

How do we Make Amends with Ourselves?

Many of you are very well acquainted with the 12 step programs to recovery from addiction in all its forms. Addiction is another word for all the defenses we have habitually used to deny, cover up, get away from, our own deep inner suffering.

Our suffering, or what is referred to as suffering is not only physical pain, but the deep emotional pain of not having our needs adequately or correctly met as children by the adult figures in our lives. When needs are either overly met, or not met, or ignored and neglected, or shamed and negated, we end up feeling worthless, bad, unlovable and deeply hurt. This is the worst kind of suffering as it calls into question our very existence and identity as good and loving human- beings.

As small children we learned to defend ourselves from these feelings by trying desperately to prove our self-worth in every possible way. We became externally focused on the needs and feelings of everyone else and to deny the pain of our own feelings and needs. We compromised ourselves to please others so that others would like us, accept us, let us belong. We gave to keep safe. We tried to be perfect so we would not be shamed.

All of these behaviors constitute a kind of response to the trauma of shame and the fear of being shamed, that we are indeed worthless and unlovable. We learned to “love others,” meaning we would give them everything they needed and everything that seemed to make them happy so as to be physically, emotionally and intellectually safe.

The trouble is that in becoming so very focused on meeting the needs of others, we didn't even know about our own needs or feelings. This aspect of ourselves was left behind in the long distant past of childhood. We have denied, repressed, rejected, judged and hated our own small needy and hurt inner children. We protect our behavior now with rationalizations and justifications. Now we have turned against ourselves, split ourselves in two. There is the small inner child with big feelings and many needs left behind, hidden from sight, locked away, and there is the adult part of us living in our defenses split off from knowing about our suffering.

All of this happened for a good reason, in complete unawareness. We used the judgements and demands of our parents against our own feelings and needs and denied our reality. This made us socialized and acceptable to the groups we belonged to, but at great cost.

The 4th step in all the 12 step programs can be summed up by “making a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.” As taught in the 12-step program, it is to see deeply how living in defense has actually hurt others. Our addictions have hurt others. Our caretaking has hurt others. Our indirect communication and fake behaviors masking our true feelings and needs have hurt others. Our perfectionism has hurt others. Our people-pleasing has hurt others. Our shopping, spending, eating, drinking, spacing out, gambling and sexual acting out has hurt others. Our rescuing, fixing and helping have hurt others.

But in every case, these behaviors *hurt us the most*. The behaviors constitute a denial and rejection of the underlying suffering of our inner child. And we cannot even see the cruelty in it.

The focus of the program is not on “How has this hurt me?” And this is actually the only place to start the work. How has it hurt me to live in defense, and how do I the adult, now need to take stock of the cost to my younger selves who have been relegated to the darkest and most inaccessible corners of the basement of my consciousness with their suffering, that I do not want to know about or feel. How is that young soul hurting, as a result of me the adult, living in defense? What has the cost been.

The cost in every case is a split. There is a split between the inner suffering and the defense. In every case it is a failure to love, to be present, to hear, to see the inner suffering of a small child. And so, now you have become your parents to yourself in the ways in which you were originally hurt.

How to make amends? What does this even mean? It means reconciliation, connecting, healing, listening, caring so that the two can become ONE again. It means being in relationship with our suffering. All that is required is the opposite of what we were taught to do. We have to be present to ourselves, without collapsing into the pain, without judgment, criticism, trying to fix, rescue, give advice, bully, control, lecture, teach, soothe or any of the other manipulations you were taught. It means to be the Loving Parent that listens to the feelings and need..... sees, listens, hears, understands and connects. **BE AWARE and DO NOTHING**. That is all.



It means seeing how these behaviors have actually hurt you further and taking responsibility to never again do them *to yourself*. If you didn't do them to yourself, you sure as heck would not project those behaviors on to others. It all starts with being in **RIGHT** relationship with **YOURSELF**. It means being right with yourself, not in conflict and war with yourself.

So, what are the steps?

1. Notice how you relate to any feelings, needs, thoughts, or defenses that you have
2. Assess whether you are relating in a loving or hateful way?
3. If you are being controlling, judgmental etc. stop immediately and feel what that felt like recognizing how you just perpetrated against yourself as was done to you originally
4. Then see how it also affects others

5. Examine deeply how this originally happened and how you learned to do it
6. Understand with complete empathy for how this happened
7. Apologize
8. Made amends - which means a promise to do whatever it takes to not repeat the offense

So, for instance, when you find yourself making some habitual judgment of yourself like, "That was so stupid," notice how that feels to your younger self. Is it loving or hateful? Does it show any depth of understanding into memory, motives and consequences? How does it affect others when you do this?

When you *really see* the destructiveness and war-making that it is, you will awaken to having compassion for yourself - meaning a willingness to suffer the pain with yourself of how this originally happened and will automatically awaken a desire to stop doing what you have been doing. You could not stop your parents and the adults in your life when you were a child. But you, the adult, can sure stop doing it to the child you still are now. And this IS YOUR responsibility.

Exercise:

- For what are you starving? How do you beg outside of yourself?
- Can you learn to love the beggar and see deeply into the needs and feelings?
- Can you be the one to feed the hungry one, take in the poor one, listen to the inner one that has been disenfranchised, accept the rejected and spurned one?
- Are you an true activist or a "do-gooder?"
- Are you aware, connected, listening, seeing - INTERNAL? You cannot really see anything externally until you do

For very good reading:

Novogratz, Jacqueline. [The Blue Sweater.](#)