

Step Five: A Clean Slate

Those Tormenting Ghosts of Yesterday

We were all born with a clean slate. From the first day of our lives, we started to experience different emotions and those feelings had to do with the way we evolved into who we are today. Instinctively we responded to the different Threats and Comforts, of life, and these were the things that established our mental Strengths and Weaknesses. I believe, our problems can be traced back to the conditioning we experienced as we formed our Mental and Spiritual makeup. The perception we have of ourselves may be likened to a chalkboard containing every experience of our lives. If we can look at it and be satisfied that we had a good track-record, we would be comfortable with it and lead a normal life. If, however, we find ourselves on the negative side of the ledger in our formative years, we may develop abnormal feelings of guilt and shame, that triggers the beginning of the compulsion to drink excessively. In the beginning we get a temporary relief that tells us that we are fine, but it only lasts until we wake up the next morning and find ourselves in an even deeper quandary. We reach for the bottle, and again it gives us that temporary euphoria, and we repeat this process over and over until, something tragic in our lives drives us to Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) where we are encouraged to go through a process that can restore us to a more normal life. Steps One through Four are about surrender, acceptance, and discovery. Step five is about disclosure and for me, it was the gateway to how I was to live the rest of my life. After two attempts at Step Four, I was faced with the decision as to whether my future was going to be honest and meaningful, or just a meaningless facade. Fortunately, for me, I took a leap of faith and disclosed all those, so called, *tormenting ghosts of yesterday*, (12&12 pg.55) and looking back on it now, I realize that the decision to do this was the hinge pin for my thoroughness, with the rest of the steps. Had I not Cleaned the Slate at that time, I just do not see how I could have followed the spirit of truth and honesty, with myself and others that would have resulted in the peace of mind that I enjoy today. My inventory had to deal with bad, habits and deeds which had to be changed by the process suggested in steps six and seven. That was the easy part of step five. However, *those tormenting ghosts of yesterday* were another story. These were not habits, but deeds that I had done as an adolescent kid that seemed unforgivable. *No one should ever know; I would take them to the grave with me.* Mustering the strength to take that risk may have been the most crucial step forward I have ever made. My brain had been lying to me, after all; how bad could a thirteen-year-old kid be? That one decision is what I credit with giving me my life back and if I had not done it, I do not see how I could have given a good effort to the rest of the steps. I often hear members of the program that seem to resist looking deeper into their regrets and seem to build a wall of reasons why they do not need to, and I wonder if they might be caught up in the same dilemma that I was in when I took my fifth step. I wish I could reassure them that it is not worth the mental torment that it puts us through and that it may be wise to revisit that step and clean the slate. We cannot live alone with them; we must talk to someone about them. (Even A.A. old-timers, sober for years, often pay dearly for skimping this step. (12&12 pg. 56) If, you are that person, I encourage you to try to garner the strength to take that risk, and clean the slate; After all, we only live once. Let us not waste the opportunity to live a peaceful and contented life.