* 2001, 59–60)

We can learn from their lessons. We don't have to hit bottom or have a personal crisis to embrace change. We can take a similar

journey because we choose to, because we want to, and because we are interested in reaching our potential. Because we want real peace of mind and serenity.

This book is for people who are new to the Twelve Steps as well as those who may be considered experienced pathfinders. For those new to the journey, I hope the book points you in an exciting and positive direction. For those who have walked many miles on the path, I hope you will gain a new perspective and see the Steps from a different angle.

If you are in recovery and working the Steps, I feel quite certain that I will be able to help you to better understand the therapeutic value of them. My goal, however, is more ambitious than just to promote an understanding of the psychological soundness of the Steps. I want to help you get past your “stuck points,” to help you work through an impasse you might be experiencing in working the Steps, especially Steps 8, 9, or 10. I hope to help you become aware of your resistance and help you break through it.

The major focus of this book is on Steps 8, 9, and 10. I want to help you understand the twelve hidden rewards you will experience when you work these three Steps. First, let me define what I mean when I talk about hidden rewards. A hidden reward is an indirect benefit we receive from something helpful or therapeutic. Let’s look at strength training as an example. While increasing strength is a direct benefit of this type of physical exercise, there are other indirect benefits. As lean muscle mass increases, our metabolic rate increases and we burn more calories. This increase in metabolism is a hidden reward of strength training.

We will see that there are twelve hidden rewards from working Steps 8, 9, and 10. While all twelve Steps are equally important, these three Steps are critical for achieving peace of mind and emotional well-being. As you will see, in order for us to experience peace

of mind and serenity, we need to resolve the unfinished business in our lives by cleaning up the wreckage of our past. But that isn't enough. We also need to function according to a set of spiritual principles that will prevent us from doing more harm. Steps 8–10 guide us along this path. They help us develop the necessary skills to have healthier and more satisfying human relations. They help us reconcile our past, find forgiveness, and take the best possible attitude toward ourselves and others.

Let's put Steps 8–10 in context to better understand their significance. *The Twelve Step program is a design to ensure day-to-day emotional well-being and peace of mind.* Much work needs to be done, however, before the person in recovery reaches this phase of their development. They must deconstruct their reliance on a *false-self* and all that it demands they should be. They must deeply challenge themselves and their beliefs. They must hold themselves to a high level of accountability for their past actions and current behavior. They must ask for help. They also must go to any lengths to make these changes. It's quite an order, isn't it?

The Twelve Steps are a guide to recovering our lost true-self. They also create a more positive self-concept. Some people even describe the process of working the Steps as establishing “ego integrity.” To realize the full benefit of the Twelve Steps, they must be worked in order because they are interdependent.

For example, the therapeutic forces unleashed when we take Step 1 create a powerful emotional and psychological energy that prepares us for what happens in Step 2. Step 1 is surrendering to reality. It is facing something about ourselves that we didn't want to face. When we face and accept reality without distorting it, a crisis results. In Step 1, we admit that we have a serious problem and we don't know what to do about it. We realize that we are between a rock and a hard place; we need a better solution but don't have one.

Step 2 tells us that there is a solution to our dilemma, that there is hope. This process is repeated throughout: Step 2 prepares us for Step 3, Step 3 for Step 4, and so on. A therapeutic momentum carries us along in the exact direction we need to go. This momentum forces us to confront the very issues that we have been avoiding and to develop the undeveloped parts of our personalities. It is a people-growing process. The Steps help us mature and grow a more positive self-concept and a more realistic view of ourselves and our life. This process exposes our false-self and creates more freedom from it, along with all the nonsense that goes along with living according to its ridiculous rules.

Later we will unpack the particular therapeutic value of each Step, but for now I want us to think of Steps 1–7 as a foundry that forges a key from honesty, open-mindedness, willingness, and self-awareness. That key unlocks a chest of hidden treasures: emotional sobriety, a positive self-concept, and an amazing inner force for growth, self-respect, trustworthiness, integrity, and wholeness. Many of us won't discover these hidden treasures because we balk at the difficult tasks inherent in Steps 8, 9, and 10.

What good is a key if we don't use it, if we just keep it in our pocket or let it dangle from our keychain? That's exactly the problem that many of us come across in recovery. We don't use the key we have forged in the first seven Steps because we want to avoid the discomfort we believe we are going to feel when we work Steps 8, 9, and 10. These are demanding Steps, no doubt about it. However, don't sell yourself short because of the erroneous belief that you can't handle the pain and discomfort.

If you don't hear anything else I say, I want you to hear this: *You are more capable than you realize*. Dr. Viktor Frankl made this observation as he was overseeing the care of men and women in a Nazi concentration camp: "We must never forget that we may also find

meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed” (1984, 116). He witnessed men and women deepen their spiritual life even under the most abhorrent conditions imaginable.

We have a wealth of untapped emotional and spiritual resources within that can help us face any challenge life puts in our path, even the most difficult, uncomfortable, and horrendous situations. There are those among us who have survived rape, molestation, concentration camps, genocide, prejudice, combat, torture, natural disasters, the loss of everything but life, or who have been witness to brutality and cruelty—the list goes on and on. The point is that we are resilient. If we weren’t, we would no longer exist. We have an amazing ability to repair ourselves emotionally and to adapt. Unfortunately, many of us have never tapped into or used our ability to emotionally repair ourselves, so we don’t even realize that this ability exists.

Researchers are discovering that infants aren’t as fragile as we used to think, either (Tronick and Cohn 1989). They have a remarkable ability to soothe themselves when upset. However, what typically happens is that a loving parent intervenes and usurps the process. We, the parents, become anxious that the child is hurting and fear that he or she will be irreparably damaged, so we intercede to protect the child. When this happens, the child becomes dependent upon our intervention to create their well-being instead of using their inner resources to create their own state of emotional well-being. We create and reinforce emotional dependency rather than facilitate emotional resilience, and we do it all in the name of being a good parent. Unfortunately, we don’t realize how competent children really are.

Perhaps our good intentions have contributed to the epidemic of codependency in our nation. We haven’t learned how to take care of our emotional well-being. We look outside of ourselves for relief. We turn to drugs, love, sex, money, objects, work, or gambling to

soothe our discontent or anxiety. We have become obsessed with and addicted to *more*, hoping that if we put enough into the emotional hole we will fill it. However, no one and no thing can fill that hole. Only *you* can fill it by learning how to soothe yourself.

If you commit yourself to the process of working Steps 8–10, you will open the door to your lost integrity and emotional resilience. You will be able to build a positive self-concept based on the reality of who you are (your true-self), rather than on some idealized image of who you think you should be but never can live up to (your false-self). You will build a way of living that works under any condition. You will develop self-respect and discover the healing powers of forgiveness.

Sounds like quite a promise, doesn't it? Well, it is. In fact, the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) understood the incredible power of this process and described the effects of working the Steps, which have been affectionately referred to as the "Promises." They guaranteed that if we worked the first nine Steps we would find a new freedom, peace of mind, and serenity.

What do Steps 8, 9, and 10 do? They help us take the necessary corrective actions to address the defects of character that were identified in the previous seven Steps. Steps 8–10 help us sort out guilt from shame, and sort out our real culpability from what we imagine. They help us understand forgiveness and compassion. These three Steps help us step up and take absolute responsibility for past and current behavior in the spirit of developing the best possible attitude we can take toward ourselves and others.

Steps 8, 9, and 10 help us achieve autonomy and emotional sobriety. Let's take a second look at them:

Step 8: Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

Step 9: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Step 10: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. (*Alcoholics Anonymous* 2001, 59)

You've Been Warned

I ask you to approach this work with an open mind and an open heart. I must warn you, however, that many dangers lie ahead. You will be asked to be honest with yourself in ways that most people avoid. It will not be easy, and it is not for the faint of heart. You will see things about yourself you won't like, but you will also discover things about yourself that will amaze you. You will see the worst in you and the best in you.

You will look at yourself through a very different lens. I will help you see *what is right* about you that you have alienated yourself from. You will see how you have twisted yourself into something you aren't in order to belong, to be loved and accepted, or to have power. This is what creates the real problem in your life. You will understand that you lost your true-self by seeking glory, that you betrayed your true-self to soothe your anxiety. You will see how you have sold out and lost your integrity. You will admit that you have betrayed friends and family because they have not submitted to your unreasonable expectations. With compassion for yourself in your heart, you will see how you settled for playing roles while living in constant fear that you were going to be found out.

Change begins when we accept who we are, rather than trying to be something we are not. You've heard it before: *the truth sets us free*. What most people haven't heard is that the truth will set us free *only if we are willing to live our truth*.

That's what this book is really about. It is going to provide you

with a way of integrating your truth into your life. It will help you achieve autonomy and freedom from your psychic prison and all the nonsense you used to build your prison walls.

What You Need to Bring and What You'll Gain

I hope you will choose to take the risk and embrace the difficult road that lies ahead. If you do, then please make it your intention to be as present during this process as you can possibly be. Focus your attention on the thoughts and feelings that arise as you explore these issues. Think of your personal reactions as a signal from a lighthouse. Your reactions will illuminate where you need to go. If you remain open during this process, you will see what is missing in your life and what you need to do to remedy the problem.

Don't fret if you don't always understand what your reactions are telling you. Sometimes you will come to an "aha" immediately; other times it may take a day or more for a new path to emerge. The point is that if you begin this work, a process will take over that will lead you exactly where you need to go. I remind my patients of this often: "Trust the process." Later, you will learn more about what I mean by this statement.

I am very excited about sharing the wisdom of the Twelve Steps with you. By the time you finish reading this book and working with these principles, you will experience firsthand the value that these Steps can bring to your life. You will discover the soundness of the psychological principles at work in Twelve Step recovery and how to apply these in your life today—regardless of whether you suffer from an addiction.

Does it excite you to hear that you might be able to develop a deep sense of emotional well-being—to recover something important that you have lost? I hope it does, because I am excited to be your guide on this journey.

Before we unpack this process, I want to help you understand who you really are. I want to challenge your beliefs about your basic nature. I want to paint a picture of what it means to be a fully functioning person.

Part 1:

Unpacking the Therapeutic Value
of the First Ten Steps and Some
Reflections on Working Steps 8–10



I don't know about you, but I am sick and tired of picking up a self-help book and being told what's wrong with me.

It's not that I am unwilling to look at my issues. (Well, OK, to be really honest, there have been times in my life when I've resisted facing my issues, but overall I do not.) It's that something doesn't feel right about the whole approach—that is, reducing a person to what's "wrong" in his or her life. We are all much more than what is wrong with us. We all have a desire to grow, to learn about ourselves, and to actualize ourselves. These basic needs are an important part of who we are, and these basic needs are awakened in recovery.

Until recently psychology was dominated by psychoanalytic and psychodynamic ideas. Psychoanalytic theory suggested that there was something innately wrong with us that needed fixing. Psychoanalysts argued that we suffered from a "repetition compulsion"; in other words, we are destined to act out our problems. They believed that our early childhood experiences created something

similar to a groove in a record—a rut in our psyche that forces us to re-create the traumas we suffered in childhood. We are stuck replaying this tune for the rest of our lives. The theory is that in order to change, we need extensive treatment.

We have recently discovered that this is not true. Over the past seventy years, we have viewed our human nature in a very different way. Humanistic psychologists rejected the notion that something is innately wrong with us and instead put forth the idea that there is something inherently *right* about us. This way of thinking created a huge shift in the therapeutic community and suggested a novel way of relating to ourselves. Let's consider the psychoanalytic theory of "repetition compulsion." From a humanistic perspective we re-create these earlier traumas to work through our feelings and develop a part of ourselves that was hindered by the original traumas. Our basic need to grow and become whole motivates us to fill in what is missing in our personal development. With this new orientation in mind, our personal work or therapy has more to do with getting out of the way of our inner drive for self-realization than transforming our so-called uncivilized id into a good, productive citizen. (The id is a concept from psychoanalysis; Freud believed our mind could be divided into a superego or conscience, an ego, and an id. The id was the most primitive.) What ultimately makes us sick is ignoring our basic nature, not our basic nature per se. Let's explore this in more detail.

Right now, without being consciously aware of it, you are maintaining your internal body temperature at 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. Your nervous system is programmed to keep your body temperature in a steady state or dynamic equilibrium called *homeostasis*. If you get cold, your nervous system will automatically do something to warm you up; for example, you might start shaking. If you get too hot, your nervous system will make you perspire to cool you off. It

automatically responds to the change in your body temperature and makes the necessary adjustments until you return to normal. It's like we have a thermostat built into our nervous systems.

We automatically repair ourselves or regulate ourselves when something goes wrong with our temperature. This means that there is an incredible wisdom programmed into our nervous systems—just like flight is programmed into the nervous system of a bird. A bird does not have to be taught to fly. It just knows how to fly; once a fledgling's nervous system and body matures to a certain point, it takes off! It has an organic wisdom. We have such a wisdom too, as you will see.

The True-Self

We are each born with a true-self. Our true-self is like an acorn. According to Dr. Karen Horney, one of the unheralded geniuses in psychology, “You need not, and in fact cannot, teach an acorn to grow into an oak tree, but when given a chance, its intrinsic potentialities will develop” (1950, 17). Just like the acorn that is genetically programmed to become a unique oak tree, we are programmed to become our true-self (Horney 1950; Maslow 1962). Given the proper set of circumstances, we will develop the unique forces of our true-self—the ability to experience the depth of our own feelings, thoughts, wishes, desires, and needs. We will develop the faculty to express ourselves and spontaneously and respectfully relate to others. We will learn to equally honor our need for togetherness and our need to be ourselves. We will come to realize our own set of values and purpose in life. We will be able to tap our own resources to satisfy our needs and to regulate ourselves by soothing our pain or disappointment. We will develop a solid yet flexible self.

An acorn cannot reach its true potential unless it grows in a nurturing environment. The environment and climate have to provide

certain critical elements. There needs to be an adequate amount of sunlight and water. The soil needs to contain certain nutrients. If these nutrient conditions are adequately met, then the acorn will eventually become what it is destined to be: a beautiful oak tree with a set of unique qualities and characteristics. However, the developing acorn cannot be exposed to harsh conditions until it is well rooted and has matured to a certain point.

The conditions for successful human development are very similar. Like the acorn, we have basic needs that must be satisfied for us to thrive. We need shelter, food, and water. We need a secure and warm attachment that will provide us with love and nurturing. We need intellectual and spiritual stimulation. We need encouragement and empathy. We need to be acknowledged and celebrated. We need to be protected from traumas and abuse. We also need some degree of healthy friction with the wishes and wills of others. If these conditions are adequately met, we will develop an inner security and an inner freedom that enables us to be response-able to our own feelings and express ourselves according to who we really are. Unfortunately, this rarely happens.

What Goes Wrong?

Through a variety of adverse influences, we do not grow according to our individual possibilities. A whole host of factors can easily distort our development: our desire to please, our need to belong or to be loved and accepted, incorrect learning, bad habits, anxiety, family dynamics, traumas, and cultural tradition.

We need to belong. We need love and acceptance to thrive emotionally and spiritually. So we are hardwired to seek it. The fear that we don't belong, that we won't be loved or accepted, creates a basic anxiety that permeates our lives. *This anxiety drives us to look for a solution that will ensure love and acceptance. Our anxiety makes us feel*

out of control, so we decide that we need to take control of our lives, and we head out on a quest to ensure love and acceptance.

This path is called the “search for glory” (Horney 1950, 17). We search for a way of being that will ensure love and acceptance—that will make us feel like we belong. Our solution shapes our personality and beliefs. Here’s what happens.

To solve the problem created by our basic anxiety, we develop a way of being that is based on an idealized image of who we think we should be. We believe this idealized-self will give us inner security. This is not our true-self. It is our false-self, or fabricated-self. (You can think of the false-self as our ego, as it is commonly referred to in the Twelve Step literature.)

In order for our idealized-self to crystallize into the false-self we must shape our personality accordingly. This is accomplished through our *pride system*. This system rewards and punishes us to ensure that we develop according to its idealized specifications or laws. We feel good and proud of ourselves when we act, behave, think, or feel the way we think we should (reward). We despise or even hate ourselves when we don’t (punishment).

The laws and specifications of the pride system amount to a collection of “shoulds,” which become a tyranny that exercises absolute control over our lives. We are driven to be the way our idealized image demands, and we dare not question its authority. These idealized specifications are absolutes; they are not negotiable. This in turn creates pervasive “black and white” thinking in our lives. Our false-self requires blind obedience. We do not question its tenets or its authority—we perceive it and feel it as the way we are supposed to be.

We sell out our true-self during this process. We sell out big time. We lose ourselves in this process, rejecting our true-self in favor of a fabricated false-self. We abandon and alienate ourselves

from who we really are and become estranged from our true-self at a very deep level. Our anxiety leads us to believe that we aren't good enough the way we are and that to be OK, we must become something we are not. We develop a life based on phony aspirations. What a tragedy! We reject ourselves for an ideal. We swallow this solution whole and uncritically accept its nonsense.

To describe this process, I used the following analogy in *12 Smart Things to Do When the Booze and Drugs Are Gone*.

Have you ever seen a beautiful bonsai tree? A bonsai artist works patiently over many years to constrain what should be a full-sized tree into perfect miniature. The artist constantly prunes the tree, wraps wires around its branches to shape them, deprives it of water, and trims its roots to fit a tiny pot. Such a tree becomes perfect to look at. And yet . . . and yet. It is not its true-self. It is a tree made to conform to a *vision* of miniature perfection. (2010, 26)

This is what we have done to ourselves with our “shoulds.” They are the wire we wrap around our true-self to shape us into our idealized image.

Horney (1950) observed that our basic solution to our anxiety typically forms around three different unique themes that are developed outside of our consciousness:

- the *self-effacing* solution, based on the appeal of love
- the *expansive* solution, based on the appeal of mastery
- the *attitude of resignation*, based on the appeal of freedom

In all of these solutions, alienation from our true-self is the core problem.

If the *appeal of love* becomes the focus of our solution, we become self-effacing people pleasers. We feel inadequate, inferior,

guilty, and contemptible. We must not think or feel superior to others or display any such feelings in our behavior lest we not be loved. Self-assertiveness makes us anxious. Therefore we can easily become victims in relationships. We dare not stand up for ourselves. We long for help, protection, and the experience of love both passionate and spiritual. We become chameleon-like, trying to figure out what someone wants us to be and molding ourselves to their image.

If the *appeal of mastery* becomes the focus of our solution, we try to get love and acceptance via the expansive solution. We earn love by excelling, by being the best, and by being superior in some way. This is the opposite of the self-effacing solution. If we follow the appeal of mastery, we tend to manipulate or dominate others to make them dependent upon us. We strive for power over others, either through becoming superior or by being ruthlessly vindictive. We identify with our idealized image and become arrogant and narcissistic.

Finally, if the *appeal of freedom* attracts us, then we will withdraw from the inner battlefield and declare ourselves uninterested. This is the attitude of resignation: we resign from the so-called rat race. This is the most radical of all the solutions. We give up and stop trying. We become indifferent underachievers. We are seen as having all kinds of potential, but no ambition or desire for success.

You are likely to recognize one of these three themes in your life. We all develop along one of these paths, essentially rejecting our true-self. What we didn't realize at the time we rejected ourselves is that *any life based on self-rejection will never be fulfilling or satisfying.*

The Price We Pay

The pain and trauma caused by the alienation from our true-self manifests in a myriad of symptoms, including alcoholism and other drug addictions. Dr. Carl Jung believed that this alienation actually

caused alcoholism. In a letter to Bill Wilson, Jung stated that the alcoholic had a “spiritual thirst” (Wilson 1988a, 280). He went on to explain that the alcoholic had a longing to be whole and one with God and that the effects of alcohol and other drugs simulated the experience, leading many to return to it repeatedly.

I believe we long to be united with our real-self. This is what creates wholeness and integrity. This is the path to a real connection with a “God of our understanding.”

Abandoning our true-self sets in motion a juggernaut of absurd behaviors aimed at satisfying the unyielding demands of our false-self, with its system of rigid laws and perfectionistic specifications. When this juggernaut couples with alcoholism, addiction to other drugs, and/or a process addiction (such as sex, gambling, video games, shopping, or stealing), the result is devastating.

We are not destined to stay on this fabricated path. Something inside us desires self-realization and self-actualization. Something deep inside yearns for us to be who we really are. We desire wholeness and integrity.

We can deconstruct our false-self and begin living a more meaningful and fulfilling life right now. Our true-self is never permanently removed. Famed humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow (1954) stated that our basic needs are “intrinsic aspects of human nature which culture cannot kill, but only repress.” They are there for our discovery; they are there to be recovered.

The Nature of the True-Self

What is the nature of our true-self? I have pondered this question for most of my career as a psychologist. The following is my best answer to this question. Let us begin understanding our true nature by becoming aware that we possess a very powerful growth force called self-actualization. This force is hardwired into our DNA.

Maslow determined that we demonstrate in our own nature a pressure toward fuller and fuller being and that we grow toward a more and more perfect actualization of our humanness in exactly the same naturalistic, scientific sense that an acorn may be said to be “pressing toward” being an oak tree (Goble 1971, 38). This drive toward self-realization remains a part of us. It lies dormant within. *When we remove the destructive forces of our addictions and our false-self, the constructive forces of the real-self are reintroduced into our lives and facilitate our growth and self-actualization.* We are propelled toward self-realization.

Who are we when we actualize our human potential? How will we behave? How do we function when we transcend our false-self? We must answer these questions to understand the self we are recovering by working the Twelve Steps.

This will sound strange, but the healthy person doesn't have much personality. This doesn't mean that they are bland or boring. Quite the contrary. It means that they do not respond to a situation in a stereotyped or rigid manner. A healthy person is flexible and focused on the current moment. A healthy person uses their full awareness and intuition to invent how to respond appropriately to a novel situation or to satisfy their needs. A healthy person makes *creative adjustments* to their environment to satisfy their needs.

Our true-self is response-able, which means that we are not identified with any self-configuration. Our true-self isn't one self, but a population of selves working in harmony. This idea may sound strange to you because we tend to think of the true-self as one self, but it isn't. Don't be alarmed—this doesn't mean we have a Sybil-like multiple personality disorder. It means that when we are functioning from our true-self we can respond from any part of our self that would help restore our homeostasis, by either eliminating tension or gratifying a need. We adopt a way of being that is appropriate

to the life situation we are facing. When we are real, when we are authentic, we function spontaneously. We tap our inner wisdom, and we learn to trust ourselves as never before. We learn to make creative adjustments.

Carl Rogers (1961), often considered the father of humanistic psychology, felt that the person who is psychologically free behaves in the following ways:

- He is more able to live fully in and with each and all of his feelings and reactions.
- She makes increasing use of all of her ability to sense accurately the existential situation within herself and in her environment.
- He makes use of the information his nervous system supplies, using it in awareness, but recognizing that his intuition may be, and often is, wiser than his awareness.
- She is more able to function freely and select from the multitude of possibilities the behavior that in this moment of time will be most generally and genuinely satisfying.
- He is able to put more trust in his functioning, not because he is infallible, but because he can be fully open to the consequences of his actions and correct them if they prove to be less than satisfying.
- She is more able to experience all of her feelings, and is less afraid of any of her feelings.
- He is his own sifter of evidence, and therefore is open to input from all sources.
- She is completely engaged in the process of being and becoming herself.
- He lives more completely in this moment, and knows that this is the soundest living for all time.

- She is becoming a more fully functioning organism, and because of the awareness of herself that flows freely in and through her experience, she is becoming a more fully functioning person. (191–92)

When we operate from our real-self, we have a solid but flexible sense of self. We honor ourselves, support ourselves, and take responsibility to satisfy our needs—but *only if we don't get in our own way*. The path we follow to satisfy our needs or eliminate tension is called the *cycle of experience*. Let's explore this in more detail.

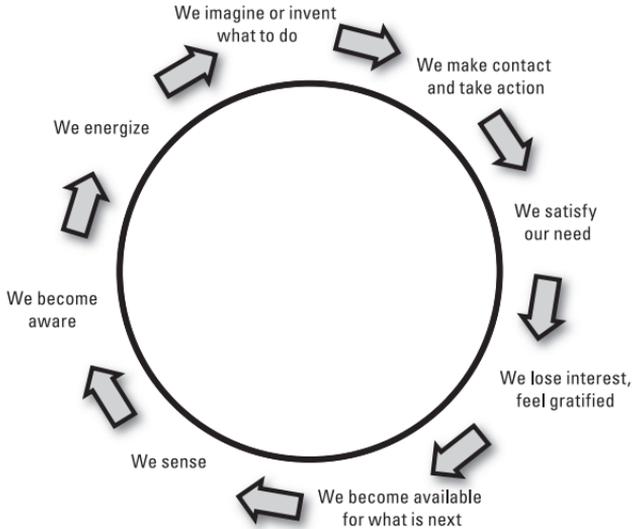
The Cycle of Experience

What happens when we are hungry but don't have time to eat before we drive home from work? Our need to satisfy our hunger moves into the foreground of our consciousness until it's satisfied. It creates a disequilibrium that motivates us to satisfy the unmet need. If the route home takes us on the freeway, we will notice all the billboards advertising places to eat. We spontaneously seek out the things in our environment that will satisfy our hunger. Once we eat and satisfy our hunger, we will hardly notice those advertisements that seemed so compelling just moments earlier. This is an example of the innate wisdom that motivates us and orients our senses to the relevant information in our environment so we can satisfy our needs or eliminate tension.

But what is it that makes us function in this manner? Underlying our behavior is a process called *self-regulation*. Very simply stated, we strive to maintain a balance between need gratification and tension elimination. A healthy person identifies his or her most meaningful need and responds to it appropriately, thereby restoring balance (peace of mind), releasing new energy, and allowing the next important need to emerge. Self-regulation is obtained by moving through various stages of the cycle of experience.

To illustrate the cycle of experience, let's look at what happens when we need to eliminate the tension caused by the urge to urinate. Follow along in figure 1.

Figure 1. Cycle of Experience



Your bladder is constantly filling with urine (We sense). When the volume of urine reaches a certain level, we become aware of the need to void the urine (We become aware). The next thing that happens is we mobilize ourselves to eliminate the tension caused by the urine in our bladder (We energize). We search our environment to find a restroom and head straight for it (We imagine or invent what to do). Once we do what we need to do in the restroom (We make contact and take action), the tension caused by a full bladder is eliminated (We satisfy our need) and we stop thinking about urinating (We lose interest). Once our need to urinate is eliminated, we become available for whatever comes next. This is how the cycle

operates to address a physical need. Next, we will look at what happens with a psychological tension.

Let's imagine Jeremy had an argument with his spouse the other day, and ever since then something has been gnawing at him (We sense). He just doesn't feel good about what happened. Jeremy wasn't able to identify what was bothering him, but after he thought about it for a while he realized that he needed to make amends (We become aware). He said many things that he doesn't feel good about. He needs to apologize, to work Step 10. Yesterday, he didn't think his partner deserved an apology. He justified his rotten behavior. Today, he realized that there is no justification for talking to someone he cares about in that way. That is not the person he wants to be.

Once Jeremy became aware of what he wanted, he mobilized himself to take action. He energized himself to take action and reached out to his wife to discuss his real feelings (We imagine or invent what to do). He ended up saying:

“Hon, are you available to talk with me about our conversation yesterday? I want to apologize for what I said to you and how I justified my actions. I am sorry, truly sorry for calling you names and then justifying my behavior. You didn't deserve to be treated that way. I was upset with myself and took it out on you. Is there something I can do to repair the damage I've done to you? You don't deserve to be treated that way. I am sorry. I plan on talking to my sponsor about my anger.”

Sometimes making amends unfolds differently than expected. Let's imagine that Jeremy started to cry unexpectedly. As he made amends, he realized that the way he had treated his wife was similar to how he was treated as a child. This was what his father, now deceased, used to do to him when his father was upset with himself.

Jeremy learned this abusive behavior at his father's feet. Jeremy's unresolved pain surfaced during his discussion with his wife. To address this unresolved trauma, he needs to follow a different path.

A fully functioning person will be willing and able to follow the path of their experience wherever that path leads. In the example above, Jeremy will need to address his feelings toward his father, once he has finished making amends to his wife. Because his father passed away, he may need to imagine his dad sitting in front of him while he says the things to him he has always wanted to say about being mistreated. Here's an example of something one of my patients shared with me the other day.

About two weeks ago, Sharon's father passed away. He had been ill for several months, and his death was expected. Sharon had come to peace about his passing and spent a wonderful day with him on Father's Day. She sat at his bedside, cared for him, talked to him, and let him know how much she loved him. He passed away two days after she flew back home.

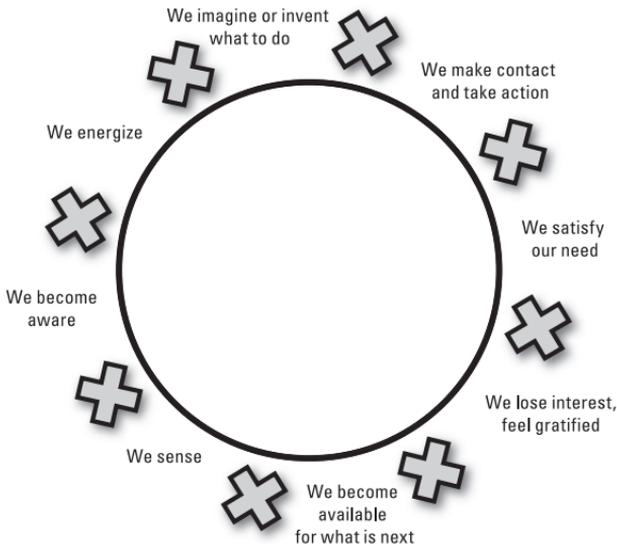
The funeral and wake was scheduled for Saturday. Sharon was going to take the red-eye flight and arrive in New Jersey around 8 a.m. Her stepmother, Eleanor, scheduled the funeral and wake for 10 a.m. When Sharon found out the time, she called Eleanor and asked if she'd be willing to reschedule the services to later in the day, giving her time to freshen up and get settled in to her hotel. Eleanor flat-out refused. This was one of many conflicts that Sharon had experienced with her stepmother—she was always unwilling to accommodate her stepdaughter's needs. Sharon was furious. She went out on her back porch and started yelling at her stepmother, even though she was not actually there, telling her how frustrated she was with her selfishness and her disrespect. Sharon's tirade lasted twenty-five minutes and was very cathartic.

This cycle of sensing and acting to heal a negative inner

experience is how we function when we *don't* get in our own way. Unfortunately, many of us are not this spontaneous or free to flow with our experience. Instead we turn to others to soothe us or we try to deny our needs, which interrupts the cycle of experience. For example, if Sharon had been raised with the idea “If you don’t have something nice to say, don’t say anything at all,” she likely would have stopped herself from getting angry. She would have internalized her feelings.

Our false-self interrupts our ability to flow with our experience. If, according to our false-self, a need arises that we shouldn’t have, we won’t acknowledge it or we won’t respond to it. If our false-self doesn’t recognize a need, we won’t energize or mobilize ourselves to take the action required to eliminate it or satisfy it. If our false-self is afraid to let go of something, we won’t release it. As you can see in figure 2, we can disrupt or block the cycle of experience at any point in the transition from one stage to the next.

Figure 2. Interrupted Cycle of Experience

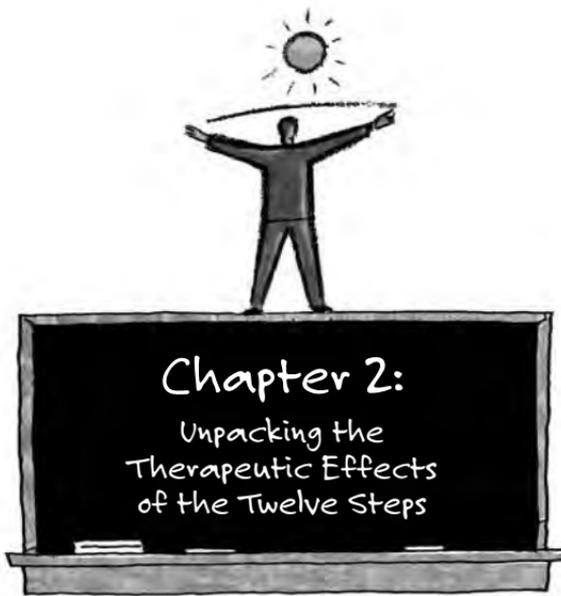


Our ability to flow with or follow our cycle of experience is restored in recovery. Even more to the point, Steps 8–10 are crucial in restoring self-regulation and in creating true peace of mind.

We have a need to complete unfinished business. Erving and Miriam Polster, two acclaimed Gestalt therapists, observed that “all experience hangs around until a person is finished with it” (1973, 36). Unfinished business is stored in the background of our consciousness, waiting for an opportunity to come forward for resolution. The more unfinished business we have stored up, the harder it is for us to function in the present moment. These unfinished issues demand our attention and divert our psychological resources. Each issue we resolve frees up psychological resources, which we can then use to get on with living and actualizing our potential.

The process is quite simple, but never easy. What this means for us is that to achieve peace of mind and emotional freedom, we need to complete our unfinished business and be responsive to our needs. I like to refer to this as being response-able. Being response-able is at the heart of Steps 8, 9, and 10.

The remarkable thing about the Twelve Steps is that they help us recover our lost true-self. They help us restore our authenticity and our ability to flow with our experience. They restore self-realization, which in turn restores our self-actualization. It is truly an incredible program, as you are about to see in the next chapter.



The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous have been heralded as the most important spiritual development of the past 100 years (Rohr 2011). It is my opinion that they should also be considered one of the most innovative psychological interventions of the past century. As evidence, consider the fact that the Twelve Steps have had more success in treating a wide variety of addiction problems than all other medical or psychological intervention or treatment programs combined (Schenker 2009).

What are the therapeutic forces that enable the Twelve Steps to help so many people who are struggling to reclaim their lives? My conclusion is that the Twelve Steps help us recover our lost true-self. They provide a framework that helps us work out a new understanding of ourselves and that teaches us a design for living that encourages authenticity and responsibility. This new design for living honors our basic nature. Working the Twelve Steps creates a

powerful personal transformation that leads to a deep sense of well-being, serenity, and peace of mind.

As you learned in the previous chapter, a main source of much of our psychological distress stems from the belief that we need to be something we aren't—that is, attempting to live by the unreasonable demands of our false-self. We have alienated ourselves from our true-self in favor of an idealized version of who we should be. We've lost sight of the importance of character, people-centered values, keeping our integrity, authenticity and honesty, and honoring our true-self. We've made things more important than people.

This is the veer in the trajectory of our personal development that the Twelve Steps correct. The Steps help us wake up from the trance that our culture has created. They help us deconstruct our reliance on a false-self and guide us on an incredible journey of self-discovery and self-actualization. They help us clean house and make amends to those people we have hurt. They help us stay centered, grounded, and humble. They help us become authentic and present in our lives. They help us restructure our self-concept into something more positive, solid, and flexible. They help us recover our true-self.

Abraham Maslow (1962, 22) made the following observations about the importance of a basic need like self-actualization:

- The absence of self-actualization breeds illness. (The absence of our true-self creates serious problems; it becomes a breeding ground for addictions and other forms of psychopathology.)
- The presence of our true-self prevents illness. (This is the most important protective factor against alcoholism and other drug addictions.)
- The restoration of the true-self cures illness. (This is the experience millions of us have had in recovery: our true-self is restored through working the Twelve Steps.)

In the next two chapters I will explore the changes that take place within us during the process of working the first seven Steps, but before I do, let's look at how the Twelve Steps are organized.

The Organization of the Twelve Steps

The Twelve Steps are numbered for good reason. The optimal therapeutic benefit occurs when they are worked in order, because the Steps are interdependent. As I mentioned before, each Step builds on the one that precedes it to create a powerful transformative experience. What happens in Step 1 creates an experience that readies a space in our psyche for what happens in Step 2. Step 2 leads to what happens in Step 3, and so on. This is how change unfolds across all Twelve Steps. The Twelve Steps create a momentum that motivates us to honestly face ourselves and others like we have never done before.

Grouping the Steps

We can cluster or group the Twelve Steps into four functional groups. Steps 1–3 form the first grouping. These Steps demolish the foundation of our self-destructive life, the one that didn't work, and build a stronger and more resilient foundation for a new life that works under any condition whatsoever.

Steps 4–7 form the second grouping. These Steps help us develop a positive self-concept by encouraging authenticity and promoting self-awareness and personal accountability. They help us to become our best possible selves.

The third grouping, which consists of Steps 8 and 9, helps us become trustworthy by righting the wrongs we have done to others. They teach us the nature of healthy relationships and to aim at having the best possible attitude toward human relations.

The last three Steps, Steps 10–12, form the final cluster. These

Steps help us maintain our new way of life. They continue to promote self-awareness, self-realization, and emotional maturation through serving others and an ongoing program of personal and spiritual growth. These groupings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of the Organization of the Twelve Steps

Group	Steps	Purpose
I	1–3	Build the foundation for our personal transformation, for our recovery.
II	4–7	Help us develop a positive self-concept by encouraging authenticity, increasing our self-awareness, and promoting responsibility and accountability.
III	8 and 9	Help us become trustworthy by righting the things we have done wrong to others, and teach us about the nature of healthy relationships.
IV	10–12	Help us maintain and deepen our humility and the connection to our true-self, as well as expand and enrich our consciousness, through serving others.

The process of working the Steps is like constructing a building from the ground up. You'd work in intervals and wouldn't move on until the previous job was completed. First, you'd demolish the old foundation because it was faulty, weak, and unable to support the new structure you hoped to build. Next, you'd dig a foundation and

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Allen Berger, Ph.D., is a popular recovery author and public speaker. He is an internationally recognized expert on the science of recovery. He is author of Hazelden's *12 Stupid Things That Mess Up Recovery* and *12 Smart Things to Do When the Booze and Drugs Are Gone*. He is widely recognized for his work in several areas of recovery that include

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- emotional sobriety
- helping new patients understand the benefits of group therapy and how to get the most out of it
- helping families adjust to the challenges of recovery

Dr. Berger is also author of *Love Secrets Revealed; How to Get the Most Out of Group Therapy*, a guide for new patients; and *Recovery and Relationship Matters*, a series of eight audio recordings.

Dr. Berger is in private practice in Southern California. You can learn more about Dr. Berger and his work at www.abphd.com.

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ISBN 978-1-61649-446-9
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