

PREPARING FOR THE TENTH STEP

THE TENTH STEP:

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

Read the middle of p.84 of the “Big Book” (starting with “This thought”) to the bottom of p. 85 (ending with “that means more action”.) and read pp. 88-95 of the “12 & 12”

1. Review the four types of inventory (spot check, day’s end, review, and retreat) explained on p.89 of the “12 & 12”.
2. Review the seven questions the “Big Book” says we review when we retire at night on p. 86 (first paragraph).
3. How “prompt” was the last time I made an amend? Did I make the amend within minutes, hours, or days after giving offense?

“UNITY INSURES RECOVERY THROUGH SERVICE”
MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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promptly admitted it.”**

Homework: Writing Inventory on the Tenth Step
By Dennis F.

Read the middle of p. 84 of the “Big Book (starting with “This Thought”, to the bottom of p. 85 (ending with “that means more action”) and read pp. 83-95 of the “12 & 12”.

It is clear from the “12 & 12” that there are four types of inventory (see p.89):

1. The “Spot-check” inventory which is taken whenever we are upset or frustrated during the day.
2. The “Day’s End” inventory.
3. A “Review” inventory taken with our sponsor once a year or every six months.
4. The “Retreat” inventory for a day or so of self-overhaul and meditation.

The “Spot-check” inventory is my new defense against occasions that happen in sobriety that I used to drink over. By using even a mental “Spotcheck” inventory, I am able to break the cycle that used to lead to “wet drink” and can now lead to a “dry drink” (a period of being miserable while not drinking because of a lack of conscious contact with my Maker).

The cycle begins with frustration. If I fail to deal with my frustration, it becomes anger born of fear. Anger that is not overcome with love becomes resentment. Resentments trigger self-pity or depression. Self-pity always preceded my first drink. I might also mention that dry drunks precede wet drunks.

The “Day’s End” inventory is the keystone of my daily relationship with God. I use the seven questions that the “Big Book” says we review when we retire at night. (See p. 86, first paragraph):

1. Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest or afraid?
2. Do we owe an apology?
3. Have we kept something to ourselves, which should be discussed with another person at once?
4. Were we kind and loving toward all?
5. What could we have done better?
6. Were we thinking of ourselves most of the time?
7. Or were we thinking of what we could do for others, of what we could pack into the stream of life?

As I review these questions mentally, and something occurs to me that I didn't do too well or that I need to investigate, I take out paper and pencil and use the three-sentence inventory format detailed earlier under the fourth step. I have not found a day when I didn't need to write inventory.

In the beginning, I did not take a nightly written inventory, but only a mental one. I soon found out that I did not get to the heart of my problems. I need written inventory for me to see where I need to grow in my relationship with God.

I have four reasons for preferring nightly written inventory over mental inventory.

1. Our books recommend written inventory in three places but do not mention mental inventory at all.
 - a) If we have been thorough about our personal inventory, we have written down a lot. We have listed and analyzed our resentments." (Big Book, p.70)
 - b) "We have a written inventory and we are prepared for a long talk." (Big Book, p.75)
 - c) "Therefore, thoroughness ought to be the watchword when taking inventory. In this connection, it is wise to write out our questions and answers. It will be the first tangible evidence of our complete willingness to move forward." ("12 & 12", p.54).

Since tenth step inventory is the continuation of fourth step inventory, ("Continued to take personal inventory"), but deals with today instead of yesterday, it should be written in the same way that the above quotations suggest that fourth step inventory be taken.

2. I might not believe your observations about me but I cannot deny my own observations about myself in my own handwriting! I see myself without passion when I read these inventories later to my sponsor. I found that when I took mental inventory I lost concentration easily. Before I knew it I was fantasizing. Writing truly "aids clear thinking and honest appraisal" ("12 & 12", p.54)
3. I use my nightly written inventories as the basis for my eleventh step meditation in the morning. My tenth step feeds my eleventh step which in turn suggests the twelfth step spiritual actions I need to take to grow spiritually in order to find tomorrow's sobriety. I could rarely recall in the morning what the subject of my mental inventory was the night before. With a written inventory I have an immediate record to refer to.
4. Without a written inventory I don't have a written record of the areas where I need spiritual growth to read to my sponsor and receive guidance.

The tenth step encompasses the first nine steps ("and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it"). The first three steps keep me in the now: I can't handle today, I am powerless

over it (step one): God can handle today (step two); therefore, I let Him by turning my will and my life over to Him on a daily basis.

Writing inventory produces “awareness”. When I fifth step these nightly inventories, I receive two benefits: I feel “forgiveness”, and I find that my “awarenesses” are confirmed and put into perspective by a spiritually understanding person.

I read my daily inventories to my sponsor once every several weeks. If I don’t seek continued spiritual guidance, no matter how long I’m sober, I will immediately revert to my alcoholic way of thinking and try to become my own God by thinking that I am in charge of myself spiritually. I still need “humility through humiliation”.

I practice the sixth step daily by “accepting” my powerlessness to change newly discovered defects in these inventories. I “surrender” in a seventh step and humbly ask God to help me practice “love” when I feel “anger”, etc. I become “willing” in a daily eighth step to make any amends, and I direct “amends” in a daily ninth step unless it would do more harm than good. Because of daily amends, my relationship with others is in divine order. I promptly admit to others when I am wrong. I admit it to God in my nightly inventory.

I am now able to have a chance to truly live a day at a time, since my nightly inventory removes the causes of today’s mistakes. I have found it impossible to live a day at a time without closing the day with inventory.

I am prepared to meet my Maker whenever He calls me because I have settled today’s accounts with Him and you.

After taking the inventory, I ask God’s forgiveness and ask what corrective measures I should take. I don’t allow myself to get obsessed with “the story”, or “what I did wrong”. Instead I focus on the third part of the inventory, “what would God expect me to do instead?”

“But we must be careful not do drift into worry, remorse or morbid reflection, for that would diminish our usefulness to others. After making our review, we ask God’s forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken.”¹

I find it helpful to focus in my inventory on the question, “How well am I handling Father’s will today?” rather than “How well am I handling my business today?”

I want to be able to hear God’s voice in my life. Therefore, I don’t focus on taking inventory with my old judgmental ideas: When I judge myself, I end up with no self-esteem, when I judge others, I end up with a resentment.

Nitpicking and being judgmental produce “guilty” and “remorseful” inventories. Trying to carry our God’s vision of me in each situation makes a “growth” producing inventory possible.

¹ Big Book”, p.86

In order to rid myself of my alcoholic negativity on awakening in the morning, I think of something enjoyable that I am looking forward to the next day. It could be noted at the end of nightly inventory. I woke up with an expectant attitude the next morning thinking of these certain pleasures God has in store for me today: thinking what I am going to accomplish, working with a newcomer, taking my wife out to dinner, getting caught up at work, playing tennis, etc.

I also add to my nightly inventory a sentence describing one spiritual victory today. Perhaps I held my tongue and didn't react in anger or sarcasm today. It is important to note my victories because it helps my self-esteem in the proper way. Spiritual victories encourage other attempts at surrender of self-will.

I like to follow the word of the "12 & 12": "This is a good place to remember that inventory taking is not always done in red ink. It's a poor day, indeed, when we haven't done something right." (p.93) Also, page 95 encourages writing about any spiritual advance we made in the day by suggesting that we do not omit "to take due note of things well done."

I make a report on today's spiritual assignment that came from last night's inventory. If I failed, I try again tomorrow. More often than not though, I can usually report one success.

I cannot adequately describe the benefits to me of the nightly written inventory.

My internal life is elevated from the level of my volatile emotions to one of near constant faith. Whenever I need more faith, I simply pray for it and it comes.

Self-centered fear activates my defects. When I have isolated in writing my selfishness, that is, what it is I fear I will lose or not get and surrender it, the fear instantly disappears (see "12 & 12", middle p. 76).

For example, when I fear that I will be overwhelmed by my creditors, I find that what I really fear is the threat to my comfort. When I surrender this selfishness and cut back and live within my means, the fear is gone.

The kind of fear we are dealing with is not the healthy kind that warns us of danger, but an instinct gone astray through self-involvement. Inventory produces the "awareness" I need in order to have defects removed so that I can grow closer to God.

The "problems" I have are nothing more than situations plus self-involvement. Once inventory exposes the self-involvement behind my fear, I no longer have a problem, just a situation.

I spend my time where my heart is, if I really care about my relationship to sobriety and my Maker. I will spend the five or ten minutes it takes to confront myself in writing concerning the state of that day's relationship with God.

If I could put the message of the twelve steps in my life today, I could put it in only five words: “I grow or I drink!”

I do not need to be afraid of making mistakes in attempting to grow. In “A.A. Comes of Age”, page 231 contains these sobering words about penalty for the failure to go on growing:

“In the years ahead, we shall, of course, make mistakes. Experience has taught us that we need have no fear of doing this, providing that we always remain willing to confess our faults and to correct them promptly. Our growth as individuals has depended upon this healthy process of trial and error. So will our growth as a fellowship. Let us always remember that any society of men and women that cannot freely correct its own faults must surely fall into decay, if not into collapse. Such is the universal penalty for the failure to go on growing. Just as each A.A. must continue to take his moral inventory and act upon it, so must our whole society do if we are to survive and if we are to serve usefully and well.”

In working with others and in attending participation meetings, I have discovered two areas that constantly prevent many alcoholics from enjoying the fullness of the sunlight of the spirit in all areas of life: a failure to complete a written fourth step inventory or failure to take nightly written inventory.

The alternative for me is taking nightly inventory or developing an attitude of “creeping complacency”. This is what happened to me when I completed my fourth step inventory at the end of my second year of sobriety. I didn’t want to drink, but I didn’t have the red-hot glow of enthusiasm I had in the first year of sobriety.

I decided that I had better practice the program the way it is described in the A.A. books: “Step Four is but the beginning of a lifetime practice.” (“12 & 12”, p.50)

Soon my attitude toward God became ungrateful, and I blamed him for what were really challenges to my growth in sobriety. I found myself in the middle of a dry drunk, that is loss of conscious contact with God. Dry drunks precede wet drunks. I am convinced that this is the only way my alcoholism can defeat me – if I turn my back on the program to recovery that my Higher Power lays out for me.

So I have taken up the practice of nightly written inventory since my third year of sobriety. Some miracles began to happen: I met my soul mate in A.A., and we were married and had a beautiful baby boy!

I don’t think it was a coincidence that my Higher Power entrusted me with a wife and child I had prayed for when I began this practice.

WRITING INVENTORY ON THE TENTH STEP

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INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to four sentences.)

- a) The Story:
- b) What did I do wrong (name the character defect)?
- c) What would God expect me to do instead?
- d) What good did I do today?