Chapter 6

INTO ACTION

Having made our personal inventory, what shall we do about it? We have been trying to get a new attitude, a new relationship with our Creator, and to discover the obstacles in our path. We have admitted certain defects; we have ascertained in a rough way what the trouble is; we have put our finger on the weak items in our personal inventory. Now these are about to be cast out. This requires action on our part, which, when completed, will mean that we have admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our defects. This brings us to *the Fifth Step* in the program of recovery mentioned in the preceding chapter.

Now that you have made your personal inventory, what should you do about it? What comes next?

Before you made your inventory, you started trying to find your spirituality and connect with a Higher Power. Part of that process was figuring out if anything was blocking you. Were there obstacles in your path? Anything keeping you from creating a relationship with God?

Making your inventory helped you find those obstacles and name them. By listing your mistakes and weaknesses, you began to see how you were keeping yourself from connecting with your Higher Power. You began to see where you were selfish and wrong.

> Now, your mistakes and weaknesses are going to be removed from you. To make this possible, you must take action. You must take *the Fifth Step* in the program of recovery mentioned in Chapter 5: "Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

This is perhaps difficult—especially discussing our defects with another person. We think we have done well enough in admitting these things to ourselves. There is doubt about that. In actual practice, we usually find a solitary self-appraisal insufficient. Many of us thought it necessary to go much further. We will be more reconciled to discussing ourselves with another person when we see good reasons why we should do so. The best reason first: If we skip this vital step, we may not overcome drinking. Time after time newcomers have tried to keep to themselves certain facts about their lives. Trying to avoid this humbling experience, they have turned to easier methods. Almost

invariably they got drunk. Having persevered with the rest of the program, they wondered why they fell. We think the reason is that they never completed their housecleaning. They took inventory all right, but hung on to some of the worst items in stock. They only *thought* they had lost their egoism and fear; they only *thought* they had humbled themselves. But they had not learned enough of humility, fearlessness and honesty, in the sense we find it necessary, until they told someone else *all* their life story.

We know this may not be easy. Discussing our mistakes and weaknesses with another person is very difficult, but it's also very important. We may think we did enough by trying to be honest with ourselves while we made our inventory. However, making this list by ourselves is not enough. We must go further. We must talk about our inventory with someone else.

It will be easier to talk with another person about our inventory if we know why doing this is important. And the most important reason is this: If we skip this vital step, we may not be able to stop drinking.

Finish your house cleaning

Many new people have come to A.A. who wanted to keep their lives secret. They wanted to avoid discussing the truth about their lives with anyone. if they did everything else in the A.A. program and followed all of the other 11 Steps, these people almost always struggled to stay sober. At some

point, they got drunk. They were unable to control themselves and wondered why they started drinking again.

We think the reason is that they never completed their "house cleaning." They started to take inventory, but didn't finish the process. They *thought* they had gotten rid of their selfishness and fear, but they had not. They *thought* they had learned to be humble, but they had not. They had not learned enough about selfishness and fear because they had not told someone else their *complete* life story.

More than most people, the alcoholic leads a double life. He is very much the actor. To the outer world he presents his stage character. This is the one he likes his fellows to see. He wants to enjoy a certain reputation, but knows in his heart he doesn't deserve it.

One reason it's hard for alcoholics to know when we have told our entire life stories is this: Many alcoholics lead double lives. We are like actors. When we are around other people, we act like a character on stage, showing them the version of ourselves we want them to see. We pretend to be people we are not so others will like us. Even when we know we don't deserve to be liked.

The inconsistency is made worse by the things he does on his sprees. Coming to his senses, he is revolted at certain episodes he vaguely remembers. These memories are a nightmare. He trembles to think someone might have observed him. As fast as he can, he pushes these memories far inside himself. He hopes they will never see the light of day. He is under con-

stant fear and tension—that makes for more drinking.

> Leading a double life becomes harder when we go on drinking sprees. Once we get sober, we may remember how we acted when we were drunk and feel disgusted with ourselves. Realizing someone else may have seen us act this way is very upsetting. These memories are like nightmares. We may push them deep inside ourselves so we don't have to face them. Feeling this way makes us feel constantly afraid and tense, which can lead to more drinking.

Psychologists are inclined to agree with us. We have spent thousands of dollars for examinations. We know but few instances where we have given these doctors a fair break. We have seldom told them the whole truth nor have we followed their advice. Unwilling to be honest with these sympathetic men, we were honest with no one else. Small wonder many in the medical profession have a low opinion of alcoholics and their chance for recovery!

> Psychologists tend to agree that alcoholics struggle to be honest with themselves, and also struggle to be honest with others. Many of us have spent thousands of dollars working with psychologists, never feeling able to tell them the whole truth. We couldn't take their advice, no matter how kind they were to us. We couldn't be honest with our psychologists or anyone else. No wonder so many doctors believe alcoholics can't recover!

We must be entirely honest with somebody if we

expect to live long or happily in this world. Rightly and naturally, we think well before we choose the person or persons with whom to take this intimate and confidential step. Those of us belonging to a religious denomination which requires confession must, and of course, will want to go to the properly appointed authority whose duty it is to receive it. Though we have no religious connection, we may still do well to talk with someone ordained by an established religion. We often find such a person quick to see and understand our problem. Of course, we sometimes encounter people who do not understand alcoholics.

Find the right person

As hard as it is, we must all find a way to be entirely honest with somebody. If we want to live long or happily in this world, we must take this step. Before we do, we need to consider who we can trust to listen to our stories. Who is the best person with whom to take this step? Those of us who belong to religions that require confession might want to talk with our faith leaders. Even those of us who don't have religious connections may feel comfortable talking with faith leaders. These people often see and understand our problems faster than others do.

If we cannot or would rather not do this, we search our acquaintance for a close-mouthed, understanding friend. Perhaps our doctor or psychologist will be the

person. It may be one of our own family, but we cannot disclose anything to our wives or our parents which will hurt them and make them unhappy. We have no right to save our own skin at another person's expense. Such parts of our story we tell to someone who will understand, yet be unaffected. The rule is we must be hard on ourself, but always considerate of others.

> If we cannot or would rather not talk with a faith leader, we need to look for a trustworthy, friend. Our doctor or therapist might be the right person. It might be one of our own family members, but we cannot share anything with our spouses or our parents that will hurt them and make them unhappy. We have no right to help ourselves when doing so hurts other people. The rule is we must be hard on ourselves, but always considerate of others.

Notwithstanding the great necessity for discussing ourselves with someone, it may be one is so situated that there is no suitable person available. If that is so, this step may be postponed, only, however, if we hold ourselves in complete readiness to go through with it at the first opportunity. We say this because we are very anxious that we talk to the right person. It is important that he be able to keep a confidence; that he fully understand and approve what we are driving at;

that he will not try to change our plan. But we must not use this as a mere excuse to postpone.

> Although it's necessary and important to talk about our inventory with someone, some of us may struggle to find the right person. The right person will be able to keep a secret. This person will understand why we have decided to tell them about our lives, and never try to stop us from sharing. If a person like this cannot be found, this step can be postponed. We can wait to do it until we find a person we trust. As soon as we find that person, however, we need to be ready to talk with them right away. Being unable to find the right person cannot become an excuse to skip this step.

When we decide who is to hear our story, we waste no time. We have a written inventory and we are prepared for a long talk. We explain to our partner what we are about to do and why we have to do it. He should realize that we are engaged upon a life-and-death errand. Most people approached in this way will be glad to help; they will be honored by our confidence.

> When we have decided on a person to hear our story, we should make a plan to tell it immediately. We have our written inventory already, so we should feel ready for a long talk. Before we start our story, we should explain to our partner what we are going to do and why we need to do it. They should understand that telling this story is a matter of life or death for us. Most people who are told how important they are to our

recovery feel honored. They are glad to help us.

We pocket our pride and go to it, illuminating every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past. Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Creator. We may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now we begin to have a spiritual experience. The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will often come strongly. We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe.

When we're ready, we must swallow our pride and start telling our story. We share all the ugliest parts of our personalities. We shine a light on every dark or difficult experience from our pasts. Once we have taken this step and told our complete, unedited stories we feel happy and relieved. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall away from us. We may start to feel closer to our Higher Power. Before this we may have had spiritual beliefs, but now we start to have a spiritual experience. The feeling that our drinking problem has disappeared may rise up inside of us. It feels like walking down a wide, open road hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe.

Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet for an hour, carefully reviewing what we have done. We thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know Him better. Taking this book down from our shelf we turn to the page which

contains the twelve steps. Carefully reading the first five proposals we ask if we have omitted anything, for we are build-ing an arch through which we shall walk a free man at last. Is our work solid so far? Are the stones properly in place? Have we skimped on the cement put into the foundation? Have we tried to make mortar without sand?

After sharing our whole story, we go home. We look for a place where we can sit alone in the quiet for an hour. We think back over what we have done. We thank God from the bottom of our hearts for helping us. Taking this book down from the shelf, we turn to the page that lists all Twelve Steps. Carefully reading the first five, we think back to make sure we haven't skipped anything. We do this because we are building toward our own freedom. Think of it like building an arch that we will eventually walk through. Is the work solid so far? Are all the stones in the right place? Have we used too little cement for the foundation? Have we tried to make mortar without sand?

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

DEFECTS OF CHARACTER/CHARACTER DEFECTS:
Personality flaws or shortcomings that block our spiritual growth and get in the way of our recovery. Examples include

fear, selfishness, dishonesty, self-pity, and pride. These are also called "liabilities" or "shortcomings." Addressing our defects of character is the focus of Steps Six and Seven.

Let go of defects

If we feel that we have truly and completely finished Step Five, we take a look at *Step Six*. This step is, "Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character." Throughout this book, we've mentioned how important it is to be willing and open to spiritual change. That is especially important now. We must ask ourselves if we are ready to let our Higher Power remove all of our problems and struggles. Can God really take them all away? Every single one? If it turns out that there's something we can't let go, we can ask God to help us release it.

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

When we feel ready, we have completed Step Six. Then we say something like this: "My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen." Then we have completed *Step Seven*.

Now we need more action, without which we find that "Faith without works is dead." Let's look at *Steps Eight and Nine.* We have a list of all persons we have harmed and to whom we are willing to make amends. We made it when we took inventory. We subjected ourselves to a drastic self-appraisal. Now we go out to our fellows and repair the damage done in the past. We attempt to sweep away the debris which has accumulated out of our effort to live on self-will and run the show ourselves. If we haven't the will to do this, we ask until it comes. Remember it was agreed at the beginning *we would go to any lengths for victory over alcohol.*

AMENDS: Making amends is the focus of Steps Eight and Nine of A.A. It means finding ways to make things right with people you have hurt. It involves accepting responsibility for what you've done, stating you were wrong, explaining how you have changed, and asking what you can do and/or how you can heal the relationship.

Be willing, make amends

Now we need to take even more action. What we do next is related to the old saying, "Faith without works is dead." In other words, we must *do something* to make things right in our lives. When we look at *Steps Eight and Nine*, we see that they have to do with taking steps to right our wrongs. Step Eight is, "Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all." We made this list—or most of it—when we took inventory of ourselves. We looked hard at our lives and actions, and that included thinking

about the people we had hurt. Once we have that list, we move on to Step Nine.

Step Nine is, "Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others." This is where we reach out to people we've hurt to fix the damage we did in the past. We do this to try to clear away the clutter and mess we've made by trying to run our lives by ourselves. If we don't feel ready to make amends, we work with our Higher Power until we are ready. Remember that we agreed at the beginning to *do whatever it took to win our battle with alcohol.*

Probably there are still some misgivings. As we look over the list of business acquaintances and friends we have hurt, we may feel diffident about going to some of them on a spiritual basis. Let us be reassured. To some people we need not, and probably should not emphasize the spiritual feature on our first approach.

We might prejudice them. At the moment we are trying to put our lives in order. But this is not an end in itself. Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us. It is seldom wise to approach an individual, who still smarts from our injustice to him, and announce that we have gone religious. In the prize ring, this would be called leading with the chin. Why lay ourselves open to being branded fanatics or religious bores? We may kill a future opportunity to carry a beneficial message. But our man is sure to be impressed with a sincere desire to set right the wrong. He is going to be

more interested in a demonstration of good will than in our talk of spiritual discoveries.

> Making amends is hard, and we may feel doubtful or afraid about this step. As we read over the list of coworkers and friends we have hurt, we may feel worried about going to some of them and talking about our spiritual experience. Luckily, we don't have to talk about God right away with everyone when we make amends. Doing that might make them unwilling to listen to us just when we are trying to make our lives better.
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> We should remember, though, that we want to be as helpful as possible to everyone around us. If we try talking to someone who is still angry with us or hurt by something we did, and then say we have found religion, it may go badly. Why risk making them feel put off by us? Doing that might destroy an opportunity to offer them a helpful message about recovery. But this same person will probably react well to our true wish to fix what we had done wrong. They will be more interested in our good will than hearing about our spiritual discoveries.

We don't use this as an excuse for shying away from the subject of God. When it will serve any good purpose, we are willing to announce our convictions with tact and common sense. The question of how to approach the man we hated will arise. It may be he has done us more harm than we have done him and, though we may have acquired a better attitude toward him, we are still not too keen about admitting our faults. Nevertheless, with a person we dislike, we take the bit in our teeth. It is harder to go to an enemy than to a friend, but we find it much more beneficial to us.

We go to him in a helpful and forgiving spirit, confessing our former ill feeling and expressing our regret.

However, if it feels natural to mention our Higher Power, we should do it. There's no reason to hide our relationship with a Higher Power.

It can be tricky to decide how to approach someone to make amends. This is especially true if they have hurt us more than we have hurt them. We may have changed our attitude about them, since we now think of people who hurt us as sick people who need and deserve our help. But it can still be hard to make amends to them. To do this with a person we dislike, we must find a way to push through our discomfort. It is harder to make amends to an enemy than to a friend, but we grow more by making amends to an enemy. Going to them feeling helpful and forgiving, confessing how we felt, and talking about our regret are all healthy things to do.

Under no condition do we criticize such a person or argue. Simply we tell him that we will never get over drinking until we have done our utmost to straighten out the past. We are there to sweep off our side of the street, realizing that nothing worth while

can be accomplished until we do so, never trying to tell him what he should do. His faults are not dis cussed. We stick to our own. If our manner is calm, frank, and open, we will be gratified with the result.

No matter what happens, we cannot criticize the other person, or argue with them. We just tell them that we won't be able to stay sober until we have done our best to straighten out the past. We focus on changing ourselves and our lives, and never tell others what to do with theirs. When we are making amends, we don't talk about the faults of the other person. We stick to our own. And if we stay calm, are honest, and remain open, we will be happy with the results of the conversation.

In nine cases out of ten the unexpected happens. Sometimes the man we are calling upon admits his own fault, so feuds of years' standing melt away in an hour. Rarely do we fail to make satisfactory progress. Our former enemies sometimes praise what we are doing and wish us well. Occasionally, they will offer assistance. It should not matter, however, if someone does throw us out of his office. We have made our demonstration, done our part. It's water over the dam.

Most alcoholics owe money. We do not dodge our creditors. Telling them what we are trying to do, we make no bones about our drinking; they usually know it anyway, whether we think so or not. Nor are we afraid of disclosing our alcoholism on the theory it may cause financial harm. Approached in this way, the most ruthless creditor will sometimes surprise us. Arranging the best deal we can we let these people know we are sorry. Our drinking has made us slow

to pay. We must lose our fear of creditors no matter how far we have to go, for we are liable to drink if we are afraid to face them.

Expect the unexpected when making amends

Most of the time when we make amends, unexpected things happen. Sometimes the person we are talking to admits they are wrong, too, and bad feelings that have lingered for years vanish in an instant. Sometimes our former enemies praise what we are doing and wish us well. Sometimes they offer to help us. However, it shouldn't matter if the person we're speaking with decides to throw us out of their office. We still need to do our part. We owe them amends—an honest attempt to make things right—and we cannot deny them what we owe to them. When we tell them what we are trying to do, we don't try to hide anything about our drinking. They usually know about it anyway, whether we realize it or not. We cannot worry about how long it has taken us to make these amends. Our drinking has made us slow to understand what needs doing. We must put aside our fear of being judged by our enemies because we might drink if we are afraid to face them.

Perhaps we have committed a criminal offense which might land us in jail if it were known to the authorities. We may be short in our accounts and unable to make good. We have already admitted this in confidence to another person, but we are sure we would be imprisoned or lose our job if it were known. Maybe

it's only a petty offense such as padding the expense account. Most of us have done that sort of thing.

Maybe we are divorced, and have remarried but haven't kept up the alimony to number one. She is indignant about it, and has a warrant out for our arrest. That's a common form of trouble too.

> We may have committed a crime that would land us in jail if the police found out. We may be unable to pay our debts. We have already admitted all of this to another person when we did Step Five. But we are sure we would end up in prison or fired from our jobs if others found out. Maybe it's a minor offense like putting personal expenses on our business credit card. Many of us have done things like that.
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> Maybe we are divorced and have remarried, but haven't paid alimony or child support to our ex-spouse. They may be angry; they may even have a warrant out for our arrest. That's a common form of trouble, too.

Although these reparations take innumerable forms, there are some general principles which we find guiding. Reminding ourselves that we have decided to go to any lengths to find a spiritual experience, we ask that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be. We may lose our position or reputation or face jail, but we are willing. We have to be. We must not shrink at anything.

Although making amends can take many forms, we use some guidelines to make this step effective. First, we remind ourselves that we are to finding a spiritual experience, and we ask to be given strength and direction to do the right thing. We may lose our jobs, ruin our reputations, or even go to jail, but we are willing. We have to be. We must not run away from anything.

Usually, however, other people are involved. Therefore, we are not to be the hasty and foolish martyr who would needlessly sacrifice others to save himself from the alcoholic pit. A man we know had remarried. Because of resentment and drinking, he had not paid alimony to his first wife. She was furious. She went to court and got an order for his arrest. He had commenced our way of life, had secured a position, and was getting his head above water. It would have been impressive heroics if he had walked up to the Judge and said, "Here I am."

However, making amends involves other people. This means we must be careful not to hurt them as we work to save ourselves from alcoholism. Here's a story that shows how important it is to think of others while making amends.

A man we know got remarried. Because of his anger toward his first wife and because of his drinking, he had not paid alimony to her. She was furious. She went to court and got an order for his arrest. He had started the A.A. program, had gotten a new job, and was getting his head above water.

We thought he ought to be willing to do that if

necessary, but if he were in jail he could provide nothing for either family. We suggested he write his first wife admitting his faults and asking forgiveness. He did, and also sent a small amount of money. He told her what he would try to do in the future. He said he was perfectly willing to go to jail if she insisted. Of course she did not, and the whole situation has long since been adjusted.

We thought he should be willing to turn himself in, but he disagreed. He knew that in jail, he couldn't provide for either family. We suggested he write to his first wife admitting his faults and asking forgiveness. He did, and also sent a small amount of money. He told her what he would try to do in the future. He said he was perfectly willing to go to jail if she insisted. Of course she did not insist, and the whole situation got resolved.

Before taking drastic action which might implicate other people we secure their consent. If we have obtained permission, have consulted with others, asked God to help and the drastic step is indicated we must not shrink.

> Before taking any action that might affect other people, we need to ask for their consent. If we have permission, have consulted with other people, asked God to help, and the action still makes sense, we must not run away from it.

This brings to mind a story about one of our friends. While drinking, he accepted a sum of money from a bitterly-hated business rival, giving him no receipt for it. He subsequently denied having received the money and used the incident as a basis for discrediting the man. He thus used his own wrong-doing as a means of destroying the reputation of another. In fact, his rival was ruined.

> This brings to mind another story. While drinking, one of our friends accepted a sum of money from a bitterly hated business rival, and didn't give him a receipt. Then our friend denied having borrowed the money, and used this incident as a way to ruin the reputation of the person who had loaned it to him. He used his own wrongdoing to destroy someone else.

He felt that he had done a wrong he could not possibly make right. If he opened that old affair, he was afraid it would destroy the reputation of his partner, disgrace his family and take away his means of liveli-

hood. What right had he to involve those dependent upon him? How could he possibly make a public statement exonerating his rival?

> Later, he felt that he could not possibly make this situation right again. If he tried to make amends to the other person, he was afraid it would destroy his reputation again, disgrace his family, and get him fired. What right did he have to involve the people who depended on him? And how could he admit that he had been so wrong?

After consulting with his wife and partner he came to the conclusion that it was better to take those risks than to stand before his Creator guilty of such ruinous slander. He saw that he had to place the outcome in God's hands or he would soon start drinking again, and all would be lost anyhow. He attended church for the first time in many years. After the sermon, he quietly got up and made an explanation. His action met wide-spread approval, and today he is one of the most trusted citizens of his town. This all happened years ago.

> After talking with his spouse and business partner, he decided that it was better to take those risks than to stand before God feeling so guilty. He saw that he had to trust God to guide him in this situation, or he would start drinking again. If that happened, all would be lost anyhow. He went to church for the first time in many years. After the sermon, he quietly got up and told his story to the congregation. Other members of his community were very understanding and accepting. Today he is one of the most trusted citizens in his town.

The chances are that we have domestic troubles.

Perhaps we are mixed up with women in a fashion we

wouldn't care to have advertised. We doubt if, in this respect, alcoholics are fundamentally much worse than other people. But drinking does complicate sex relations in the home. After a few years with an alcoholic, a wife gets worn out, resentful and uncommunicative. How could she be anything else? The husband begins to feel lonely, sorry for himself. He commences to look around in the night clubs, or their equivalent, for something besides liquor. Perhaps he is having a secret and exciting affair with "the girl who under-stands." In fairness we must say that she may under-stand, but what are we going to do about a thing like that? A man so involved often feels very remorseful at times, especially if he is married to a loyal and courageous girl who has literally gone through hell for him.

Infidelity and amends at home

Many of us have troubles with our partners and families. Maybe we have cheated on them. In this way, alcoholics may not be any worse than other people. But drinking does complicate our sexual relationships. After a few years with an alcoholic, spouses and partners get worn out, angry, and unwilling to communicate. How could they be any other way? Meanwhile, the alcoholic begins to feel lonely, and to feel sorry for themselves. They begin to look for someone else to satisfy their sexual needs. They might have a secret affair with someone because it's exciting. Or because they believe this other person "understands" them better than their spouse. Maybe they really do. But in many cases, the spouse at home has gone through hell to support their alcoholic partner.

Whatever the situation, we usually have to do something about it. If we are sure our wife does not know, should we tell her? Not always, we think. If she knows in a general way that we have been wild, should we tell her in detail? Undoubtedly we should admit our fault. She may insist on knowing all the particulars. She will want to know who the woman is and where she is. We feel we ought to say to her that we have no right to involve another person. We are sorry for what we have done and, God willing, it shall not be repeated. More than that we cannot do; we have no right to go further. Though there may be justifiable exceptions, and though we wish to lay down no rule of any sort, we have often found this the best course to take.

Our design for living is not a one-way street. It is as good for the wife as for the husband. If we can

forget, so can she. It is better, however, that one does not needlessly name a person upon whom she can vent jealousy.

> If we find ourselves in this situation, we have to do something about it. It can be hard to know how to handle it. If we are sure our spouse does not know, should we tell them? Not always, we think. If they know generally that we've been cheating, do we tell them all the details? We definitely need to admit we've been wrong. Our spouse or partner may insist on hearing the details. We tell them we have no right to involve another person. We are sorry for what we have done and, God willing, we won't do it again. More than that we cannot do; we have no right to go further. This is the best way to handle a situation like this, we have found. If we can avoid naming the person with whom we had an affair, that's best. It prevents our spouse from blaming that other person for everything.

Perhaps there are some cases where the utmost frankness is demanded. No outsider can appraise such an intimate situation. It may be that both will decide that the way of good sense and loving kindness is to let by-gones be by-gones. Each might pray about it, having the other one's happiness uppermost in mind. Keep it always in sight that we are dealing with that most terrible human emotion—jealousy. Good generalship may decide that the problem be attacked on the flank rather than risk a face-to-face combat.

In some cases being more detailed may be better. All partnerships and marriages are unique. The partners involved are the only ones who can judge what will work best. Both partners may decide to forgive and forget. Both might pray about it, keeping each other's happiness in mind. When it comes to being unfaithful, we must remember that we're dealing with one of the worst human emotions: jealousy.

If we have no such complication, there is plenty we should do at home. Sometimes we hear an alcoholic say that the only thing he needs to do is to keep sober. Certainly he must keep sober, for there will be no home if he doesn't. But he is yet a long way from making good to the wife or parents whom for years he has so shockingly treated. Passing all understanding is the patience mothers and wives have had with alcoholics. Had this not been so, many of us would have no homes today, would perhaps be dead.

Even those of us who haven't cheated on our partners still have plenty to do at home. Sometimes alcoholics say that the only thing they need to do is to stay sober. Certainly we must all stay sober, or we will risk losing our homes and families. But just staying sober means we are still a long way from making amends to our spouses or parents. There are people at home whom we've treated so horribly. It is almost impossible to understand the patience of our partners and our parents who stood by us. If they had left us or thrown us out, many of us would have had nowhere to go. We might even be dead.

The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring his way

through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept the home in turmoil. We feel a man is unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough. He is like the farmer who came up out of his cyclone cellar to find his home ruined. To his wife, he remarked, "Don't see anything the matter here, Ma. Ain't it grand the wind stopped blowin'?"

An alcoholic is like a tornado roaring its way through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affection is destroyed. Selfish and inconsiderate habits keep our homes in chaos. We believe that alcoholics who say stopping drinking is enough don't understand the damage they have caused. They're like farmers who come up from the basement after a tornado to find their homes ruined. Then they s ay to their spouses, "Don't see anything wrong here! And isn't it great the wind stopped blowing?"

Yes, there is a long period of reconstruction ahead. We must take the lead. A remorseful mumbling that we are sorry won't fill the bill at all. We ought to sit down with the family and frankly analyze the past as we now see it, being very careful not to criticize them. Their defects may be glaring, but the chances are that our own actions are partly responsible. So we clean house with the family, asking each morning in meditation that our Creator show us the way of patience, tolerance, kindliness and love.

> There is a long period of rebuilding ahead. We must take control. Mumbling that we are sorry won't work at all. We need to sit down with the family and talk honestly about the past, being very careful not to criticize them for their part in it. Their defects may be obvious, but it's likely that actions we took are also responsible. So we clean house with the family, and ask each morning that our Higher Power show us how to be patient, kind, and full of love.

The spiritual life is not a theory. *We have to live it.* Unless one's family expresses a desire to live upon spiritual principles we think we ought not to urge them. We should not talk incessantly to them about spiritual matters. They will change in time. Our behavior will convince them more than our words. We must remember that ten or twenty years of drunkenness would make a skeptic out of anyone.

> Spiritual life is not a theory. *We have to live it.* However, unless our families tell us they also want to live using spiritual principles, we shouldn't

force them. We also shouldn't talk about spiritual matters all the time. If they are going to adopt a spiritual way of living themselves, it will happen naturally. Seeing our behavior change will convince them more than words ever could.

There may be some wrongs we can never fully right. We don't worry about them if we can honestly say to ourselves that we would right them if we could. Some people cannot be seen—we send them an honest letter. And there may be a valid reason for postpone-ment in some cases. But we don't delay if it can be avoided. We should be sensible, tactful, considerate and humble without being servile or scraping. As God's people we stand on our feet; we don't crawl before anyone.

There may be some wrongs we can never fully right. As long as we can honestly say to ourselves that we would right them if we could, we don't need to worry about this. If we cannot meet with someone to make amends in person, we can send them an honest letter. And there may be a good reason to wait to make amends with other people. But we don't delay unless it's truly necessary. When we do speak with them, we need to be polite, considerate, and humble without being dramatic or overly apologetic. We don't need to crawl; we can stand on our own two feet.

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to 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 the scale we have gone, 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 suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

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.

Finding serenity

If we are painstaking about Step Nine, we will be amazed before we have made amends to half of our list of people. We will find new freedom and new happiness. We will not regret the past or wish we could forget about it. We will understand the word serenity and we will know peace.

SERENITY: A state of feeling calm, peaceful, and untroubled.

No matter how badly we have behaved in the past, we will begin to see how our experience can benefit others. Any feelings of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in

selfish things and begin to take an interest in helping other people. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook about life will change. Fear of people and of money worries will leave us. We will know how to handle situations which used to confuse or worry us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

SELF-SEEKING: Acting in a way that puts our own self-centered needs first.

Are these outrageous or unlikely promises? We think not! These promises come true among A.A. members every day—sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always come into our lives if we work for them.

This thought brings us to *Step Ten,* which suggests we continue to take personal inventory and continue to set right any new mistakes as we go along. We vigorously commenced this way of living as we cleaned up the past. We have entered the world of the Spirit. Our next function is to grow in understand-ing and effectiveness. This is not an overnight matter. It should continue for our lifetime. Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them. We discuss them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone. Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help. Love and tolerance of others is our code.

Now we are at *Step Ten*, which says, "Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it." This means that we

need to continue to make right any new mistakes we make. We found a new way of living as we cleaned up our past. Our next task is to grow in our understanding and to become more effective. We cannot do this overnight. It will happen slowly, over our whole lifetimes. We keep watching for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When they show up, we ask God to remove them. We talk about them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have hurt anyone. After that, we think about someone else we can help. Love and tolerance of others is our way of life.

And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone—even alcohol. For by this time sanity will have returned. We will seldom be interested in liquor. If tempted, we recoil from it as from a hot flame. We

react sanely and normally, and we will find that this has happened automatically. We will see that our new attitude toward liquor has been given us without any thought or effort on our part. It just comes! That is the miracle of it. We are not fighting it, 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 has been removed. It does not exist for us. We are neither cocky nor are we afraid. That is our experience. That is how we react so long as we keep in fit spiritual condition.

> At this point we have stopped fighting anything or anyone—even alcohol. By this time our sanity will have returned. We will no longer feel interested in liquor. If we are tempted, we may even pull back from liquor like we would when touching a hot flame. We are able to react sanely and normally to our lives, and find that this is happening automatically. We will see that our new attitude about liquor has been given to us like a gift. It arrives without any thought or effort on our part. That is the miracle of it. We are not fighting it, and we are not avoiding temptation. We feel safe and protected. We have not even made promises to ourselves or others about drinking. Instead, the problem has been removed from us. It does not exist anymore. We don't feel overly confident or afraid about this new state of being. It is just our new reality.

It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. We are headed for trouble if

we do, for alcohol is a subtle foe. We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all of our activities. "How can I best serve Thee—Thy will (not mine) be done." These are thoughts which must go with us constantly. We can exercise our will power along this line all we wish. It is the proper use of the will.

> It is easy to stop paying attention to our spirituality, but we will be in trouble if we do that. We must remember that alcohol is a tricky enemy. We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is relief from alcoholism for that day, but this completely depends on keeping up our spirituality. Every day is a day when we must bring the vision of God's will into everything we do. We remind ourselves of Step Three, when we turned our will over to the care of God. This kind of thinking must be with us all day long. It helps us keep our will in line with our Higher Power's will.

Much has already been said about receiving strength, inspiration, and direction from Him who has all knowledge and power. If we have carefully followed directions, we have begun to sense the flow of His Spirit into us. To some extent we have become God-conscious. We have begun to develop this vital sixth sense. But we must go further and that means more action.

> We've already talked about receiving strength, inspiration, and direction from our Higher Power. If we have carefully followed directions, we have begun to sense the flow of spirituality into us. We have begun to develop a very important sixth

sense. But we must go further and that means more action.

Step Eleven suggests prayer and meditation. We shouldn't be shy on this matter of prayer. Better men

than we are using it constantly. It works, if we have the proper attitude and work at it. It would be easy to be vague about this matter. Yet, we believe we can make some definite and valuable suggestions.

Step Eleven says, "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." We should try to embrace prayer and meditation. Both of them work, if we have the right attitude and work at them. If you're not sure how to get started with prayer or meditation, we can make some helpful suggestions.

When we retire at night, we constructively review our day. Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest or afraid? Do we owe an apology? Have we kept something to ourselves which should be discussed with another person at once? Were we kind and loving toward all? What could we have done better? Were we thinking of ourselves most of the time? Or were we thinking of what we could do for others, of what we could pack into the stream of life? But we must be careful not to drift into worry, remorse or morbid reflection, for that would diminish our useful-ness to others. After making our review we ask God's forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken.

When we go to bed at night, we think back on our day. Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest, or afraid? Do we owe anyone an apology? Have we

kept something secret that should be discussed with another person? Were we kind and loving toward everyone? What could we have done better? Were we thinking about ourselves most of the time? Or were we thinking about what we could do for others? When we do this review, we must be careful not to drift into worry, guilt, or negative thoughts. Doing that would limit how useful we can be to other people. After reviewing everything, we ask God's forgiveness and ask what we should change or do better next time.

On awakening let us think about the twenty-four hours ahead. We consider our plans for the day. Before we begin, we ask God to direct our thinking, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonest or self-seeking motives. Under these conditions we can employ our mental faculties with assurance, for after all God gave us brains to use. Our thought-life will be placed on a much higher plane when our thinking is cleared of wrong motives.

When we wake up, we think about the 24 hours ahead of us. We consider our plans for the day. Before we begin, we ask God to watch over our thinking, especially asking that our thoughts stay away from self-pity, lying, or self-serving motives. When we start the day this way, we can clear our minds and use our brains thoughtfully. Our thoughts will be on a much higher plane when our thinking is cleared of negative motives.

In thinking about our day we may face indecision. We may not be able to determine which course to take. Here we ask God for inspiration, an intuitive thought or a decision. We relax and take it easy. We don't struggle. We are often surprised how the right

answers come after we have tried this for a while.

What used to be the hunch or the occasional inspiration gradually becomes a working part of the mind. Being still inexperienced and having just made conscious contact with God, it is not probable that we are going to be inspired at all times. We might pay for this presumption in all sorts of absurd actions and ideas. Nevertheless, we find that our thinking will, as time passes, be more and more on the plane of in-spiration. We come to rely upon it.

> When we think about our day, we may feel confused. We may not be able to decide which course to take. If this happens we ask our Higher Power for inspiration, an intuitive thought or a decision. We relax and take it easy. We don't struggle. We are often surprised how the right answers come after we have tried this for a while.
>
> We used to get a hunch or an inspiration once in a while, but gradually these experiences become a regular part of our daily thinking. If we are new to spirituality, we may not feel fully inspired all day every day. Still, as time passes, we will find that inspiration will come to us more and more often.

We usually conclude the period of meditation with a prayer that we be shown all through the day what our next step is to be, that we be given whatever we need to take care of such problems. We ask especially for freedom from self-will, and are careful to make no request for ourselves only. We may ask for ourselves, however, if others will be helped. We are careful never to pray for our own selfish ends. Many of us have wasted a lot of time doing that and it doesn't

work. You can easily see why.

> We usually finish praying or meditating by asking our Higher Power to show us what our next step will be, and we ask that we be given what we need to take that step. We ask for freedom from a desire to control our lives, and we're careful not to ask for anything that would benefit only us. We never pray for selfish reasons. Many of us have wasted a lot of time doing that and it doesn't work. You can easily see why.

If circumstances warrant, we ask our wives or friends to join us in morning meditation. If we belong to a religious denomination which requires a definite morning devotion, we attend to that also. If not members of religious bodies, we sometimes select and memorize a few set prayers which emphasize the principles we have been discussing. There are many helpful books also. Suggestions about these may be obtained from one's priest, minister, or rabbi. Be quick to see where religious people are right. Make use of what they offer.

> If we do morning meditation, we might ask our partner or friends to join us if that makes sense. If we belong to a religion that includes morning services, we may attend those. If not, we may choose and memorize a few prayers that focus on the ideas we've been discussing in this chapter. There are many helpful books also. We may ask for suggestions from our faith leader.

As we go through the day we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action. We constantly remind ourselves we are no longer

running the show, humbly saying to ourselves many times each day "Thy will be done.'' 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 foolishly as we did when we were trying to arrange life to suit ourselves.

As we go through our day we pause if we feel upset or filled with doubt, and ask for the right thought or action. We constantly remind ourselves that we are no longer running the show. We say to ourselves many times each day, "Thy will be done." We are then in much less danger of fear, anger, worry, self-pity, or foolish decisions. We become much more efficient. We do not tire as easily, because we are not burning up energy foolishly like we did when we were trying to control everything in our lives without help from a Higher Power.

It works—it really does.

It works—it really does.

We alcoholics are undisciplined. So we let God discipline us in the simple way we have just outlined.

But this is not all. There is action and more action. "Faith without works is dead.'' The next chapter is entirely devoted to *Step Twelve.*

We alcoholics struggle to obey rules when we are

left on our own. So we let God help us find the rules we need to lead better lives. But this is not all. There is action and more action. "Faith without works is dead."

The next chapter is all about how to practice *Step Twelve*.