

*Step Experience Essay 2*

## **I HAVE A CHOICE**

AT THE AGE OF 23, AFTER MANY YEARS OF USE, I ADMITTED TO myself I was an addict. But even though I believed I would die before I was 25 because of my addiction to crystal meth, I still thought my life was manageable. I thought that if all the things that were going wrong in my life were different, maybe everything would be better. I had no sense of responsibility for the things that were messed up in my life, nor was I able to admit the causal relationship between my drug use and the breakdowns going on around me. I simply resigned myself to thinking that everyone else was crazy.

After I had been sober for 30 days, I met my sponsor and asked him if he would take me through the Twelve Steps. I'd been avoiding this crucial work, but I knew that what I had been doing wasn't working for me and that I couldn't continue to do it alone.

For Step One, my sponsor had me look at all the damage I had done. He had me examine the ways I'd tried to stop on my own and whether those had worked. He also had me describe all the things I'd said I would never do and then did when I was high, as well as all the things I said I would never do but will do if I use again. Without a doubt, at the end of working this Step, I could see that I was powerless over crystal methamphetamine and that my life had become unmanageable.

As for Step Two, I had always believed there was a God, but I couldn't

see what he had done for me. While contemplating this Step, I looked at my life and became aware of all the times I should have been killed or could have gotten busted and gone to prison during my using days. After writing down my thoughts, I came to the unavoidable conclusion that either there was a Higher Power that had spared me during these times—and also could restore me to sanity—or I was extremely lucky. Since I've never won the lottery, I went with the first.

Step Three was not very difficult for me. Because crystal meth was burying me alive, I didn't have a problem getting on my knees to pray. I felt the benefits from it immediately. I had around ninety days at the time, and getting on my knees when I woke up in the morning and saying the Third Step Prayer was a huge help in carrying me through that time and in the months since. When I first started saying the prayer, I would feel tingling up and down my spine; I felt connected. Even though that specific sensation comes and goes, I continue to feel connected. I still consistently turn my will and life over to a God of my understanding, in good times and in bad. Not surprisingly, during this time I began to understand acceptance and serenity.

Having thoroughly worked the first Three Steps, I felt confident about making a searching and fearless moral inventory. I had by now built a relationship of trust with my sponsor. All the direction I took from him seemed to make things better, and Step Four was next.

This is not to say that I deluded myself into thinking it would be a simple and painless procedure. I just knew that it could be done and that I had the tools to work through anything that came up. To explain further, during most of the time I spent working on this Step, I was out of the United States in a country where there were no meetings. I had to get down on my knees and pray every time those resentments and other emotions I had stuffed deep down came to the surface, but I got through it. And if I could get through it without the support of meetings—because of the tools given to me by the first Three Steps—then anyone could. As my sponsor said, “Just do it.”

My sponsor and I said a prayer before I read him my inventory (Step Five). With his guidance, I was able to see my part and that most of my

resentments were toward myself. I was able to understand that the world wasn't my problem, and meth wasn't my problem (although I have a problem with meth). *I* was my problem. Within twenty or thirty minutes after reading my inventory, I could feel a change within me. I didn't feel as if I could climb Mt. Everest, but I did sense that I had let go of a tremendous burden. At first it was uncomfortable for me to experience what felt like emptiness, however I was soon able to distinguish it from the spiritual void I'd felt throughout most of my life. This was a feeling of freedom. This freedom was completely different from anything I had felt before, especially the way I felt while I was using.

I've always been hard on myself, which made it pretty easy to write out a list of my character defects (Step Six). I also had my inventory to work with. I had about five and a half months clean when I sat in a restaurant and made the list. There were a lot of issues I didn't want to look at or admit, but I didn't seem to have a problem writing them down. At the end of compiling my list, I realized that just by soberly working the previous Steps, I had stopped acting out on many of my character defects. I wasn't being violent; I wasn't stealing; I wasn't being intentionally manipulative. Then something clicked for me. If I do the work, my being and my conduct no longer have to be dictated by my character defects. I have a choice.

Just the same, I also know I will always be working Step Seven. Complacency brings out the worst in me. When I don't take contrary action, I sink into old behaviors and that will certainly lead me into relapse. Working Seven gives me even more peace. My sponsor had me humbly ask God to remove my shortcomings by doing at least two random acts of kindness every day. When I let someone ahead of me in traffic, I become less angry. When I give someone a ride, I become less selfish. Even as I first worked this Step the promises began to come true for me.

I took my time with Step Eight. I wanted the list of people I had harmed to be as complete as possible. I learned from doing the previous Steps that the more thoroughly I worked them, the more I cleaned up my side of the street. And, indeed, I had a lot of wreckage to clear from my past. Every time I wrote, I would get down as much as I could until I couldn't remember anything else. After sleeping on it for a little while,

something new would come to mind and then I would pour out even more. Writing with rigorous honesty—and not worrying about how I would make the amends—allowed me to become aware of how much I'd messed up and how much wrong I'd done. With this awareness came the insight that it would be possible to be free of all the guilt and shame from my past.

Then came the time when I sat down with my sponsor, eager to begin cleaning up the wreckage of my past. A lot of it was simple: Stop doing those things and don't do them again. I did the hardest amends first. If I hadn't gotten humility from working the Seventh Step, I surely got it from working Step Nine. Having to say I was wrong worked miracles, especially when I said it to the person I'd wronged and meant it. So far, all the amends I've made have absolved me from the shame and guilt I carried from holding on to my past. I truly understood what my sponsor meant when he told me this Step isn't about anyone else but you—it's about cleaning your side of the street. I have cleaned much of my side of the street and I continue to do so.

By the time I did Step Ten, I saw the genius in the continuity of the Twelve Steps. I continued to take personal inventory and keep doing so. I cannot describe the freedom I get from being able to write out resentments and make amends. While also cleaning up the past, I am able to not weigh myself down with life and my reaction to it in the present. Working this Step in conjunction with Step Three gives me the ultimate tool for dealing with life by showing me how to process every situation that comes along. Ten also has helped me stay out of a lot of the trouble that an addict in his first year of recovery can get into.

I recently started working Step Eleven. In my morning prayer and meditation, I no longer ask God for personal things or for anything specific for other people. I have learned that by doing so, I am praying for what *my* will is, not God's. Now that I pray for God's will, not mine, my conscious contact with the God of my understanding is flourishing. God reveals his will for me, at what seems like some of the most obscure times. I sense a shift, from feeling like a parasite to becoming someone who may have a purpose.

Although at present I have not yet sponsored another addict, I have worked Step Twelve throughout this first year of my sobriety. I have

commitments. I have spoken at meetings and on panels. I have been of service, and being of service has been an important part of my sanity and recovery. Spirituality, as I understand it, is when you come outside of yourself. In my limited experience, I have found there is no better road to spirituality than service.

I know if I keep working these Steps and keep being of service, then I will continue to stay sober. I will continue to know serenity and acceptance. If it is God's will for me, in one month, I will celebrate my one-year birthday with all my brothers and sisters in sobriety.