A 9th Step Amend — The Books Stolen from My College Library by Robert W.

In the June 2010 edition, this piece was inadvertently cut. Here is the whole story.

A few years ago I mentioned to a potential sponsor that I wanted to make an amend to my college library for having stolen books when I was a student. I was thinking about shipping the books I still had to the library, with a letter of apology.

He said, the words of the Step are "make a direct amend." He suggested I think about driving up to the college, meeting with someone, making the amend, and offering to pay for the lost use of the books.

I was taken aback. This was more of an amend than I had bargained for. Harder, less comfortable, and the idea of making financial reparations seemed overwhelming. I decided to put off this particular amend.

Later, I worked for a while with a small 9th step group, which included the person who had given me the suggestion about making a direct amend for my stealing the books from my college library. The three of us met monthly, shared about the amends we wanted to make or were planning to make, and offered each other our thoughts and support. The process was slow and often we struggled with resistance. We talked and read about the spiritual meaning of making amends, about how making an amend might help us with our spiritual progress.

When I began planning to visit my college for a weekend standing in the middle of campus on both Friday and Monday, it occurred to me that this might be an opportunity to make the amend about the library books.

A few years ago I had begun to set these books aside in a box, the ones I still had, those which had not been lost, destroyed, given away or (in one case) sold. I had two dozen books, very fine solid editions, including books of philosophy, psychology, art, and music. These were books I still valued for their intellectual achievement, whose authors I still respected.

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I hadn't really connected with anyone about the spiritual process from a spiritual and program perspective. I felt that despite the good support, I felt uncomfortable about the reasonable financial restitution before offering my own. Several program people be given strength and direction to do the right thing, no innumerable forms, there are some general principles which we be given. I called a possible sponsor who discussed how to handle late fines on books like these. But these weren't books my appointment one of my former 9th step partners called me back. We talked of the idea of direct amend and I felt supported and on the right track.

On Monday after the festival ended, I drove to the library with the suitecase of books. The librarian welcomed me into his office. In his words, I was taking stock of things. There had been some time in my life and there were some things I had done that I was not proud of. I said that one of them was that I had stolen books from the library. I outlined the number and types of books and described the limited edition of etchings. I said I was sorry and that I wanted to make some financial restitution. He listened, then spoke to me with kindness. He said he understood the motives that brought me here. He established human connections between us — we were both from a certain background and had been drawn to a greater degree of self-awareness at the same time I'd been underaged, the times had been unsettled. He said there was no need to make any financial restitution but suggested two groups to whom I might make a contribution if desired. One was a fund in the library, the other a college entity that does spiritual and community service. He repeated that there was no need for me to make any financial restitution, but I didn't have any financial contribution or restitution, that I was free to do whatever I wanted to do in whatever amount but there was nothing expected.

First, this man incorporated the kind, respectful, generous attitude that I had experienced from every staff, administrative, and faculty member when I was attending the college, independent of my own rebellious critical attitudes at the time.

Second, he not only accepted my amend, but welcomed me back into this community of scholarship and growth by inviting me to experience the latest expansion of the library.

I walked through the study area thinking of the great gift this university gave to those whom it welcomed into its community, which had once, and now once again, included me. The library was designed with the concept of a cathedral of learning. The clients.

I found this in the Big Book: Although these separations take inumerable forms, there are some general principles which we find guiding. Reminding ourselves that we have decided to go to any lengths to find a spiritual experience, we ask that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be. We may lose our position or reputation or fail, but we are willing. We may not shrink at anything.

I had worked out a program of what I thought was a reasonable financial restitution. Several program people suggested I listen to the librarian's thoughts on what would be a reasonable financial restitution before offering my own. Despite the good support, I felt uncomfortable about the process from a spiritual and program perspective. I felt that I hadn't really connected with anyone about the spiritual importance or challenge of this amend. Nevertheless, I put in a call to the college librarian. We exchanged a few messages, then finally talked and I explained about the books and the possibility of making a redo in my possession from that earlier time. He started asking questions that got more and more sticky and I finally begged to see him in person to discuss this rather than the phone. We made an appointment.

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