

The Cart Before the Horse

Step Five and Step Four

By Rick R.

When I was contemplating doing Step Four, the first thing that crossed my mind was that I was going to have to admit my faults to someone else in Step Five. The character-building part of that was no problem. I could follow the guide in the Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous) and deal with the changing of habits that were getting in the way of my spiritual development. This just meant that I should get my ego out of the way and live my life based on spiritual principles and adhere to those principles. No Problem!

The thing that made me resist taking Steps Four and Five was not my faulty habits of the past, it was what they refer to in the (The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions) 12&12, Step 5, second paragraph, "then the need to quit living by our-selves with those tormenting ghosts of yesterday gets more urgent than ever. We have to talk to somebody about them" That sentence described my dilemma exactly. I had been living with the guilt and shame of a-few Deeds that happened as an adolescent kid, and my mind was telling me that I should take them to the grave with me. Deeds cannot be erased. In the past, I got relief from the bottle, and we know where that road leads.

I was fortunate to have mentors in the program that, (although they did not know the nature of my reluctance to proceed with these steps), suggested that I did not have to follow through with Step Five if I did not want to, but I should not let Step Five stop me from doing Step Four. They went on to say, if I still felt that way after completing Step Four, I could burn it if I wanted to. Do not get the Cart Before the Horse. This gave me an option and I took it.

I proceeded to go through Step Four exactly as it is suggested in the Big Book, with the character defects and my shortcomings, and was very happy with all the revelations it provided, and when I completed that portion, I flipped a few pages over and I scribbled those tormenting ghosts of the past, in a manner which no one could read, even if they wanted to, then I closed the book and I was finished.

What happened next was life changing. I knew exactly who I would ask to take my Fifth Step with. When I finished the fourth step, the fifth step came easier. I was in a perfect state of willingness, and I unloaded all that grief that had plagued me and had blocked me from any chance of having a normal life. He was a man I could trust with the intimate details of the past. Had it not been for overcoming the fear, and taking the risk while I was engaged in the spirit of willingness and wanting to be free of all that guilt and shame, I may never have taken the rest of the steps, after all, it would have been like a house of cards at best, and I would never know the peace I have today. It would have continued to color my personality, and bar anyone from getting close to who I really am. I was not willing to risk that, so took the plunge.

Concerning these two steps, I encourage anyone who is struggling with this dilemma, not to get the Cart before the Horse. Do step four on your character defects and when you are finished with that, flip a few pages forward, then start scribbling those tormenting ghosts of the past, close the book, and TAKE THE RISK. You will not regret it. You may experience peace of mind for the first time in your life.