

A Deeper Wisdom The Twelve Steps From a Woman's Perspective



"Deeper" acknowledges that a woman's journey is one of descent. Instead of looking to gods or higher powers outside of our lives, we look deep within to reclaim forgotten aspects of ourselves.

"Wisdom" acknowledges that in our descent we rediscover the original wisdom that orchestrated our days and development in the very beginning of life. Deeper Wisdom restores us to wholeness and to a loving relationship with ourselves.

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A Deeper Wisdom

The Twelve Steps From a Woman's Perspective

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Introduction

A Personal Story

My awakening came late in time. I missed the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. I was immersed in fundamentalist traditions that kept me isolated from the political movements in the wider culture. I was dealing with the aftermath of growing up in a severely dysfunctional home, children's shelter, and orphanage—the kind of situations no one wanted to hear about because they were “so depressing.”

I was managing depression and my disheveled inner landscape with food and relationships. These habits of behavior kept me comatose until I was ready to walk through my personal past. I also finished high school and college successfully, launched a private day school, found great joy in teaching, and courageously entered a marriage. Light and darkness always dance together in our lives.

I was not alone. In circles of women I heard stories of others whose "consciousness raising" was precipitated by real life challenges. The "knight in shining armor" mythology shattered as they divorced and became the sole financial and emotional provider for their children.



They sought support at a local women's center and began to listen to women's stories, shedding the competitive attitudes of a lifetime.

They stumbled into self-help meetings and someone said "Goddess" instead of the compulsory "God" in the Twelve Steps, and they wondered how she got the courage to commit such a heretical act. Their therapists suggested they read *The Second Sex* or *The Creation of Patriarchy* and they were stunned that women were writing such powerful treatises and they knew nothing about them.

In the 1980s after my divorce, I showed up at graduate school to major in religious education, the appropriate focus for young women, only to discover that most of my classmates were "radical" women going into the ordained ministry. After graduate school, I relocated and was drawn to the local Unitarian church. I sat with tears in my eyes every Sunday listening to the preacher. Her words resonated with my deepest experience in a way that the words of male ministers had never been able to do.

In the process of awakening, I realized that aspects of the 12 Step model weren't working for me. I desired a non-shaming, non-hierarchical framework within which to wrestle with my habits of behavior. I rewrote the 12 Steps from an inner perspective, recognizing that my journey was an inward one. Instead of looking to another god or higher power outside of my life for salvation, I longed to return home to myself, to grow in knowledge and love of myself, to accept and trust myself. I wasn't interested in ascending to enlightened states of being

that involved the denial of the self. I was compelled to descend—to look deep within to reclaim forgotten aspects of myself.

Releasing the shame of a lifetime, I reached beneath my obsession with flaws, beneath the accomplishments that masked my sense of unworthiness, beneath years of alienation from myself, toward the goodness at my center. I discovered that the good was deeply embedded within me. As I embraced my original goodness, my inner spaces were cleared out and reclaimed as my own. I found rest within my own life and now accept all of myself as worthy.

From a self-possessed center, I refused to embrace any set of principles based on the belief in my fundamental sinfulness and defectiveness, or on the necessity of ego-deflation, humiliation, or the surrender of my natural impulses. Instead, I reframed the 12 Steps based on my belief in original goodness and the necessity of self-love and -trust. Each step now answers the question, “What’s good and right about me?” and affirms my natural impulse toward healing and wholeness.

As I was writing *A Deeper Wisdom*, I invited a community of recovering women to join me in the process. It is always in the company of women that we are reminded of our common heritage as women. A heritage that reaches beyond “the beginning” defined by men to the “very beginning” when the divine was imagined as woman.

We discover a courageous community of women whose experience and stories, ideas and images, creativity and outrage become healing resources for us. No longer asking the question “what’s wrong with me,” we step outside of patriarchal thought and immerse ourselves in women’s history, philosophy, theology, creativity, and recovery. Receive Gerda Lerner’s strong challenge:

To step outside of patriarchal thought means being skeptical toward every known system of thought and being critical of all assumptions, ordering values and definitions. It means being critical toward our own thought, which was trained in the patriarchal tradition. Finally, it means developing intellectual courage, the courage to stand alone, the courage to reach farther than our grasp, the courage to risk failure.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to thinking women is the challenge to move from the desire for safety and approval to the most “unfeminine” quality of all—that of intellectual arrogance, the supreme hubris which asserts to itself the right to reorder the world. The hubris of the god-makers, the hubris of the male system-builders.

We’ve been warned against exhibiting hubris (“arrogant pride”) all of our lives. Gerda Lerner supports us to be full of ourselves for the salvation of a planet out of balance and in danger of annihilating itself. In her every word, we hear the powerful affirmation, “It is right and good that you are woman. Assert to yourself the right to reorder the world. Be full of yourself!”

ADW Steps

The Rewriting Process and Outcome

*"Deeper" acknowledges that a woman's journey is one of descent.
Instead of looking to gods or higher powers outside of our lives,
we look deep within to reclaim forgotten aspects of ourselves.*

*"Wisdom" acknowledges that in our descent we rediscover the original wisdom
that orchestrated our days and development in the very beginning of life.
Deeper Wisdom restores us to wholeness and to a loving relationship with ourselves.*

The 12 Steps introduced in this book were written from an inner perspective, recognizing that life is lived from the inside out and that the most essential aspect of our human journey is an inward one. Instead of looking to another god or higher power outside of our lives for salvation, we return home to ourselves and accept the responsibility of becoming awake to and aware of our thoughts, feelings, behaviors, lives, and relationships.

The "A Deeper Wisdom" version of the 12 Steps invites us to descend—to look deep within to reclaim forgotten aspects of myself. As we descend, we notice an unmistakable design flowing from the depths of us. We notice that this flow of deep wisdom was faithful even in the midst of difficulties and apparent detours from what was healthy and good.

The journey home begins with a deep breath and the courageous vulnerability of acknowledging that we have lost our way and need guidance to find our way home. On the journey home, we are restored to peace, sanity and loving relationship with ourselves.

The ADW Steps are listed here and explored in depth in their own chapters. Take a deep breath and begin your journey home...

Step 1: Vulnerability

Caught in the swirl of my habits of behavior, I've lost touch with myself and my life has become unmanageable. I reach out for support. This is a brave action on my own behalf.

Step 2: Sanity

I have come to believe in the deep wisdom of my own inner life. I stop flailing and am restored to the sanity of a loving and respectful relationship with myself.

Step 3: Support

I turn my current situation over to the deep wisdom that flows in and through my life. One self-caring step at a time, I unravel my harmful habits of behavior and the thoughts that hold them in place.

Step 4: Self-Awareness

Turning a merciful eye toward myself, I inventory both my life-affirming and ineffective habits of behaviors, and identify the habits of thought that inspire them.

Step 5: Personal Responsibility

In the company of trustworthy allies, I celebrate my life-affirming behaviors, accept responsibility for my ineffective behaviors, and make a commitment to my transformation.

Step 6: Readiness

I am entirely ready to deepen my inner well-being by relinquishing my negative habits of behavior and cultivating new thoughts to inspire healthier behaviors and outcomes.

Step 7: Participation

My life journey is orchestrated by my own inner wisdom. In the fullness of time, I am transformed at a deeper level of my being. I actively participate in this process.

Step 8: Relationship Awareness

Certain that I love myself, I welcome clarity in my relationships. I acknowledge those who were hurt by my ineffective habits of behavior.

Step 9: Relationship Responsibility

Having forgiven myself, I take active responsibility by making amends to those I harmed except when to do so would further injure them or others.

Step 10: Accountability

Choosing to be present in my own life, I acknowledge the gifts and challenges of the day, celebrate my life-affirming behaviors, and take responsibility for my ineffective ones.

Step 11: Harmony

Through mindful reflection, I place myself in the stream of wisdom flowing through my life. I make conscious with my truest self and clearest thought.

Step 12: Connection

Having had an awakening as a result of these Steps, I practice these principles in all my affairs by living in harmony with my deepest wisdom, truest self, and clearest thought.

An Invitation

An Evolving Relationship to the Steps

We are usually in crisis when we attend our first Twelve Step meeting. While in crisis, we are usually obsessed with our negative, troubling condition. After we achieve a level of sobriety and clear thinking by abstaining from our bottom line addictive behaviors, we become aware of the formative experiences and habits of thought beneath our troubling and ineffective behaviors. We begin our quest for deeper meaning and holistic health.

Eventually we use the Steps "in all our affairs," embracing them as a tool of support in everyday life. Through each of these three stages, our understanding of the Steps evolves as illustrated by Sarah's use of the Steps at different stages of her recovery.

I. In Crisis - We are obsessed with our negative, troubling condition.

Step 1: I am powerless over my mental obsession and eating compulsion. My self-destructive use of food cannot be willed away. I came to an OA meeting

Step 2: I have come to believe that the group will restore me to sane eating.

Step 3: I let go of the obsessive focus on my eating. I will attend three meetings a week. I turn my obsession over to the group and its tools of support.

II. The Search for Meaning – We become aware of the formative experiences and habits of thought beneath our ineffective behaviors.

Step 1: I can't change the fact that I was born into an alcoholic home and that the formative experiences of my mother's helplessness and my father's violence shaped my thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. One of the ways I coped through a turbulent childhood was to eat compulsively.

Step 2: I have come to believe that healing resources are available to me. I will be restored to a loving relationship with my body.

Step 3 : I turn myself over to care of these healing resources. I spend time in a community of support weekly. Through its tools of support I learn how to listen to my body's needs and meet them in a self-caring way.

III. Practicing In All Our Affairs - We use the Steps to support us in everyday life.

Step 1: I cannot change my body's fluctuating cycles and monthly cravings for sugar.

Step 2: I believe that dietary supports are available to reduce cravings.

Step 3: I turn my cravings over to these dietary supports.

Preparing to Read

If you are in the crisis stage, work through the "Deeper Wisdom" step process with a particular habit of behavior/addiction in mind. Use this process:

1. Identify your bottom line addictive behavior. For example,

"I compulsively eat sugar."

"I compulsively use my credit cards to purchase things I don't need."

2. Define your abstinence:

"I will abstain from eating sugar one day at a time.

I will call a sponsor/friend daily to reaffirm this commitment."

"I will abstain from incurring unsecured debt one day at a time.

I will call a sponsor/friend daily to reaffirm this commitment."

If you are in Stage II ("Meaning") or Stage III ("In All Our Affairs"), allow your understanding of the Steps to expand beyond your original troubling habit of behavior. Use the situations and challenges of ordinary life as your focus while working through the "Deeper Wisdom" step process.

Imagine a woman who acknowledges the past influence on the present.

A woman who has walked through her past.

Who has healed into the present.

Imagine a woman who discovers the way home to herself.

A woman who descends into her own inner life.

Who reunites with her essential self and reclaims her natural capacities.

Imagine yourself as this woman as you read *A Deeper Wisdom*.



Step 1

A Two-Fold Acknowledgment



As Written

**We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and
that our lives had become unmanageable.**

As Rewritten

**Step 1: Caught in the swirl of my habits of behavior, I've lost touch with myself
and my life has become unmanageable. I reach out for support.
This is a brave action on my own behalf.**

I. Original Power

Men and women bring different experiences of the concept of power. For men to acknowledge their powerlessness means relinquishing the illusion of power and disconnection in which they have been saturated since childhood. This admission allows them to seek significant connection and mutually supportive relationships within a spiritual, therapeutic, or recovery context.

On the other hand, women have been admitting powerlessness most of their lives. Our access to thrones, negotiating tables, board rooms, pulpits, and presidencies has been limited. Our position has been clear. We are inferior and our power is limited. Thus the admission of powerlessness, as it has been defined by men, has not been woman-affirming.

A woman-affirming recovery encourages us to reclaim our original power. Women affirm that it is possible to remain connected to others and to have power. Women redefine power as the capacity to author their own lives, act on their own behalf, handle whatever confronts them, and gather the resources necessary to heal into the present. These capacities are fostered in community.

For men, the admission of powerlessness was essential in order to experience connection with others. For many women, walking into their first therapy appointment, women's support group, or recovery meeting is a powerful act on their own behalf.

A Reflection: Reclaiming Your Original Power

In the very beginning, the girl-child is a warrior. She is capable of carrying out any task that confronts her. She has everything she needs within the grasp of her mind and imagination. She accomplishes great things in her room, family, and neighborhood.

Whatever the challenge, she knows there is a way to deal with it. It takes no effort for her to summon up her courage, to arouse her spirit. With her courage, she solves problems. With her spirit, she changes what doesn't work for her.

She says no when she doesn't want to be hugged. She says yes when she wants to spend time with folks who love, respect, and listen to her. She takes care of herself. The power of the universe pulsates through her. She is full of herself.

Remember the powerful one you once were. It may be easier to remember the power of your pre-adolescent daughter, granddaughter, or niece. Allow her to awaken memories of a time when you were full of your power in the very beginning of life. Use your self-awareness journal to record your memories of your original power.

There are those who are threatened by the girl-child's willfulness. Whether well-meaning or abusive, they will attempt to preach it out of her. She is told: "Stubborn and Angry One, Don't be so proud and uppity. Say yes when you mean no. Pretend you don't know what you know. Pretend you can't do what you can do. . Give your anger to God. Ask the boys to help you. The world's a big and scary place for Little Red Riding Hood. Eve's daughters are small, weak, and powerless."

Eventually, the powerful one falls asleep. Occasionally she awakens to remind the woman of what she once knew. These periodic reminders are painful. The woman fills her life with distractions so she will not hear the quiet inner voice calling her to return home... to her own willfulness, power, and courage.

Years later, wise teachers enter our lives: a therapist, women's circle, or beloved friend. They remind us of what we once knew in the very beginning of our lives. No longer waiting for a deliverer to come, we take responsibility to implement our desires in the world.

No longer accepting spectator status, we choose to participate fully in our lives. Affirm your original power as you read these words:

"I am capable of carrying out any task that confronts me. I have everything I need within the grasp of my mind and imagination. I accomplish great things-in my home and neighborhood, and in the world. I am Proud and Uppity One. I am too big for my britches. I do not need the boys' help. I will be doctor or mother or whatever I want to be. I am capable. The power of the universe pulsates through me, I am full of myself."

Imagine the Powerful One awakening within you. Acknowledge her. Sculpt her. Draw her. Dance her. Reflect on a current life challenge in your Self-Awareness Journal. Call upon the Powerful One within you to support you to move through the challenge.

II. Unmanageable Lives

In the fullness of time, we hit bottom. We became dizzy, aching, depleted, lost, fat, obsessed, or bankrupt. Recognizing the unmanageability of our lives, we finally reach out for support.

1. Having lost our capacity to act on our own behalf as a result of the stupor brought about by alcohol, drugs, debt, food, or an obsessive relationship with work, child, lover, friend or co-worker, we seek help. We are limited by our habits of behavior.

"When I entered the program, I admitted I was powerless over my work addiction, which resulted in my total isolation, the destruction of my primary relationship, and the deterioration of my health. This unmanageability led me to my first meetings."

2. Having relinquished authorship of our lives, we seek help. Twisted out of shape, it made great sense to turn our lives over to lovers, jobs, causes, and religions. We are limited as a result of being estranged from our own lives.

"I came to the program after ending a dysfunctional relationship where I allowed my life and self-esteem to slide so that I was in debt, out of work, and without friends. Having no grounding in a sense of self, my life spun out of control into permanent isolation. I despaired of ever finding a firm footing from which to build a life."

3. Acknowledging our lack of resources to deal with the addiction of child, spouse, or friend,

we seek help. We are limited by our lack of knowledge and resources.

"Faced with the alcoholism of my son, I tried to save him. I dragged the family to a program to learn about the disease. I organized family and friends to meet with an intervention counselor. I was certain I was powerful enough to get him to stop drinking. Once none of these efforts bore fruit, I came to Al-Anon."

4. Acknowledging our lack of resources to deal with the past's influence on the present, we seek help. The past's intrusion into the present may manifest as recurring childhood memories; a pattern of failed intimate relationships; or as an ever-present guilt, shame and self destructive streak deposited in us by our early experiences. We exhausted all possibilities in a desperate attempt to work on ourselves. We are limited in coping with demons that seem beyond our reach.

"I cannot change the fact that I did not receive emotional nurturing from my parents. This resulted in my belief that I don't deserve to be loved. Since I can't expect love, nurture, and support, I never ask for help. I hide my neediness. When the pain becomes unbearable, I filled up the empty space inside with obsessive work, relationships, and shopping. My life is unmanageable because these things cannot fill the hole. Realizing that this hole originated in my alcoholic family of origin, I reached out to others who had discovered healing resources in Adult Children of Alcoholics. "

Reflection: Unmanageableness

With curiosity, reflect on these questions in your Self-Awareness Journal:

- Describe the "bottom" that led you to a support group, women's circle, or therapist.
- How did you experience the "bottom" in your health, finances, and relationships?
- How did you experience the "bottom" in your personal projects, dreams, aspirations?
 - Are you willing to journey home to yourself and take full responsibility for your own life and its rich potential?

III. A Two-fold Acknowledgment

Ours is always a two-fold acknowledgment. Yes, we are limited and finite *and* we are powerful and gifted. We incorporate this two-fold acknowledgment in to the first step:

1. I am limited and finite. Some things I cannot change.

We acknowledge that we are limited as a result of our habits of behavior, our alienation from ourselves, our lack of resources and knowledge, and our formative experiences. We admit: yes, we are limited; yes, there are things we cannot change; yes, we need support. To acknowledge our limits brings relief. The energy that is no longer needed to handle things beyond our control is transformed; it is now available to change those things we can change.

2. I am powerful and gifted. Some things I can change.

We acknowledge that we are powerful and gifted. There are things we can change: our life choices, our own moodiness, our response to the addiction of a co-worker or friend, the design of our own lives. We can now focus on long-ignored creative interests, authoring our own relationships, ending energy-depleting friendships, taking responsibility for our ineffective behaviors, and choosing wellness resources and communities. Courage is available to exert, initiate, and move on our own behalf.

A Meditation: At the Stream of Living Water

Turn your attention inward by taking two deep breaths. Descend into the clearing, surrounded by a sparkling stream of living water. Sit quietly on its bank and watch the faithfully flowing water. Become one with the flow. Breath into it.

Breathing in . . . I let go

Breathing out . . . Into the wise flow of life.

The stream of living water reminds us that we are limited and finite. That we cannot change some things no matter how hard we try, no matter how desperately we want to rescue or fix, or no matter how genuine our concern or profound our love.

We were not meant to carry some burdens: Life choices of a loved one. Moodiness of a friend. Addiction of a co-worker. Struggle of an adolescent. Depression of a relative. The changing nature of life. The twists and turns of the past. The unknowns of the future.

It is deeply wise to lay down these burdens, to let them go into the stream of living water, to release them into the wise flow of life. As you are reminded of a situation, concern, person, or relationship you cannot change, let it go into the stream, naming it in the quietness of your

heart. Be relieved of burdens not yours to carry.

Breathing in . . . I release _____

Breathing out . . . Into the wise flow of life.

Breathing in . . . I release _____

Breathing out . . . Into the wise flow of life.

As we let go of our futile attempts to change those things we cannot change, an abundance of energy is available to turn toward those things we can change. Ours is always a two-fold acknowledgment. Yes, we are limited and finite *and* we are powerful and gifted. There are many things we can change.

The stream invites you to step into full responsibility for your life. Courage is available to exert, initiate, and move on your own behalf in your relationships, in your work-place, and in the world. Reach into the stream and receive courage to change the things you can, naming them in the privacy of your own heart: I will design my own life. I will focus on long-ignored creative interests. I will author my relationships. I will end energy-depleting friendships. I will name my own gods. I will take responsibility for my ineffective behaviors.

Breathing in . . . I receive the courage to _____

Breathing out . . . I will act in my own behalf.

Conclude your meditation by weaving an affirmation into the breath:

Breathing in . . . I have everything I need

Breathing out . . . To let go of depleting relationships.

Breathing in . . . I have everything I need

Breathing out To choose satisfying relationships.

Breathing in . . . I have everything I need

Breathing out . . . Within the rich resources of my inner life.

IV. Practicing Step 1

Practice the first step after reading the following examples. Personalize the first step based on a past situation or a current issue.

Option I: Use a formula by filling in the blanks.

- I am limited. I do not have the necessary resources to deal with _____.

- My life has become becomes unmanageable in these ways: _____.
- I am powerful. I will reach out for resources to change the things I can.

Option II: Creatively personalize the Step inspired by the following examples, which will be used throughout Steps 1-3 to illustrate the suggested process for personalizing the Steps.

Step 1: Dysfunctional Society

I cannot change the fact that I was born into a society that idolizes a male god and prefers men. Its intense socialization process reinforced ineffective behaviors that do not support my life, including: deference to men, denigration of feminine qualities, and competition with women. I am exploring healing resources.

Step 1: Dysfunctional Family of Origin

I cannot change the fact that I was born into a home with warring alcoholic parents. I was powerless as a child over their craziness and my life was unmanageable. I am powerless as an adult over the legacy of scars I carry in my body and life as a result of those early years. The past reaches into the present, touches my life, and moves it to the place of original pain. As an adult, I am courageously walking through the past. I celebrate my courage today.

Step 1: Addictions

I cannot change the fact that I was born into an alcoholic home and that as a result, my thoughts and behaviors were shaped by my mother's helplessness and my father's violence. One of the ways I sought soothing and support was to eat compulsively. I have reached out for healing resources to walk through my past and heal into the present.

Step 1: Relationships

I cannot change the twists and turns of another's life. I become arrogant and intrusive when I presume to know what's right for anyone else and when exert effort to bring about the changes I prescribe. I celebrate my willingness to look at this behavior and move beyond it.

Step 1: Intimate Relationships

I cannot control whether my partner and I are compatible. My attempts to manipulate so his energy turns toward me are driving us both crazy. I am frantic and overwhelmed. I have no idea if he is choosing this relationship freely. I celebrate my willingness to look at this behavior and to move beyond it.

Step 1: Life

I cannot change the imperfect nature of life—that things change, that mistakes are made. When I attempt to change the changeless, my life becomes unmanageable, and I become frustrated and depleted with no available time or energy to change what I can in my own life. I celebrate my desire to accept and honor life in all its trouble and beauty, gift and challenge.

Step 1: Specific Situations

I cannot change the fact that my mother has Alzheimer's disease and I cannot know if my finite body holds that tendency within it. I become overwhelmed with fear and desperation when I entertain that possibility for too long. I celebrate my capacity to be aware of and to articulate my fear and desperation.

**Caught in the swirl of my habits of behavior, I've lost touch with myself
and my life has become unmanageable. I reach out for support.**

This is a brave action on my own behalf.

Step 2

Bring Many Names



As Written

**We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves
can restore us to sanity.**

As Rewritten

**I have come to believe in the deep wisdom of my own inner life.
I stop flailing and am restored to the sanity of a loving
and respectful relationship with myself.**

I. Coming to Believe

Overwhelmed by our own addiction or caught up in the addiction of another, we reached out to the Twelve Step community for assistance. The first step "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol that our lives had become unmanageable," was relatively easy for us to acknowledge. It was the unmanageability of our lives that prompted us to seek out a community of support.

The second step "We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity" was harder to accept. Old time members spoke of "coming to believe" in a God or higher power. This "God-talk" triggered our early attitudes, beliefs, and experiences with religion. Images of confessionals and Days of Atonement, pangs of guilt and shame, and the judgmental voices of rabbis and priests welled up within us.

Yet we desperately needed the support of the program so some of us twisted our sense of the divine into acceptable shapes. We stuffed the religious images of childhood back into the

closets of our memory, hoping to quiet the pangs of guilt and the judgmental voices of old. We thought by ignoring our religious past, we would eventually come to believe in the god espoused by the Program. Others of us left the program unable to get the god-part.

"When I entered Adult Children of Alcoholics and read the second step, I was reminded of the early Catholic vision of god the old father in the clouds with the long white beard and book of judgment. This image made me uncomfortable."

"My response to the "god-talk" of the program was mixed. One part of me was relieved to think I could rely on a power greater than myself. The other part of me was embarrassed to hear members speak of Christianity's god because it didn't offer me the comfort I yearned for as a child. Its messages were so contradictory."

Central to the practice of the Twelve Step program, however, is the importance of choosing one's own concept of "higher power." Both AA and Al-Anon give us the permission to name the god of our understanding in whatever way is helpful to us. Ask yourself the following questions as you read the passages below: What is my conception of god? Who/what is the god of my understanding?

- "Much to our relief we discovered we did not need to consider another's conception of God...our own was sufficient to effect contact." (AA's Big Book, p. XIV)
- "It was left entirely up to us what the name of God meant to us personally. We might have imagined God as a ruler or judge or as the quality of Universal Love, revealing itself in our lives. To some it might have been a personal God powerful but separate from us, while to others, God might have been thought of as an essential part of all creativity." (Al-Anon's Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 46.)

There has always been a voice in the recovery community affirming a universal spirituality and wisdom beyond gender. A search through the Big Book of AA uncovered the following inclusive images. Respond to each image through writing or drawing. Incorporate them into your prayer and meditation today.

- Universal Mind, Spirit of Nature, Spirit of the Universe (p. 12)
- All Powerful, Guiding, and Creative Intelligence (p. 49)
- Great Reality Deep Down Within Us (p. 55)
- The Mighty Purpose and Rhythm That Underlies All (p. 55)
- Presence of Infinite Power and Love (p. 56)

Although Bill Wilson's (one of the founders of AA) description of his spiritual awakening was eventually reduced to Christian constructs, its original expression did not contain traditional religious language. Reflect on the images he used to describe his spiritual awakening. Respond to them in writing or drawing:

"The room lit up with a great white light. I was caught into an ecstasy which there are no words to describe. It seemed to me...that I was on a mountain and a wind not of air but of spirit was blowing. And then it burst on me that I was a free man. Slowly the ecstasy subsided. For a time I was in another world, a new world of consciousness. All about me and through me was a wonderful feeling of Presence.

II. Reclaiming Your Original Spirituality

In the very beginning of her life, the girl-child has direct access to the spirit of life. It is as near to her as the breath that fills her. And it connects her to everything. She is not alone. Her spirit is one with the spirit of her beloved grandmother, her favorite rock, tree, and star. She develops her own methods for contacting the spirit in all things.

She climbs a tree and sits in its branches, listening. She loves the woods and listens there too. She has a special friend—a rock. She gives it a name and eats her lunch with it whenever she can. She keeps the window open next to her bed even on the coldest of nights. She loves the fresh air on her face. She pulls the covers tight around her chin and listens to the mysterious night sky.

She believes that her grandmother is present even though everyone else says she is dead. Each night, she drapes the curtain over her shoulders for privacy, looks out the window near her bed, listens for Grandma and then says silent prayers to her.

Her imagination is free for a time. She does not need priest or teacher to describe god to her. Spirit erupts spontaneously in colorful and unique expressions. God is Grandma, the twinkling evening star, the gentle breeze that washes across her face, the peaceful quiet darkness after everyone has fallen asleep, and all the colors of the rainbow. And because she is a girl, her experience and expression of spirit is uniquely feminine. The spirit of the universe pulsates through her. She is full of herself.

Eventually the girl-child will turn away from the Spirit-filled One. Her original spirituality will become confined within the acceptable lines of religion. She will be taught the right way to imagine and name god. "He" will be mediated to her through words, images, stories, and

myths shaped, written, and spoken by men. She will adopt the god she is given. It is too dangerous to rebel. If she dares to venture out of the lines by communing with the spirit of a tree, the mysterious night sky, or her grandma, she will be labeled heretic, backslide, or witch. She is told:

Prideful One, Your grandma is not god; neither is your favorite star or rock. God has only one name and one face. You shall have no gods before him. God is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. He is found in the church, in the heavens, in the holy book, not in you. God is the god of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is god of the fathers and sons, the daughters have no say in the matter. Remember: As it was in the beginning, it is now and ever shall be.

The Spirit-Filled One falls asleep. Occasionally she awakens to remind the girl-child-turned-woman of what she once knew. These periodic reminders are painful. The woman fills her life with distractions so she will not hear the quiet inner voice, calling her to return home. Years later, new teachers enter the woman's life—a therapist, a self-help group, a women's support circle, a beloved friend, or perhaps this workbook. They remind her of what she once knew:

Spirit-filled One, Your grandma is god and so are your favorite star and rock. God has many names and many faces. God is Mother, Daughter, and Wise Old Crone. She is found in your mothers, in your daughters, and in you. God is the God of Sarah and Hagar, of Leah and Rachel. She is Mother of all Living, and blessed are her daughters. You are girl-woman made in her image. The spirit of the universe pulsates through you. Be full of yourself. You are good. You are very good.

Women are reclaiming the divine feminine today. Surrounded by women from every age and inspired by their courage, we are committing the forbidden acts of naming and imagining the gods of our understanding as Goddess, Woman God, and God the Mother. Although we are not all devotees of the goddess, it was essential for us to extend our historical and theological vision to include the divine feminine.

Some find her within traditional religion in the images and stories of Eve and Mary, Sophia and Shekinah, Miriam and Esther, Naomi and Ruth, Tamar and Susanna, and of countless unnamed women. They are incorporating these women's stories into their liturgies and prayers. Others find her on the margins of patriarchal history in the images and stories of the

Goddess. They are incorporating her images into their paintings and songs, their altars and prayers, and they are weaving her ancient festivals and beliefs into their unfolding spirituality.

Inspired by a view of history that reaches beyond the beginning defined by men, women are assuming theological equality with religious traditions and reclaiming the richness of their own imaginations. We have come to believe that the theological tasks performed by men throughout the ages were not inspired by a god out there somewhere. Rather they were prompted by a very human and natural inclination to answer existential questions and to order disparate experiences into a coherent whole through religious imagination.

Humankind's religious imagination has always given birth to goddesses and gods, and to stories which attempt to make sense of our beginnings and endings. No longer held hostage by a truncated view of history or by the dominance of the Genesis account of creation, our imaginations are once again free.

Women's Stories

Notice your reactions to the following personalizations of Step 2. Do they please you or trouble you? Inspired by them, personalize Step 2 based on your beliefs.

"I have come to believe in a Sister God who stands beside me, offering support and gentle guidance. She is a peer rather than a power distant or apart from me. She holds my hand as I make the choices that shape my life. She restores me to serenity."

"I imagine Higher Power as the power at work in me and in everyone throughout the universe. I can let go into this source of empowerment. In doing so, I am not surrendering; rather, I am choosing life."

"I have come to believe in myself. I know that the voices within me of negativity, derision, and self-mocking are not my own but are the voices of my family. I believe at the very depth of me is the truth of my life. I am restored to a quietness in which my truth makes itself known to me."

"I have come to believe that communities of support are available to heal my wounds. These healing communities remind me that I am not alone. They connect us to our common humanity."

III. The Changing Face of God

As face of god changes for us, we bring our own images of the divine to the Steps. In the spirit of AA's founding principle, we reclaim our right to imagine and name the god of our understanding. These woman-affirming principles inform our "coming to believe" process:

- The Ultimate truth, wisdom, and power of the universe is far deeper, higher, wider and richer than any name or image we use to refer to it. Every name and image must be held loosely. Mystery cannot be confined in our names and images.
- Every name and image has limitations. The wounding of women as a result of the dominance of male god language must be taken into account. A time may come when a particular image is no longer useful to you. The wisdom of your process will provide another image that is more helpful. Honor the changing face of god in your life.

A Meditation: Bring Many Names

The ultimate truth, wisdom, and mystery of the Universe is far deeper, higher, wider, and richer than any name or image we use to refer to it. Mystery cannot be confined within a language. Let us bring many names...and no names at all.

Bring many names...moving us beyond the limitations of gender:

Breathing in...Deeper Wisdom

Breathing out...Source of Life

Breathing in...Community of Support

Breathing out...Sacred Breath

Bring many names . . . retaining the relational quality of the divine:

Breathing in...Loving Wise One

Breathing out...Welcoming Friend

Breathing in...Compassionate One

Breathing out...Nurturing One

Bring many names . . . weaving traditional names into an unfolding spirituality:

Breathing in...Loving Father

Breathing out...Abba

Breathing in...Wise Spirit

Breathing out...Mother-Father God

Bring many names . . . challenging the idolatry of traditional religion:

Breathing in...Goddess.

Breathing out...Woman God

Breathing in...Sister God

Breathing out...Sophia

Breathing in...A God With Breasts Like Mine

Breathing out...Mother of All Living

Bring many names and no names at all.

In the silence let us leave space for the unknown.

Breathing in...In the silence,

Breathing out...I leave space for the unknown.

IV. Restored To Sanity

Imagine being restored to financial solvency, healthy eating, abstinence from drugs and alcohol. Imagine being restored to serenity, joy, the ability to create art, the expression of feelings, and healthy relationships. Until we imagine something, it remains an impossibility. Once imagined, it becomes our experience. Imagination is essential to our transformational journey. Be inspired by Laura's vision of sanity and hope.

I am available to myself. The shadows and monsters which have haunted me dissolve as the bright good light penetrates. I develop a good vocation and am financially responsible. I recover the abandoned pieces of myself, the bits of feeling, humor, anger, grief, sexuality that I had disowned. As my dynamic feelings become more available to me, my creativity broadens and informs my work and relationships. I meet others with less judgment and more kindness. I become increasingly attentive to my own needs. I achieve physical health and balance. I sleep. I enjoy handling and eating the lovely stuff of the earth.

Imagine what sanity would look like in your particular situation. Use the following process to compose your own vision of hope:

1. Acknowledge the injury to be healed.
2. Describe what healing looks, feels, tastes, and sounds like.

1. Acknowledge the ineffective behavior to be transformed.
2. Describe what the transformed behavior looks, feels, tastes, and sounds like.

1. Acknowledge the obsessive patterns of thought or action to be lifted.
2. Describe what freedom from obsession looks, feels, tastes, and sounds like.

1. Acknowledge the depleting relationship to be relinquished.
2. Describe what life-enhancing relationships look, feel, taste, and sound like.

1. Acknowledge the damaging messages to be exorcised.
2. Describe what life-affirming messages look, feel, taste, and sound like.

V. Practicing Step 2

Practice the second step in all your affairs after reading the following examples. Continue with the issue you used in Step 1 or use another current life challenge.

Option 1: Use a formula:

- I have come to believe that (describe what you have come to believe) will restore me to (describe what "sanity" will look like in your specific situation).

Option 2: Creatively work the Step inspired by the creative personalizations below.

Dysfunctional Society

Step 1: I cannot change the fact that I was born into a society that idolizes a male god and prefers men. Its intense socialization process reinforced ineffective behaviors that do not support my life, including: deference to men, denigration of feminine qualities, and competition with women. I am exploring healing resources.

Step 2: I have come to believe that a deeper wisdom resides within me, reaching beneath my ineffective behaviors. This deeper wisdom restores me to my original power—I no longer defer to men. It restores me to my original connection—I celebrate women. It restores me to my original goodness—I embrace the rich resources within me.

Dysfunctional Family of Origin

Step 1: I cannot change the fact that I was born into a home with warring alcoholic parents. I was powerless as a child over their craziness and my life was unmanageable. I am powerless as an adult over the legacy of scars I carry in my body and life as a result of those early years. The past reaches into the present, touches my life, and moves it to the place of original pain. As an adult, I am courageously walking through the past. I celebrate my courage today.

Step 2: I have come to trust that a deeper wisdom holds my life and has been faithful to me since childhood. I have always found a way to thrive in life. I have made a choice to live that is deep and abiding. I say it's fragile, but I'm seeing how tenacious it truly is.

Addictions

Step 1: I cannot change the fact that I was born into an alcoholic home and that as a result, my thoughts and behaviors were shaped by my mother's helplessness and my father's violence. One of the ways I sought soothing and support was to eat compulsively. I have reached out for healing resources to walk through my past and heal into the present.

Step 2: I believe my deepest impulse is toward life and health. I am restored to a loving relationship with my body. I listen to its needs and meet them in a self-caring way.

Relationships

Step 1: I cannot change the twists and turns of another's life. I become arrogant and intrusive when I presume to know what's right for anyone else and when I exert effort to bring about the changes I prescribe. I celebrate my willingness to look at this behavior and to move beyond it.

Step 2: I have come to believe that a deeper wisdom is at work in his/her life and in my own. Deeper Wisdom will remind me of the way home to myself. It restores my serenity and respect for each person's sacred journey.

Intimate Relationships

Step 1: I cannot control whether my partner and I are compatible. My attempts to manipulate so his energy turns toward me are driving us both crazy. I am frantic and overwhelmed. I have no idea if he is choosing this relationship freely. I celebrate my willingness to look at this behavior and to move beyond it.

Step 2: I believe that relationships unfold according to the deep wisdom of attraction, compatibility, and intention. I trust and listen for this inherent wisdom.

Life

Step 1: I cannot change the imperfect nature of life—that things change, that mistakes are made. When I attempt to change the changeless, my life becomes unmanageable, and I become frustrated and depleted with no available energy to change what I can in my life. I celebrate my desire to accept and honor life in all its trouble and beauty, gift and challenge.

Step 2: I have come to believe that a deep wisdom reaches beneath the changing nature of life and that my own life unfolds according to its design. I am restored to trust in this organic unfolding.

Specific Situations

Step 1: I am powerless over my mother's Alzheimer's disease and whether my finite body will develop the same disease. I become overwhelmed with fear when I entertain that possibility for too long. I celebrate my capacity to articulate my fear and desperation.

Step 2: I have come to believe that my life is held by a deep wisdom that will restore me to the sanity of living this day...fully and completely.

**I have come to believe in the deep wisdom of my own inner life.
I stop flailing and am restored to the sanity of a loving
and respectful relationship with myself.**

Step 3

Restored to Wholeness



As Written

Made a decision to turn our life and will over to the care of God as we understood God.

As Rewritten

I turn my current situation over to the deep wisdom that flows in and through my life. One self-caring step at a time, I unravel my harmful habits of behavior and the thoughts that hold them in place.

I. The Wisdom of The Universe

Sitting in a Twelve Step meeting several years ago, I listened as a woman spoke about learning to trust the God of her understanding: "When I let Higher Power take charge, everything works out fine. When I'm in the driver's seat, I blow it every time." Inspired by her talk, several other women acknowledged that they were fundamentally ill-equipped to deal with life. Based on their sense of inadequacy, each one found it necessary to "surrender" to a power greater than themselves.

Later that week I sat in a women's support circle as a woman complained about the unavailability of her therapist who was on vacation: "I have to see her every week or things begin to fall apart around me. I don't seem to have what it takes to live my life without the assistance of a trained professional."

While on the book tour supporting *A God Who Looks Like Me*, I was interviewed on a religious radio show. During the call-in part of the program, the inevitable question about sin and salvation was asked: "Do you believe we are sinners and in need of the salvation God

offers?" I told the caller that my own inner wisdom was trustworthy and that it was communicated to me through my natural impulses, instincts, and intuition. I no longer needed the salvation offered by gods, higher powers, therapists, or gurus. The caller was appalled. "We can't trust ourselves," she exclaimed, "we are sinful and left to our own devices, we will mess things up every time. God is the only trustworthy one."

Convinced that our lives are not our own, we become alienated from our inner sense of what is true, right, and appropriate for us. We become experts at watching the way others live and we shape our lives accordingly. From talk show hosts, to our therapists and trainers, to the countless experts we consult to design our experience, everyone knows better than we do.

We have spent our lifetimes trying to fit into someone else's idea of what is right for us: assembling our bodies according to society's formula of the perfect woman, forming our thoughts and opinions to suit the audience, limiting our feelings to what's acceptable, and formulating our behavior and actions according to the expectations of others. We have become emotionally crippled as a result of habitually abandoning ourselves into the shapes of others. Each surrender of our feelings, our truth, our originality becomes a mini-abdication of who we are.

The central virtue in a shame-based expression of recovery is obedience to a power greater than ourselves. "Turning it over" is the shorthand used at Twelve Step meetings for the surrender called for in the third step. Being asked by the third step to turn our will and lives over to a Higher Power continues the disempowering process that alienates us from our own resources, from our own powers of self-assertion and determination.

II. Deeper Wisdom

Reminded of the truth about ourselves, we reject the dominance of cultural and religious myths and theologies that exiled willful women, portraying us as powerless victims incapable of independent thought and action, of self-determining choice, and of the successful implementation of our desires in the world.

We reject the passivity-based messages that required the surrender of our wills to the dictates of others. We embrace a woman-affirming recovery that reminds us of our original willfulness. We remember ancient women who valued their willfulness and encouraged their daughters to believe their "will" was valid and achievable in the world. We remember

ancient ways that taught women to refuse submission and subordination and applauded women for their assertiveness. Women who exerted, initiated, and moved in their own behalf in harmony with their own deep wisdom.

Inspired by the stories of old, women are turning inward—instead of looking to a God or higher power outside of our lives for salvation, we journey "home" to ourselves. Instead of ascending to enlightened states of being that involve the denial of the self, we have discovered that ours is a journey of descent: we look deep within to reclaim forgotten aspects of ourselves.

We reach beneath our obsession with flaws, beneath the accomplishments that mask our sense of unworthiness, beneath years of alienation from ourselves, toward the goodness at our center. We discover that the good is deeply embedded within us. As we embrace our original goodness, our inner spaces are cleared out and reclaimed as our own. We find rest within our own lives and accept all of ourselves as worthy.

In our descent, we rediscover Sophia, which is the Greek word for wisdom. She is a feminine aspect of the divine presented in the Hebrew scriptures. Her presence in the male pantheon of Gods has been obscured but not completely eradicated. In the Gnostic writings, considered heretical by the "orthodox" church, Sophia was present at creation for all things were conceived in feminine power and wisdom. After creation, she escorted Adam and Eve toward self-awareness.

Women are reclaiming Sophia as a representation of their own inner wisdom. No longer is "God's will" imposed from outside of their lives—wisdom unfolds from within them and is in sync with their own natural gifts and capacities. No longer available to turn their lives and wills over to Gods, gurus, and experts, they are refusing to surrender except to Wisdom's urgings. No longer abdicating responsibility for their lives, they are employing their own willfulness in harmony with Wisdom's ways.

In a woman-affirming recovery, the will is valued. We are encouraged to know our own will and to believe that it is valid and achievable in the world. Rather than surrendering to a Higher Power outside of us, we reclaim the natural resources within us. Sophia speaks to us:

“Daughter of Woman, refuse to surrender to Gods, gurus, and higher powers. Descend into your own inner life. Assert your will in harmony with its impulses and instincts.”

Include the following affirmation in your prayer and meditation practice:

"I value my will. I am self-determined. Others will not dictate the terms of my recovery journey. I design my own recovery. I will not look outside of myself for salvation. I name my own gods. I turn toward the rich sources of creative living that are within me. I move from dependency on recovery experts to self-directedness.

III. Turning It Over

We redefine "turning it over" to include a whole new set of possibilities. Most of them involve getting out of our heads and the inclination to figure things out, and finding the path to our hearts and Deeper Wisdom. Add your own alternatives to the list below and practice them this week.

- We turn the problem over to the silence of prayer and meditation. We no longer attack our problems. Rather, we listen for the voice of our Deeper Wisdom.
- Imagining her concern as a pancake, Jen flips it over to see it from a different perspective and to consider a whole new set of options for dealing with it.
- We turn the problem over to the wisdom of our support group or women's spirituality circle by going to a meeting and talking about it.
- We turn the difficulty over by talking to a wise friend. We invite her to support us in discovering the inner resources available to confront the situation.

My favorite passage in Alanon's *One Day at a Time* book of daily readings is this Emerson quotation that offers us another "turning it over" practice:

"There is guidance for each of us, and by lowly listening, we shall hear the right word. Place yourself in the middle of the stream of power and wisdom, which flows into your life. Then without effort, you are impelled to truth and to perfect contentment."

Emerson affirms that wisdom and power reside within us. Our only action is to stand in the middle of the stream that flows through our lives. Using this image, Steps 2 and 3 reads:

"I have come to believe that a deep stream of wisdom and power flows into my life. Without effort it restores me to wholeness and to deepening contentment and satisfaction with my life. I place myself in the stream of love and wisdom, flowing through my life.

How do you place myself in the middle of the stream of power and wisdom, flowing in and through your life? Add your responses to the ones below:

- I go to meetings. This is turning my life over to the Deeper Wisdom of the program. I allow what I hear to impact my life.

- I choose to be myself with no judgment and blame. I choose to unconditionally love myself. In the past, the stream has been cluttered with debris of self-judgment.
- I let go of the outcome, allowing the stream to flow unencumbered.
- I place myself in the middle of the stream by reducing the number of activities I engage in and by making it okay to be quiet and listen.
- I place myself in the middle of the stream by reading spiritual sources, attending lectures, and listening to tapes that teach me new ways of responding to familiar situations.
- When stuck in the familiar ways, I place myself in the babbling brook. I am refreshed. Unwanted anxieties flow away downstream. I am restored to harmony.

IV. An Encounter With "A Deeper Wisdom"

The use of "deeper" in the title and pages of this book acknowledges that a woman's journey is one of descent. Instead of looking to a god or higher power outside of our lives, we look deep within to reclaim forgotten aspects of ourselves.

The use of "wisdom" acknowledges that in our descent we rediscover the original Wisdom that orchestrated our days and development in the very beginning of life. Deeper Wisdom restores us to wholeness and to a loving relationship with ourselves and others.

Turn your attention inward by taking a two deep breaths. Imagine standing in the clearing deep within the forest of your being. You are surrounded by ancient redwoods. Everything breathes in the forest. Take two more deep breaths.

Breathing in . . . The breath rises from the earth beneath me.

Breathing out . . . I release the breath into the air around me.

Breathing in . . . I savor the breath of life

Breathing out . . . As it flows in and through and around me.

A circle of benches appears. Sit on one of the benches. You are waiting for Wisdom to arrive. She may appear as someone you know: a wise teacher, grandmother, sister, or friend. Or Wisdom may visit as a mythic figure: the Wise Old Woman, the Mother of all Living, the Goddess, or the Divine Girl-Child.

In the fullness of time, Wisdom walks into the circle and sits across from you. Her eyes invite you to speak: "Tell me about the confusing situation, troubling relationship, disturbing memories, or current life challenge. Tell me about the situation consuming your thoughts."

Remain in the quietness of your imagination and describe your life challenge in your imagination or journal.

In the stillness following your presentation to her, ask Wisdom to answer a specific question about the situation you described or to offer a creative strategy for addressing your challenge. If an image forms, draw it. If a message wells up from the depths of you, write it down. Do not edit what comes. Simply write it down. When finished with your dialogue, thank Wisdom for her support. Weave an affirmation into the breath:

Breathing in . . . I come home to the rich resources of my inner wisdom.

Breathing out . . . Home is always waiting.

V. Personalizing Step 3

Whatever you come to believe in Step 2 will shape the decisions made in Step 3. For example:

- If you have come to believe in a community of support (Step 2), you will choose to spend time in that community to experience its healing resources (Step 3).
- If you have come to believe that intuition is your guiding light (Step 2), you will develop ways of listening to it and acting on its guidance (Step 3).

Personalize Step 3 based on what you have come to believe. Redefine "turning it over" to reflect your beliefs and experience. Continue with the same issue you used in Steps 1-2 or use a new one.

Option 1: Personalize one of the following three templates.

- I choose to 'turn it over' to _____(describe the god of your understanding) by _____, _____, _____.
- I place myself in the middle of the stream of wisdom and power that flows through my life by _____, _____, _____.
- I have made the following healthy decisions: _____, _____, _____.

Option 2: Creatively work the Step inspired by the personalizations below.

Dysfunctional Society

Step 1: I cannot change the fact that I was born into a society that idolizes a male god and prefers men. Its intense socialization process reinforced ineffective behaviors that do not

support my life, including: deference to men, denigration of feminine qualities, and competition with women. I am exploring healing resources.

Step 2: I have come to believe that a deeper wisdom resides within me, reaching beneath my ineffective behaviors. This deeper wisdom restores me to my original power—I no longer defer to men. It restores me to my original connection—I celebrate women. It restores me to my original goodness—I embrace the rich resources within me.

Step 3: I turn toward healing resources to restore me to wholeness and to, one day at a time, choose life affirming behaviors that support my recovery and life: I no longer defer to men. I celebrate women. I embrace the rich resources within me.

Dysfunctional Family of Origin

Step 1: I cannot change the fact that I was born into a home with warring alcoholic parents. I was powerless as a child over their craziness and my life was unmanageable. I am powerless as an adult over the legacy of scars I carry in my body and life as a result of those early years. The past reaches into the present, touches my life, and moves it to the place of original pain. As an adult, I am courageously walking through the past. I celebrate my courage today.

Step 2: I have come to trust that a deeper wisdom holds my life and that has been faithful to me since childhood. I have always found a way to thrive in life. I have made a choice to live that is deep and abiding. I say it's fragile, but I'm seeing how tenacious it truly is.

Step 3: I choose to create support systems to hold me as memories are brought to surface and as thoughts and ineffective behaviors are triggered. I spend time each week in a supportive community to hear its healing words and to learn its tools of support. I now have the tools with which to face anything that comes along. I am no longer powerless. I am learning new ways of being, thinking, and expressing feelings.

Addictions

Step 1: I cannot change the fact that I was born into an alcoholic home and that as a result, my thoughts and behaviors were shaped by my mother's helplessness and my father's violence. One of the ways I sought soothing and support was to eat compulsively. I have reached out for healing resources to walk through my past and heal into the present.

Step 2: I believe my deepest impulse is toward life and health. I am restored to a loving relationship with my body. I listen to its needs and meet them in a self-caring way.

Step 3: I spend time in a community of support weekly. There I am reminded of the tools of support available to empower me to feel my feelings and show up for my life. I am creating a safe home in which I feed myself nurturing meals.

Relationships

Step 1: I cannot change the twists and turns of another's life. I become arrogant and intrusive when I presume to know what's right for anyone else and when I exert effort to bring about the changes I prescribe. I celebrate my willingness to look at and move beyond this behavior.

Step 2: I have come to believe that a deeper wisdom is at work in his/her life and in my own. Deeper Wisdom will remind me of the way home to myself. It restores my serenity and respect for each person's sacred journey.

Step 3: I turn _____ over to the wisdom of his/her own process. I will not arrogantly intrude. Theirs is a sacred journey. Across the distance, I honor and respect ____'s sacred journey.

Intimate Relationships

Step 1: I cannot control whether my partner and I are compatible. My attempts to manipulate so his energy turns toward me are driving us both crazy. I am frantic and overwhelmed. I have no idea if he is choosing this relationship freely. I celebrate my willingness to look at and move beyond this behavior.

Step 2: I believe that relationships unfold according to the deep wisdom of attraction, compatibility, and intention. I trust and listen for this inherent wisdom.

Step 3: I turn my script of the way the relationship should unfold over to the deeper wisdom. I choose to spend my time listening to this wise inner voice. I let go of the outcome.

Life

Step 1: I cannot change the imperfect nature of life—that things change and mistakes are made. When I attempt to change the changeless, my life becomes unmanageable and I become frustrated and depleted with no time or energy to change what I can in my own life. I celebrate my desire to accept and honor life in all its trouble and beauty, gift and challenge.

Step 2: I have come to believe that a deep wisdom reaches beneath the changing nature of life and that my own life unfolds according to its design. I am restored to trust in this organic unfolding.

Step 3: I choose to accept life as it is, with its bursts of light, unpredictability, and surprise. I choose to be grateful for the beauty of life just as it is. I choose to acknowledge my gratitude for life with my sponsor and at my meetings.

Specific Situations

Step 1: I am powerless over my mother's Alzheimer's disease and whether my finite body will develop the same disease. I become overwhelmed with fear when I entertain that possibility for too long. I celebrate my capacity to articulate my fear and desperation.

Step 2: I have come to believe that my life is held by a deep wisdom that will restore me to the sanity of living this day...fully and completely.

Step 3: I turn my future over to the faithful stream of wisdom, flowing through my life. Without effort, I flow toward truth and perfect contentment one day at a time.

**I turn my current situation over to the deep wisdom that
flows in and through my life. One self-caring step at a time,
I unravel my harmful habits of behavior and
the thoughts that hold them in place.**

Steps 1, 2, & 3

Letting Go of Over-Responsibility



Step 1: I am not responsible for the swirling thoughts, feelings, behaviors and actions of others. I become dizzy when I step into anyone's swirl.

Step 2: I have come to believe that Deeper Wisdom is at work in their lives. Deeper Wisdom restores me to the serenity of my own life and reminds me of the way home.

Step 3: I turn others over to the wisdom of their own life-process. I will not violate their intellectual, spiritual, and emotional boundaries. Across the distance, I choose to honor and respect their sacred journeys.

I. Caught in the Swirls

In the very beginning of life, you were acquainted with the exquisite natural resources of your breath, body, and inner life. You breathed deeply into your belly. You loved your body. You were in touch with the wisdom within your own life. Over time, however, the girl-child becomes disconnected from the "home" within her.

Caught in the swirls of others, twisted into the shapes of others, and depleted by the demands of others, she becomes outer-directed and loses touch with herself. Her breath becomes shallow. She ignores her body. She looks to saviors for salvation and validation, forgetting the rich resources within her. Estranged from her own life, she becomes susceptible to the swirls of others.

A swirl is any relationship or person; religion, cause, or dogma; food or drug; activity or project outside of oneself that becomes the controlling or organizing focus of one's time, energy, and attention. Women's "swirls" range from pleasing boyfriends/girlfriends to rescuing alcoholic children, from supporting partners' careers to meeting the body-beautiful

demands of the culture, from addictions to compulsive distractions, and from searching for the “perfect” self-improvement regimen to fulfilling the expectations of new age gurus. Swirling requires disengagement from our bodies—we ignore our organic needs; from our breath—being out of breath with no time to catch our breath; and from our inner life—being out of touch with ourselves and not knowing what’s really going on. And yet our swirling doesn’t stop until we’re ready.

Swirls have a life and purpose of their own. They are held within a trustworthy process. We swirl until we lose our breath and bearings, until we become dizzy. Unable to eat or sleep, fragile and shaking, we become willing to journey home to ourselves and take full responsibility for our own lives and awesome potential. Hallie describes her swirls:

My primary swirls have been trying to manage other people’s lives. At the end of college, instead of getting my life ready for my own future, I took on my first husband as my fix-it cause. I encouraged him to get a job, found him an apartment, and helped him apply to college.

After the breakup of that marriage, I stopped swirling for a while. I got in a camper and traveled with my dog for two years. I rediscovered my spiritual center. I was at home with myself. But I didn’t know how to bring that peace with me when I re-entered a relationship. It didn’t take long to get caught in another rescuing swirl.

I was truly dizzy and my life out of balance when I joined a woman’s support group. I was fearful for my alcoholic stepson’s life. I couldn’t sleep and cried a lot. I kept trying to figure out some solution to hand him. After months of panic and craziness, it dawned on me that I was not handling my own life. By swirling in his life, I was jeopardizing my own health, sanity, friendships, and professional commitments.

In the fullness of time, we become dizzy from swirling; our lives ache from being twisted out of shape; and our spirits become depleted from servicing others with our energy and attention. Weary, we long to return home, yet have forgotten the way. We reach out to a coach, therapist, or self-help group. We are offered information, insight, and tools of support. We are inspired by the experience, strength, and hope of others, who are turning toward their own lives.

II. Grounded in Our Own Lives

When we are caught up in the swirls of others, they become a burden to us. Settled and grounded in the serenity and responsibility of our own lives, we are free to support others in ways that enhance them and do not dizzy or burden us. Practice Steps 1, 2, and 3 daily until they become deeply embedded in your relationships. Focus on a past or current swirl.

Step 1: I am not responsible for the swirling thoughts, feelings, behaviors and actions

of _____. I become dizzy when I step into his/her swirls.

Step 2: I have come to believe that Deeper Wisdom is at work in his/her life. Deeper Wisdom restores me to the serenity of my own life and reminds me of the way home.

Step 3: I turn _____ over to the Wisdom of his/her own process. I will not violate _____'s intellectual, spiritual, emotional boundaries. Across the distance, I choose to honor and respect _____'s sacred journey.

Step 1 Acknowledgment

I am not responsible for the swirling thoughts, feelings, behaviors and actions of others. I become dizzy when I step into their swirls.

Step 1's acknowledgment reminds us that we are limited and finite, that there are some things we cannot change no matter how hard we try; no matter how desperately we want to rescue, fix, or work things out; no matter how genuine our concern or profound our love. It also reminds us of the organic consequences of stepping into the swirls of others—we become dizzy.

Personalize Step 1's acknowledgment by naming the particular person, describing the nature of their swirls, and outlining the ways you become dizzy: *I am not responsible for the swirling thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and actions of _____. I become dizzy when I step into his/her swirls: _____, _____, and _____.*

Step 2 Acknowledgment

I have come to believe that there is a Deeper Wisdom at work in his/her life and in my own. The Deeper Wisdom restores me to the serenity of my own life.

Step 2's acknowledgment invites us to remember the god of our understanding. The use of "deeper" acknowledges that a woman's journey is one of descent. Instead of looking to a god or higher power outside of our lives, we look deep within to reclaim forgotten aspects of ourselves. The use of "wisdom" acknowledges that in our descent we rediscover the wisdom that orchestrated our days and development in the very beginning of life. Deeper Wisdom restores us to wholeness and to a loving relationship with ourselves and others.

Personalize the acknowledgment by naming the swirl and using metaphors in harmony with your own beliefs: *I have come to believe a Deeper Wisdom/God/Goddess is at work in _____'s life and in my own. Deeper Wisdom/God/Goddess restores me to the serenity of my own life and reminds me of the way home.*

Step 3 Acknowledgment

I turn ___ over to the wisdom of their own process. I will not violate ___'s intellectual, spiritual, emotional boundaries. Across the distance, I honor and respect their journey.

Step 3's acknowledgment invites us to take responsibility for the ways we have trespassed the lives of others. When we get caught up in the swirls of another we assume we know what's best for them. We trespass their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

We choose against arrogantly intruding into someone else's life-process. It is impossible for us to know the Deeper Wisdom for another person's life. Step 3 invites us to lay down responsibilities we were not meant to carry, to "turn them over" to a wisdom deeper than our own, to let them go into the wise flow of life.

Step 3's acknowledgment invites us to accept that even between the closest human beings infinite distances continue to exist. It invites us to love the distance by seeing the "other" whole and against a wide-open sky!

Personalize the acknowledgment: *I turn _____ over to the Wisdom of his/her own process. I will not violate _____'s intellectual, spiritual, emotional boundaries. Across the distance, I choose to honor and respect _____'s sacred journey.*

III. Practicing Steps 1-2-3

Are you caught in the swirl of pleasing your boyfriend, rescuing your adult children, supporting your partner's career, meeting the body-beautiful demands of the culture, searching for the "perfect" self-improvement regimen, or fulfilling the expectations of a new age philosophy or guru? Are you whirling in chaos not your own, losing touch with your breath and body, and the grounding center within you?

Befriend the richness within you by reclaiming your natural resources. Redirect your energy away from the "swirling" patterns of old toward adventures of self-discovery. Recognize each impulse to step into the life of another as an indication of disconnection from yourself. Learn to pause, notice the disconnection without judgment, and then return home, making conscious contact with your breath, woman-body, and inner life. Allow Jane's example inspire you to release and let go:

Step 1 Acknowledgment: I'm not responsible for the swirling thoughts, feelings, behaviors and actions of my alcoholic son. I become exhausted when I step into his swirls to try to rescue him. I neglect work responsibilities because he consumes my thoughts and time.

Step 2 Acknowledgment: I have come to believe that a deeper wisdom is at work in his life and in my own. He will find his own way in the fullness of time. Wisdom will restore me to the serenity of my own life and will remind me of the way home to myself and to the fulfillment of my own personal responsibilities.

Step 3 Acknowledgment: I turn my son over to the wisdom of his process. Across the distance, I honor and respect his sacred journey. I will not violate his boundaries by opening his mail, listening to his conversations, or monitoring his money.

Women's Stories

Janet: I do not have the time or energy to get caught up in the swirls of my past. My current life demands my energy. I do not need to resolve every unpleasant occurrence of my past before I can choose to live in the present. Whenever I begin to obsess about my past life, I will re-establish conscious contact with my breath and body, and the grounding center within me. I will toward one of these life-projects:

- Centering on my breath.
- Playing in my garden.
- Taking the time to read.
- Spending time with my creative projects.

Renee: I do not have the energy to focus my thoughts, time, and energy on my ex-lover any more. This depletes me of the energy I need to take to care of myself. His life is none of my business. Whenever I begin to get caught up in my ex-lover's life, I will re-establish conscious contact with the grounding center within me. I will turn toward one of these life-projects:

- The launch of a fitness program that includes daily walk-runs and yoga.
- The development of my career and the daily goals set for myself.
- Relating responsibly to my widening circle of friends.

Karen: I will not be diverted from the projects in my life by the swirl of making senseless comparisons between my life and those of my friends and associates. If others have something in their lives that I want and can reasonably attain, I will act to get it for myself, rather than feeling victimized. Whenever I am tempted to get caught up in the swirl of useless comparisons, I will re-establish conscious contact with my own life. I will turn toward one of these life-projects:

- Increasing the number of social contacts in my life;
- Taking the risk to sign up for a ceramics class;
- Putting in regular work on my dissertation topic.

I am not responsible for the swirling thoughts, feelings, behaviors and actions of others.

I become dizzy when I step into anyone's swirls.

I have come to believe that Deeper Wisdom is at work in their lives.

Deeper Wisdom restores me to the serenity of my own life and reminds me of the way home.

I turn others over to the wisdom of their own life-process.

I will not violate their intellectual, spiritual, and emotional boundaries.

Across the distance, I choose to honor and respect their sacred journeys.

Steps 4 & 5

Merciful Consciousness



As Written

Step 4: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Step 5: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

As Rewritten

Step 4: Turning a merciful eye toward myself, I inventory both my life-affirming and ineffective behaviors, and identify the habits of thought that inspire them.

Step 5: In the company of trustworthy people, I celebrate my life-affirming behaviors, accept responsibility for my ineffective behaviors, and make a commitment to my transformation.

I. Overview of Step 4

The fourth step invite us to come out of denial. We are encouraged to turn our awareness toward ourselves. We've been released from shame and self-rejection. Certain that we love ourselves, we welcome awareness and honesty. Our awareness of ourselves is informed by self-love and tenderness. It embraces the two-fold nature of our lives, our incredible goodness and our vulnerable humanness.

A fourth step inventory must always include a celebration of our goodness and a recognition of our the origins and an acceptance of responsibility for our ineffective behaviors. In one sense, the process of recovery is a continuous and fluid fourth step.

Searching: We have begun the descent into the wealth of our lives. Slowly, we reconnect with the original goodness and strength buried beneath years of alienation from ourselves. Step 4 calls us to accept all of ourselves as worthy. Embracing our wholeness, we move forward as powerful.

Fearless: We do not expect danger as we descend into the depths of our lives. We expect clarity about the nature of our ineffective behaviors. We are unafraid because the "god of our understanding" is no longer a punishing judge. The 4th and 5th Steps are less intimidating as we imagine the non-punitive face of the divine.

Moral: Many of us postpone taking a "moral" inventory for years unable to free ourselves of the lingering images of childhood that shamed and accused us. Karen describes her first response to Step 4: "I have disliked Step 4 as written and interpreted by much of the Twelve-step community. It has reminded me of the humiliating confessions of my Catholic girlhood."

Freed of the alien energies of shame and guilt, we become reacquainted with the spontaneity and goodness within us. Our inner spaces have been cleared out and reclaimed as our own. We have become self-possessed. Healed of our deep sense of unworthiness, we no longer look at our ineffective behaviors as evidence of our fundamental sinfulness. This does not excuse us, however, because we accept our responsibility for the consequences of our ineffective behaviors. In Step 4, we embrace the responsibility that is ours.

II. Taking An Inventory as a Ritual of Empowerment

Step 4 offers us an opportunity to turn consciousness toward our challenges and concern, and the resources available to address them. A Step 4 inventory may be taken around specific issues and relationships:

- An inventory of your relationship to work, money, and finances.
- An inventory of your relationship to a specific person.
- An inventory of your relationship to healing resources and tools of support.
- An inventory of your relationship to religion/spirituality.

An Inventory at the End of a Relationship

An inventory acknowledges the two-fold message of life—both its trouble and its beauty. Below is a sample inventory taken after a relationship had ended. It was taken to bring clarity by uncovering recurring ineffective behaviors and closure by letting go of the guilt

and resentment. Jennifer made four columns on a piece of paper and labeled them:

1. Ineffective Behaviors: I am finite and limited.
2. Life affirming Behaviors: I am powerful and gifted.
3. Resentments and Disappointments: There were challenges in the relationship.
4. Gratitudes: There was beauty in the relationship.

Jennifer then spent time with each column, listing her ineffective behaviors in column 1 and life-affirming behaviors in column 2. Then she listed the resentments/disappointment that had accumulated during the relationship. And finally, the process led Jennifer to list her gratitudes for the relationship. After completing each column's reflection, she read the column aloud to herself. At the end of each list, she wrote (and said) these words:

Column 1: I forgive myself.

Column 3: I let go.

Column 2: I celebrate myself!

Column 4: I am grateful.

Column 1 - Ineffective Behaviors: I am finite and limited.

1. I ignored my initial concerns about our incompatible definitions of monogamy.
2. I didn't eat regularly. My moodiness was erratic and confused my lover. ***I forgive myself.***

Column 2 - Life-Affirming Behaviors: I am powerful and gifted.

1. I was willing to be his ally and partner in the process of our growth and change.
2. I asked for a room and a bed of my own, recognizing my need for space within a relationship. Eventually, I listened to the inner child and her needs. ***I celebrate myself.***

Column 3 - Resentments and Disappointments: There was trouble in the relationship.

1. He never apologized or acknowledged the hurtful consequences of his behavior.
2. He watched TV late into the night as his drug of choice at the end of busy days. ***I let go.***

Column 4 - Gratitudes: There was beauty in the relationship.

Through the pain, I have a deeper understanding of my addiction to betrayal, involvement with compulsive people, and desire for a creative relationship that is not prescribed by the conventional marriage and family script. ***I am grateful.***

III. Practicing Step 4's Rituals of Self-Empowerment

Choose one (or more) of the following inventories to practice this week.

1. An Inventory of an Old Relationship

To let go of your guilt and resentment.

To uncover the recurring ineffective behaviors you bring into intimate relationships.

Column 1- Ineffective Behaviors: I am finite and limited.

- I was too dependent on my last lover. I expected him to love me when I couldn't love myself. He bailed me out with loans when my business was in trouble. .
- I did not express negative emotions. I wasn't able to tell him how much his temper outbursts upset me and how disappointed I was that we couldn't do projects together as equals. He had to be in charge, with me taking orders. I was too submissive.

I forgive myself.

Column 2 - Life-affirming Behaviors: I am powerful and gifted.

- I committed myself totally to the relationship. I was faithful in every way. I embraced his children and worked hard to be their friend and ally.
- I treated him with love and respect at all times. I told him my positive feelings. I was genuinely myself with him. I was fun to be with. I supported him in every way.

I celebrate myself!

Column 3 - Resentments and Disappointments: There was trouble in the relationship.

- His temper tantrums when he was under stress.
- His unwillingness to work in therapy on the marriage issue.
- His bossiness when we did projects together. He gave orders.
- His rigidity. His inner life was under lock and key. He wouldn't share his feelings.

I let go.

Column 4 - Gratitudes: There was beauty in the relationship.

- I am grateful for his unconditional love of me.
- He helped me to take better care of myself by calling doctors sooner.
- He changed my pictures of men for the better.
- He was fun to be with. He enjoyed dancing. He had a sense of humor.

I am grateful.

2. An Inventory of Your Relationship to Healing Resources

To highlight the obstacles that keep you from utilizing these resources.

To encourage you to use them in your ongoing recovery process.

Column 1 - Ineffective Behaviors: I am finite and limited.

- I don't share with at meetings. I rarely make program calls.
- I watch TV rather than meditate to quiet myself.
- I isolate from my old friends when I feel uncomfortable with myself.
- I read the newspaper in the morning rather than the ODAT or my affirmations.

I forgive myself. (or I am becoming willing to forgive myself.)

Column 2 - Life affirming Behaviors: I am powerful and gifted.

- I am a serious participant in a women's spirituality and recovery group.
- I regularly attend one other ACOA meeting.
- I share a recent recovery experience with one or two other people after the meetings.
- I begin and end my day with the serenity prayer.
- I reflect on the first three Steps every night before I fall asleep.

I celebrate myself! (or I am becoming willing to celebrate my goodness.)

Column 3 - Resentments and Disappointments: There are challenges.

I resent it when my recovery friends remind me that I have the inner resources to deal with challenges. I want them to handle it for me. I resent the truth sometimes. It disrupts my numbness and won't allow me to fall asleep again.

I let go. (or I am becoming willing to let go.)

Column 4 - Gratitudes: There is beauty.

- I am grateful to the women in the spirituality group for their support and trust.
- I am grateful to my co-sponsor for sharing her wisdom in a gentle manner.
- I am grateful that the dysfunctional relationships in my adult life provide clues to the childhood dysfunction in my family of origin.
- I am grateful for all the tools of the program because when I remember to use them, they always offer comfort and sustenance.

I am grateful. (or I am willing to become grateful.)

3. An Inventory of Your Behaviors When Attracted to a Potential Lover

A member of Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous took a honest look at her relationship addiction and her ineffective and life-affirming choices.

Column 1 - Ineffective Behaviors: I am finite and limited.

- As a result of being attracted to man in Al-Anon, I tried to control his impression of me by how I dressed and what I shared in meetings.
- I looked through old sign-in pads to see if he had attended previous meetings. I felt desperate and lonely.
- I attended a meeting for six months where he was a regular even though the meeting was not convenient to my schedule.

I forgive myself. (or I am becoming willing to forgive myself.)

Column 2 - Life affirming: I am powerful and gifted.

- I faced great fear and shame to talk to him instead of running away.
- I eventually made a decision to withdraw from the group where he is a regular.
- I was able to secretary a meeting effectively even when he was in the room giving a share that was very painful for me to hear.

I celebrate myself! (or I am becoming willing to celebrate my goodness.)

Column 3 - Resentments: There were challenges.

- He turned away from me after a brief period of moving toward me.
- He turned up at my regular meeting after I left his meeting and shared about the growing intimacy in his current relationship and of his desire to start a family.
- He immediately got involved with someone else after deciding to break up with me.

I let go. (or I am becoming willing to let go.)

Column 4 - Gratitudes: There were gifts.

- Since we are incompatible on many levels, it's a blessing we didn't initiate a relationship. It would have been painful to break up, if I could have at all.
- He triggered my desire to see my mother after many years of no contact.
- Through my obsession with him, I learned a lot about my relationship addiction.

I am grateful. (or I am willing to become grateful.)

4. An Inventory of Your Relationship With an Alcoholic Relative or Friend

Many women enter Al-Anon caught in the swirls of a drug or alcohol addicted relative or friend. By the time they reach Al-Anon, they are depleted. Their own lives have been set aside as they have devoted all of their time and energy in to rescue their friend or child.

Column 1 - Ineffective Behaviors: I am finite and limited.

- I put down my son's intellectual gifts.
- I tried to control and manipulate his choice of a mate.
- I let his acting out dominate my life for many years.
- I am easily wounded by things he says and does.
- I trespass his thoughts and behaviors by overly analyzing his words and actions.

I forgive myself. (or I am becoming willing to forgive myself.)

Column 2 - Life affirming Behaviors: I am powerful and gifted.

- I love him unconditionally. I never gave up on him.
- I gave him structure and a role model for a strong woman.
- I offered him the choice to make something of his life and he took it.
- I made him go to class and finish high school.

I celebrate myself! (or I am becoming willing to celebrate my goodness.)

Column 3 - Resentments: There were challenges.

- He got drunk and acted out at my wedding to his father.
- He is dishonest about his feelings.
- He doesn't confide in me.
- He is clean and sober WITHOUT the program.
- He is oblivious to the wounds inflicted on him by his family of origin.

I let go. (or I am becoming willing to let go.)

Column 4 - Gratitudes: There are gifts.

- He is now clean and sober.
- We have a loving relationship.
- He graduated from high school.
- He and his mate are going to have a baby.
- He is financially independent.

I am grateful. (or I am willing to become grateful.)

IV. Ritual of Self-Empowerment: Steps 1, 2, 3 and 4

Although the Fourth Step stands on its own as a powerful self-empowerment tool, it is most often taken after we have worked the first three Steps around a particular issue or person. An adult child of an alcoholic parent used Steps 1-4 to begin her journey into her past to heal into the present. Use her step work to inspire yours.

Family of Origin: Steps 1, 2, and 3

Step 1: I cannot change the fact that I was born into an alcoholic family. I cannot change the fact that my family never touched nor said "I love you" or "You are enough." I feel powerless when present events trigger memories and I feel the pain in my heart more intensely.

Step 2: I have come to believe that a transformational community exists and that as I share my experience, strength, and hope within that community, I purge the demons that haunt my mind as I hear these words: "You deserve love. You are enough. You are not to blame."

Step 3: I place myself in the stream of power and wisdom flowing in and through my life. I use the tools and strength of the 12 Step community to help me face what comes along. I listen to and learn from the experience, strength and hope of others. I share my own truth.

The Behaviors I Learned in My Family: A Step 4 Inventory

Column 1 - The Ineffective Behaviors I Learned:

- I don't communicate my feelings in close relationships.
- I try to take care of other people's needs to the exclusion of my own.
- I didn't learned to express anger. It was safer to be quiet .
- I minimize my problems. It is difficult to ask for help.
- I tried to get good grades so that my parents would love me and pay attention to me.

I forgive my family. (or I am becoming willing to forgive my family.)

Column 2 - The Life-affirming Behaviors I Learned:

- I learned financial responsibility at age twelve. I am self-sufficient. I am reliable.
- I cherish and value the education my parents provided for me. I worked hard and got good grades. I am successful.
- I strive for and meet my goals. I have high standards for myself.
- I am a survivor. I am good in a crisis. I am sensitive to others.

I celebrate myself! (or I am becoming willing to celebrate my goodness.)

Column 3 - The Resentments I Have:

- I resent not having had a normal childhood.
- I resent that I was hit by my parents for being an exuberant kid.
- I resent that my parents did not show affection and did not touch us lovingly.
- I resent that I never heard the words, “I love you.”

I let go. (or I am becoming willing to let go.)

Column 4 – Gratitudes: The Gifts of My Childhood:

- I am grateful that my mother served as a role model of a working woman, who contributed to the financial concerns of the household.
- I am grateful that Dad taught me how to dance.
- I am grateful they took us on vacation. They never dumped us somewhere and went off on their own. They were young and active.

I am grateful for the gifts of my childhood. (or I am willing to become grateful.)

V. The Fifth Step—No More Secrets

The fifth step invites us to celebrate our life-affirming behaviors and accept responsibility for our ineffective behaviors. Most women simply read their inventory to a trusted therapist, step group, or sponsor in a relaxed setting. Imagine sharing your Fourth Step while sitting beside the stream of wisdom or next to your god or goddess. Be inspired by these stories:

I shared my 4th step with my sponsor. I asked her to listen without giving feedback—to witness in respectful silence. After each section, I took a deep breath and with certainty, spoke the ritualized ending.

In a group setting we listed our positive and negative attitudes, character traits, and actions. We shared our inventories aloud and I felt tremendous support for my honesty and effort. A twenty-pound bag of garbage was lifted from my shoulders. It gave me clarity.

I shared my deepest secrets with my therapist and partner. My trust has grown. I’ve been released of the burdensome sack of guilt and shame I’ve carried throughout my life. I now share deeply with others and find that this intimacy attracts others willing to open to me.

I am “fifth stepping” all the time with my lover. I cannot be intimate unless I am willing to be vulnerable and honest. As I turn the dreaded and unspeakable over to him, I experience an exquisite vulnerability, which expresses my expanding self-trust and willingness to love and be loved. I have allowed light to spill on myself. My own eye is now merciful.

VI. Vow of Faithfulness and Self-Commitment Ceremony

The fifth step also invites us to make a commitment to our own lives and transformation. One way to do this is to write a "Vow of Faithfulness" and share it during our fifth step session or during a self-commitment ceremony. Vow composition and ceremony design are explored in more depth in *I Promise Myself* (Conari Press).

Amy attended a Vow of Faithfulness Retreat. From early childhood her one all-consuming fantasy had been of standing under the "chupah" (wedding canopy) with her beloved. Tired of this fantasy and the relationship addiction it inspired, she included the chupah in her private "Vow of Faithfulness" ceremony at the Retreat, witnessed by her new women friends.

Amy utilized familiar symbols and ritual components from her Jewish background and reshaped them. Here is the outline of her ceremony:

Queen of the Universe

I light the Shabbat candles and chant the blessing in Hebrew, including G-d's name as female and as "Queen of the Universe." At the end of the prayer, I change the word "shabbat" to "ha yom," making the blessing for "today."

The Chupah and The Vow

Four women hold the corners of the chupah over my head while I recite my vow:

I, Amy, vow that:
As I so love the moon,
Shall I so love myself.
And as I so love the sound of running creek water,
Shall I so love myself and the sound of my Inner Voice.
And as I so love special stones
And a certain way sun falls through the leaves,
Shall I so love what makes me special to myself.
I will remember that by myself
I have everything I need and
I am enough.

The Walk About

Walk around photographs of myself three times while reciting the Hebrew prayer I invented, addressed to G-d: "Anachu ovdeem b'yah-chad." ("We work together.")
I ask the women: "Nachon?" (Right?) All the women reply: "Nachon!" (Right!)

The Blessing

With my foot, smash the tree-bark, representing the broken years of my life.
Together we exclaim: L'chaim! (To life!)

Steps 6 & 7
In The Fullness of Time



As Written

Step 6: We were entirely ready to have God remove these defects of character.

Step 7: Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

As Rewritten

Step 6: I am entirely ready to deepen my inner well-being by relinquishing my negative habits of behavior and cultivating new thoughts to inspire healthier behaviors and outcomes.

**Step 7: My life journey is orchestrated by my own inner wisdom.
In the fullness of time, I am transformed at a deeper level of my being.
I actively participate in this process.**

I. Entirely Ready

At a chaplaincy training seminar, we were told this story: "A camper noticed a moth pushing, straining, and struggling to get out of its cocoon. It was a disturbing sight to the camper, and when she could take it no longer, she extended the tiny slit-opening of the cocoon. The moth was freed and fell to the ground and died. The camper was devastated. Her intention had been to help."

Inspired by the story, I investigated the moth's life. Its life-cycle from egg to adult moth is orchestrated by a remarkable inner mechanism of "right timing" that leads to each new transformation. This timing allows for the larva's emergence to coincide with an adequate food supply, the outgrowing of its skins, and the location of the cocoon where it will remain in until the conditions are ready for its survival as a fully-formed adult moth.

The struggle against the walls of the cocoon supports the moth's metamorphosis by strengthening its wings and releasing fluids to enhance its coloring. The camper, unaware of the trustworthiness of timing and the sacredness of struggle in the moth's cycle, cut open the cocoon. This premature release led to the death of the moth. Swirling in her own discomfort, she had arrogantly intruded in the moth's life process. Yet the moth was content in the midst of its own trustworthy process, a process essential to its development.

Like the moth, you are an emerging healthy adult whose process is orchestrated by a finely tuned inner timing. In the fullness of time, when a behavior begins to hamper, press, and squeeze, you twist and turn until you burst out of the old skin and are freed at a deeper level of your existence.

Each time a memory or feeling is ready to be acknowledged out of decades of denial, it gnaws its way to the surface through a dream or a sensory memory, through a movie, or by reading the stories of others. In the fullness of time, it is remembered or felt. The trustworthy timing of your Inner Wisdom leads to each new transformation when you are ready. Attending your first support group or 12 Step meeting was an indication of being "entirely ready."

II. Defects of Character and Shortcomings

Imagine hearing Eve's words at your church, synagogue, mosque, or women's circle:

As the Mother of all Living, I pick the fruit of life. It is good and satisfies hunger. It is pleasant to the eye and offers pleasure. It is wise and opens the way to self-discovery and understanding. Those among you who are curious, who lust for life in all its fluidity, dare with me—bite into your life and the fullness of its possibility.

After Eve's words are read, the elder women give an apple to the first person in the row. As the crone hands you an apple, she looks into your eyes and says,

Take and eat of the good fruit of life. You are good. You are very good. Bite into the apple and savor its sweetness, and pass it to the next person with the same words.

After all have partaken of the good fruit of life, the closing blessing is spoken,

Open to the depths of goodness within you. Believe in your goodness. Celebrate your goodness. Live out of the abundance of who you are as a child of life. Affirm the original goodness of your children and your children's children until the stories of old hold no power in their hearts. Bite into your life and the fullness of its possibility.

As we dismantle the throne of God, traditional religion's hierarchically-based answers to the fundamental questions of human existence must be reformulated from our own experience. As the image of the big guy in the heavens, scrutinizing our every thought and action dissolves, and as his system of rewards and punishments, keeping us in line, is disbanded, women are reframing traditional religion's definitions of sin, salvation, and surrender and recovery's definitions of defects of character.

Ascent has been the journey of men. They erect ladders and monuments, reaching toward the heavens. They name their gods "Higher Power" and "God of the High Places." They have accurately defined their sin as pride, the willful pursuit of power, and the desire to be god.

In a society that worships a male god, these have not been our sins. Godlikeness has never been an option for us. Our place has been clearly secondary and supportive. The root of our sin has been an alienation from ourselves and an accompanying self-critical spirit. We have internalized the systems of thought and belief that take for granted our defectiveness.

We sin by our own participation in a hierarchical paradigm that at its foundation is not woman or life-affirming and by our cooperation in the maintenance of this paradigm in the training of our daughters and granddaughters. We sin each time we ask "what's wrong with me;" each time we waste a precious resource of time, money, or energy in our frantic search for remedies; each time we twist ourselves out of shape in response to an "expert" opinion.

We sin as we hide our bodies beneath layers of clothing, our natural processes beneath layers of secrecy, our sexuality beneath layers of passivity, our opinions and thoughts beneath layers of conformity, and our feelings beneath layers of restraint. We sin as we hide the reality of our lives beneath layers of seething resentment in response to and in avoidance of the persistent scrutiny of the culture, of god, and eventually, of ourselves.

As we redefine sin, we rethink the remedies put forward to alleviate our sinful condition as well. Men's sins have been pride and grandiosity so it makes sense that ego-deflation, denial of self, and "surrender to god's will" have been the accepted remedies. Our alienation from self and all-consuming self-critical attitude require a conversion of sorts. We turn inward — instead of looking to a god or higher power outside of our lives for salvation, we journey "home" to ourselves.

Instead of ascending to enlightened states that involve the denial of self, we have discovered that ours is a journey of descent—we look deep within to reclaim forgotten aspects of ourselves. We reach beneath our obsession with flaws, beneath the accomplishments that mask our sense of unworthiness, beneath years of alienation from ourselves, toward the goodness at our center. We discover that the good is deeply embedded within us. As we embrace our original goodness, our inner spaces are cleared out and reclaimed as our own. We find rest within our own lives and accept all of ourselves as worthy.

No longer scrutinizing every facet of our beings to figure out what is wrong, we celebrate ourselves as powerful and gifted children of life. Refusing to speak of defects of character, we affirm: “I am good not bad. I am not defective. I was taught ineffective behaviors that do not support my recovery. As I heal into the present, I reconnect to my original goodness. From it my life-affirming behaviors flow.”

III. The Steps 6 and 7 Process

We become entirely ready to have our injuries healed and ineffective behaviors transformed. Our recovery journey is orchestrated by Deeper Wisdom. In the fullness of time, we are ready for transformation. We must actively participate on the transformational process by practicing the Step 6 and 7, outlined and practiced below.

Step 6—Determining Readiness

1. Identify Your Ineffective Behaviors
2. Identify the Underlying Thought Structure
3. The Readiness Statement

Step 7—The Request

Step 6—Determining Readiness

1. Identify Your Ineffective Behaviors

List four of your ineffective behaviors. Rank them according to "readiness." As you list them, you will know which ones you are ready to work on. For example:

1. I do not take care of myself: I do not go to the doctor. I do not eat regularly. I ignore aches and pains. I live as if I am going to die at 50.
2. I do not trust myself in relationships.
3. I ignore danger signals in relationships and live in potentiality, not reality.
4. I am easily seduced by charming males.

2. Identify the Underlying Thought Structure

Focusing solely on behaviors will not reach deep enough to bring about sustainable transformation. We must uncover the formative events that shaped our thoughts. These thoughts hold our behaviors in place. What formative event shaped the #1 ineffective behaviors you listed in the exercise above? For example:

"I was neglected as a child. It was not safe to tell anyone that my body hurt, my head ached, or that I was hungry. I was told I would die if I told the truth. I now tell the truth in my life. There is an old belief that this is dangerous and will lead to death."

3. The Readiness Statement

Write a statement of your readiness. Within your statement, list the healing resources and tools of support available to support your readiness. For example:

"I am ready to take care of my body and life with tenderness and care. I am ready to see a doctor every six months to honor my body and health."

Step 7—The Request

Write a request (prayer) to your Deeper Wisdom, Intuition, Community of Support, or whatever image you embraced in Step 2 as your "higher power." For example:

"Dear Deeper Wisdom, as I turn toward the resources available to me, I trust the faithful process of healing and transformation to unfold. I ask that I might, one day at a time, learn to take care of my body with care and constancy."

IV. Practicing Step 6 and Step 7

Use the following examples of the Step 6 and 7 process to support your practice with a challenge of your own. Identify the ineffective behavior you are ready to see transformed.

1. Perfectionism

Ineffective Behavior: I have outrageously unrealistic expectations of myself. I must produce perfect articles that inspire the admiration of my colleagues. In relationships, I must be the other person's best-loved friend. In my inner life, I must have a perfect recovery, boundless energy, and unending creativity.

Formative Experience: My family desperately needed to look good on the outside because it was so sick inside. I was not allowed to make mistakes. I was criticized no matter how well I did at school or home. I could never be, do, or have enough.

Readiness: I am ready to let go of perfectionism. I will make a conscious effort not to be the best at work. Every time I have the urge to become #1, I will stop and reflect on the origins of this compulsion. I shift to new thoughts: I no longer need to be the best to have a place and voice on this earth. I will ask a friend to listen to me.

Request: Deeper Wisdom, give me faith that I will be loved even if I am not perfect. Promise me that if I live a normal, human life, I will not disappear to the people most important to me. Help me find compassion for my failings and limitations. Do not let me pass on this curse of perfectionism to my children. Let me and my children sincerely believe we are enough, even wonderful, just as we are.

2. Caretaking By Giving Advice

Ineffective Behavior: I give advice to others.

Formative Experience: It's hard for me to simply witness another person's problem or pain. I must do something about their problem or take away their pain. I was raised with people who gave unsolicited advice and who were not capable of simply being witnesses. I didn't learn how to help another except by giving advice. I still use advice-giving to avoid the feelings that come up when I truly listen.

Readiness: I am ready to stop giving advice. I am ready to listen to others, knowing I cannot fix their problem or take away their pain without feeling out of integrity with myself. I am willing to learn to be a caring witness and to accept the uncomfortable feelings that come up with a measure of detachment.

Prayer: Breath and the Wise Center you bring me into contact with, I ask that you stay with me as I endeavor to be an open and caring witness of my friends and family's lives without giving advice unless it is asked for.

3. Judgmental of Others

Ineffective Behavior: I'm judgmental.

Formative Experience: I lived with parental judgment in my childhood. We learned to judge others as a way to hold ourselves above them, to boost our fragile self-esteem.

Readiness: I am ready to stop judging others as morally, intellectually, and emotionally inferior to me. I have strong self-esteem, which comes from my center and does not need to be propped up by denigrating others. I can learn from and love others when I withhold my judgments of them. This I am ready to do.

Prayer: Breath, be my companion as I endeavor to suspend my judgments. Support me to hold myself in high esteem and enable me to accept others on their own terms.

V. Ritual of Self-Empowerment: Steps 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7

Although the Sixth and Seventh Steps are most often taken after we have worked Step 4, there is no one right way to move through the Steps. As we become familiar with them and practice them in all our affairs, we weave them into our ongoing life-journey to experience clarity and transformation. Be inspired by Josie's use of the Steps 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7 as her own rituals of self-empowerment and transformation.

As a member of Al-Anon detached from the swirls of her alcoholic son, she was confronted with her own ineffective behaviors. Initially she took the first three Steps concerning her son, she now personalized them to deal with her relationship to food and deepened her reflection in Steps 6 & 7.

Steps 1, 2, and 3

Step 1: I am powerless over my misuse of food for a multitude of purposes other than nutritional sustenance. Sometimes my life is unmanageable as a result and sometimes it seems altogether manageable. But always in the background a voice says I should be able to control these eating impulses. I am powerless over that voice. I am powerless over the fact that a manifestation of this obsession is disassociation from my body. I use food to substitute for feeling. Perhaps the admission of my powerlessness over my misuse of food will free me in many of the ways taking the first step around my son's alcoholism did.

Step 2: I believe that a healing community exists which can help me change my ineffective behavior with respect to food and my body. I have come to believe that there is an appropriate time in my life for each area to be worked on. I have given up the notions that I must work on them all at once and that if I'm not working on my distorted body image all the time I can't be happy or well. I have come to believe in progress not perfection.

Step 3: I choose to trust in my own unique timetable for addressing my food disorders and body disassociation. I make a decision to spend one hour a week reflecting on this issue and focusing on how to work the Steps around it. During this hour I will listen to my Inner Voice. I choose to pay attention to this Voice and to follow where it leads me.

Steps 6 and 7

Behavior: I use food inappropriately to dull my feelings and escape from pain. I am inactive. I don't exercise regularly. I get depressed. I don't reach out for the resources I know I have. I

isolate. Something feels deeply wrong about expressing my sadness, fears, and feelings. I only reach out when I'm feeling positive, not negative. I use food, TV, and depression to keep from feeling and from acknowledging those parts of myself that I feel are inappropriate.

Formative Experiences: As a child, I was expected to be wonderful. My parents were busy, people who had no time for me and no tolerance for me to be other than perfect. I got it at an early age that I was only acceptable when I was sweet, happy, singing, and perfect. As a pubescent girl full of inappropriate and imperfect thoughts and feelings, I retreated to my room so that I wouldn't infect those thoughts and feelings on my parents. My parents were more than willing to have me stay in my room and only emerge when I was "civilized."

Readiness: I am ready to share my shameful thoughts and feelings with my support community, my mate, program friends, and therapist. I am willing to be aware when these escape-tendencies overwhelm me and I will make an effort to use the resources of music, nature, and spiritual community to heal myself of the shame. I am ready to share some of this with my sponsor.

Prayer: Sacred Spirit, fill me with the courage to face into the dark places, to reach out for the support I know is there. Help me to break the isolation. Help me to acknowledge the thoughts and feelings. Keep me from using my inappropriate covering-up tactics. Help me to celebrate all the dark, frightened parts of myself which are as sacred as the wise, witty, and charming parts.

**I am entirely ready to deepen my inner well-being
by relinquishing my negative habits of behavior and
cultivating new thoughts to inspire healthier behaviors and outcomes.**

**My life journey is orchestrated by my own inner wisdom.
In the fullness of time, I am transformed at a deeper level of my being.
I actively participate in this process.**

Steps 8 & 9 Taking Responsibility



As Written

Step 8: Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

Step 9: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible except when to do so would injure them or others.

As Rewritten

Step 8: Certain that I love myself, I welcome clarity in my relationships. I acknowledge those who were hurt and those who were enriched by my habits of behaviors.

Step 9: Having forgiven myself, I take active responsibility by making amends to those I harmed, wherever possible, except when to do so would further injure them or others.

I. Taking Responsibility for Our Lives and Their Impact on Others

In Step 4, we acknowledged both our life-affirming behaviors and our ineffective behaviors. As we continue our journey out of denial, Steps 8 and 9 encourage us to turn our awareness toward the consequences of these behaviors in the lives of others. Certain that we love ourselves, we risk and welcome clarity and honesty in our relationships. There are several possible ways to make amends.

1. As we come out of denial, our current transformation is an amend to ourselves and others for the ineffective behaviors of our past. In the words of a member of Adult

Children of Alcoholics:

"I have changed many aspects of my life. I seek healthy relationships and compassionate people. I've stopped overworking and over-drinking. I have started to speak honestly. I have learned how to set limits, ask for help, and exercise my voice. My current life is an amend for my former life."

2. A direct amend may involve an acknowledgment to the person or persons who bore the brunt of our ineffective behaviors. A participant shares her experience:

"During my college years I acted out of my own self-rejection in jealousy toward women. One friend bore the brunt of this ineffective behavior. I was jealous of her beauty. In insidious ways I kept her from interacting with my friends and colleagues. I was afraid she would take their love and attention away from me. Her presence seemed life-threatening at times.

Years later as I understood the effect of the formative experiences of abandonment and institutionalization, I remembered her. She had been a supportive friend through high school and college and then, as a result of the strain of my jealousy, we had drifted apart. I made direct amends to her in a letter, acknowledging my jealousy and the ways I had acted out toward her. I thanked her for her support and wished her well in her current endeavors."

3. An amend may involve compensation for injury or loss. Through a fourth step, an Al-Anon member became aware of the ways she'd neglected her children as a result of addictive relationships with men. She used the family's limited resources of food and money to bail out the abusive men who came and went from their lives. At times she didn't have lunch money for her children. As she worked through the Steps and slowly disengaged from the swirls of men, she chose to compensate her children by making a firm commitment to three life-affirming behaviors:

- She arranged a non-negotiable weekly food shopping trip as a family outing.
- She prepared daily lunches in gratitude for the children's presence in her life.
- She started a savings account for each child as a tribute to their future dreams.

II. Practicing Steps 8 and 9: Rivals

Competition among women is woven into the fabric of a society that prefers men. We compete with each other for the attention of men. Inundated with cultural and religious attitudes fostering rivalry and suspicion among women, we lose touch with our original

connection to the women in our lives. They function merely as fill-in companions between lovers. Inundated with homophobic messages, we become even more deeply alienated from each other and the organic resources available in women-centered relationships. Like the steady drip of an IV inserted at birth, we absorb attitudes and fears designed to keep us separate. Add your stories to these:

"I was groomed to compete with women. I feel tremendous jealousy. I don't know how to release myself from it. At the very core of it, I am afraid that our closeness will violate the tenet that I have to compete. And I fear that if I get too close to women, I will be attracted to them and then my lesbian phobia comes up."

"I was taught that "men only want one thing," namely sex with a beautiful woman and that a woman had to be cooperative to keep a man. This left me out and I have been jealous of attractive, outgoing women all my life. I tend to judge attractive women as superficial and assume they look down on those of us not as beautiful. These judgments and assumptions have kept me from being open to women and from experiencing healing through our common experiences."

"My most comfortable relationships today are with women. Yet I painfully acknowledge that for most of my life, I had to feel more attractive than a woman to include her in my life. She must pose no threat and there must be no possibility of competition between us. I instantly sized up women, and when I felt out of their league, I became intimidated and jealous. I expressed these feelings indirectly through gossip and a critical attitude."

At some point during our work together I encourage women to inventory their attitudes, relationships, and behaviors toward other women. Steps 8 and 9 offer us an opportunity to confront these behaviors and move beyond them. A participant in the Deeper Wisdom recovery circle took the challenge and looked at her personal and professional relationships with women. The Eighth and Ninth Steps guided her through this reflection.

Step 8: List those you have hurt through jealousy, gossip, triangular affairs, passive-aggressive anger, and diminishing the reputation of another.

"I was jealous of my friend's wife while visiting their home. She is a very organized cook and hostess. I felt smothered by it all and wanted to spend time with my friend, rather than with her. I expressed my jealousy indirectly through criticism and smoldering anger."

Step 9: Determine if making direct amends (acknowledgment to the person) is appropriate.

If yes, write a statement of your intention to carry out the amends in specific terms.

“When we are together again I will make amends to myself by acknowledging my need to spend more time with my friend. He has been in my life for many years and time with him is important to me. I will acknowledge that some of the discomfort we experienced was due to my feelings of inadequacy in the face of her competence. I will also make a practice of expressing appreciation for her gifts.”

If no, determine how you might make amends through our changed behaviors in the present.

“My colleagues and I struggle to keep from feeling inferior so we compete with each other for men’s attention. I will make amends by giving women support rather than striving to receive the approval of men at work. I will affirm our solidarity.”

III. Ritual of Self-Empowerment: Steps 6, 7, 8, and 9

Although the 8th and 9th Steps stand on their own as a powerful self-empowerment tool, most often they are taken after we’ve worked Steps 6 and 7. An Al-Anon member, after listing and ranking her ineffective behaviors, determined she was ready to change her habit of indirect communication. She continued in Steps 6 and 7, by listing those harmed by this ineffective behavior and determining if direct or indirect amends were due in Steps 8-9.

Steps 6 and 7: Indirect Communication

List to Determine Readiness

- 1. Indirect communication - Entirely Ready!**
2. Bodily neglect- Ready.
3. Isolation- Working on readiness.
4. Repressed anger and sadness- Not Ready.

Behavior: Indirect communication with people. When I think or feel something, I keep silent or drop hints, hoping people will get what I mean. I deal with my anger or outrage when something doesn't feels right by nagging my loved ones with accusation and blame.

Formative Experiences: I learned to communicate indirectly from the behaviors of my family of origin. As a child, I was not encouraged to say “No” if something did not feel right to me. I was not encouraged to discover how I really felt or thought. I was told how I ought to feel and think. To stray from the shoulds was terrifying. As a child I was not safe stating my needs or wants. I survived by meeting the needs of others.

Readiness: I am ready to express who I am and what I need, feel, and think. I trust that I am held by my support community and my sense of worth and confidence. I trust that as I learn to express myself I will not be abandoned or shamed. I trust the ADW process to assist me to transform my indirectness into more direct, honest ways of relating and living.

Steps 8 and 9: Those Splattered by Indirect Communication

Harm: My husband and children bear the brunt of my indirectness and repressed emotions. My language is full of self-righteous blame, which leaves scars. When I become overwhelmed by my responsibilities and commitments, I ignore my well-being while attending to the family, which leads to episodes of my irrational ranting and raving. This is the indirect way I act out my repressed anger.

Direct Amends: I have acknowledged to my husband the inappropriateness of my habit of nagging. I have also acknowledged my inappropriate intrusions into my daughter's life.

Indirect Amends: I have made the most substantial amends by making changes for the better within myself. I am more present with my emotions. I am learning to be more assertive about my needs. I have taken the blaming talk out of my language and I am learning to communicate with my loved ones with greater clarity and honesty.

IV. Ritual of Self-Empowerment: Steps 6, 7, 8, and 9

A member of Debtors Anonymous looked at her relationship to money using Steps 6 and 7. She then listed those who bore the brunt of her ineffective behaviors in Step 8, and determined if direct or indirect amends were called for in Step 9.

Steps 6 and 7: Finances

Ineffective Behaviors: I do not utilize my resources well. I spend compulsively for instant gratification at restaurants and movies. My essential needs go unmet. I end up with no prudent reserve to buy contact lenses and work shoes. I am unable to carry out my financial responsibilities to my daughter. Deprivation and instant gratification go hand in hand—I deprive myself of the experiences I need to round out my life.

Formative Experiences: In my family of origin, there was never enough love, money, or attention so my attitude became "it won't be there later, so use it now." As a result of

my mom's alcoholism and the sex perversion of my step-father, I learned to numb out feelings in any way I could. Because my mom was addicted to her husband, she couldn't buy the things I needed; only my step-father was free to use the money. His snack food and pornography stashes were always well stocked. I grew up feeling cheated. I was determined to never again feel deprived. Yet, I ended up deprived anyway because I never developed a self-caring discipline around the use of money.

Readiness: I am ready to stop acting out of a pattern of deprivation. I can take care of myself by looking further ahead than the moment at hand. I will utilize the tools of support made available to me in Debtor's Anonymous. I will continue to attend meetings, meet with my budget support group, make program calls before I spend compulsively, and one day at a time, face into my financial obligations.

Steps 8 and 9: Those Splattered by Ineffective Financial Behaviors

Harm: My daughter lives with her dad and my patterns effect them long distance. They both bear the brunt of my behaviors. I don't consistently pay child support, which limits her standard of living. Folks from whom I borrowed and never repaid have been effected by my behaviors. The pain of these consequences keeps me committed to recovery.

Amends: I have thanked my ex-husband for his patience and understanding. I am taking Steps to rectify the child support situation. I am making amends to all of us by being in Debtors Anonymous and working my program which means:

- Being willing to abstain from compulsive spending and debting.
- Developing a spending plan in order to move out of financial vagueness.
- Keeping records of all my spending in a clear and concise manner.
- Working towards solvency and living in abundance.
- Moving out of under-earning and underachieving.

**Certain that I love myself, I welcome clarity in my relationships.
I acknowledge those who were hurt by my ineffective habits of behaviors.**

**Having forgiven myself, I take active responsibility by making amends to those
I harmed except when to do so would further injure them or others.**

Step 10

The Gift and Challenge of Life



As Written

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

As Rewritten:

Choosing to be present in my own life, I acknowledge the gifts and challenges of the day, celebrate my life-affirming behaviors, and take responsibility for my ineffective ones.

I. Ordinary Life is Interesting Enough

In the very beginning, the girl-child is interested in herself and involved in self-motivated adventures. She moves through each day with an exuberant strength, a remarkable energy, and a contagious liveliness. Every experience is filled with wonder and awe. It is enough to gaze at the redness of an apple, to watch the water flow over the rocks in a stream, to listen to the rain dance, to count the peas on her plate.

She is a natural explorer of everything in her world. Life is her teacher, her challenge, and her delight. She is never bored. There is always another adventure and project to turn toward. Her ordinary life is interesting enough.

As she grows, this vitality dies. From her first reading of Sleeping Beauty, she longs to be delivered from ordinary life and transported to the realm of fairy tales. She turns away from the Vital One she once was. Her intimate connection to life's unfolding is severed. No longer is ordinary life her challenge, inspiration, and delight; it is boring. She waits for a savior to come along and rescue her from "ordinary life."

She longs for human saviors: "if only" she had a different partner, job, or family; a life-changing insight or treatment; a big lottery win. She longs for divine saviors: "if only" a vision from heaven, a miracle, a definite word from god/goddess/higher power through her therapist or guru. Her life remains on hold as she waits for the deliverer to come. Eventually, she needs a drug of some sort—alcohol, a lover, an adrenaline rush—to feel what she once felt spontaneously in the midst of her ordinary life.

Step 10 reminds us of what we once knew: "Vital One, you move through life with an exuberant strength, remarkable energy, and contagious liveliness. Your ordinary life is interesting enough. It will be your teacher, healer, challenge, inspiration, and delight. Embrace it with respect. Express it with all the colors of the rainbow. Trust its lessons above the prescriptions of experts. Your ordinary life is good. It is very good."

As we take a daily Step 10 inventory, we discover what we once knew—ordinary life is interesting enough. And to our surprise, we encounter Gratitude in the midst of working, playing, crying, laughing, and needing, while surrounded by red apples and spilt milk, vacuum cleaners and computers, ordinary women and men, dogs, cats, and vets, and rivers flowing with water not wine.

Embrace your ordinary life, whatever its wrapping,
for in the embrace you will hear the whisper of Gratitude.
Listen for her in the ordinary activities of your day,
in the ordinary encounters with loved ones,
and in the ordinary challenges that rise to greet you each morning.
She speaks from the depths of you, in the voice of your ordinary life.

II. A Daily Inventory

A daily inventory invites us to reflect upon the two-fold nature of life: its blessing and its challenge. A daily inventory invites us to take responsibility for our two-fold response to life: life-affirming behaviors based on gratitude and ineffective behaviors based on resentment.

Taking a daily inventory lightens our load as we travel through life, We take care of business each day. Thus the moment is no longer cluttered with accumulated resentment, guilt, and unfinished business. Taking a daily inventory reminds us that our lives, our precious ordinary lives, are our teachers, healers, and challenge. It is the curriculum life offers us. All we need to heal, learn, and grow is made manifest within our own lives.

Look back on your day: acknowledge both life's blessing and its challenge, and take responsibility for your response to life. Just as you did to prepare for the 4th Step, make four columns on a large piece of paper. Label the columns:

1. Ineffective Behaviors: I am finite and limited.
2. Life affirming Behaviors: I am powerful and gifted.
3. Resentments and Disappointments: There were challenges today.
4. Gratitudes: There were gifts today.

After completing your daily inventory, read each column aloud to yourself. At the end of each list write (and say) these words:

Column 1: I forgive myself. (or I am becoming willing to forgive myself.)

Column 2: I celebrate myself! (or I am becoming willing to celebrate my goodness.)

Column 3: I let go. (or I am becoming willing to let go.)

Column 4: I am grateful. (or I am willing to become grateful.)

III. A Daily Tenth Step—Examples to Inspire You

Daughter of Woman, sustain interest in your own life.

Embrace it as your teacher, healer, and challenge.

Welcome its ordinary moments of beauty and grace with gratitude.

1. Jessica's Tenth Step

Ineffective Behaviors: I am finite and limited.

I didn't eat regularly today.

My moodiness was erratic and confused my children.

I forgive myself. I choose to take better care of myself tomorrow.

Life-Affirming Behaviors: I am powerful and gifted.

Today I was reminded of my goodness: I responded to music, my son's smile, and my husband's touch. I truly heard my friend's voice and felt heard by her. I looked at the sky and sighed a deep sigh. I cleaned my house until it pleased me. I kept my center.

I celebrate my willingness to live in the moment.

Resentments and Disappointments: There was challenge today.

My husband seldom apologizes for his ineffective behaviors.

I let go. As I let go of resentment I discover life-affirming strategies for my challenges.

Gratitudes: There was blessing today.

I walked with a beloved friend today. We share the stuff that really matters so easily with other. This is truly a gift.

I am grateful for the blessing of my friend today.

2. Julia's Tenth Step

Ineffective Behaviors: I am finite and limited.

Today it was difficult to accept constructive criticism from my boss.

I forgive myself. I receive my boss as my teacher and challenge and extract every lesson life has to teach me through him. When there's nothing more to learn, I'll move on.

Life-Affirming Behaviors: I am powerful and gifted.

Today a man called to express appreciation for something I said that gave him conversation an insight into his relationship with his daughter who is my age.

I celebrate my willingness to share my life experiences with people.

Resentments and Disappointments: There was challenge today.

I'm disappointed I didn't get an A+ review from my boss.

I let go. As I let go, I discover creative strategies for my job challenges.

Gratitudes: There were gifts today.

Today was my weekly massage date. This is the best treat I give to myself.

I am grateful for the blessing of my life today.

3. Sharon's Tenth Step

Ineffective Behaviors: I am finite and limited.

Today I gave my sister unsolicited advice instead of listening to her non-judgmentally.

I forgive myself. I choose to receive my sister as my teacher and challenge. She remind that her life is her own to lead. She will ask for support when she wants it.

Life-Affirming Behaviors: I am powerful and gifted.

Today I became aware of my effectiveness as I noticed the way my students respond to me when I allow them their "own shape" with a minimum of structure and control.

I celebrate myself my capacity to teach and my willingness to allow creative chaos rather than repress the natural curiosities and abilities of my students.

Resentments and Disappointments: There were challenges today.

My landlord is constantly changing our agreements to suit his whims.

I resent being at his mercy as a renter.

I let go. As I let go, I discover creative strategies for my housing challenges.

Gratitudes: There were gifts today.

My friends gave me love and support today.

I am grateful for the blessing of my friends today.

4. Kathleen's Tenth Step

Ineffective Behaviors: I am finite and limited.

Today I was made aware of my inability to ask for things I need. My office is a mezzanine space that often becomes too hot. Rather than ask to have the air-conditioning turned on, I changed into a cooler dress.

I forgive myself. I choose to receive my job as my teacher and challenge. It reminds me constantly that new behaviors are a choice away. It reminds me to ask for what I want and need as I observe others taking care of themselves effortlessly.

Life-Affirming Behaviors: I am powerful and gifted.

Today I received a program call from someone who had just been laid off from his job. I was able to listen without giving advice or making judgments. I suggested we check back in an hour to provide support for work we were both trying to accomplish.

I celebrate my compassion and my capacity to listen to and support my friends.

Resentments and Disappointments: There were challenges today.

Today I received a call from a friend who talks non-stop. I resent that I am the one who must learn to set firm boundaries.

I let go. As I let go of my resentment, I take responsibility to set my own limits with behaviors that do not work for me.

Gratitudes: There were gifts today.

During lunch I enjoyed a walk on the pier. I could appreciate the sky, water, birds, and beautiful skyline. Simple things delight me. *I am grateful for simple things of beauty.*

Conclude your daily inventory with these words: *I turn toward my life in the present with renewed energy and attention. My daily life is infused with consciousness. I live it with joy*

Step Ten Meditation: In Gratitude For My Significant Others

Imagine standing in your favorite place in the natural world. Feel the firm ground, supporting you. A circle of benches appears. Sit in the middle of the circle and take a few deep breaths. One by one your closest friends, relatives, and colleagues walk into the clearing and sit on the benches. *List them in your journal as they enter.*

When they are all seated, turn toward them one by one using the list as your guide. Acknowledge the ways they teach, heal, challenge, inspiration, and delight you in your journal. For example:

____, you are my teacher. I've learned to speak the truth through knowing you.

____, you are my healer. I love myself more deeply through knowing you.

____, you are my challenge. I stretched beyond my comfort zone
through knowing you.

____, you are my inspiration. My choice for life is strengthened in your presence.

____, you are my delight. I've experienced joy through knowing you.

When you are finished acknowledging the significant others of your daily life, step outside the circle and view them across a loving distance. Write a poem, word collage, or letter, thanking each of them for teaching, healing, challenging, inspiring, and delighting you.

Conclude the meditation by weaving an affirmation into the breath.

Breathing in . . . (Visualize the person.)

Breathing out . . . I am grateful for your presence in my life.

Step Ten Meditation: In Gratitude For The Activities of My Ordinary Life

Imagine standing in your favorite place in the natural world. Feel the firm ground, supporting you. A circle of benches appears. Sit in the middle of the circle and take a few deep breaths. One by one your every day activities walk into the clearing and sit on the benches. They may arrive as a symbol, color, shape, or image.. List them in your journal as they enter. For example:

- Cooking breakfast every morning.
- Cutting fresh vegetables
- Learning to use a computer.
- Reading a novel in bed.

When they are seated, turn toward them one by one using the list as your guide. Acknowledge how they teach, heal, challenge, and delight you in your journal. For example:

- My teacher: Cutting fresh vegetables has opened my eyes to the earth's bounty.
- My healer: By cooking breakfast every morning, I accept my body's needs.
- My challenge: Learning to use a computer developed my unexplored capabilities.

- My delight: Reading a novel in bed at the end of a full day delights me.

When you are finished acknowledging the activities of your daily life, step outside the circle and view them across a loving distance. Write a poem or word collage of gratitude dedicated to each activity, thanking it for teaching, healing, challenging, or delighting you.

Conclude the meditation by weaving an affirmation into the breath.

Breathing in: (Visualize the activity.)

Breathing out: I am grateful for your presence in my life.

Breathing in: I am interested in my own life.

Breathing out: I embrace it as my teacher, healer, and challenge.

Breathing in: With gratitude,

Breathing out: I welcome the ordinary moments of beauty and grace.

**Choosing to be present in my own life,
I acknowledge the gifts and challenges of the day,
celebrate my life-affirming behaviors,
and take responsibility for my ineffective ones.**

Step 11

Making Conscious Contact



As Written

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.

As Rewritten

Through mindful reflection, I place myself in stream of wisdom flowing through my life. I make conscious contact with my truest self and clearest thought.

I. Our Original Spirituality

While at a prayer and meditation retreat, I was reminded of a story from a Harry Chapin story-song about a vibrant child who picked up crayons excitedly on the first day of school. She filled the paper with flowers of every color. Her drawing disturbed the teacher and she asked what the child was doing. "I'm painting flowers," the child answered.

The teacher reprimanded her: "Flowers are red, and leaves are green. There's no need to see colors any other way than the way they've always been seen." The child exclaimed: "Oh, no! There are so many colors in the rainbow... so many colors in the morning sun... so many colors in the flowers... And I see every one."

The teacher called the child sassy and placed her in the corner with these words, "There's a way things should be done. You must draw flowers in the same colors and shapes they've always been drawn." At a time when the child needed encouragement of her originality and creativity, she was shamed and ostracized. She was convinced by her isolation that it is

wrong to follow her own impulses and to follow the prescribed formula is right. Frightened and lonely, she recanted, parroting the teacher's words: "Flowers are red, and leaves are green. There's no need to see flowers any other way than the way they've always been seen."

Years later the child moved to another school. Her new teacher said that drawing should be fun with these words, "There are so many colors in the rainbow, so many colors in the morning sun, so many colors in the flowers. You can use every one!" Unmoved, the child painted flowers in neat rows of green and red.

Harry Chapin's story reminds me of the evolution of our spirituality. In the very beginning of our lives, we have direct access to the spirit of life. It is as near to us as the breath that fills us. And it connects us to everything. We are not alone. Our spirit is one with the spirit of our beloved grandmother, of our favorite rock, tree, and star. We develop our own special methods for contacting the spirit in all things.

Our imaginations are free for a time. We do not need priests or teachers to describe the divine to us. Spirit erupts spontaneously in colorful and unique expressions. God is grandma, the twinkling evening star, the gentle breeze that washes across our face, the peaceful quiet darkness after everyone has fallen asleep, and all the colors of the rainbow.

Eventually, we find our way into the open spaces of spirituality. We learn again what we knew as children, to use all the colors of the rainbow in the expression of our spirituality. Add to the following list, the creative ways you pray, reflect, and meditate, ways that move beyond the prescriptions of family and religion.

- Dance a prayer to your favorite music.
- Play with a child as a meditation to bring you into the moment.
- Play a game with friends and laugh as a joyful meditation.
- Dance, allowing the life-force to move through you in merriment, stilling the obsessive chatter of your mind.

- Sing a prayer of joy to express love for your children and friends.
- Swim under the open sky. Imagine the water holding your body with care.
- Stand quietly and concentrate on your breathing and balance. In the stillness, your own truth is revealed.

- Walk in the forest as a walking meditation, honoring the beauty of all creation.
- Walk in a protest march, each step a peace-prayer in honor of the Earth.
- Write in your journal and listen to your personal truth.
- Write a daily gratitude list, affirming the abundance and grace of your life.
- Enjoy a massage as a tender prayer for your body.
- Enjoy a long, hot bath with candles and oil as a body-loving meditation.

Swimming is my meditation. I feel held, contained, nurtured, and at one with the water. I lose awareness of everything except the water, my body and breath.—Sara

I take time out from the busyness of the day and make a cup of tea. Then I sit down and put all my attention onto that cup of tea: it's smell, taste, temperature and appearance. This meditation is refreshing, and doesn't require much time.—Jody

I take a special view of the time spent waiting for my two year old. As I take a deep breath, I clear away the agenda set for him. I return to the present. I am in the moment with him. It is a meditation for me. I feel in harmony with myself and my son because there's nowhere to go and nothing to do as important as watching the moment unfold together.—Sally

Prayer is imbuing the despised parts of myself with tenderness. I imagine a Renaissance painting, the tender quality of the light, the acceptance of the lines on my face, of my inner darkness and fear. I allow the tender rich antique light to hold and accept the despised parts of myself. Prayer is turning that tender inner light toward others. Seeing clearly who they are, not denying their flaws, yet being kind and courageous enough to speak from the tender illuminated inner space to that which is the same in them. —Felicia

II. To Improve Conscious Contact

Spirituality is developing conscious contact with our own lives: the decisions we make, the relationships and livelihoods we choose, the quality of our eating, spending, and being. Spirituality is the process of healing into the moment so that our every thought, word, and action become a prayer and meditation to Life as it flows in, through, and as our lives. Women reflect on the ways they improve conscious contact with their own lives.

I develop conscious contact with my life by slowing down enough to know what I need. I try not to be a super-achiever or perfect. I give myself time to make decisions and permission to make mistakes. I attempt to tune out what society expects of me and I have purged the words "should" and "ought" from my internal voice.

I develop conscious contact with my feelings as I make recovery from food addiction my priority. Abstinence gives me an opportunity to sit with the anxiety and feelings that come up. I accept them as a part of me. As a result of spending less time obsessing about food, I am faced with my life. I am learning to be present with myself and with others, to know my feelings and to honor theirs.

I develop conscious contact with my life by reflecting on it. I am questioning my source of income. I want my work to support the world as I view it. I wonder about all the time I spend cleaning my house. I think about my love of clothes. It all seems rather wasteful of the world's energy, and my own. But on a smaller scale, I am proud that I have brought much harmony into my life.

I am developing conscious contact with a Deeper Wisdom in the universe. When I feel the pull of my compulsions around spending, eating, or just wanting a situation to go my way, I get a warning. My heart pounds. I start to feel out of balance. I take a deep breath, letting go of my ideas and thoughts. It often only takes a second for me to suspend my attachment and open to other possibilities.

III. Coming into Alignment

As we look back on our lives, we see an unmistakable design flowing from the depths of us in harmony with our gifts, talents, uniqueness, and life purpose. This flow of deep wisdom is faithful even in the midst of difficulties and apparent detours from what is healthy and good. Inner peace comes from trusting the faithfulness of wisdom.

We make a daily decision to place ourselves in the middle of this stream of wisdom. Alignment means that we choose to be ourselves this day with no judgment, and to live in harmony with the deepest wisdom of our lives. Martha Graham's said it this way:

There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening translated through you into action. And because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and it will be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good or valuable it is, nor how it compares to others. It is your business to keep it yours, clearly and directly. To keep the channel open."

Making Conscious Contact Meditations

Use the following meditations, along with those offered throughout the workbook, to improve your conscious contact with Deeper Wisdom (called by many names) and to support your choice to live in alignment with its urgings, to keep the channel open.

Many Names

A conscious life unfolds from the inside out. Your inner life has been called by many names and known by many images. Breathe into each name and image.

Breathing in . . . Source of Life,

Breathing out . . . My life begins in you.

Breathing in . . . Ground of My Being,

Breathing out . . . My life is rooted in you.

Breathing in . . . Deeper Wisdom,

Breathing out . . . My life unfolds from you.

Breathing in . . . Truest Self,

Breathing out . . . Integrity at the center of my being.

Breathing in . . . Heart Center,

Breathing out . . . Compassion at the center of my being.

Breathing in . . . Womb Center,

Breathing out . . . Creativity at the center of my being.

Breathing in... Inner Sanctuary,

Breathing out . . . Stillness at the center of my being.

Breathing in . . . Sacred Clearing

Breathing out . . . Spaciousness at the center of my being.

Breathing in . . . Intuition,

Breathing out . . . Knowing at the center of my being.

Breathing in . . . I descend into the rich resources of my inner life.

Breathing out . . . I assert my will in harmony with its urgings.

The Heart of Life

According to Eastern teachings, the body has seven energy centers called chakras. The fourth chakra is the Heart Center. It is connected to our capacity to love, open, and give. There is an acupressure point located at the Heart Center on the sternum between your breasts. Place the fingertips of each hand there. This powerful point supports conscious contact with our emotions. Begin and end the day with the "Heart of Life" meditation. As you become familiar with it, improvise and create your own meditation.

Breathe in with fingertips on sternum. Breathe out as arms open outward.	<i>Heart of Life, To you I am opening.</i>
Breathe in, bringing fingertips to sternum. Breathe out as arms open outward.	<i>Strong is your pulse, Soothing is your touch.</i>
Breathe in, bringing fingertips to sternum. Breathe out as arms open outward.	<i>In you, I feel and flow and live</i>
Breathe in with fingertips on sternum. Breathe out as arms open outward.	<i>Heart of Life, To you I open.</i>
Breathe in, bringing fingertips to sternum. Breathe out as arms open outward.	<i>Steady is your pulse, Healing is your touch.</i>
Breathe in, bringing fingertips to sternum. Breathe out as arms open outward.	<i>In you, I feel and flow, and live.</i>

Heart of Life, to you I am opening.
Strong is your pulse. Soothing is your touch.
In you, I feel and flow, and live.

Heart of Life, to you I open.
Steady is your pulse. Healing is your touch.
In you, I feel and flow, and live.

The Source of Life

According to Eastern teachings, the second chakra is located between the pubis and navel. It is connected to our capacity to create and be sexual. The "Sea of Energy" acupuncture point is located three finger widths below the belly button. Place your hands on your belly with the tips of your index fingers meeting in the center at the "Sea of Energy" point. This powerful point supports our conscious contact with the Source of Life. Begin and end the day with the "Source of Life" meditation. As you become familiar with the movements, create your own.

Sitting with both hands on your belly,

Breathing in . . .	<i>Source of Life,</i>
Breathing out . . .	<i>To you I come.</i>
Breathing in . . .	<i>Welcoming is your womb,</i>
Breathing out . . .	<i>Nurturing is your love.</i>
Breathing in . . .	<i>In you,</i>
Breathing out . . .	<i>I am enclosed and sustained.</i>

Standing with your legs spread apart and your knees slightly bent.

Breathe in with both hands on your belly.	<i>Source of Life,</i>
Breathe out as your hands move downward From your belly through to the space between your legs and then out in front of you.	<i>From you I am pushed.</i>
Breathe in, bringing hands to belly.	<i>Strong is your womb,</i>
Breathe out as your hands move downward from your belly through to the space between your legs and then out in front of you.	<i>Powerful its thrust.</i>
Breathe in, bringing hands to belly.	<i>In you,</i>
Breathe out as your hands move downward from your belly through to the space between your legs and then out in front of you.	<i>I exert, initiate, and move.</i>

To conclude the meditation, weave an affirmation into the breath:

Breathing in: I place myself in the stream of wisdom, flowing through my life.

Breathing out: I make conscious contact with my truest self and clearest thought.

Step 12

In All Your Affairs



As Written:

**Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps,
I carry this message to others and practice these principles in all my affairs.**

As Rewritten:

**Having had an awakening as a result of these Steps, I practice these principles
in all my affairs by living in harmony with my deepest wisdom,
truest self, and clearest thought.**

I. In the Very Beginning

The human life journey has been described in a variety of ways by secular, religious, and philosophical systems of thought. Here are three versions of the journey:

Religious Viewpoint:

Perfection: We were created perfect.

Fallen: We fell from perfection.

Redeemed: We need redemption.

Philosophical Viewpoint:

Essence: We have an essential nature.

Ego: We lose touch with essence as ego takes precedence.

Enlightenment: We reclaim essence.

Natural Viewpoint:

Birth: We are born.

Death: We die.

Rebirth: We are reborn.

The viewpoint underlying the ADW Step Process recognizes that a woman's life journey is unique, cyclical, and seasonal. The journey takes us through three seasons of a woman's life, which are outlined here and expanded upon by wise and insightful writers and teachers.

1. The Very Beginning: Our Natural Endowment | At Home

The season, often short-lived, when we loved ourselves and had access to the resources and capacities necessary to support resilient living.

- Dear Sisters, please remember: The jewel is in your bosom. Why look for it somewhere else? — Japanese Folk Saying
- At the buried core of women’s identity is a distinct and vital self first articulated in childhood. — Emily Hancock, *The Girl Within*
- I have a strong connection to my daughter. She reminds me of the girl child I once was. She is perfect. I look at her and I don’t see any flaws. What I celebrate in her reminds me of my true nature. As I parent her as I wish I’d been parented, the child in me is healed. — Erin Louise Stewart, Life Coach

2. Forgetting: Conformity-Based Dictates | Away from Home

The season when life’s influences and expectations veiled our self-love and replaced it with self-criticism. We become “formula females.”

- Women are socialized to pretend, settle, and call our compromises “life.” Our bodies are harder to fool. —Harriet Lerner, *The Dance of Deception*
- Our psychological being has been severed from our biological selves for so long that we are completely cut off from our true natures.
—Elinor Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*
- For over a century, the edge of adolescence has been identified as a time of heightened psychological risk for girls. Girls at this time have been observed to lose their vitality, their resilience, their immunity to depression, their sense of themselves and their character. — Carol Gilligan, *Meetings at the Crossroads*
- By the time they are seventeen many young women have surrendered their ambitions to a growing need for affection and their autonomy to an emotional dependence on the approval and good will of others. At seventeen the young woman is well on her way to being a formula female.
—Madonna Kolbenschlag, *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Goodbye*

3. Remembering: Reclaiming What We Once Knew |The Return Home

The season when we reunite with our essential self and natural endowments and relearn how to be, live, and love from the inside out.

- There was a time when you walked alone, full of laughter. You bathed bare bellied. You say you have lost all recollection of it, remember! You say there are not words to describe it; you say it does not exist. But remember! Make an effort to remember! Or failing that, invent. —Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères*

- When we live from within outward, in touch with our inner power, we become responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense. As we recognize our deepest feelings, we give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and the numbness, which seems like the only alternative in our society. —Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*

Each book and resource I've written and developed reminds women of these three seasons of a woman's life and invites them to return home to the "very beginning" when they loved themselves. This "returning" involves ousting the question "what's wrong with me" from our hearts, minds, and bodies. In addition it involves learning a new language to replace critical self-talk. We re-learn the language of self-celebration.

In ADW Circles, we affirm that we're originally blessed, not cursed, and that strength, goodness, and creativity reside within each of us. We've discovered that the good is generous enough to include our injuries and ineffective behaviors. As we embrace our original goodness, our inner spaces are cleared out and reclaimed as our own. We find rest within our own lives and accept all of ourselves as worthy.

One by one, we speak the truth of a woman's life. We commit the forbidden act of biting into self-critical thought, refuting it, smashing it, discarding it, and beginning again in the very beginning when women loved their bodies, named their gods, authored their lives. When women refused to surrender except to life as it pulsed through them.

We remind each other that there's nothing wrong, there never has been anything wrong, there never will be anything wrong with woman. That's why no remedy ever works. Stop asking the question! As we oust the question "what's wrong with me" from our hearts, minds, bodies, and lives, we need new words to use to talk about ourselves. We relearn the language of self-celebration and practice it in all our affairs. The language of self-celebration is made up of 8 vocabularies:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. The Vocabulary of Goodness | 5. The Vocabulary of Spirit |
| 2. The Vocabulary of Self-Possession | 6. The Vocabulary of Partnership |
| 3. The Vocabulary of Willfulness | 7. The Vocabulary of Equality |
| 4. The Vocabulary of Reverence | 8. The Vocabulary of Connection |

This final chapter of *A Deeper Wisdom* introduces you to the vocabularies of self-possession, willfulness, and equality and invites you to use them in all your affairs. If you are interested in exploring the 8 vocabularies in more depth, they are woven into Imagine a Woman International's six "Remember Yourself" self-guided retreats.

- The vocabularies of self-possession, willfulness, and goodness are introduced and explored in Retreat 3: Author Your Own Life.
- The vocabulary of reverence is discussed and practiced in Retreat 4: Love Your Body.

- The vocabulary of spirit informs Retreat 5: Name Your Own Gods.
- The vocabularies of partnership, equality, and connection are the centerpiece of Retreat 6: Relationships From the Inside Out.

II. In All Our Affairs: Speaking the Vocabulary of Self-Possession

Daughter of Woman, author your own life, recovery, and therapeutic process.

Trust your inner sense of what is right for you.

Refuse to twist your life out of shape to meet the expectations of others.

In the very beginning, the girl-child is self-possessed. She doesn't need experts to manage her movements from crawling to walking to running, her sounds from garbles to words to sentences, and her knowing of the world through her amazing senses. Her own interests, curiosities, and capacities orchestrate the flow of her days.

She sing songs to herself for an hour straight without interruption, loving her own company; she sits in the attic for a whole afternoon, looking through old picture albums while conversing with her dead grandmother; she ventures into the meadow beside her house in the morning and forgets all about lunch as she carries on important conversations with her favorite trees.

Inundated with cultural and religious myths elevating women who have relinquish the ownership of their bodies, the authorship of their lives, and the naming of their experience, the girl-child will enter adolescence questioning her ability to control her own destiny and to function independently in her own life. She will twist her body, life, and experience into the acceptable shapes of the culture. In the process, she loses touch with the shape-spinning center within her.

Years later, wise teachers enter the woman's life: a therapist, women's circle, or beloved friend. They remind her of ancient times when virginity meant owned by no man, author of one's own life, and creator of one's own destiny. They remind her of ancient women who refused to surrender the ownership of their bodies except to their natural rhythms and cycles. Women who refused to surrender the authorship of their lives except to their deepest wisdom. Women who refused to surrender the naming of their experience except to their inner truth. Women full of themselves!

Reminded of the truth about ourselves, we re-learn the vocabulary of self-possession. It replaces the dependency-based vocabulary of our socialization and our chronic tendency to abdicate our lives to the design and specifications of others. Consider the following examples of the vocabulary of self-possession. Highlight the ones that resonate with your own experience. Incorporate the vocabulary of self-possession into your daily conversations, interactions, and challenges.

1. From a self-possessed center, we speak to ourselves with strength:

My body is my own. I will not allow the standards of others to twist it out of shape.

My thoughts are my own. I will not allow them to be molded by others.

My feelings are my own. I will not allow them to be expressed by others.

My life is my own. I will allow it to be shaped by the expectations of others.

I refuse to surrender my self-possession to the dictates and specifications of others.

I live in harmony with my deepest wisdom and truest self.

2. From a self-possessed center, we author our own lives with strength. Our first question when faced with a life challenge is "What inner resources do I have to address this challenge?" We begin by consulting our own feelings, thoughts, intuition, and bodily sensations. They will escort us on the journey toward a creative solution.

- I notice that I become irritated in the presence of a colleague. Clearly the irritation is mine. I'll take responsibility for it and get to understand it before I dump it on her. I'll begin by paying attention to my feelings and thoughts when I'm in her office.
- I notice a growing sexual attraction to my daughter's teacher. It's my attraction and I wonder what it's telling me about myself. I'll take responsibility for it by paying special attention to my body and its sexual needs this week.

3. From a self-possessed center, we refuse to embrace any set of principles based on the belief in our fundamental sinfulness and defectiveness, or on the necessity of ego-deflation, humiliation, or the surrender of our natural impulses. Instead, we reframe them to reflect our commitment to self-celebration. Women are rewriting the Twelve Steps based on their belief in original goodness. Each step now answers the question "what's good and right about us" and affirms our natural impulse toward healing and wholeness.

II. In All Our Affairs: Speaking the Vocabulary of Willfulness

Daughter of Woman, participate in your own life.

Meet each challenge with creativity.

Act on your own behalf with clarity and strength.

In the very beginning, the girl-child is a warrior. She is capable of carrying out any task that confronts her. She has everything she needs within the grasp of her mind and imagination. She accomplishes great things in the neighborhood, in her room, and in her mind. Whatever the challenge, she knows there is a way to deal with it.

It takes no effort for her to summon up her courage, to arouse her spirit. With her courage, she solves problems. With her spirit, she changes what doesn't work for her. She says no when she doesn't want to be hugged. She says yes when she wants to spend time with folks who love, respect, and listen to her. She takes care of herself.

There are those who are threatened by the girl-child's willfulness. Whether well-meaning or abusive, they will attempt to preach it out of her. She is told, "Stubborn and Angry one, Don't be so proud and uppity. Say yes when you mean no. Give your anger to god. Pretend you don't know what you know. Pretend you can't do what you can do. Ask the boys to help you. The world's a big and scary place for Little Red Riding Hood. Eve's daughters are small, weak, and powerless."

Eventually, the willful one falls asleep. Occasionally she awakens to remind the woman of what she once knew. These periodic reminders are painful. The woman fills her life with distractions so she cannot hear the quiet inner voice calling her to return home to her own power and willfulness.

Years later, wise teachers enter the woman's life: a therapist, recovery group, women's circle, or beloved friend. They remind her of what she once knew in the very beginning of her life and she learns again the vocabulary of willfulness. It replaces the passivity-based vocabulary fed to us since childhood.

No longer waiting for a deliverer to come, we take responsibility to implement our desires in the world. No longer accepting spectator status, we choose to participate fully in our lives. Consider the following examples of the vocabulary of willfulness. Highlight the ones that resonate with your own experience. Incorporate the vocabulary of willfulness into your daily conversations, interactions, and challenges.

1. No longer asking "what's wrong with me," we change what isn't working and celebrate what is. Supported by our willfulness, we take action in our own behalf by acknowledging what works for us and going after it, and by acknowledging what doesn't work for us and changing it. We speak to ourselves with courage, incorporating self-celebratory affirmations into our inner dialogues:

"I am capable of carrying out any task that confronts me. I have everything I need within the grasp of my mind and imagination. I accomplish great things in my home, neighborhood, and world. Whatever the challenge, I know there is a way to deal with it. It takes no effort for me to summon up my courage, to arouse my spirit. With my courage, I solve problems. With my spirit, I changes what doesn't work for me. I've reclaimed my own willfulness. I am capable of independent thought and action, of self-determining choice, and of the successful implementation of my desires in the world. I exert, initiate, and move in my own behalf."

2. No longer accepting inertia, passivity, and depression as facts of our existence, we regularly inventory our lives to notice what's working and what isn't. Calling upon our inner and outer support systems, we change what we can and let go of what we can't.

- It's not working for me to eat dinners alone. I will invite my single friends to share meals with me three times a week, possibly rotating to each other's homes.
- My job is depleting me. I refuse to complain about what isn't working. I will speak to my boss and arrange for a four-day work week. This will free up an extra day for creative projects while the kids are in school.
- My apartment is cluttered with the old stuff and I cringe when I walk into it. I will sort and clean this weekend. I will hire the neighbor kid to help. When finished, I will invite my women's group over to bless the apartment's new life.

3. No longer settling for relationships that don't work, we regularly evaluate them, express our concerns, and invite others to co-create solutions that work for all.

- I am no longer willing to reach out to you on a regular basis unless you meet me half-way. I am unavailable for relationships that are not mutual. If you value our time together, please call and make the arrangements for our next get together.
- I am not available to hear another litany of complaints about your marriage. When you become ready to co-create solutions or to take action in your own behalf, I will gladly listen. Until then, let's talk about other areas of mutual interest.
- My life is full at this time. I do not have the time or energy to engage in these daily conversations. It works for me to check in weekly. And I support you to extend

your circle of support to include others who can be there for you on a daily basis.

- Given my schedule shifts, it doesn't work for me to prepare dinner every evening. I would appreciate sharing that responsibility with you. I can handle it on Tues., Thurs., and the weekend. Will you cook the other nights or should we hire a cook?
- My financial resources are limited. I'm saving for a house. I'm unable to lend you the money you need. I support you to address the underlying factors creating your financial vulnerability. Here's a DA meeting schedule for your area.
- This is the third time you've been late to pick the kids up. Out of respect for the children's excitement and the importance of my week-end plans, please redesign your Friday afternoons or arrange for a friend to pick the children up. If it happens again, we will need to sit down with the mediator.

III. In All Our Affairs: Speaking the Vocabulary of Equality

Daughter of Woman, assume equality in your relationships.

Relinquish the belief that you are inferior and in need of salvation.

Take your rightful place beside in the human community.

In the very beginning, the girl-child recognizes no limits on her capacities and possibilities. She loves her body, feels her feelings, speaks her truth, expresses her creative spirit, and trusts her inner wisdom. There is nothing she cannot do: she joins the boys in their games, excels in the classroom, and helps her mom with the chores. The sky is the limit as far as her possibilities are concerned. She wants to pitch in the neighborhood baseball game, be Peter Pan in the school play, and someday, be President of the United States.

There are those who are threatened by the girl-child's capacities. They will attempt to preach them out of her. She is told, "Tomboy, only boys can run fast, play hard, and climb trees. Only boys can be pitcher, Peter Pan, President, and God. Be beautiful. Act coy. Strength, wit, and ability are reserved for the boys. No girls allowed. World without end. Amen." Eventually, her capacities will fall asleep within her. Occasionally she is reminded of what she once knew. These periodic reminders are painful. She fills her life with distractions so she will not hear the quiet inner voice calling her to return home to her own capacities.

Years later, wise teachers enter the woman's life: a therapist, women's circle, recovery group, or beloved friend. They remind her of what she once knew in the very beginning of life and she relearns the vocabulary of equality. It replaces the hierarchically-based vocabulary we learned in childhood and the exclusive language that continues to be used in every arena of life.

Through our use of the language of equality, we step into our rightful place in the human community. We assume equality in our personal and professional relationships, and in the church, home, and world and employ the full range of astounding capacities.

Consider the following examples of the vocabulary of equality. Highlight the ones that resonate with your own experience. Incorporate the vocabulary of equality into your daily conversations, interactions, and challenges.

1. We speak to ourselves with self-respect, incorporating self-celebratory affirmations into our inner dialogues:

"I celebrate the birth of my daughters, granddaughters, and nieces as I celebrate my own. I believe in their goodness as I believe in my own. I nurture their wisdom as I nurture my own. I cultivate their power as I cultivate my own. We are mothers and daughters, nieces and aunts, girls and women full of ourselves!"

2. We step into our rightful place in the human community.

"I now know it is possible to have healthy and mutual relationships with men. And this is not because the male-dominance of the world is changing. My vision of what is possible is transforming as I develop a loving and respectful relationship with myself. I no longer hate myself. I no longer believe that I am inferior. I walk into every encounter as a whole person expecting respect and mutual-enhancement."

3. We are no longer available for relationships based on a one-up, one-down mentality in which men's interests take priority. We assume mutuality. We speak our mind and expect our intimate partners, friends, and associates to listen and acknowledge our thoughts, ideas, and concerns. We express our feelings and expect others to witness them without invalidating how we feel.

- I have a full life today that includes special friends, personal projects, and compelling interests. I don't have time to elevate anyone to god status.
- I'm an active participant in work situations. I celebrate the talents and skills I bring to the workplace. I work with men as partners. I'm no longer intimidated by their presence and intelligence.
- Arguments are no longer my style of communication. Arguments involve a winner and a loser. I engage in healthy interactions today. We present our concerns or issues. Then our challenge is to discover a way in which we both win for the greater good.

4. Inspired by Simone de Beauvoir's words in *The Second Sex*, we make a commitment to design relationships of equality within our families.

- We will bring up our daughters from the first with the same demands and rewards, the same severity and the same freedom, as their brothers, taking part in the same studies, the same games, and promised the same future.
- As partners, we will assume on the same basis the material and moral responsibility of our children. The mother will enjoy the same lasting respect, responsibility, economic freedom, and prestige as the father.
- We will orient our daughters toward their power and courage, authorizing them to test their powers in work and sports. We will instill into our sons a sense of equality, not superiority. They will be encouraged by the example of their father to look up to women with as much respect as to men.
- We will surround our children with women and men who are undoubted equals. They will perceive around them a world of equality in which both women and men have access to the full range of their human capacities.
- We will surround our children with images of strong women so our daughters will be proud of themselves and our sons will learn to respect a woman's wholeness.

5. We include ourselves by offering alternatives to the exclusive language and imagery used in the liturgy, hymns, and sermons. We reverse the historic neglect of the women's contributions and concerns by telling our stories.

- Be inspired by this letter written to religious leader in the community:

I am seeking a woman-affirming spiritual community in which my daughter's birth will be welcomed with as much pomp, circumstance, and opportunity as her brother's; where her body and its processes will not exclude her from participation in religious rituals; and where she will be surrounded by images of a god who looks like her in the presence of clergywomen and women priests. Is yours such a community?

- Be inspired by this note written in a sermon response card:

Although I appreciate your congregation's commitment to social justice, I've been disturbed by your sermons. You use quotations to bolster your theme, yet no woman has ever been quoted. You clarify each point by telling a story from everyday life, yet not one story has included a woman, mother, or daughter. It is understandable that you gather experiences, stories, and quotations based on your male view of the world. I invite you, however, to extend your vision to include women in order to more effectively minister to over half of your congregation.

In Conclusion

Gratitude and Well-Being



**Imagine a woman who is interested in her own life.
A woman who embraces her life as teacher, healer, and challenge.
Who is grateful for the ordinary moments of beauty and grace.**

**Imagine a woman who lives an embodied life.
A woman who has returned home to her breath.
Who breathes consciously in gratitude for life itself.**

Imagine yourself as this woman.

A Personal Story

I first learned about gratitude as a potential response to life in Alanon, back in the day. When my recovering alcoholic husband announced that he wanted a divorce and I discovered that he was involved with a woman he met in AA, I ran to my Alanon sponsor for support. She challenged me to resist the temptation to live in fear of that day 18 months ahead when we would be divorced.

Ginny encouraged me to stay present during every moment of the experience and to maintain a daily gratitude practice of acknowledging the goodness of life even as the world around, and within, me was falling apart. She promised me that if I stayed present, that I would be ready for that far-off day when the “no-fault” divorce would be finalized.

By the time he and I met at the courthouse 18 months later to finalize the divorce, I was studying at Princeton Theological Seminary and in love with my new life of study, exploration, and writing. As we embraced after the divorce proceedings, I offered him the blessing of gratitude, “I’m grateful for the gift you gave me. Yes, my world crashed when you left, but it needed to crash. The life I live today is more authentic, joyful, and real. Thank you, and peace be with you.”

I've continued that almost-daily gratitude practice for over 3 decades and have explored the important role gratitude plays in our happiness, healthy adjustment to life's twists and turns, and physical well-being. I've come to believe that gratitude, as a response to life is a cost-effective way to manage our anxiety and to increase our body, mind, and spirit wellness!

Gratitude and Well-Being

Gratitude is one of the most effective interventions to shift the content of our thoughts. This is because the positive emotion of gratitude changes our brain chemistry. The brain is a single processor, which means it can only process one thing at a time. When you focus on the things you appreciate in your life, there is no space in the brain for anger, complaint, or worry. In this way, gratitude contributes to our well-being.

According to Dr. Robert Emmons and Dr. Michael McCullough, who edited the first scholarly volume devoted to a fundamental human quality of gratitude, there are many emotions and personality traits important to well-being, but gratitude is uniquely important. They focused on gratitude as an emotion. In scientific experiments, individuals were asked to keep track of their experiences of gratitude.

Participants noticed several positive changes. They reported more optimism; fewer physical symptoms; better sleep; more progress on their own personal goals; higher levels of alertness, enthusiasm, and determination; fewer experiences of bitterness, sadness, and fear; and were more likely to report having helped someone else.

Emmons and McCullough also found that when individuals are asked to keep track of their experiences of gratitude, they experience more gratitude and more of the positive changes associated with it. Grateful people experience these qualities of well-being:

1. Grateful people are happier and more satisfied with their lives and relationships.
2. They have higher levels of self-acceptance and greater authority and control of their circumstances, their personal growth, and the purposeful use of their capacities.
3. They have more positive ways of coping with life's difficulties because they are more likely to seek support from others and grow from the experience.
4. They have fewer negative coping strategies because they are less likely to avoid or deny the problem, blame others for the problem, or cope through substance use.

5. They have fewer experiences of bitterness, resentment, irritation, and envy. They may experience these negative reactions initially, but grateful people tend to pivot/shift from these more readily and turn toward gratitude as their primary response.
6. They cope better during life transitions because they are more grateful before the transition, they are less stressed and depressed during the transition, and more satisfied with their lives after the transition.
7. They sleep better because their responses are less reactive and more peaceful.

Increasing Gratitude: A Gratitude Practice

The practice of shifting our thoughts from complaint to gratitude strengthens our neural pathways to look for what's good in your life, which will then makes it easier for our brains to find things to appreciate. We can strengthen our gratitude "muscle" by using it. Here are five general gratitude exercises to awaken your natural appreciation for life:

1. Think about a living person for whom you are grateful.
2. Write about someone for whom you are grateful.
3. Write a letter to deliver to someone for whom you are grateful.
4. Look around the space you are sitting in and notice what you are grateful for.
5. End each day with your own gratitude practice. In your journal, list your gratitude, write a gratitude poem, compose a song expressing your gratitude, or create a collage inspired by each day's gratitude.
6. Incorporate the ADW Tenth Step Practice and the Gratitude Meditations in the ADW Step chapter into your daily routine.
7. Read through the most inspiring gratitude quotations below before bedtime.

We launched a Facebook gratitude practice. Lots of people participated. Allow their words and the additional quotations to inspire you to add a daily gratitude practice to your life.

- I'm grateful to spend the afternoon with my family to make apple butter. —Sue
- I'm grateful for the sun in the morning—it makes the surroundings glow. —Diana
- I'm grateful for children's carefree, uninhibited, and contagious laughter. —Jeannie

- I'm grateful for the people who make up the quilt of my life—my mother, sister, son, and wonderful friends. —Michelle

- I'm grateful for people with the willingness and courage to speak their truth to me, whether it feels good to me or not. —Candy

Gratefulness is the key to a happy life and we hold it in our hands. If we're not grateful, then no matter how much we have, we won't be happy. We'll always want something else or something more." —Brother David Steindl-Rast

At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us."
—Albert Schweitzer

Life is swift and precious while it's in our grasp. Loving yourself is such a small act of appreciation for the everlasting Love that has breathed you into being and on whose wings you will be carried when it's time to leave this life." —Paula M. Reeves

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns problems into gifts, failures into success, the unexpected into perfect timing, and mistakes into important events. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow. —Melodie Beattie

Embrace your ordinary life, whatever its wrapping, for in the embrace you will hear the whisper of Gratitude. Listen for her in the ordinary activities of your day, in the ordinary encounters with loved ones, and in the ordinary challenges that greet you each morning. She speaks from the depths of you, in the voice of your ordinary life. —Patricia Lynn Reilly

We turn logical with our gratitude because it is terrifying. The wonder of a moment in which there is nothing but an upwelling of simple happiness is utterly awesome. Gratitude is so close to the bone of life, pure and true, that it instantly stops the rational mind, and all its planning and plotting. That kind of let go is fiercely threatening. I mean, where might such gratitude end? —Regina Sara Ryan

I am interested in my own life. I embrace my life as teacher, healer, and challenge. I am grateful for the ordinary moments of beauty and grace.

**I live an embodied life. I have returned home to my breath.
I breathe consciously in gratitude for life itself.**

Daughter of Woman,

**Having had an awakening as a result of these Steps,
choose purposeful connection with the world around you.
Practice these principles in all your affairs by living in harmony
with your deepest wisdom, truest self, and clearest thought.**

**Refuse to twist your life out of shape to meet the expectations of others.
Author your own life, recovery, and therapeutic process.
Trust your inner sense of what is right for you.**

**Participate in your own life.
Meet each challenge with creativity.
Act on your own behalf with clarity and strength.**

**Assume equality in your relationships.
Relinquish the belief that you are inferior and in need of salvation.
Take your rightful place in the human community.**

**You are an individualized expression of creative intelligence.
Your creative capacities are available 24/7 to transform every personal,
relational, professional, national, and global challenge.**

Return “home” often, you have everything you need there.

The Twelve Steps From a Woman's Perspective

Step 1: Caught in the swirl of my habits of behavior, I've lost touch with myself and my life has become unmanageable. I reach out for support. This is a brave action on my own behalf.

Step 2: I have come to believe in the deep wisdom of my own inner life. I stop flailing and am restored to the sanity of a loving and respectful relationship with myself.

Step 3: I turn my current situation over to the deep wisdom that flows in and through my life. One self-caring step at a time, I unravel my harmful habits of behavior and the thoughts that hold them in place.

Step 4: Turning a merciful eye toward myself, I inventory both my life-affirming and ineffective habits of behaviors, and identify the habits of thought that inspire them.

Step 5: In the company of trustworthy allies, I celebrate my life-affirming behaviors, accept responsibility for my ineffective behaviors, and make a commitment to my transformation.

Step 6: I am entirely ready to deepen my inner well-being by relinquishing my negative habits of behavior and cultivating new thoughts to inspire healthier behaviors and outcomes.

Step 7: My life journey is orchestrated by my own inner wisdom. In the fullness of time, I am transformed at a deeper level of my being. I actively participate in this process.

Step 8: Certain that I love myself, I welcome clarity in my relationships. I acknowledge those who were hurt by my ineffective habits of behavior.

Step 9: Having forgiven myself, I take active responsibility by making amends to those I harmed except when to do so would further injure them or others.

Step 10: Choosing to be present in my own life, I acknowledge the gifts and challenges of the day, celebrate my life-affirming behaviors, and take responsibility for my ineffective ones.

Step 11: Through mindful reflection, I place myself in the stream of wisdom flowing through my life. I make conscious contact with my truest self and clearest thought.

Step 12: Having had an awakening as a result of these Steps, I practice these principles in all my affairs by living in harmony with my deepest wisdom, truest self, and clearest thought.

Become ADW Specialist

The ADW Specialist Certificate

Since *A Deeper Wisdom* (ADW) was first published, women have requested a Certificate Program to prepare and certify them to facilitate groups and coach individuals based on the ADW Step-Process. In response we designed the ADW Specialist Certificate. The certificate entitles you to facilitate the copyrighted ADW 12 Step Process in groups and/or with private clients, and to charge a professional fee for this coaching and facilitation. Visit www.imagineAwoman.com for details.

Training and Certification Overview

1. The Training Period: The centerpiece of the ADW Specialist Training Program is your own journey through *A Deeper Wisdom* and the ADW Specialist Training Manual. We encourage



you to complete the Training within six months. Most women complete it sooner. Keep the completion expectation in mind to support your forward movement. Our primary concern is that you honor your investment to enhance your professional portfolio by completing the program in a timely manner.

2. Support from Patricia Lynn Reilly: IAW has created a private ADW Trainee group on Facebook. You will be invited to join the group. Patricia will visit at least once weekly to answer questions and to inspire you along the way.

3. Inspiration from Imagine a Woman International: IAW posts inspirational content to its fan page several times a day. IAW also has a private Gratitude Circle on Facebook. Both pages are available 24 hours a day to inspire and support women in every season of their lives.

4. “Certified Facilitator-Coach” Certificate: Once certified, you’ll receive an ADW Specialist Certificate to place at your website, email signatures, e-newsletters, and business cards. In addition, you will be given a discount code to use when you purchase quantities of the ADW digital book and poster.

5. Certification and Promotion: Once certified, you’re entitled to facilitate the ADW Step Process for groups and individuals. Your name, business name/location, and website will be listed at IAW’s website. Yearly renewal is offered at no charge to certified ADW Specialists.

6. Book and Resource Starter Kit: Once certified, you will receive a kit of additional woman-affirming books, resources, posters, and greeting cards. Start planning how you will use these fabulous resources. Give them away or sell them on website, or at events.



Imagine a Woman International's "Remember Yourself" Self-Guided Retreats

The "Remember Yourself" Retreats were designed to inspire and encourage you in all seasons and situations of your life. Each retreat contains 5 reflections, and companion meditations and exercises based on five "Imagine a Woman" stanzas that form the centerpiece of that retreat. Journaling space is provided. Inspiring quotations, women's stories, unique exercises, and creative reflections based on the course theme are included.

Make the IAW Promise to Yourself: "30 minutes a day, no matter what!" by purchasing one of IAW's six "Remembering Yourself" Personal Retreats and receive these "pillows of support" to accompany you on your retreat journey.

- The "Home Is Always Waiting" Meditation MP3 to prepare for retreat.
- "Thirty Daily Meds" (meditations) in your in-box to inspire you.
- Membership in IAW's Members-Only Circle on Facebook.

We offer six "Remember Yourself" Retreats, each with a special focus.

The Journey Home: Three Pathways Home reminds you of the resources for authentic living that reside within you, and how to access them daily. Imagine a woman who discovers the way home to herself. A woman who descends into her own inner life and reunites with her essential self and reclaims her natural capacities. Imagine yourself as this woman.



Heal Into the Present: Four Steps Into The Present reminds you of the expressive capacities for resilient living that are your birthright, and how to access them daily. Imagine a woman who acknowledges the past's influence on the present. A woman who has walked through her past. Who has healed into the present. Imagine yourself as this woman.

Author Your Own Life: Five Choices of Authentic Living reminds you of the creative intelligence you already possess, and how to access it to author your own life and self-understanding. Imagine a woman who authors her own life. A woman who trusts her inner sense of what's right for her. Who takes responsibility for the design and content of her life. Imagine yourself as this woman.

Love Your Body: Five Pathways to Body Love reminds you of the body-loving instincts of the child you once were, and of how to awaken them in every season of your life. Imagine a woman who is glad to be alive. A woman who has released body-scrutiny and -criticism. Who celebrates her body with reverence and respect. Imagine yourself as this woman.



Name Your Own Gods: Five Paths to Conscious Spirituality reminds you of your birthright of freedom and courage, and how to use this birthright to inspire and design your own spirituality. Imagine a woman who embodies her spirituality. A woman who honors her body as the sacred temple of the spirit of life. Who breathes deeply as a prayer of gratitude for life itself. Imagine yourself as this woman.

Relationships from the Inside Out: Five Ingredients of Conscious Relationship reminds you of the essential connection between self-love and the love of others, and how to experience your relationships from the inside out. Imagine a woman who turns toward herself with interest and attention. A woman who turns inward to listen, remember, and replenish. Whose capacity to be available to others deepens, as she is available to herself. Imagine yourself as this woman.

**The Remember Yourself Retreats and
A Deeper Wisdom: The 12 Steps from a Woman's Perspective
can be purchased at www.imagineAwoman.com.**

**Everything you've longed for "out there" is already within you.
The path to authenticity travels through your own heart, mind, body, and spirit.
—Patricia Lynn Reilly, IAW Retreat Program**