

Gamblers Anonymous

THE TWELVE STEPS OF RECOVERY

Suggestions for arresting the compulsive gambling problem.

Step One

We admitted we were powerless over gambling-that our lives had become unmanageable.

Who likes to admit defeat? Almost no one. Every instinct we have says we will make it tomorrow; we are not powerless. It is very difficult to admit weakness. We have a mind obsession that says, "Not true! Not true!". Yet, something is always reminding us of the destructiveness of our gambling. No other kind of destruction is quite like this; an emotional illness. Once this fact is accepted, our human concerns are complete.

Upon entering G.A., we take another view of this absolute humiliation. We come to believe only through utter defeat are we able to take our first steps toward sanity and strength. Our admission of personal defeat turns out to be our foundation upon which happy and purposeful lives may be built.

When first challenged to admit defeat, most of us revolted. We had approached G.A. expecting to be taught self-confidence and will power. Then we were told that so far as gambling is concerned, self-confidence was not an asset; in fact, it was a distinct liability. We were then told that we were the victims of a mental obsession, so subtly powerful that no amount of human will power could break it. There was no such thing as the personal conquest of this compulsion. Few, indeed, were those so afflicted who ever conquered their illness through single-handed efforts. Under the lash of gambling, we are driven to G.A. and there we discover the fatal nature of our situation.

Then, and only then, do we become open-minded to conviction and willing to listen, as only the dying can be. We stand ready to do anything that will lift the merciless obsession from us.

Gamblers Anonymous

THE TWELVE STEPS OF RECOVERY

Suggestions for arresting the compulsive gambling problem.

Step Two

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to a normal way of thinking and living.

Newcomers, their minds in a turmoil after reading Step Two, ask, "What have we here? We are told in Step One that we have an emotional obsession to gamble and our lives are unmanageable. Now we are told only a Higher Power can restore us to a normal way of thinking and living. Some do not believe that God exists; some have no faith He will perform this miracle. Yes, you have us confused. Where do we go from here?"

Let's look at the belligerent compulsive gambler. He is now thinking about everything he is faced with, something really impossible. His sponsor should say, "Take it easy. The road you should travel is very wide; it will not crowd you. There are many people in G.A. today who, when they first came to the fellowship, believed as you do, and they have 'made it'. How, under the circumstances, does a person take it easy? Gamblers Anonymous does not demand that you believe anything. All of the Twelve Steps are but suggestions. There is no one telling you that you must accept all of Step Two right here and now. The only thing we suggest is that you keep an open mind."

Take, for example, the athlete. To become professional, he must train continuously; practice time and time again. When I first looked at G.A., I thought as most newcomers. "I simply won't consider such nonsense. My will power will be enough!" But when I woke up, I had to admit that G.A. showed results. Here were many men with years of abstinence to prove this. The minute I stopped arguing with myself and others, I could begin to feel Step Two. I can't say upon what occasion or upon what day, for the change was gentle and very gradual, but I came to believe in a Power greater than myself. Certainly, I have this conviction now. To acquire this, I had only to stop fighting and begin to practice the rest of the G.A. program to the best of my ability.

Defiance and lying are the outstanding characteristics of many gamblers, so it is not uncommon that many of us have had days of defying God. This is especially true when He did not deliver a winner, or when He did deliver a winner and we did not do as we had promised. Many of us have prayed to get even, for a job promotion, or to be prosperous. We have said, "God has not delivered us the good things of life!", which we, as greedy people, specified. Then we went to gamble.

Gamblers Anonymous

The fact is, we really hadn't cleaned house so that the work of God could enter and expel the obsession to gamble. We had not taken a moral and financial inventory of ourselves. We had not made amends to those we had harmed, had not give freely to another human being without demands for reciprocation, and had not prayed correctly. We were always asking for our wishes to be granted. We did not understand the love of God and man, so how could we return to a normal way of life?

How many practicing G.A. members have a full understanding of areas in which they are irrational; or, seeing their irrationality, can face it? Step Two is the turning point for all. Whether agnostic, atheist, or nonbelievers, we can stand together on Step Two. True humility and an open mind can lead us to a Power greater than ourselves and will, in time, take us to God, love of man, and a normal way of life.

Gamblers Anonymous

THE TWELVE STEPS OF RECOVERY

Suggestions for arresting the compulsive gambling problem.

Step Three

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of this Power of our own understanding.

Here is where the door to the Recovery Program is starting to open. The first two steps asked you to believe and accept. Step Three calls for willingness to do something, and to turn away from self-will. This is the way to a faith in G.A. that works. The conclusions of Step One and Step Two require acceptance. Step Three requires positive action. Like all the remaining steps, Step Three calls for affirmative action; for, only by action is the self-will, which has always blocked the entry of God or a Higher Power into our lives, cut away.

Faith alone cannot accomplish this step. Therefore, our problem now becomes just how and by what means shall we be able to let this Power in. The effectiveness of the whole G.A. Program rests upon how well and earnestly we have tried to come to the decision of turning our will and lives over to the care of God, as we understand Him. This step is extremely difficult. No matter how much one desires, how can a person turn his will and his life over to the care of a God of his understanding? Fortunately, those who have tried with equal misgivings can affirm that anyone can begin to do it. A beginning, even the slightest, is all that is needed. Once we have acted with willingness, results will happen. Self-will may attempt to assert itself from time to time, but we can persist in our new attitude. Perhaps this sounds ridiculous, but let us examine how practical it really is.

Every man and woman who joins G.A. and intends to remain in the fellowship has, without realizing it, made a beginning on Step Three. Is it not true that in all matters of gambling, each has decided to turn his or her life over to the care, protection, and guidance of Gamblers Anonymous? A willingness has been evinced to cast out one's own will and one's own wishes about the gambling problem in favor of those suggested by G.A. All willing new members feel that G.A. is the only safe way to restore sanity and a normal way of life. This is turning your will and life over to a Power greater than yourself.

Suppose the urge to gamble cries out, as it certainly will? Do you not depend upon G.A. and its meetings to arrest this urge? Yes, of course. Many of us have the idea we can handle all other problems and maintain our great egos. Thus our spiritual development is handicapped. This kind of thinking takes no real account of the facts. The more we become willing to depend upon a Higher Power, the more independent we actually become. Many, perhaps all of us, have been slaves to gambling. To free ourselves, we practice the Twelve Steps of Recovery. It is really a means of gaining independence through the love of God and man.

Gamblers Anonymous

Let's examine, for a moment, this tale of dependence at the level of every day living. Every modern house has electric wiring carrying power and light to the interior. We are delighted with this and accept this dependence. We trust nothing will ever cut off the supply of current. This makes us feel comfortable and secure.

Consider, too, the polio sufferer confined to an iron lung, dependent totally on the motor to keep the vital life force within him. Yet, the moment our mental or emotional independence is questioned, how differently we behave. We all claim the right to decide for ourselves what we shall think and just how we shall act. When problems arise, we'll listen politely to those who advise us, but all the decisions are to be ours alone. No one is going to meddle with our personal independence in such matters. There is no one we trust. We are certain that our intelligence and will-power will be sufficient and guarantee us success in the world we live in.

This type of thinking sounds good, but how well does it work? Take a good, long look in a mirror. This should be the answer for a compulsive gambler. Each compulsive gambler has had his own fatal encounter with self will. He has suffered enough under its weight to be willing to look for something better; otherwise, he would not be in G.A., have admitted defeat, acquired faith, or have made the decision to turn his will and life over to a Higher Power.

Once the willingness has been acquired, he is the only one who can make the decision to exert himself. Trying to do this is an act of his own will. All the steps, in order to conform to their principles, require sustained and personal exertion; so, we trust to God-will. It is when we try to make our will conform to God's will that we begin to use it correctly. Once we have come into agreement with these ideas, it is really easy to begin to practice Step Three. During times of emotional disturbance or indecision, we can pause, ask for quiet, and in calmness simply say, "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Gamblers Anonymous

THE TWELVE STEPS OF RECOVERY

Suggestions for arresting the compulsive gambling problem.

Step Four

Make a searching and fearless moral and financial inventory of ourselves.

If men and women made no effort to exert themselves to be secure in their persons, to create or produce food and shelter, there would be no survival. If there were no social instincts, if men cared nothing for society or one another, there would be no society. So these desires for the sex relation, for material and emotional security, and for companionship are perfectly right and necessary and surely God-given.

These instincts, so essential for our existence, often exceed their proper functions. They drive us, dominate us, and insist upon ruling our lives. No human being, however near perfect, exempt from these drives. Nearly every serious emotional problem can be seen as a case of misdirected instincts. When that happens, our great natural assets turn to liabilities, physical and mental. We should look squarely at the unhappiness this has caused others as well as ourselves. By discovering what our emotional deformities are, we can move toward their correction.

Let's have a closer look at our basic problem, gambling. Examples take on a world of meaning when we think about them. Our financial problem must be examined. Go through the Pressure Group handbook. Make a budget that can meet your means of support and your obligations which must be repaid in time. Some develop an obsession for financial security and hoard their money. Some deny themselves family and friends. Some members go "power mad" and attempt to rule their fellow members. These people throw away all chances of legitimate security and a happy family life. Whenever a human becomes a battleground for the instincts, there can be no peace; he becomes a slave to instincts.

We have gambled to get away from responsibility, fears, frustrations and depressions. We have envisioned great dreams of wealth and position when we would repay those we harmed by gambling. All this leads to loss of self respect, peace of mind. We must take a mature look at all of our problems, for this is pride in reverse; so logically, we should reverse ourselves.

Gamblers Anonymous

Many of us believe that the good characters we had before gambling became an obsession in our lives will be revived the moment we quit gambling. If we were average trustworthy, kind, and truthful people, except for our gambling weakness, what need is there for a moral inventory now that we are not gambling?

Have we not blamed all of our troubles on others, never ourselves? Have we not believed we were different in the things we did to secure money to gamble? Yet, when we come to G.A., we find there are others with whom we can identify and agree that we are gripped by a mental obsession to gamble. We are told that is in the past. The future can be different if we change certain principles in our daily affairs.

It is much better to face your defects fearlessly. Most of our egos have built up a great wall of resistance regarding ourselves. We invented excuses for ourselves and told lies to excuse our gambling weakness. So, if we are to arrest the obsession of gambling, our defects must be correct.

In G.A., we slowly learn that something has to be done about our vengeful resentments, self-pity, and unwarranted pride. We must be made to see that every time we play the "big shot" we turn people against us. We must see that when we harbor grudges and plan revenge, we defeat ourselves instead of others. We learned that if we are seriously disturbed, our first need is to quiet that disturbance, regardless of who or what we think cause it.

Did we see faults in others much quicker than in ourselves? First, we had to admit we had many of these defects, even though such disclosures were painful and humiliating. Where other people were concerned, we had to drop the word "blame" from our speech and thoughts. This requires willingness to change. Once over the first two or three times, it becomes easier, for we have started to get a true perspective of ourselves and are gaining in humility.

Let us mention common defects of character, such as; greed, lust, anger, envy and pride. Pride can lead to self-justification, unconscious fears, and many human difficulties. Pride lures us into making demands upon ourselves or others which cannot be met without perverting or misusing our instincts, or justifying our excesses. Therefore, the watch-word when taking inventory is thoroughness. In this connection, it is wise to write out our questions and answers. It will serve as an aid to clear thinking and honest appraisal. It will be the first tangible evidence of our complete willingness to move forward.

Gamblers Anonymous

THE TWELVE STEPS OF RECOVERY

Suggestions for arresting the compulsive gambling problem.

Step Five

Admitted to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrong.

This step will deflate your ego. In considering the ego, this step will be more difficult than the others, but it is necessary for long and complete arrest of compulsive gambling and for complete peace of mind. Experience has taught us that we cannot live alone with our pressing problems and the character defects which aggravate them. If we have gone over Step Four and it has revealed experiences we'd rather not remember, we should come to know how wrong thinking and action have hurt us and others. If we want to get rid of yesterday's guilts and torments, we must talk with someone about them.

Many search for an easier way to try to skip Step Five, which usually consists of the general and painful admission that, when gambling, we were sometimes bad performers. Then, for good measure, we add dramatic descriptions of part of our gambling behavior, but the things that really bother us, we say nothing about. This we justify with the excuse that humiliating memories ought not be shared with anyone.

If the G.A. experience means anything, this is very unwise. Some people are unable to stop gambling at all; others will relapse periodically until they really "clean house." Many reveal how they tried to carry the burden alone: how they suffered with remorse and depression. Everyone has to confess his own defects. Most of us would admit that without a fearless admission of our defects to another human being, we could not have stopped gambling. It seems plain that the grace of God will not enter to expel our destructive obsession to gamble until we are willing to try this.

This step will tend to drive away loneliness. When we first came to G.A. and for the first time in our lives stood among people who understood our problems, had suggestions to offer, and were willing to share experiences, we thought our problems had been solved. But it was not until we had disclosed our defects and listened to others do the same that our burden was actually lightened. Step Five was the answer. It was the beginning of true fellowship with man

Gamblers Anonymous

and God. This step is the means of learning the art of forgiveness. We feel, in practicing Step Five, that there is a chance of our being forgiven, and then we, in turn, can forgive others.

This step is where true humility comes. Humility, in this step, means to recognize what we were and what we really can become. Our humility must consist of recognizing our defects. No defect can be corrected unless we clearly see what it is. All of us have realized the need for honesty and tolerance; the need to do away with self-pity. Our next problem will be to discover the person in whom we are to confide.

It should be someone with experience. It could be your sponsor or it could be someone you feel has had experiences close to yours. This individual can be entirely outside of G.A.; a doctor, clergyman, rabbi, priest, etc. Once this decision is made, you will have a very pleasant surprise. The conversation will start easily and soon you will become eager. Provided you hold back nothing, your sense of relief will mount from minute to minute. The rock in the pit of your stomach will gradually leave. It will vanish as soon as your wrongs are exposed. When humility and serenity are so combined, something else of great moment is apt to occur; your first actual feeling of the presence of God. Even those who had faith before, often become conscious of God as they never experienced before.

This feeling of being one with God and man, through the open and honest sharing of our terrible burden of guilt, brings us rest and peace of mind where we may prepare ourselves for the following steps, toward a full and meaningful life - free of gambling.

Gamblers Anonymous

THE TWELVE STEPS OF RECOVERY

Suggestions for arresting the compulsive gambling problem.

Step Six

Were entirely ready to have these defects of character removed.

Any person, capable of enough willingness and honesty to try repeatedly Step Six on all his faults, with any reservations, has indeed come a long way spiritually. None of us will ever be perfect, but, through Step Six, we establish a willingness to become mature men and women, sincerely trying to grow.

Sure, we were beaten, absolutely whipped. My own will power just would not work to stop gambling. Change of location, the efforts of a wonderful family, friends, doctors, and clergymen were no help to stop me from gambling. No human being could help me stop gambling. But when I became willing to “clean house,” remove all the garbage down to the finest detail, and then ask a Higher Power, God as I understand Him, to give me strength for this day to live free of gambling, I found the help I needed. Tomorrow I shall repeat this, for one day at a time becomes a life-time.

All of us are born with an abundance of natural desires. It isn't strange that we often let these desires far exceed their intended purpose. When the gambling impulse drives us blindly, we willfully demand, and in some way obtain, the means with which to gamble. As time goes on, our acts or measures to secure money to gamble increase; bad check, illegal loans, etc. none of these are due us. That is the point at which we depart from the degree of perfection that God wishes for us here on earth. That is a good measure of our character defects. If we ask, God will surely forgive, but, in no case, does He render us white as snow and keep us that way without our cooperation or willingness to work toward a better way of life, to the best of our ability.

This does not mean that all of our character defects will be removed. A few of them may be, but with most of them we shall have to be content with gradual improvement. The key words in Step Six are “entirely ready.” They underline the fact that we want to aim at the very best we know or can learn. How many of us have this degree of readiness? In an absolute sense, practically no one has it. The best we can do, with all the honesty we can muster, is to try to have it. All of us will find to our dismay that there are stumbling blocks at which we say, “No, I cannot give this up just yet!”; or “This I will never give up!” No matter how much we have progressed, desires will always be found that oppose, but for the grace of God, they may remain.

Gamblers Anonymous

No one really wants to be labeled a thief, liar, or be angry enough to murder. No one wants to be agonized by this pain of envy many of us have felt. Most human beings suffer these defects at rock-bottom levels.

There is no spiritual effort involved in avoiding excesses that bring punishment. But when we face up to the less violent aspects of these very same defects, where do we stand? Who, for example, does not like to feel just a little superior to the next fellow; or perhaps, a lot superior to someone else? Isn't it true that we may let greed masquerade as ambition? Or, how many men and women speak love with their lips and believe what they say, so that they can hide lust in a corner of their minds?

We live in a world riddled with envy, to a greater or lesser degree. Everyone seems to be infected with it. From this defect, we must surely get a warped, yet definite, satisfaction. Otherwise, why would we consume such great amounts of time wishing for what we do not have, rather than working for it; or, angrily look for attributes we probably shall never have, instead of adjusting to the fact and accepting it? How often do we work hard and long only to gamble it away?

Consider, too, our talent for procrastination. Nearly anyone could submit a long list of such defects. Yet, we were living with these, not wanting to give them up; at least, not until they caused us excessive misery. How many of us, even if we list just the minor defects, still want to hang on to some of them? It seems plain, therefore, that few of us can quickly or easily become ready to aim at spiritual and moral perfection. We want to settle for only as much perfection as will get us by in life. So there is a difference between striving for self-determined objectives and for the perfect objective which is through the grace of God.

How can we accept the entire implication of Step Six? That is perfection. This is a goal we may strive for, but never quite reach; however, it is urgent that we make a beginning and keep trying. The moment we say "No", our minds close against the grace of God. Delay is dangerous; rebellion may be fatal. This is the exact point at which we abandon limited objectives and move toward God's will for us.

Gamblers Anonymous

THE TWELVE STEPS OF RECOVERY

Suggestions for arresting the compulsive gambling problem.

Step Seven

Humbly asked God (of our understanding) to remove our shortcomings.

Here, we should stop and take a long look, consider just what humility is, and what the practice of it can mean to us. The attainment of greater humility is the foundation principle of each of the G.A. Twelve Steps. For without some degree of humility, no compulsive gambler can stop gambling for long. Most all G.A. members have found that unless they develop much more of this precious quality than may be required to stop gambling, they still have little chance of becoming truly happy. Without it, they cannot live to much useful purpose; or in adversity, be able to summon the faith that can meet any emergency, of which there will be many.

Humility, as a word and as an ideal, has a very bad time of it in our world. Not only is the idea misunderstood; the word itself is often intensely disliked. Many people haven't even a nodding acquaintance with humility as a way of life.

With great intelligence, men of science have been forcing nature to disclose her secrets. The immense resources harnessed promise such a quantity of material blessings that many have come to believe that a man-made millennium lies just ahead. Poverty will disappear and there will be such abundance that everyone can have all the security and personal satisfaction he desires.

Certainly no compulsive gambler and no member of G.A. wants to depreciate material achievements. Nor do we debate with the many who so passionately cling to the belief that to satisfy our basic natural desires is the main object of life. But we are sure that no class of people in the world ever made a worse mess of trying to live by this formula than the compulsive gambler.

For thousands of years, we have been demanding more than our fair share of security and prestige, so we thought. When we seemed to be succeeding, we gambled. We dreamed of yet greater achievements and of the high scores. When we were frustrated, even in part, we gambled. Never was there enough of what we thought we wanted. In all of these strivings, so many of them well-intentioned, our compulsive gambling was our lack of humility. We had lacked the perspective to see that character building and spiritual values had to come first and that material satisfaction was not the purpose of living. But, whenever we had to choose between character and gambling, the character building was lost in the dust of our chase after what we thought was true happiness and a love for gambling. We never thought to make honesty, tolerance, and true love of man and God the daily basis of living.

Gamblers Anonymous

For just so long as we were convinced that we could live exclusively by our own individual strength and intelligence, for just that long was a working faith in a Higher Power impossible.

This was true even when we believed that God existed. These earnest beliefs remained barren because we were still trying play God ourselves. As long as we place self-reliance first, a genuine reliance upon a Higher Power was out of the question. That basic ingredient of all humility, a desire to seek and do God's will, was missing. Every new member of Gamblers Anonymous is told, and soon realizes for himself, that his humble admission of powerlessness over gambling is his first step toward liberation from its obsession.

So it is that we first see humility as a necessity. But this is the barest beginning. To get completely away from our aversion to the idea of being humble, to gain a vision of humility as the road to true freedom of the human spirit, to be willing to work for humility as something to be desired for itself, takes most of us a long time. A whole lifetime geared to self-centeredness cannot be set in reverse all at once. Complacency dogs our every step at first.

When we have taken a square look at some of these defects, have discussed them with another, and have become willing to have them removed, our thinking about humility commences to have a wider meaning. By this time, in all probability, we have gained some measure of release from compulsive gambling. We enjoy moments in which there is something like real peace of mind.

To those of us who have hitherto know only excitement, depression, or anxiety, in other words, to all of us, this newfound peace is a priceless gift. Something new indeed has been added. Where humility had formerly stood for a forced feeding of humble pie, it now begins to mean the nourishing ingredient which can give us serenity. Up until now, our lives have been largely devoted to gambling, running from anything painful and away from our problems. We never wanted to deal with the facts.

You may hear the poor excuse of some about working the step: "That would make me a saint. Who wants to be a saint?" Then at the G.A. meeting, we listened. Everywhere, we saw failure and misery transformed, by humility, into priceless assets. We heard story after story of how humility had brought strength out of weakness.

As we approach the actual taking of Step Seven, it might be well if we, in G.A., inquire once more just what our deeper objectives are. Each of us would like to live at peace with himself and his fellows. We would like to be assured that the grace of God can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

We have seen that character defects, based upon short-sighted or unworthy desires, are the obstacles that block our path toward these objectives. We now clearly see that we have been making unreasonable demands upon ourselves, upon other, and upon God. The Seventh Step is where we make the change in our attitude which permits us, with humility as our guide, to move out from ourselves towards others and toward God.

Gamblers Anonymous

THE TWELVE STEPS OF RECOVERY

Suggestions for arresting the compulsive gambling problem.

Step Eight

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

Step Eight is concerned with personal relations. We must first take a look backwards and try to discover where we were at fault. Next, we make an honest attempt to repair the damage we have done. With our new-found knowledge of ourselves, we may develop the best possible relations with every human being we know.

This is a very large order. It is a task we may perform with increasing skill but never really finish. Learning how to live in the greatest peace, partnership, and brotherhood with all men and women, of whatever description, is a moving and fascinating adventure. Every G.A. member has found that he can make little headway in the new adventure of living until he first back-tracks and really makes an accurate and unsparing survey of the human wreckage he has left behind from compulsive gambling.

When we first look at emotional wounds, some old, some perhaps forgotten, and some still festering, I will at first look like a purposeless and pointless piece of work. But if a willing start is made, the great satisfaction of doing this will quickly reveal itself and the pain will be lessened as one obstacle after another melts away.

Right here, our emotions go on the defensive. To escape looking at the wrongs we have done another, we resentfully focus on the wrong he has done us. This is especially true if he has, in fact, behaved badly at all. This the perfect excuse for minimizing or forgetting our own.

At this point, we need to look for the key to Step Eight, "Foregiveness." Let's remember that compulsive gamblers are not the only ones bedeviled by sick emotions. Moreover, it is usually a fact that our behavior, when gambling, has aggravated the defects of others. Did we not strain the patience of our best friends to the snapping point and brought out the very worst in those who didn't think much of us to begin with? We are really dealing with people whose woes we have increased. If we are now about to ask forgiveness for ourselves, why shouldn't we start out by forgiving them, one and all.

When listing the people we have harmed, most of us hit another solid obstacle. We got a pretty severe shock when we realized that we were preparing to make face-to-face admission of our wretched conduct to those we had hurt. It had been embarrassing enough when, in confidence, we had admitted these things to God, to ourselves, and to another human being. But the prospect of actually visiting or even writing the people concerned now overwhelmed us, especially when we remembered in what poor favor we stood with most of them. There

Gamblers Anonymous

were cases, too, where we had damaged others who still were happily unaware of being hurt. We cried, "Why? Why shouldn't by-gones be by-gones? Why do we have to think of these people at all?" These were some of the ways in which fear conspired with pride to hinder our making a list of all the people we had harmed.

Some of us think differently. We cling to the claim that, when gambling, we never hurt anyone but ourselves. It was our money, we gave the family plenty, we always stayed on the job, and our reputation hadn't suffered because we were certain few knew of our gambling. Those who did would assure us that, after all, a little gambling was only a good man's sport and recreation. What real harm, therefore, had we done? No more, surely, than we could easily mend with a few casual apologies. This attitude, of course, is the end result of purposeful forgetting. It is an attitude that may be changed only by a deep and honest search of our motives and actions.

We might next ask ourselves what we mean when we say that we have "harmed" other people. What kind of harm do people do one another? To define the word "harm" in a practical way, we might call it the result of instincts in collision, which cause physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual damage to people. If our tempers are consistently bad, we arouse anger in others. If we lie or cheat, we deprive other; not only of their worldly goods, but of their emotional security and peace of mind. We really issue them an invitation to become contemptuous and vengeful.

Let us think of some of the more subtle ones which can sometimes be quite as damaging. Suppose that in our family lives, we happen to be irresponsible, irritable, critical, and impatient. Suppose we pay no attention to any member of the family. With this neglect, what happens when we try to dominate the whole family? What happens when we wallow in depression and self-pity, and then inflict that upon those about us? This makes living with us, as compulsive gamblers, difficult and often unbearable. When we take such personality traits as these into shop, office, and the society of our fellows, they can do as much damage as that we have caused at home.

Having carefully surveyed this whole area of human relations and having decided exactly what personality traits in us injured and disturbed others, we can now commence to ransack memory for the people to whom we have give offense. To put a finger on the closest and most deeply damaged people shouldn't be hard to do. Then, year by year, we shall be bound to construct a long list of people who have, to some extent or other, been affected.

We should avoid extreme judgments of ourselves and of others involved. We must not exaggerate our defects or theirs. A quiet objective view will be our steadfast aim. Remembering what G.A. experience in this step has meant to others: it is the beginning of the end of isolation from our fellows and from God.

Gamblers Anonymous

THE TWELVE STEPS OF RECOVERY

Suggestions for arresting the compulsive gambling problem.

Step Nine

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

Good judgment, a careful sense of timing, courage, and prudence are the qualities we shall need when we take Step Nine.

After we have made the list of people we have harmed, have reflected carefully upon each instance, and have tried to possess ourselves of the right attitude in which to proceed, we will see that the making of direct amends divides those we should approach into several classes. There are some who should be dealt with as soon as we become reasonable confident that we can refrain from gambling. There will be those to whom we can make only partial restitution, lest complete disclosures do them or others more harm than good. There will instances where disclosure should be deferred. There will be other cases where, by the very nature of the situation, we shall never be able to make direct, personal contact at all.

Most of us began making certain kinds of direct amends from the day we joined Gamblers Anonymous. The moment we tell our families that we are really going to try the program, the process has begun. In this area, there are seldom any questions of timing or caution. After coming from our first meeting or reading the G.A. Big Book, we usually sit down with some member of the family and readily admit the damage we have done by our compulsive gambling. Almost always, we want to go further and admit other defects that have made us difficult to live with. This will be a very different occasion; in sharp contrast with those pangs of utter despair on Monday morning when we are to pay off for our past week's encounters, sometimes blaming the family and everyone else for our troubles. First, we will wish to be reasonably certain that we are making the G.A. program. Then, we are ready to go to these people, telling them what G.A. is and what we are trying to do. With this background, we can freely admit the damage we have done and make our apologies. We can pay or promise to pay whatever obligations, financial or otherwise, we owe. Response of most people to such quiet sincerity will often astonish you. Even our severest and most justified critic will frequently meet us more than half-way on the first trial.

Gamblers Anonymous

If we have prepared ourselves well, any reversals will not deflect us from our steady and even purpose. After taking this preliminary trial at making amends, we may enjoy such a sense of relief that we conclude our task is finished. The temptation to skip the more humiliating and dreaded meetings that still remain may be great. We will often think of excuses for dodging these issues entirely. We may also procrastinate, telling ourselves the time is not right; when, in reality, we have already passed up many chances to right a serious wrong. Let's not take a negative approach when the right one is just before us.

As soon as we have begun to feel confident in our new way of life and have begun, by our behavior and examples, to convince those about us that we are indeed changing for the better, it is usually safe to talk in complete frankness with those who have been seriously affected. The only exception we will make will be cases where our disclosure would cause actual harm. But if the opportunity does not easily, head straight for the person concerned and lay all our cards on the table. Amends at this level should always be forthright and generous. For instance, gambling a good chunk of our firm's money, whether by borrowing or just plain stealing. Suppose this may continue to go undetected, if we say nothing. Do we instantly confess our irregularities to the firm, when to do so would mean being fired and become unemployable? Are we going to be so rigidly righteous about making amends that we do not care what happens to the family or home? Or do we first consult those who are to be gravely affected? Do we lay the matter before our sponsor spiritually ask for God's help and guidance; meanwhile resolving to do the right thing when it becomes clear, cost what it may?

There is no pat answer fitting all such dilemmas, but all of them do require a complete willingness to make amends as fast and as far as may be possible in a given set of conditions. Above all, we should be sure that we are not delaying because we are afraid. For the readiness to take the full consequences of our past acts and, at the same time, to take responsibility for the well being of others is the very spirit of Step Nine.

Gamblers Anonymous

THE TWELVE STEPS OF RECOVERY

Suggestions for arresting the compulsive gambling problem.

Step Ten

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

As we work the first nine steps, we prepare ourselves for the adventure of a new life. But when we approach Step Ten, we begin to put our G.A. way of living to practical use, day by day. Then comes the rigid test: can we stay away from gambling, and in emotional balance live a normal, happy life with meaning, under all circumstances? The desire to learn and grow by this means is a necessity for the compulsive gambler, for we have learned this the hard way.

The wise people have always known that no one can make much of his life until self-searching becomes a regular habit, until he is able to admit and accept what he finds, and until he patiently and persistently tries to correct what is wrong. When we have gambled far beyond our means, we must admit it was the direct result of yesterday's excesses of negative emotions. Do not linger in the past for long. It requires an admission and correction of errors now. Our inventory enables us to settle with the past. We are really able to leave it behind us. When we have made peace with ourselves, we can meet tomorrow's challenges as they come.

The mental check or inventory is required because many of us have never really acquired the habit of self-appraisal. Once this healthy practice has been acquired, it will be so interesting and profitable that the time it takes won't be missed. For these minutes, and sometimes hours, spent in self-examination, are bound to make all the other hours of our day better and happier. And surely, our inventories will become a regular part of every day living, rather than something unusual or set apart.

Few people have been more victims by resentment than the compulsive gambler. It does not matter whether our resentments were justified or not. A burst of temper could spoil a day and a well-nursed grudge could make us miserably ineffective. What we think is justified anger can lead us to gambling. Other disturbances, such as envy, self-pity, and hurt pride, will do the same thing. A mental spot-check inventory, taken when disturbed, can quiet your emotions. The quick inventory is aimed at our daily ups and downs, lest we be tempted to make mistakes. This takes a willingness to admit when the fault is ours and an equal willingness to forgive when the fault is elsewhere. Do not be unduly disturbed when your thinking falls back to the compulsive gambling days, for these disciplines are not easy. We shall look for progress, not for perfection.

Gamblers Anonymous

Our first objective will be the development of self-restraint. This should rate top priority. When we speak or act hastily or rashly, the ability to be fair-minded and tolerant leaves us at once. One unkind word, one snap judgment can ruin our relations with another person for a day or maybe a whole year. Nothing pays off like restraint of tongue and action. We must avoid quick-tempered criticism and furious, power-driven arguments. The same goes for sulking or silent scorn. These emotional pitfalls, baited with pride and vengefulness, can trip us up. When we are tempted, we should train ourselves to step back and thin; for we can neither think nor act to good purpose until the habit of self-restraint has become automatic.

Disagreeable or unexpected problems are not the only ones that call for self-control. We must be just as careful when we begin to achieve some measure of importance and material success. For no group of people has ever loved personal triumphs more than the compulsive gambler, as they then feel elated. When temporary good fortune came our way, we indulged ourselves in fantasies of still greater victories over people and circumstances. Thus, blinded by prideful self-confidence, we were prone to play the "Big Shot". Of course, people turned away from us, either bored or hurt.

Now that we are in G.A. and not gambling, now that we are winning back the esteem of our friends and family and business associates, we find that we still need to exercise special vigilance. As an insurance against "Big Shotism", we can often check ourselves by remembering that we are today not gambling only by the grace of God and that any success we may have is far more His success than ours.

Finally, we begin to see that all people, including ourselves, are, to some extent, emotionally ill as well as frequently wrong. It will become more and more evident as we go forward that it is pointless to become angry or get hurt by people who, like us, are suffering from pains of growing up.

A change in our outlook will take time; perhaps a great deal of time. How many people love everybody? Most of us admit that we have loved but a few. We were indifferent to all, except the ones that kept bailing us out of jams, and even to those people when they finally refused to help us further.

Although these attitudes are common with the compulsive gambler, in G.A. we find we need something much better in order to keep our balance. The fear and hate for others has to be abandoned, if only a little at a time.

We can try to stop making unreasonable demands upon those we love. We can show kindness where we had shown none. With those we dislike, we can begin to practice justice and courtesy; perhaps going out of our way to understand and help them. Whenever we fail any of these people, we can promptly admit it to ourselves always and to them, also, when the admission would be helpful.

Courtesy, kindness, justice and love are the keynotes by which we may come into harmony with practically anyone. We can often ask ourselves, "Am I doing to others as I would have them do to me today?" This is a good time to see if your inventory is red or black for the day. It

Gamblers Anonymous

is a poor day when we have not done something right. Your waking hours should be filled with good intentions, good thoughts and good acts. They are there for us to see. Even when we have tried hard and failed, we may consider this a credit of all. Under these conditions, the pain of failures are converted into assets. Out of them we receive the stimulation we need to go forward.

Someone who knew what he was talking about once said that the pains of compulsive gambling had to come before wanting to stop gambling and emotional turmoil before serenity. As we look at the debit side of today's ledger, carefully examine our motives in each thought or act that appears to be wrong; our motives won't be hard to see and understand. When prideful, angry, anxious, or fearful, we acted accordingly, and that was that. Here, we need only recognize that we did act or think badly. Try to visualize how we might have done better and resolve, With God's help, to carry these lessons over into tomorrow, making amends still neglected.

But in other instances, a close look will reveal what our true motives were. Our enemy, rationalization, has stepped in, justifying conduct that was really wrong. The temptation here is to imagine that we had good motives and reason when we really did not. Is it truly important to win a useless argument? We sometimes hurt those we love because they need to be taught a lesson, when we really want to punish. We were depressed and complained we felt bad when, in fact, we wanted sympathy and attention.

This old trait of mind and emotion, this perverse wish to hide a bad motive underneath a good one permeates human affairs from top to bottom. Learning daily to stop, admit, and correct these flaws is the essence of character-building and good living. An honest regret for harms done, a genuine gratitude for blessings received, and a willingness to try for better things tomorrow will be the permanent assets we should seek.

Having so considered our day, not omitting to take due note of things well done, and having searched our hearts with neither fear or favor, we truly can thank God for the "Serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference".