

*Mindful Steps to Forgiveness*

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# *Mindful Steps to Forgiveness:*

## *Step One*

Step One: We admitted we were powerless over gambling...that our lives had become unmanageable

“I don’t have power over what desires I have, but I do have power over what actions I take...I am powerless, but I also have the ability to [change] my actions of speech, body, and mind through the practice of spiritual principles” (Noah Levine)

List as many things as you can think of over which you have no power:

What are the things in your life over which you do have power?

What is the difference between powerlessness and helplessness?

Four Basic Truths:

First Truth: Suffering is a part of life. (Shit Happens). We are powerless over suffering. Being born is suffering, getting sick and old are suffering, being separated from those we love is suffering, not getting what we want is suffering. Suffering unites us, because it is part of everyone’s life. To try to avoid it, control it, or push it away is insanity. Trying to deny this truth of life is to make life unmanageable. It is important to understand the true nature of suffering.

What suffering is currently in your life?

Second Truth: Suffering has its origin in craving and attachment to desire. Three basic forms of desire are: the desire to feel good (sense pleasure), the desire to become something (ambition, to be what I am not), and the desire to be rid of something (to not

feel pain). It is important to be mindful of our attachments and understand our experience of desire so that we can recognize it, accept it and allow it to pass.

How was gambling connected to these three forms of desire for you?

Third Truth: There is an end to suffering. This is based in the reality that everything is impermanent – nothing lasts forever. If we do not cling to our desires, try to hold onto feeling good all the time, try to push away all unpleasant feelings and thoughts, or attach to becoming we have the opportunity to open our minds to observing what brings suffering. We can see deeply into our attachments and addictions and being able to see them for the pain that they bring. We can also recognize that non-attachment and recovery can bring a cessation to this suffering.

Fourth Truth: There is a way out of suffering. In Gambler's Anonymous this way out is the 12 Steps. In Mindfulness this is the Eight Fold Path. They are very similar and basically involve, doing and saying the right things (Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood), Developing Wisdom (Right Understanding, Right Aspiration) and Concentration (Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration).

How can being mindful of powerlessness and these four truths support your recovery and decrease your suffering?

What is one specific thing you can practice or do this week to be mindful of the first step?

# *Mindful Steps to Forgiveness:*

## *Step Two*

Step Two: Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to a normal way of thinking and living [sanity]

While the first step is about surrender, the second step is about hope, trust and confidence. Not the false hope that is to be found in ego: The hope that I can figure everything out by myself. Believing that I am the only person I can really trust. Confidence that I have all the answers all by myself.

I am a Rock – Simon and Garfunkle

A winter's day  
In a deep and dark December;  
I am alone,  
Gazing from my window to the streets below  
On a freshly fallen silent shroud of snow.  
I am a rock,  
I am an island.

I've built walls,  
A fortress deep and mighty,  
That none may penetrate.  
I have no need of friendship; friendship causes pain.  
It's laughter and it's loving I disdain.  
I am a rock,  
I am an island.

Don't talk of love,  
But I've heard the words before;  
It's sleeping in my memory.  
I won't disturb the slumber of feelings that have died.  
If I never loved I never would have cried.  
I am a rock,  
I am an island.

I have my books

And my poetry to protect me;  
I am shielded in my armor,  
Hiding in my room, safe within my womb.  
I touch no one and no one touches me.  
I am a rock,  
I am an island.

And a rock feels no pain;  
And an island never cries.

Rather the second step is about having faith that I am not alone, accepting that there is something beyond my limited ego that can help guide and restore me and recognizing the reality of interconnectedness.

The Higher Power of Mindfulness (excerpts from *A Burning Desire* by Kevin Griffin)

*The Higher Power of Mindfulness is the power of attention and non-reactivity. It opens us to wisdom and insight through clear seeing. Mindfulness is the foundation of all spiritual growth as it reveals the truth of the way things are, internally and externally.*

[Remember the feeling of building up to gamble. A feeling as if some force over which you have no control is pushing you. You are going to gamble – there is no choice involved, you cannot imagine an alternative. To not gamble would be to die, would be to resist some fundamental natural law. That’s the feeling that addiction gives you. That’s the *power* of addition]

Mindfulness runs counter to that. The power of mindfulness is the power to see outside the blinkers, outside the tunnel, to see ourselves and our experience from a different perspective. We call this “higher” because it has a positive effect, as opposed to the destructive “lower” power of addiction. Mindfulness actually shows the world to be simpler than our mind perceives it to be. Instead of the complex of problems, issues, doubts, hungers, and resentments that obsess and confuse [us], mindfulness shows our experience to be simply that of six senses and those things the senses can perceive. The practices associated with mindfulness ask us to be aware of what is coming in through these six sense doors, without judging those experiences or trying to figure them out; without trying to [cling to] or repel those experiences; without being overwhelmed or losing interest in them. Simply allowing them to be.

What or who do you trust to help you in your life and recovery?

What or who provides hope in your life?

What do you have faith in?

What can you practice each day to strengthen your ability to perceive life clearly and simply?

# *Mindful Steps to Forgiveness:*

## *Step Three*

Step Three: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of this power of our own understanding.

Step two provides us with helps us realize that there is hope and that we are not alone in life's struggle and in the recovery process. Step three gives us choice and empowers us to make a decision about recovery. This is the choice between will power and willfulness versus willingness. Step two is about recognizing the possibility of hope and recovery if we can have trust and confidence in more than our own limited selves. Step three is about the commitment to put this into action in our lives.

What is the difference between will power/willfulness and willingness?

What commitments have you made in your life that have guided your actions?

Step Three begins the commitment to transformation – to taking the suffering that lead to step one and transforming that into a commitment to be willing to let go of ego and accept that there is a more skillful, wiser, healthier way to live.

In the process Kevin Griffin (*One Breath at a Time*) describes how we can use various “higher powers” in this process.

“The Higher Power of Suffering is the energy of craving and resistance that creates struggles in our world. Its power reveals the ways we need to change and inspires our efforts to overcome internal and external adversity. Insight into suffering evokes the powers of acceptance, compassion and forgiveness.”

“The Higher Power of Impermanence is the energy of change that continuously transforms us and our world. Engaging this power helps us see through the illusion of solidity, showing us the futility of clinging and the frailty of life. Insight into impermanence inspires us to let go and to deeply engage life as it is in each moment.”

“The Higher Power of Not-Self [not-ego] gives fluidity and flexibility to identity, allowing for the possibility of transformation. Engaging this power helps us see through the illusion of separateness, the false identity of ego. Insight into not-self breaks our habit of self-centeredness and guides us toward generosity, service and compassion.”

Make a list of all the different roles you play or have played in your life.

Which of these roles is you?

Who are you if you drop all of these roles?

Who or what is the higher power of your understanding?

What is his/her will for you?

Is that ok with you?



# *Mindful Steps to Forgiveness:*

## *Step Four*

*Step Four: Made a searching and fearless moral and financial inventory of ourselves.*

In many ways the first three steps have been about getting ready to take action in recovery. First acknowledging that the way I am living my life is keeping me stuck, that my addiction is not the solution. This can be done by accepting what is truly creating suffering in my life and being open to accepting this reality. Second I become willing to accept help to learn a way out of my suffering and then made a commitment to following this path.

The fourth step takes this honest appraisal of my life and willingness to see clearly a step farther. Having made a commitment to recovery, I now am asked to look deeply and fearlessly into my actions and their consequences.

**? Why do you think it is important to look at what may be painful and difficult aspects of your life?**

### Bare Attention

Practicing mindfulness can help do this inventory honestly and compassionately. The mindfulness concept of “bare attention” can be very useful here. The practice of bare attention involves simply being aware of thoughts or feelings as they arise without any adornments. Without creating a story about the thought, without judging the feeling, without blaming or excusing. For example, if I become aware of sadness, I don’t have to search for the reason for the sadness, I don’t have to find out who I can blame for the sadness, nor do I have to make any excuse for feeling sadness. What I can do is simply turn my awareness to the sadness, breathe with my sadness, neither clinging to it nor pushing it away.

It is as if a child you love dearly wants to tell you a story. Even though you have a pressing appointment, you take the time to listen to this dear child’s story with all your attention. You sit down and focus on the child’s story. You listen to each word, not thinking about where you need to be or what you need to do, you are just in this moment listening intently to the child. You listen not only to the words and their meaning, but to the sound of the child’s voice, its tones and rhythms. You also look deeply at the child’s face, the expressiveness and energy. You hear the words, the feelings, the meaning of all the child has to say. You do not judge or criticize the quality, the sentence construction, or word usage, you simply listen with your complete attention.

In doing the fourth step inventory, I can apply this type of bare attention to my life. I can allow awareness of my actions to arise and see deeply into my actions and their consequences.

## Compassion

The Fourth Step is not about beating myself up or punishing myself. It is about clearing the way for compassion. If I cannot see clearly and honestly how my actions have caused pain and suffering, then I cannot truly have compassion. If I must explain and rationalize or deny the consequences of my actions, I can't possibly feel compassion towards those I have hurt or towards myself. As I can use mindfulness to see clearly my part in another's suffering, my heart can open to compassion. Even while I fully appreciate the suffering I have caused, I can also have compassion to my own suffering.

I was listening to a news story about the trial of the police officers who shot innocent people trying to cross a bridge in New Orleans in the chaos following hurricane Katrina. I remembered the initial story of the man who was trying to save his developmentally disabled brother and the great compassion I felt for these two innocent men, trying to survive. It was more difficult to open my heart to the police who did the shooting, but then I thought about the long hours the police were working, the strain of trying to deal with so much devastation, the frustration of not having enough supplies and help, the rage within them. This compassion does not rationalize their behavior or excuse it. Suffering breeding more suffering.

The Fourth Step helps me see the truth of suffering clearly and honestly to truly begin the process of forgiveness and self-forgiveness.

## Positive Inventory

If suffering breeds suffering, then joy can breed joy as well. The Fourth Step is therefore also about doing a searching and fearless inventory of my helpful and joyful actions and attributes. For some people, seeing what is good, kind and loving about themselves may seem even more challenging than seeing what is harmful. I need to accept the ways my actions have contributed to the comfort and happiness of others with joy as much as I need to accept the suffering my actions have caused with sadness and compassion.

**? List at least three of your positive characteristics:**

**? List at least two ways you have brought comfort or happiness into someone's life:**

## The Mindful Eightfold Path as a Moral Inventory

1. Our Views – attitudes, a mind that is open, flexible, not hindered by preconceptions, able to see the reality of each moment as it is, not as we imagine it could or should be.
2. Our Thoughts – Thought, intentions, aspirations that are kind and free from delusion are considered wise thoughts. Our mental patterns.
3. Our Speech – skillful speech is truthful, nonviolent and compassionate
4. Our Actions – Wise action involves being conscious of our choices, aware of the consequences of our behavior and how it effects others (before, during and after our action)
5. Our Livelihood – Approaching our work with cooperation and harmony and realizing the impact of the ways we earn a living on others and the world.
6. Our Efforts – This is the serenity prayer in action. Wise effort is realizing when we are trying to control the uncontrollable and when we are free from trying to control the outcome and simply focus on our own actions
7. Our Mindfulness – wise mindfulness brings all of these together, placing our attention on this moment, being present.
8. Our Meditation – wise meditation is focused on teachings that keep us in recovery, that bring serenity and help us see reality just as it is.

# *Mindful Steps to Forgiveness:*

## *Step Five*

***Step Five: Admitted to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.***

### ***A Pre-Fifth Step Prayer (AA Big Book):***

*Please help me to complete my housecleaning by admitting to another human being the exact nature of my wrongs. Please remove any fears I have about this step and show me how completion of it will remove my egotism and fear. Help me to see how this step builds my character through humility, fearlessness and honesty. Direct me to the right person who will keep my confidence and fully understand and approve what I am driving at. Then help me to pocket my pride and go to it, illuminating every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past so I may complete this step and begin to feel near to you."*

Once again the steps remind us that recovery is an activity that is done in community. We are not doing our inventory in isolation. It is not enough to acknowledge the truth of our lives just to ourselves. We must now share our inventory with another human being.

The power of confession has long been realized by all major spiritual traditions. In Catholicism this is the ritual of reconciliation. Many Protestant churches urge parishioners to publically confess during services. In the Jewish tradition the practice of Teshuva requires acknowledgement of wrong doing to the community. In Buddhism, the importance of community was emphasized by the Buddha. When asked by a disciple if friends and conversation were "half of the holy life," the Buddha's response was "Not so! Noble Friends and Noble Conversation are the whole of the holy life."

Through mindfulness practice I can become more clearly aware and honest with myself about both my skillful actions as well as the actions that have caused harm to me and others. However, if I don't share this awareness, I can become lost in self-judgment or in the egotistical feeling that I am alone in my faults and shortcomings. Only through humbly admitting to another human being my worst nature, can I discover that I am not alone, that others have done the same or worse. It is an opportunity to realize that I am connected to others by our foolishness and imperfections as well as our courage and nobility. Also, I can discover that I can show someone my deepest shame and guilt and not be spit on or exiled from the community. I can directly experience the working of compassion and acceptance. In this way I reconnect to myself and others. I can put my ego aside and realize I am no better or worse than others.

This is a pivotal point on the path to forgiveness.

## Loving Kindness and the 5<sup>th</sup> Step

It is very important to hold yourself in love and compassion as you look with deep honesty at yourself. Loving Kindness practice can be a very helpful way of remembering to do this.

1. Be mindful of the following loving kindness phrases (simply repeating them to yourself several times):

May I feel free of suffering and the causes of suffering

May I feel happy and well

May I feel safe and protected

May my body support me in strength

May I live in peace and harmony

2. Think of an action or event that brings up feelings of guilt or shame. Mindfully hold those feelings and that action or event in loving kindness:

As you hold that action or event in your mind and notice how you have suffered as a result of your actions or that event, simply think “May I be free of suffering and the causes of suffering.” Open your heart to your own suffering and be willing to be free of it, to let it go. This isn’t a magic spell to make pain go away, rather it is a practice to allow your mind to be calm, to observe the causes of suffering within yourself and be willing to allow yourself to heal.

As you holding any emotional distress resulting from your actions in your mind, mentally recite “May I feel happy and well. May I feel safe and protected. Imagine you are in the presence of the most compassionate beings you can think of. Mother Teresa, Jesus, Buddha or perhaps a loving friend or family member, saints, angels, all those who have dedicated their lives to providing comfort to others. You are held in their embrace, surrounded by their love and compassion. They embrace you, just as you are.

Imagine moving forward with honesty, acceptance and compassion that you have experienced with the intention, “May I live in peace and harmony.” Imagine waking up in the morning feeling at peace and in harmony with yourself and the world. Imagine relationships that are peaceful and harmonious. Imagine work that is peaceful and harmonious. Imagine eating in a peaceful and harmonious manner. Imagine sleeping peacefully and in harmony.

Finally, end with wishing loving kindness to others who struggle with guilt or shame:

May all be free of suffering and the causes of suffering

May they feel happy and well.

May they feel safe and protected.

May their bodies support them with strength  
May they live in peace and harmony.

# *Mindful Steps to Forgiveness:*

## *Step Six*

*Step Six: Were entirely ready to have these defects of character removed.*

### Character Defects

Anger	Inadequacy
Arrogance	Intolerance
Anxiety	Jealousy
Bigotry	Laziness
Conceit	Profanity
Dishonesty	Remorse
Egotism	Resentment
False Pride	Revenge
Fear	Selfishness
Frustration	Self-Pity
Hatred	Self-Seeking
Impatience	Worry

Condemnation of Others

### Character Assets

Forgiving	Responsible
Humility	Tolerance
Calm	Kind
Willing	Conscientiousness
Generous	Gentle
Honesty	Patient
Loving	Compassion
Non-judgmental	Self-accepting
Confidence	Courage
Open-minded	Grateful
Joyful	Agreeable
Self-esteem	Empathy

Accepting of Others

In mindfully approaching step six there are two key elements: Willingness and Letting Go. Basically, this is a practice in being willing to recognize and be aware of all my potential - my potential for being loving, kind, generous, honest, etc as well as my potential for being egotistical, self-pitying, angry, selfish, etc. The mindful practice of simply noting feelings and thoughts as they arise can allow me to see all my characteristics more clearly. My willingness to be uncomfortable as I explore what it is that I am feeling, without judgment. I can practice observing and exploring my assets

and defects without trying to cling to them or push them away. I can come to see myself, just as I am, assets, defects and all.

Once I can see my defects and assets clearly, then I can use willingness again to let them go. It is easy to understand the importance of removing defects of character. However, it is just as important to learn how to let go of my attachment to my assets as it is to let go of my attachment to my defects. It is also just as important to remove my aversion to my defects as it is to remove my aversion to my assets.

What foolishness are you most attached to? \_\_\_\_\_

What does this characteristic do for you? What do you like about it or what benefits does it give you?

What would your life would be like if this defect were to be removed?

What would you need to be willing to have it removed?

What character asset are you most attached to? \_\_\_\_\_

What does this asset bring to your life?

What is the effect of your attachment to this asset? (Is your attachment useful or not useful?)

What would it be like to let go of your attachment to this asset?

Think about any uncomfortable feelings you have in acknowledging your character assets. You may do this by imaging simply saying, "I am \_\_\_\_\_" in front of a group of people. Notice where these feelings are in your body. Notice what sensations go along with those feelings. These feelings represent your aversion, your pushing away, your unwillingness to accept yourself as you are.

You can practice letting go of this aversion by simply letting yourself feel uncomfortable while at the same time, accepting this aspect of yourself, just as it is.



Having done the preparation work in steps 1 – 5, step six truly lays the foundation of transformation. This step says I can change.

Practice:

Spend some time each day (at least 10 minutes) with one asset and one defect. You can just think about each characteristic and breath and feel what that trait feels like, notice the thoughts that arise as you spend time with that trait. You might imagine that trait as a person you invite in for a cup of tea. Get to know that trait more deeply. What does it like, what does it sound like, what does it look like?

Breathing in, I acknowledge my \_\_\_\_\_

Breathing out, I smile to my \_\_\_\_\_

Breathing in, I accept my \_\_\_\_\_

Breathing out, I bow to my \_\_\_\_\_

# *Mindful Steps to Forgiveness: Step Seven*

*Step Seven: Humbly asked God (of our understanding) to remove our short comings*

One mindful interpretation of this step rewrites it:

With the assistance of others and our own firm resolve, we transformed unskillful aspects of ourselves and cultivated positive ones.

What this reinterpretation of step seven emphasizes is that there is no quick or magical way of coming to terms with and letting go of our patterns of behavior that continue to make us unhappy and dissatisfied. No one or nothing is going to wave a magic wand and change our behavior or make my life all better. That fantasy is the fabric of addiction. Rather, from a mindful perspective, I can use the support of others and make a clear commitment to work on self-awareness and personal change.

As the original step emphasizes, this is an act of humility as well as commitment. I can humbly hear deeply the way that my behavior affects others. Humility allows me to truly hear constructive criticism, or hear how a thoughtless or angry comment hurts someone I care about.

Humility also helps me to question my long held “traditional” patterns of behavior. I don’t have to accept “this is just the way I am,” or “this is always how I do things.” Being curious about my own traditions can be an essential part of being open to change.

**Once upon a time a mother and daughter who were working together in the kitchen preparing the Easter dinner.**



**They always worked together to make their special traditional family Easter meal. No matter what the mother was doing, it seemed that the daughter was always watching her intently. The mother could even feel her daughters big brown eyes on her without even turning to see if she was in the room. Yet she continued with her task of preparing the meal without even missing a beat or a blink.**



As she did every year the mother took the pan out of the cupboard and set it on the counter. Then she went to the fridge and removed the ham that had been defrosting. They had a large ham this year. It was not unusually large or different then last year's ham.



She took the wrapping off and then proceeded to cut about an inch off of either end of the ham. Before the mother even put the ham in the pan the daughter stopped her and said: "Mom why did you cut the ends off the ham?".

The mother stopped in her tracks and pondered the question. She was rather perplexed since no one had ever asked her why she cut the ham that way before. She had done it that way as long as she could remember.



The mother answered her daughter and said: "Well sweetie, I really don't know the answer to your question. Your Grandma always cut the ends off of her ham and I have just naturally done the same thing. I never ever wondered why I did that though. So let's call Grandma and ask her why she cuts the ham that way."



So they grabbed the phone and called Grandma. Then the mother asked her mother if she knew why she cut the ends of the ham off before placing it in the pan.



The Grandmother stopped and became rather quiet. She hadn't thought about her ritual of cutting the ham being anything different than normal. Then it occurred to her that her own mother had done the very same thing for as long as she remembered. The Grandmother suggested that the daughter call her mother and ask her that very question.

So she hung up the phone and dialed the little girl's great-grandmother. After the usual pleasantries she asked her why she cut the ends of the ham off before cooking it. She replied without hesitation and with a smile in her voice along with a little chuckle..... The reason that she cut the ends off of the ham was because back in the early days of their marriage she didn't have a pan big enough to hold the ham. They couldn't afford to buy a bigger pan either. So that was the only way to make the ham fit in the pan.

What traditions do you have that no longer serve a helpful purpose?

Here is another metaphor:

“ I have told you many times the importance of knowing when it is time to let go of a raft and not hold onto it unnecessarily. When a mountain stream overflows and becomes a torrent of floodwater carrying debris, a man or woman who wants to get across might think, 'What is the safest way to cross this floodwater?' Assessing the situation, she may decide to gather branches and grasses, construct a raft, and use it to cross to the other side. But, after arriving on the other side, she thinks, 'I spent a lot of time and energy building this raft. It is a prized possession, and I will carry it with me as I continue my journey.' If she puts it on her shoulders or head and carries it with her on land, do you think that would be intelligent?”

Are there any rafts that you are carrying?

Step Seven Exercise:

One unhelpful character trait or behavior pattern that I am ready to let go of is:

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Breathing in, I am ready to let go of \_\_\_\_\_ (this unhelpful trait/behavior)

Breathing out, I am willing to accept any/all help and support in letting go of \_\_\_\_\_ (this unhelpful trait/behavior)

Breathing in, ready to let go

Breathing out, willing

Breathing in, I am grateful to my \_\_\_\_\_ (unhelpful trait/behavior) for the ways it has tried to help ease my suffering in the past.

Breathing out, I thank my \_\_\_\_\_.

Breathing in, gratitude

Breathing out, thankful

Breathing in, I say good-bye to my \_\_\_\_\_.

Breathing out, I release my \_\_\_\_\_.

Breathing in, good-bye

Breathing out, release.

# *Mindful Steps to Forgiveness:*

## *Session Eight*

*Step Eight: Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all*

It is important to realize that the willingness to make amends has been preceded by a great deal of preparatory work. We have worked steps acknowledging that nothing could change in our lives if we continued in our addiction and that we needed help. We have worked on slowly becoming more aware that change is possible and what patterns, attitudes and behaviors we wanted to change in order to decrease the suffering in our lives. Also, we have realized the need to come out of isolation and alienation to share our pain and vulnerability.

Step eight asks us to go even farther and take responsibility for the ways in which our actions have contributed to the suffering of others. Without having worked on the first seven steps, it is not likely that we would have the honesty, courage and humility to see clearly the ways in which our behavior has affected others.

### **June 15 Reflection for the Day**

Learning how to live in peace and partnership—with all men and women—is a fascinating and often very moving adventure. But each of us in Gamblers Anonymous has found that we're not able to make much headway in our new adventure of living until we first take the time to make an accurate and unsparing survey of the human wreckage we've left in our wake.

*Have I made a list of persons I have harmed, as Step Eight suggests and become willing to make amends to them all?*

### **Today I Pray**

May God give me the honesty I need, not only to look inside myself and discover what is really there, but to see the ways that my sick and irresponsible behavior has affected those around me. May I understand that my addiction is not—as I used to think—a loner's disease, that, no matter how alone I felt, my lies and fabrications spread out around me in widening circles of hurt.

It is only when we take responsibility for the consequences of our actions, that we can begin to lighten our burden of shame and guilt.

As Therese Jacobs-Stewart puts it, "Step Eight invites us to strip off the armor of our denial, to let go of rationalizing, justifying, or blaming other for our actions." Additionally, this step is not about blaming ourselves either. That is just another self-defeating trick of the ego to avoid true responsibility. She continues to point out that,

“What we need is just the right amount of remorse to be transformative. If we can feel both sorrow for the hurts we have caused and – at the same time, in the same breath – accept ourselves the way we are, then our remorse inspires change. Just the right amount does not drown us in regret or humiliate us in shame. An underlying kindness and acceptance of ourselves is necessary if we are going to make an honest list of the people we have harmed.”

Please notice that this step has two parts. First just make a list. At this point you don't have to even think about amends. Just be honest about the ways your behavior has caused any harmful consequences for others. It is only after you have the list that you need to begin thinking about being willing to make amends. That is a process in and of itself.

Mindfulness Exercise:

Think of the three most important people in your life.

For each of those individuals:

May \_\_\_\_\_ be free of suffering

May he/she be happy and well

May she /he live in peace and harmony

May I see clearly the suffering my actions have caused \_\_\_\_\_

May my remorse for this suffering deepen my compassion

May I see clearly the compassionate way to help heal the suffering my actions have caused.

Now for yourself:

May I see clearly the suffering my actions have caused me

May my remorse deepen my compassion for myself

May I see clearly how to heal the suffering I have caused myself

May I be free of suffering

May I be happy and well

May I live in peace and harmony

# *Mindful Steps to Forgiveness:*

## *Step Nine*

*Step Nine: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible except when to do so would injure them or others*

*An alternate mindful version:*

*Made direct amends to such people where possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. In addition, made a conscientious effort to forgive all those who harmed us.*

Mindfulness can help with many aspects involved in working this step. Clearly all the preparation work is essential as was discussed regarding Step Eight. Devoting the time to look clearly and honestly at our actions and taking responsibility for the consequences of our actions is essential for this step.

It may be easy to pay back money that had been borrowed or stolen. It is more difficult to make amends for lying, for lashing out in anger and frustration, for lack of compassion and consideration of another's feelings. How do you know when direct amends would injure another or yourself?

It is important to be mindful of our intentions. While a benefit of making amends may be that I gain relief and forgiveness, this is not the direct intent of this step. The intent of this step is to benefit others, and to practice compassion, humility and honesty with others and to take responsibility. The non-judgmental aspect of mindfulness is essential here as well to keep the focus on responsibility, not blame or self-castigation. What is important is to be mindful with complete honesty of the harm of my addicted behavior and to feel honestly and clearly the impact of that harm. This helps develop my compassion – the ability to feel for another and to appreciate another's pain. Step nine is not about trying to get rid of that pain, but to acknowledge that pain.

### **June 17 Reflection for the Day**

Readiness to take the full consequences of our past acts, and to take responsibility for the well-being of others at the same time, is the very spirit of Step Nine. A casual apology, on the one hand, will rarely suffice in making amends to one we have harmed; a true change of attitude, in contrast, can do wonders to make up for past unkindnesses. If I've deprived anyone of any material thing, I'll acknowledge the debt and pay it as soon as I'm able.

*Will I swallow my pride and make the first overtures toward reconciliation?*

**Today I Pray**



God, show me the best ways to make “direct amends.” Sometimes simply admitting my mistakes may make it up to someone and unload my own simmering guilt. Other times restitution may take some creative thought. May I be wholly aware that I cannot take this Ninth Step unless I develop some caring, some real concern about how others feel, along with changes in my behavior.

### **Today I Will Remember**

First I care, than I apologize.

Sometimes there is no way to make direct amends or to do so with harm to self or others. In such instances the best way may be what is often called “living amends.” Ken Griffin describes living amends this way:

“If life is a story, then living amends moves the narrative toward growth and healing and away from destruction and pain. The initial amends become the benchmark for future behavior. We see them as the point that marks the turnaround in our lives. And from there we begin to live in a way that not only doesn’t harm people and create the need for more amends but actually serves others...It means bringing the lessons of our spiritual growth into the daily activities of our lives. The way we lived as...addicts caused indiscriminate harm. There’s no way to track down every person who might have stepped in our path and been hurt over those years. So, with living amends we try to somehow balance that harm with healing. Our [mindfulness] practice and the teachings on loving kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy can be the underpinning for these amends.”

Making mindful amends means:

Deeply understanding the consequences of my behavior

Deeply feeling the impact of my behavior on myself and others

Humbly acknowledging the harm of my behavior

Being clear that my intention in making amends is to be healing

Finding a skillful way to make amends

Letting go of any attachment to the outcome (allowing others their own reaction and being willing to accept whatever their response is)

### Mindfulness Exercise:

Breathing in, I see clearly the consequences of my actions

Breathing out, I feel deeply the consequences of my actions

Breathing in, I hold this honest awareness gently

Breathing out, I hold my honest awareness in infinite compassion

Breathing in, I see the pain I have caused you clearly

Breathing out, I hold the pain I have caused you in compassion

Breathing in, I humbly acknowledge the suffering I have caused

Breathing out, I humbly listen deeply to the suffering I have caused

# *Mindful Steps to Forgiveness: Step Ten*

*Step Ten: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.*

There are 3 times to reflect on our actions: before, during and after we do something. Mindfulness encourages us to practice self-awareness in this way as does Step 10. While much of the time we only become aware of the consequences of our behavior after the fact.

Reflect on the past 24 hours and ask three simple questions:

What am I grateful for?

What have I received?

What have I given?

What difficulties have I caused?

It is important to respond to each of these without judgment, attachment or blame.

Mindfulness practice helps develop awareness before we act, or doing what is called a “spot check inventory” in AA’s *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* by becoming aware in the midst of acting. This type of spot check is truly being in the moment, being aware of what I am feeling right now, the tone of my voice, the look on my face, how the other person is reacting, my intentions. Is this action accomplishing what I really want? Is it hurting or helping? Am I going down some old, habitual, unhelpful road that always leads me off a cliff or into a dead end? Can I just stop and breathe for a moment and take a silent time out. Doing this, I can interrupt my knee jerk, automatic pilot patterns and stop unhelpful behavior before I have more amends to make.

Breathing in, I observe my reactions

Breathing out, calming my reactions

Breathing in, I observe habitual patterns

Breathing out, letting go of habit patterns

Breathing in, observe

Breathing out, calm

Mindfulness also helps before reacting, acting or becoming embroiled in old, habitual responses. This helps by doing a daily check in. How am I feeling today? What is my stress level? What is the tone of my thoughts as I review what the day holds for me? Will I be facing situations that would trigger old, unhelpful behaviors and patterns?

Reflect on the day ahead:

How am I feeling today?

How can I welcome this day as a friend?

What character assets will be most useful to me today? (sense of humor, compassion, honesty, perseverance?)

What help and support can I receive today?

### **July 5 Reflection for the Day (Gamblers Anonymous *A Day At A Time*)**

I am free to be, to do, to accept, to reject. I am free to be the wise, loving, kind and patient person I want to be. I'm free to do that which I consider wise – that which will in no way harm or hinder another person. I'm free to decide for or against, to say no and to say yes. I'm free to live life in a productive way and to contribute what I have to give to life.

*Am I coming to believe that I am free to be the best self I am able to be?*

### **Today I Pray**

Let the freedom I am now experiencing continue to flow through my life into productiveness, into the conviction of life's goodness I have always wanted to share. May I accept this freedom with God's blessing—and use it wisely.

### **Today I Will Remember**

Let freedom ring true.

# *Mindful Steps to Forgiveness:*

## *Step Eleven*

*Step Eleven: 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.*

This step is often called one of the maintenance steps. It might also be considered one of the growth steps. Maintenance conjures up images of just keeping something the way it is. I maintain my car so it doesn't break down. I maintain the roof on my house so it doesn't leak. However, this step is about more than just making sure things don't fall apart. It is about continuing to deepen awareness and contact.

In this step it also talks about "God as we understood him." For some this may mean a personal God. For others it may be contact with their own spiritual nature, with the highest source of meaning, with their deepest beliefs and/or with the interconnectedness of all things. Meditation allows us the quiet time to connect with what is deep and true within ourselves and also with what is far larger than our limited being. This allows for clarity and seeing deeply into ourselves and the nature of reality.

Throughout the day, there are many ways to practice contact with this highest source of being. I can do this by paying attention to my own thoughts and feelings. I can be aware of my connections to the people around me. I can be aware of the beauty around me. I can be aware of the suffering around me. I can simply take a moment to breathe.

Think about your day. What were some moments when you experienced this type of connection?

Remember this is a practice. In this step the word conscious is important. Conscious implies mindful intention and effort. One way of thinking about this practice is asking the question, "How can I best align intention with the highest wisdom, greatest compassion, deepest love?"

### **August 12 Reflection for the Day (Gamblers Anonymous *A Day At A Time*)**

Someone once inquired of a Zen master, "How do you maintain such serenity and peace?" He replied, "I never leave my place of meditation." Although he meditated early in the morning, for the rest of the day he carried the peace of those moments with him. Being quiet, slowing down, is one of the most difficult tasks facing most compulsive gamblers in their recovery. Action has been a way of life for so long that I have to learn all over again to slow down and listen. Beginning each day in prayer and meditation can be the most rewarding experience of my day. When I choose to take that peace and serenity with me throughout the day, the world itself seems to slow down and move at my pace, rather than spinning so fast that I'm always running to catch up.

*Will I cherish the glorious peace that comes through meditation?*

**Today I Pray**

May my days begin slowly, in quietness, and remain peaceful, as I keep my focus on what is before me to do at the moment, instead of projecting a blur of unsettling activity. As frenetic action was a symptom of my compulsion, serenity is a sign of my recovery.

**Today I Will Remember**

To allow serenity into my life.

# *Mindful Steps to Forgiveness:*

## *Step Twelve*

*Step Twelve: Having made an effort to practice these principles in all our affairs, we tried to carry this message to other compulsive gamblers.*

In other 12 Step programs, this step begins, “Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps...”. I find this difference interesting.

**As you think about these two different wordings, what does each imply to you?**

In mindfulness traditions, practice is emphasized. We practice being in the moment. We practice sitting. We practice focus on the breath. We practice observing our thoughts. Seems like a lot of practice. What are we practicing for? In some traditions we practice in order to attain enlightenment. However, there is much debate about what enlightenment is. The same might be asked about a “spiritual awakening.” What is being spiritually awake? How do you know if you have had a spiritual awakening? How long does it last? Then what?

A Buddhist story describes an interaction after the Buddha obtained enlightenment:

After his enlightenment, someone asked the Buddha, “Are you a man?”  
“No,” he replied  
“Are you a god?”  
“No,” he repeated  
“Then what are you?”  
“I am awake,” he is said to have stated.

**What does it mean to you to be awake?**

### **December 23 Reflection for the Day**

How can I tell if I have begun to be aware of my spirituality. Sometimes the discovery that we are spiritual beings manifests itself in simple, rather than complicated, evidences: emotional maturity; an end to constant and soul-churning resentments; the ability to love and be loved in return; the belief, even without understanding, that a Power beyond us controls the setting and rising sun, brings forth and ends life, and gives joy to human hearts.

*Am I now aware, as I try to practice the Gamblers Anonymous principles in all my affairs, that my perspective is wider, my view of humanity gentler, than in the self-centered misery of my gambling days.*

As we practice the 12 steps, we become more awake. More awake to ourselves. Both our joy and our suffering. Continuing to practice the steps helps us handle both ends of this emotional spectrum. Step 12 also helps by recommending the compassion practice of taking the message of hope offered by the 12 steps to others who are suffering. As we have gained in wisdom through being awake to our own suffering and followed the path to relieve our suffering, we are then instructed to share this wisdom and compassion.

Mindfulness practice and 12 step practice have encouraged the development of honest, compassion, humility and courage. These traits are the hallmarks of the spiritual awakening. As Step 12 recommends they are to be shared with others. In mindfulness practice, this is embodied in the Bodhisattva Vow to forestall personal enlightenment until all beings achieve liberation. It begins, “ Beings are numberless, I vow to save them.” Both the 12 Steps and mindfulness practice, in this way, emphasize that we are all interconnected; that my well-being cannot be separated from the well-being of all.

It is only through service to others that we can truly experience the personal transformation that allows for self-forgiveness. As we offer non-judgmental acceptance and compassion to others who are new to recovery, we also can experience non-judging compassion for our own suffering.

### **Are we there yet?**

I imagine we can all remember going on what seemed to be a long trip and asking, “Are we there yet?” It may be easy to think on practicing Step 12, “Wow, I’ve finally made it.” As tempting as that thought is, it is important to be mindful of always arriving. We are always in the process of arriving in the present moment. We are always returning to Step One, even as we practice each of the other steps. We are always returning to just the next breath.

*“Meditation is something which can always be further developed. It has no boundaries, either of width or height.”* ----- Bill Wilson, *Twelve and Twelve*