

# The Hidden Rewards of Making Amends

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I have spent a good portion of my career unpacking the therapeutic forces operating in the recovery experience. Early on in my career I could plainly see the soundness of the psychological principles underlying the 12 Steps. This inspired me to spend the past 20 years of my career exploring both the specific and general therapeutic effects of each of the 12 Steps as well as the synergistic relationship amongst the Steps. I am excited to be able to share my insights with you in my new book which was published by Hazelden, *12 Hidden Rewards of Making Amends (2013)*.

The book is divided into two parts: Part I unpacks the therapeutic value of Steps 1 - 10; while Part II of the book explores the 12 hidden rewards from working Steps 8, 9 and 10.

I believe that Steps 1 - 7 are designed to promote a new relationship with ourselves, one that is more grounded and realistic. The psychic shift that takes place in these first seven Steps helps us develop a healthier self-concept. In order to function better we need to develop a solid yet flexible self. I believe this is only possible if we recover our lost, true-self.

While Steps 1 - 7 are focused on helping us construct a better version of ourselves, Steps 8, 9 and 10 are focused on improving our relationships with others. These three Steps are designed to help us use our new understanding of ourselves to operate from the best in us in relation to others. In order to repair the damages we have done we have to find the courage to face those people we have hurt and betrayed. Only the best in us can face the worst in us. When we work these three Steps we learn what it means to have genuine accountability, trustworthiness, and responsibility. Necessary ingredients for better relations.

Steps 8 - 10 are designed to help us develop "I to Thou" relationships. This is one of many of the hidden rewards of making amends. Here's a sneak peak into this issue as discussed in my new book.

Martin Buber, a brilliant philosophy professor at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, was the first to use the term "I to Thou" when describing a particular type of relationship between two people, or between an

individual and God. As we shall see, a healthy relationship is based on this type of a connection.

So what does it mean to say that a relationship has this unique quality? Buber described it in this way: “When I confront a human being as my You and speak the basic word I-You to him, then he is no thing among things, nor does he consist of things” (1970, 59).

Reread the previous sentence. Can you feel the depth of this type of a connection to another human being? This is the hallmark of an “I to Thou” relationship. This type of a connection is personal—very personal. It is not colored by what should be or what is supposed to be. When we meet and make contact on these terms, in this intimate way, we are relating to each other as the subjects of our conversation rather than as objects. We do not have an ulterior motive; our only purpose is to make contact. We are not trying to manipulate the person to validate us. We are not trying to regulate them to soothe our anxiety or trying to manipulate them for support. We don’t need to, because we can support ourselves. We are simply present with them and with the experience we are having together. We are open to whatever happens, and we don’t have an agenda or goal. Buber elaborates on this point: “The purpose of relationship is relationship itself—touching the You. For as soon as we touch a You, we are touched by a breath of eternal life” (1970, 112). This is the hidden reward of working Steps 8 through 10: we learn to make contact in a way that makes us feel we have been touched by the eternal breath of life.

My mentor, Dr. Kempler (1982), used to say, “To be more personal, we have to stop taking our partner’s behavior personally.” We have to get out of the way if we are going to be personal, if we are going to touch someone’s Youness. In order to achieve this state of mind and to see the other person’s true essence, we have to stop taking what they are saying or doing personally. When we are connected to another person in this way, it means that we are totally present with them in the here and now. Anything that subtracts from our total presence will downgrade the quality of our connection.

Making contact in this rich, alive, and meaningful way is at the heart of a healthy connection with another human being (Berger, A. - 12 Hidden Rewards of Making Amends, 2013, pgs. 161 - 163).”

I believe that Steps 8, 9 and 10 are a gateway to emotional sobriety. In these Steps we are learning to honor our true-selves by taking responsibility for our behavior and the

hurt that we have caused. We are learning to let the best in us run the show and to regulate our emotions. We are learning to have true respect for our fellows and to honor their humanity. We are learning that in a healthy relationship we are as important as others, not more or less. This is the essence of an “I to Thou” connection and one of the hidden rewards we will experience if we are fearless and thorough in this phase of our recovery.