Principles and Self-Defeating Beliefs

The newest part of the Big Book Awakening material: a sheet and a method for inventorying the beliefs we are angry at, published by BBA's daily meeting between 2024 and 2026.

The Book says to list *"people, institutions or principles with whom we were angry"* (◆ BB p.64 ¶3). The first two kinds are easy to picture. A *principle* is a belief — *"God does not care about me," "I'll never be OK unless I have a lot of money"* — that we have been angry at, or angry under, for years. The workbook's original way with them was the ordinary resentment sheet with the belief in Column 1 and no Realization; its four sample sheets are examples #9, #10, #11 and #12 here, and the margin of #11's sheet says why: *"Principle Inventory (Don't write on Realization)."*

Since then Big Book Awakening's daily meeting has built this out into its own tool, calling the beliefs **self-defeating beliefs**: a dedicated inventory sheet (2024, with a prompted version), a four-page guide to getting at them (on the tools page since early 2025), workshop recordings with Pat T (2025) and with Vinny D and Michael K (2026), and in May 2026 a set of completed examples and a sheet carrying the beliefs on through Steps Six to Twelve. All of it is linked at the end of this page and on Originals & sources. What follows is the method as those documents give it, so that a reader of this guide knows what the new sheet asks and how it differs from the one the examples here were written on.

Before starting

The 2026 resource page asks for three things first: finish at least half of your resentment sheets on people and institutions; print or download the self-defeating belief sheets; listen to the recordings at least once. The sheet itself carries a note across its top: *"This does not replace the original resentment inventory. Use this or the original resentment inventory for self-defeating beliefs."* So the sheet is an alternative to the way examples #9–#12 were written, not a correction of it.

Column 1: what do I really believe?

The guide's instruction is to write statements beginning *"I believe"* — and to look where we actually worship:

> *Take a blank sheet of paper and start statements with "I believe." Remember to reflect on the categories of: people, sentiment, things, money, and ourselves. These are the things we tend to worship.*

It asks for the belief held in the heart, not the one we think we ought to hold: *"Remember, write down what you really believe deep down in your heart, not the ideologies you think you should believe, or your wishful thinking. Rigorous honesty."* Its own examples include *"I believe I am not a lovable person," "I believe I will never be financially solvent," "I believe eventually others will leave me,"* and *"I believe if others really knew me they wouldn't love me."* The guide treats a belief as a moral act rather than an intellectual one — every belief has an agenda, and *"even if the agenda is self-defeating; good or bad, a belief must fulfill its agenda."* That is why a self-defeating belief has to be challenged and not merely noticed.

Column 2: the cause, and the two sides of anger

The workbook puts principles on the grudge list, so the second column still asks why we are angry — and with a belief the anger is often hard to find. The guide's answer is to see anger as a coin:

> *The front side is RESENTMENT. This side is easily seen when we point out towards others.*

> *The other side of anger is SELF-PITY, which points in.*

Self-pity, it says, is where a belief's anger usually lives: inadequacy, self-hate, frustration, envy, guilt, remorse, shame, entitlement, grief, despair — *"anger turned inward."* The second question for the cause is historical: *"When did I start believing this and or why?"* — and the direction is *"best to start from first dawn of memory and work your way forward,"* because the beliefs we live by were usually picked up at home and compounded later. The

guide is explicit that the cause need not be written at length or make perfect sense: enough to remember it and talk about it with a sponsor.

The prompted sheet puts the same question in three words at the top of its second column: *"The Cause: Why Do I Have This Belief? Who Told me This? What Happened in my past?"*

Column 3: the seven areas, from both extremes

The third column works as it does for a person, with one change. Because the belief splits us — the Book's *"double life"*, the stage character shown to the world against what we know in our hearts — the guide suggests writing self-esteem and pride **from both extremes**:

> *Sometimes it's best to do them from both extremes.*

Its example for self-esteem, under the belief *I have nothing to offer a woman*: the low line, *"I feel unworthy and not good enough,"* and the high line, *"I'm a good catch, I shouldn't have to worry about what others think of me."* Otherwise, it says, simply ask *"How does this belief affect these areas of self?"* and gives the seven in short form:

Area	The guide's question
Self-esteem	How you feel and think about yourself
Pride	How you want to be seen or treated
Ambitions	Who you want to be and what you want to do
Security	How you're trying to make yourself safe
Personal relations	How your relationships are directly affected by holding this belief
Sex relations	*"typically just more intense personal relationships"* — look at gender role assignments
Pocket book	How it affects your money, and the loss of time and energy

The fear column stays as it is: *"just ask yourself what you are afraid of and write it in."*

The dedicated sheet writes those questions onto the form itself — *"How does this belief make me feel about myself?"*, *"How does this belief affect how I think people see me?"*, *"Who do I want*

to be? What do I want to do? How does this belief affect those things?", *"What do I want or need to be secure in?"*, and so on through the seven, each with the *"Fear of being…"* bracket beside it — and adds one line the ordinary sheet does not have:

> *Is this a Lie?*

The prompted version answers it before you can: *"Always YES! The 2 biggest lies - "That is the way it is." & "That's the way I am.""*

The Realization, rewritten

For a person, the Realization asks how I have done the same thing. For a belief there is no one to have done it to, so the guide repurposes the slot:

> *Re-write the belief you wrote in the first column in the realization section.*

The reason is practical: the belief then sits at the top of the Fourth Column, and you re-read it each time you answer *selfish, dishonest, self-seeking* and *frightened*. The prompted sheet turns even this into a question — *"How have I used this belief to play victim or bully in the lives of those around me?"* — and gives it a prayer of its own: *"God, I have had a sick soul, please forgive me and help me forgive myself."*

Before the fourth column, the guide asks for one more turn: whatever the belief's origin, look at how it functions **today**. *"We must pull away from the origin of the belief and focus on the reality of its function today when considering selfishness, dishonesty, self-seeking, and frightened."*

Column 4: the belief at work

The guide sends the writer back to the Book's own portrait of self-centeredness — the actor who wants to run the whole show, the retired businessman in the Florida sunshine, the minister, the politicians and reformers, at the foot of ◆ BB p.61 and the top of ◆ p.62 — and

asks how each of those characters applies, because the price Ebby named to Bill was the destruction of self-centeredness and it helps to know what the target looks like.

Then a run of questions in the four directions this guide's Column 4 pages take: where the belief is inconsiderate and disregarding of others, how it disconnects, how it makes others invisible, whether it leaves a lack of conscience; where there is *"obtuse arrogance and/or conceit that may be used as a trumped form up of self-esteem"*; where there is a lack of ownership, spiritual laziness, reliance on one's own understanding. Two of its lines are worth keeping beside any belief:

> *Pay attention to entitlement especially.*

> *Look at the belief: Is it a lie? If so, why? Is it dishonest to believe a lie? Do you refuse to change your mind?*

The sheet's fourth column is headed *"Look Around the Whole Belief / Lie"* — the prompted version adds *"How have I used this belief and how has it used me?"* — and asks the four questions in the workbook's order (self-seeking, selfish, dishonest, frightened) and then the harm, *"including how it affects others i.e.: partners, kids, parents, employers etc."*

How this fits the rest of the guide

- The four workbook samples, written on the ordinary sheet, are examples #9–#12. The Column 3 packet and the Column 4 packet carry eleven more beliefs in the same form (#13–#17 and #37–#43), including the ones early recovery hands people: *"I can't have fun sober," "Once a junkie, always a junkie," "My family would be better off without me."*
- Afraid and The Chain describe what the belief sheets are built to reach: the principle inventories *"name what the person inventories can only hint at"*, because a belief is where the same fear under ten names finally gets written as one sentence.
- The fear list is the other door into the same material. A belief that keeps arriving at the bottom of a drill-down — *no God, self-reliance fails me* — is a principle, and can be inventoried as one.

The originals

- How to get at and work with principles in your inventory — the four-page guide quoted above
- Self-Defeating Belief Inventory — the blank sheet (also here), and the same sheet with prompts
- Self Defeating Beliefs — the 2026 resource page, with the recordings, the 2026 examples and Self-defeating beliefs with Steps 6 thru 12
- Vinny D, introduction to the principles inventory — audio, BBA UK workshop 2021
- The four completed examples on bbaworks.com: Relationship · Unlovable · Money · God

Quotations are from the guide and the two sheets as published on 2026-10-22; the phrasing of the method between them is this page's.

From the Big Book Awakening Step Four guide at bigbook.it/step-4/ · a page of the guide, not the workbook itself: the workbook's own pages are linked from "Originals & sources." · source principles-inventory.md