

STEP FOUR

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

The word "inventory" comes from a Latin word which means to come upon or discover. Among the definitions of "moral" is one that means to make the distinction between right and wrong conduct. These literal definitions were good guidelines to keep in mind while doing Step Four. By means of looking in the mirror, we attempted to discover what behaviors and attitudes worked and what did not work in the way we conduct in our lives.

Step Four was a daring look deep into the mirror, writing down what we saw. The purpose of the exercise was to let us recognize and sort through the chaos of our lives. By taking an inventory, we got a clear picture of the disorganization and unmanageability that had held us captive in our addiction.

Our inventory also included our good qualities, our assets, which, when we first stopped using nicotine may have been almost impossible for us to see. As an aspect of self-care, it was important to humbly acknowledge these personal assets as supportive strengths. These strengths were often helpful when addressing behaviors and attitudes we needed to change or improve.

These literal definitions were good guidelines to keep in mind while doing Step Four. By means of looking in the mirror, we attempted to discover what behaviors and attitudes worked and what did not work in the way we conducted our lives.

According to the language of Step Four, our moral inventory was to be "fearless." Yet, most of us were afraid as we stood on the threshold of this Step because of the negativism that filled our lives. We were deeply frightened of taking the hard look at ourselves that was called for by the Fourth Step. We knew ourselves as bad people, failures, losers, and imposters and we really did not want to look all of that in the face.

But we were on the way to being done with those self-destructive notions. Reflecting back over Steps One, Two and Three, we realized that we had the positive energy and guidance of a Higher Power to help us take a hard look. We recalled we were no longer alone.

We heard others in Nicotine Anonymous share their experiences with the Fourth Step and learned that they discovered they were not as wretched as they had feared.

Trusting in the experience of others, and with the help of our Higher Power, we found the courage to honestly inventory ourselves. We dared to surrender to our Higher Power and let ourselves be guided through Step Four.

Step Four tells us that the moral inventory should be "searching." This means thorough. There was no magic measuring device that could tell us how much, how deep, how long we were to look at ourselves. But the stocktaking was to be searching, to the very best of our ability at the time.

There was no such thing as a good inventory versus a bad inventory; there was only the best possible inventory we could make. The best possible was that which could be done with total honesty, humility, candor, surrender, and willingness. It should be simple and thorough. The important thing was to do it.

Many of us experienced some pain during our Fourth Step inventory. But it was important to remember that the purpose of the inventory was not to cause pain. Rather, we were trying to get a handle on how we had been living our lives. We wanted to list what worked and what did not work for us, so that we could identify and stop the useless patterns of our past.

We wanted to know how we got stuck in our past so we could find our way out of that trap, so we could find freedom from our old selves and freedom from nicotine. We were getting free of yesterday so we could live today, each day, one day at a time.

Just as there was no correct definition of a "good" inventory, there was also no absolute "right" way to take stock. We found writing it down was basic and necessary. Putting our inventory on paper made it more real and made it easier for us to be certain that we had been as searching and fearless as possible. Anything that popped up we wrote down. The goal was thoroughness. There was nothing that did not belong on the list. It was easy. If it came to mind, it went on the list.

One way to get started was to answer the questions in the Nicotine Anonymous Questionnaire that appears in Part II of these materials. The Questionnaire gave good insight into what we were trying to get from nicotine. Patterns emerged in the responses. Ideas cropped up. Those patterns and ideas were explored further.

Another option is to use the *Step Study Workbook* section for Step Four. A member (often with the help of her or his sponsor) reads the text and then discusses the questions. Some members

may even choose to use the entire Workbook as their "searching and fearless" approach to the Fourth Step.

A third approach was to think about the things we felt good about and the things we felt bad about in the past, and how we felt about them as we wrote. He wrote them down and we asked ourselves questions like these about them:

- Why do I feel that way?
- Who else was affected by this?
- Is this part of a pattern?
- Am I responsible for what happens then?
- Do I go on repeating it? How?

We wrote down all the things we felt bad about. We analyzed them, where they came from, what they did to us, why we hung on to them, how they affected those around us. We asked for help from our Higher Power to really look in the mirror and confront them.

We did the same with the things we felt good about, starting with what we already had accomplished. We were clean; we were not using nicotine anymore. We continued to think about the positive. We let ourselves be guided by a Higher Power into exploring them as far as possible.

Others found that a fourth approach to the inventory was to start with lists of persons, institutions, principles, or events we felt played important roles in our lives. We then explored what their influence or affect was on us.

That process of exploration involved looking at the people and events that led to past fears, resentments, self-loathing, or to our staying in situations long after they stopped being useful. We sought to find who or what got us to feel and think negatively. Much of it happened early in life. For many of us, it was important to go back as far as we could remember, even if the details were hazy. Much of it amazed us. Some of it seemed small and petty, but if it came up at all, it was important and we wrote it down. Whatever it was, we advanced the cause of getting free from our past by getting it down on paper.

For those of us who found that making these lists was too vague, a fifth approach was easier. We wrote a totally honest personal history, which let us see how we were led into our addiction. From our understanding of what happened, we got a better picture of where and why and how we were damaged, and how that damage had influenced our behavior since.

It was not necessary, or perhaps even possible, to understand where the autobiography was leading us while we were writing

84

it. In other words, sometimes it was not until we were finished writing down our own life story that we were able to go back to the beginning and see the individual events in a bigger perspective. But, with the advantage of the bigger picture, what before seemed like a dumb little thing, suddenly became a significant part of a large, clear pattern.

Many of us who had done a Fourth Step in another 12-step program found it necessary to rethink our inventories, giving special attention to the unique impact of nicotine addiction on our lives. For example, we found that nicotine blocked our feelings and our interactions with other human beings and the world around us. Whether we were hiding behind our smokescreen or blowing smoke at others, we crippled ourselves in ways that seemed to be unique or especially aggravated by nicotine. Thus, our recovery from other substances, as well as from nicotine, got a special boost when we reconsidered our previous inventories.

The Fourth Step allowed us to see ourselves clearly and without so much judgment. The picture it provided helped eliminate the fear that we would discover we were really awful. The Fourth Step allowed us to feel that we were ordinary people more connected to ourselves and others.

*The Twelve Steps reprinted and adapted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Service, Inc. Permission to reprint and adapt the Twelve Steps does not mean that AA is affiliated with this program. AA is a program of recovery from alcoholism -- use of the Twelve Steps in connection with

programs and activities which are patterned after AA, but which address other problems, does not imply otherwise.