

when the only injury ever suffered is – not was – self-inflicted. It's time, then, to remedy the pain we feel repeatedly. To do this we have to practice purposeful forgetting once more, this time forgetting the wrong.

But how can we forget a wrong? Not all of the resentments sprang from imagined injuries. Instead, the action of the other caused very real pain, pain the person inflicting it on us understood so very well and simply ignored. Surely we can never forget it!

Perhaps not. Have you ever been challenged *not* to think about the tip of your nose? Go ahead. Sit there. Time yourself for a minute and don't think of the tip of your nose. Of course there's no need even to try. It's impossible. You can, though, contemplate the coffee mug in front of you for a minute. And, when you finish that process, if you're asked if during that time you thought about the tip of your nose, probably you'd answer in the negative.

We don't have to dwell on wrongs done us – like we have for all the time since the occurrence. Instead, we can think of the good things about the person, the beneficial effect that may have come from the wrong itself if perhaps we became stronger through the process.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. – Philippians 4:8 (ASV)

You've been wanting to get even with the person you resented for so very long. Do it. While you should remember not to foolishly allow yourself to be injured again, you can – and should – purposefully forget the resentment, and you'll be even – even ahead.

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## Slimming Steps

For the resentments on your list that still bother you, what can you think of when these resurface? How can you practice purposeful forgetting?

## Shadows



Gossamer wraiths  
of ancient wrongs hover,  
sometimes distant,  
others riding  
my shoulders,  
no real weight, just that of the woes  
of the world. They drive  
away serenity, rouse self-pity,  
entwine my thoughts,  
build fear to bonfires.  
They shudder, though,  
when inventory and a sponsor's  
perspective bring out the light  
and make them disappear.

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## What's the Harm?

Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it – I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while – yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. – II Corinthians 7:8-10 (NIV)

We think of the phrase, “First, do no harm” regarding doctors, but it applies to Step Nine as well: “would injure them or others.” We need to know what harm or injury is. Some things harm does not mean – amends we might be tempted to make but should not – are:

-  Approaching people we have passively resented without taking action on the feelings.
-  Repeating amends to people to whom we have already fully made amends, even if they chose not to acknowledge our action.

Knowing what harm is may be exceedingly easy in some situations. We know full well we've harmed people if:

-  We stole from them.
-  Our carelessness/negligence/reckless conduct caused them monetary loss.
-  We have lied to them.
-  We assaulted them.

Between the extremes, though, decisions need to be made. For that, you need a sponsor. Please don't set out to

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do your amends on your own without having discussed them with a sponsor. In barging ahead you may actually do more harm, necessitating another round of amends. That's not your intent, is it? Some relationships require the tact and perspective of another. Repairing others seems so impossible, a second opinion helps direct you in ways meaningful to you and to your recovery.

Some of the people we hurt have died, but their part in our lives looms so large, amends compel themselves on us if we are to find recovery. In these situations, a sponsor can help with ideas. Standing in a cemetery talking to a grave may seem silly and useless. It's true, the person no longer is there, and talking to the tombstone has no effect – except it does. The effect it has is on you.

My friend Terrie asked me to come visit her halfway across the country. We had met on the Internet and became fast friends, a bond solidified by her twice making the 4000 mile round trip to my home. She passed away before her 49<sup>th</sup> birthday without my having gone. I didn't even consider this in making amends. Then another person suggested meeting each other in Terrie's city. I felt drawn there yet apprehensive, restless, discontent, not really knowing the reasons. Finally, talking to a trusted friend in recovery, I told of Terrie and my coming trip, sobbing. I knew then the trip would be an amend. I didn't visit the cemetery, just the city. But I fed the birds there, for they will forever remind me of Terrie.

Soon afterwards I sat at the edge of a pond, meditating. I thought how Terrie had stood at my kitchen window naming the birds she saw – names I'd never heard of! After that I saw birds – noticed them – everywhere. I knew they'd been there before, without my seeing. The message I gleaned from the meditation was that God is like the birds, always around whether I notice him or not. His flying creatures reminded me of his presence in the stressful times for which

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I'd paused at the water's edge to prepare. Both Terrie and God accompanied me on the odyssey of the next few weeks.

Amends didn't come easy to me, not because of reluctance in making them but because my disease is one of isolation and self-deprecation, I knew few I had harmed. As I grow in the program, though, I grow in my understanding that amends, while they benefit that other person, are absolutely necessary to mend our own broken hearts. Sometimes that's where a great deal of the real harm lies.

### *Slimming Steps*

Have you behaved in harmful ways toward others, ways you might have missed in your inventory? Have you been stingy, irresponsible, impatient, attentive to one family member while neglecting others, narcissistic, seeing yourself as the center of the universe? Harm can be physical, spiritual, mental, or emotional. How have you hurt people? What does your sponsor say about these behaviors?

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## Beginning of the End of Isolation

I never sat in the company of revelers,  
never made merry with them;  
I sat alone because your hand was on me  
and you had filled me with indignation.

Why is my pain unending  
and my wound grievous and incurable?  
Will you be to me like a deceptive brook,  
like a spring that fails?

Therefore this is what the LORD says:

“If you repent, I will restore you  
that you may serve me;  
if you utter worthy, not worthless, words,  
you will be my spokesman.  
Let this people turn to you,  
but you must not turn to them. – Jeremiah 15:17-19  
(NIV)

Have you ever been lonely? Isn't a better question, "When have you ever *not* been lonely?" Compulsive overeating is a disease of isolation, and boy, have we been good at isolation!

We welcomed being alone, for then we could get to the food without watching other people stare or having to share with them. We isolated from shame over how we looked, from anger at the people who had wronged us and didn't understand us. We lived lives of solitary desperation. But it's

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over. We've reached the beginning of the end of isolation. The road started with admitting we were powerless over food and other insanity-causing behaviors embedded in our psyche and continued with the realization God could restore sanity if we turned management of ourselves over to him.

The door began to swing open as we inventoried our fears, resentments, and hurts then widened as we admitted the nature of our defects. After the decision Steps of Six and Seven, we've reached out now with Steps Eight and Nine to those around us. This is a tough move, not only because they're people we've hurt and perhaps who have hurt us, but merely because they're people! We're more comfortable if others stay away. Or at least we were. Now, though, the impediments have been removed, and slowly, shyly, we reach out, first perhaps to other compulsive eaters, but then to the people who are family and friends.

I believed just a year ago I had no friends. Oh, I knew I did have people close to me, but I actually described them as "they believe I'm their friend, but I don't have any." I didn't know it went both ways! Now, finally, my eyes have been opened to see how totally reciprocal the relationship is with so many people. And the group continues to grow!

I began isolating in 1956. For half a century, I closed out the rest of humanity. How sad. But how delightful to move beyond that isolation to a world welcoming me with open arms. Hello, world! I'm *here!*

### *Slimming Steps*

Has your disease of compulsive overeating been one of isolation? What's happening as you look around now?

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## Step Nine

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

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## Retribution

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion  
blot out my transgressions.  
Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.  
For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is always before me...  
Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;  
you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.  
Cleans me with hyssop, and I will be clean;  
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. – Psalm  
51:1-3, 6-7 (NIV) [Read Psalms 51.]

We compulsive eaters certainly understand the despair, the misery and hopelessness inherent in the psalmist's cry. We've cried it as well. "God help me!" In my case, the prayer that resulted in God's taking away my compulsive eating was simply talking aloud to God as I've done for years, saying, "This is **stupid!**" Whatever the cry, whatever the circumstances of our sin, whether we know its nature or just have the vague notion that God doesn't hear us, we know the sentiment. That's what sin is, you know. Separation from God. And he didn't separate himself. We caused the rift.

My misdoings aren't exciting, just devastating to my own sanity. I once considered a friend of mine, how he must feel about a situation that resulted in legal proceedings. The resulting poem follows this Note of Hope.

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The regrets, whether for legal felonies or “mere” acts of moral turpitude obvious only from the inside, result in intolerable distance between us and God. What can we do to fix it? The psalmist suggested scrubbing with hyssop. What’s that? It was used in biblical times for cleansing – the temple, and people with leprosy – among other uses. The hyssop branch lifted to Jesus on the cross carried vinegar for thirst. Scrubbing with hyssop or antibacterial disinfectant or lye or any other cleanser won’t fix sin, no matter how much we may want a solution.

It’s not the cleansing with hyssop that makes us clean, nor can washing make us whiter than snow. It’s the willingness to be cleansed, the acceptance of the washing done by God. Once that acquiescence happens, then God can create a clean heart in us and renew – or create – a steadfast spirit in us.

At that point, with joy and a willing spirit, we are able to move on to Step Twelve, to teach others in our situation, other “transgressors,” God’s way and turn other compulsive eaters to God, and the joy will be passed on and on and on. Thank God!

### *Slimming Steps*

How contrite are you? Have you received God’s assurance of your acceptance? Are you passing on your joy and peace?

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## Retribution, The Sonnet

I wish to God I could unknot the mesh  
that is my life, to rectify the sin  
constraining howls within my soul, confess  
the blackness haunting me from depths within.  
Would that the soul who huddles from the ghost  
of my misdeeds could grasp the peace I've lost,  
could find a haven, knowing countless hosts  
of demons foist repayment of all cost.  
For justice through a system made by man  
is travesty compared to that by guilt  
repaid. And bitter might-have-beens will pan  
society's responses 'til they wilt.  
So lock the doors, confine this worthless soul  
for even full release won't make me whole.

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## As We Forgive Those

Forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors. – Matthew 6:12  
(NIV)

Emmet Fox, an author who significantly influenced Bill W, called this clause of the Lord's Prayer a "trip clause" placed strategically.

He has so contrived it that once our attention has been drawn to this matter, we are inevitably obliged either to forgive our enemies in sincerity and truth, or never again to repeat that prayer. (Emmet Fox, *The Lord's Prayer: An Interpretation*, 1932)

The process of forgiveness frees the other person, but at least as important is the fact it sets us free as well. Fox describes resentment as an attachment and compares holding a grudge to holding a prisoner. Certainly the one detained cannot freely leave – but neither can the person holding him. Breaking the resentment we harbor severs our attachment. The detachment comes through forgiveness. Of course that sounds easy, but we've existed with these bonds for many years; it *can't* be easy to change the status quo!

What outcome do you expect from forgiveness? Will you become bosom buddies with your former nemesis? Will you be forced to socialize and converse frequently? No. Severing is severing. Detachment is detachment. You break the ties that bind. You become willing to be distanced from the person, and it happens. Can you become friends? It could happen. Stranger than that has already occurred in your

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recovery quite probably! But do you need to become buddies? Absolutely not.

So what is your relationship with this person to become? Jesus told us that, too.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” – Matthew 5:43-48 (NIV)

Love your enemy. Pray for your nemesis. Be perfect. Yikes! Love them like God sending rain and sun. Greet them. Okay. God sends rain and sun for everybody. If everybody benefits from the way I live, including the problem person, that’s okay. I guess. And greet them. Just be civil? I can do that. I might prefer the silent treatment, but hey, if I say hello and nod at them, it could drive them crazy! Oops. Wrong motivation. But I can be civil.

That last part, though. Be perfect. I’ve tried that. I can’t do it. But II Corinthians 12:9 (NIV) says, “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” Okay. I tried before but it was the old me trying, not the me after the Steps. I can try this. *Star Wars* grabs me. Like Yoda says, “Do or do not... There is no try.” Okay, God. In your grace, I’ll forgive my enemies perfectly.

Emmet Fox says it’s all in the willingness. He says you get alone, become quiet through leading yourself into meditation by reading the Bible or repeating a prayer, then say:

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I fully and freely forgive X (mentioning the name of the offender); I loose him and let him go. I cast the burden aside. He is free now, and I am free too. The Truth of Christ has set us both free. I thank God. (*Around the Year with Emmet Fox: A Book of Daily Readings*, Emmet Fox, p. 48)

He says let it ride then, it's done and finished. We don't go back and re-forgive the same offense. Whenever we think about it again, we're supposed to bless the person and dismiss the thought. Do, or do not. There is no try.

### *Slimming Steps*

Are you willing? Is your willingness to forgive in order? Maybe first we have to pray for willingness, but the freedom we know we'll get as we fully and completely forgive is well worth the peace. We've already sensed that, have tasted the sweetness. Yes. We're willing.

Make a list of the people and events you need to forgive. Write it down. When you can be alone for a while, pray the prayer for each person you're willing to forgive. Then pray for the willingness to forgive any others.

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## About that Birthright I Stole...

When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, “We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.”

In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. He thought, “If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape.”

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He also instructed the second, the third and all the others who followed the herds: “You are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. And be sure to say, ‘Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.’” For he thought, “I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me.” So Jacob’s gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp...

But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. – Genesis 32:6-8, 19-21, 33:4 (NIV)

A stupid act in our youth can set the entire tenor of our lives. Jacob didn’t plot against his brother to steal their father’s blessing; he followed his mother’s directions. And there’s a bargain on Pacific beach property in Arizona.

Sure, it was Rebekah who hatched the plot, who cooked the goats, who showed Jacob how to feel hairy to his blind

father's touch. But Isaac, a grown man, knew his actions were deceitful. His mother's invitation to let the curse rest on her couldn't really change the nature of the actions. Jacob could justify his deceit and theft, but justifications don't change anything – except the perception of the person taking part. We explain our actions and listen to what we say, and after a while we can actually believe the words coming out of our mouths convey the truth. Almost, at least. That is almost believe, not almost truth. Patti O, One of my favorite Alcoholics Anonymous speakers, says, "Rationalization, justification, and denial. When I'm explaining it to you, I'm hearing it, and when I'm hearing it, I'm believing it."

But two times Jacob took what rightfully was Esau's. The second came with his mother's help, securing the dying man's blessing. The first, Jacob did with no external prodding. He had what his brother wanted and, using his intellect, took advantage of him, persuading his twin to sell his birthright for a single meal of stew. Jacob carried the guilt, though Rebekah had amends to make as well.

And Jacob knew it. He approached his brother fourteen years later with fear and trepidation, still trying to hide, to send others in his place, to placate his brother rather than standing tall and accepting Esau's righteous indignation.

He made amends. They were far from perfect, but Jacob did approach Esau, offering restitution for the theft. And like Jacob, as we go to so many of the people to whom we owe amends, we gain not only peace of mind but the reestablishment of family. We become willing to make amends and come face to face with our fear. God takes care of the rest.

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## Slimming Steps

What amend most causes you to fear the process? How would you feel if you were the person harmed by the action you took? You can find the courage to take this Step.

Remind yourself you decided to go to any length to find a spiritual experience. Ask God for strength and direction to do the right thing no matter what the consequences might be. Remember, even if you may lose your job or reputation or face jail, you are willing.

You must not shrink at anything.

## Harbinger

He did that on purpose.  
Unrepentant. How dare he?  
I used to put up with that,  
but not now, not in recovery,  
not when I'm trying,  
working so hard.  
Shut up, mind. Of course  
it's resentment.  
He did it on purpose, though.  
What do you mean I can't afford it?  
He did it. He meant to be mean.  
Hurt me more? Sure. He's not hurt.  
I am. A slippery slope? Hush.  
Oh, all right. I'll fix him  
so he can't hurt me.  
I'll forgive him.

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## Seventy and Seven

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." – Matthew 18:21-22 (NIV)

We live in the now. Today is the only day we have. While the Big Book at Step Eleven tells us to *think* about the next 24 hours and to *consider* our plan for the day, we can't control even that far ahead, though we can prepare for the scheduled and anticipated events. We can, however, choose not to approach the day with a negative attitude, spreading proclamations of protestation. Or we can take the high road and approach the day with affirmative actions, which lead to positive creative acceptance.

Affirmative actions. Why "actions" rather than "thinking?" Because I've done enough thinking, enough acting on my mental calculations. That doesn't work. Affirmative action moves it down a foot, from the head to the heart. Faith itself is an action, the act of moving to the point where we're uncomfortable. I've been living at the edge of my comfort zone for a while now, and to me it seems all too often I'm on the other side of the line. But that's where I want to stay, for that's where I grow.

What does positive creative acceptance do for me today? I'll meet with a group of people this afternoon. The last few meetings have been tense, disagreement rampant where it seldom surfaced before. I have a marble I got at an

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OA meeting last month in another city, and it represents a resentment. I had thought I would bring it to the meeting as a reminder. I've been sleeping with it, praying when I find it during the night for a particular person to have everything I want for myself. At this point I'm free of the resentments, but that doesn't mean we'll suddenly agree at the meeting. Despite the fact the marble fell between the headboard and the wall last night and I forgot to dig it out and bring it, I'll have it in spirit. And I've thought about that hour of the twenty-four.

I will approach the meeting with humility which comes from surrender, from allowing myself to be taught. I know some people hurt me again and again, at home, at work, in any group where I work closely with others. We've all been hurt by people we love, by institutions we trusted, by ideas embedded in us from childhood. We can identify the hurt through Steps Four and Five, clean our side of the street by Six through Nine, and we can forgive and cleanse ourselves of resentment. But we still have to interact with some of these people.

God is present in the world with, in, and through people. We live in the now, and if we fail, if we move to past hurts, we find ourselves stuck in negative energy. Living in the now requires our action. Now. The past resentments are gone. I don't have to develop new ones. I do that by not striking back. I will not put myself in a position to be a problem to other people. No, that doesn't mean I let them do what they want to do if that's inconsistent with truth and progress as I understand it. But it will not be personal to me. Differing with my ideas will not be perceived as an attack on me. The other has his own work to do, as I have mine. For me, it will center on the issues.

There is no need for me to assess the motives of other people. Living, for me, will not be a matter of just getting through another day – or another meeting. It's up to me to

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live in the now, to stay in the positive. I will move out of ego deflation. It's up to me to be happy, to be humble, to be faithful. We can substitute "compulsive overeaters" for alcoholics.

Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us! God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without His aid. Many of us had moral and philosophical convictions galore, but we could not live up to them even though we would have liked to. Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We had to have God's help. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 62.)

We get out of the negative – out of building new resentments no matter how short-lived they may be – by doing good positive actions, not just thinking. We surrender, gaining humility by allowing ourselves to be taught, and we practice the faith of moving to the uncomfortable place of accepting God in the person before us.

### *Slimming Steps*

What resentments have you recently formed? What could you have done to keep from forming them? What tense situations do you face in the next twenty-four hours? Are you willing to practice humility and faith?

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