Stubborn Resentments — when the standard process doesn't resolve it

> *"We saw that these resentments must be mastered, but how? We could not wish them away any more than alcohol."*
>
> (◆ BB p.66)

References: Bridge Passage | Column 4 Instructions | The Chain | Realization | Afraid

When a Resentment Won't Yield

You've written all three columns. You've done the Realization. You've written the Fourth Column — Self-Seeking, Selfish, Dishonest, Afraid, Harm. You've prayed. And the resentment is still there.

This is not a failure of the process. Some resentments are deeply embedded — they involve real harm, long duration, or fears so fundamental they resist the first pass. The Big Book acknowledges this: resentments "could not be wished away any more than alcohol."

What follows is additional guidance for resentments that resist the standard Fourth Column process.

Step 1: Revisit the Bridge Passage Questions

These questions are derived from the Bridge Passage (◆ BB p.65-67). Answer each one honestly for this specific resentment:

1. Have I concluded that someone else is wrong or something is not the way it should be?
2. Have I become stuck on that conclusion and cannot get past it?

3. Have I fought to have my own way?
4. Did matters get worse?
5. Did seeming victories turn out to be defeats?
6. Were my moments of triumph short-lived?
7. Has this resentment led to futility and unhappiness?
8. Have I been squandering the hours that might have been worthwhile?
9. Is my hope the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience?
10. Can I see how this resentment could be fatal?
11. Have I been giving safe harbour to these feelings?
12. Is this resentment cutting me off from the sunlight of the spirit?
13. Is the insanity of alcohol returning?
14. Do I have to be free of anger?
15. Can I see how this person or situation is dominating me?
16. Do I want to escape?
17. Do I want to master this resentment?
18. Can I see that others are spiritually sick?

If the answer to most of these is *yes*, the motivation to release the resentment should be present — even if the method hasn't yet worked.

Step 2: Deepen the Fourth Column

Go back to Column 4 and dig deeper. Often a stubborn resentment means the *real* fear hasn't been found yet.

Re-examine the Fear

The fear in a stubborn resentment is usually one of the deepest fears — not surface-level ("I'll lose my job") but existential ("I'm fundamentally defective," "I'll never be safe," "I'm unlovable").

Use the drill-down: *"If this fear came true, then what? And then what?"* Repeat until you reach something that cannot be reduced further.

Re-examine the Delusion

Ask: *What lie am I still believing that keeps this resentment alive?* Common delusions in stubborn resentments:

- "They should not have done this" — but they did
- "They need to be punished" — but that's God's job, not mine
- "I can't be OK until they acknowledge what they did" — but my peace cannot depend on their behavior
- "What they did is unforgivable" — but that belief is the prison, not the protection

Re-examine the Chain

Does the chain connect all the way? Does the fear explain the delusion? Does the delusion explain the attitude? Does the attitude explain the actions? If there's a gap, the real chain hasn't been found.

Step 3: Apply the Forgiveness Exercises

(These exercises are from Tim M's Step 4 materials — supplemental teaching tools built on ◆ BB p.66-67. *See Bridge Passage for full context.)*

Exercise 1: Withdraw the Judgment

The "entirely different angle" (p.66): separate **identification** from **judgment**.

- **Identification** is neutral: *This happened. It was harmful.*
- **Judgment** is added: *They are bad. They deserve punishment.*

Say: *"This is not a good thing; this is not a bad thing; this is just a thing. It's not good or bad — it's only my interpretation that makes it so. I withdraw my interpretation."*

Error calls for acceptance and maybe response. Judgment calls for attack. The resentment lives in the judgment.

Exercise 2: Withdraw the Demand

From Column 3: what demand underlies the resentment?

Say: *"To be happy, I don't need this demand to be met."*

The only thing making you unhappy is the belief that the demand needs to be met. Drop the demand — or transform it into a preference or action plan — and the resentment loses its fuel.

Exercise 3: Empathy

View the world from their perspective:

- What might have motivated them?
- What combination of ignorance, irrationality, emotionalism, carelessness, and selfishness was operating?
- When have I shown those same qualities?
- When have I shown them *with those very people*?

They have these traits. I have these traits. If I want to be let off the hook, I need to let them off the hook.

Exercise 4: Love and Prayer

Pray consistently for this person:

1. *"God, please help me show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend." (ref. p.66-¶4)*
2. *"This is a sick person. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done." (ref. p.67)*
3. *"God, please help me avoid retaliation or argument." (ref. p.66)*
4. *"God, please show me how to take a kindly and tolerant view of this person." (ref. p.66)*

Spend up to an hour a day on this. Continue until the resentment lifts.

Step 4: The Six-Point Process

(Adapted from the parent guide's resentment process.)

1. **Resentment is futile, even if the critical assessment is correct** — it changes nothing. If action is necessary, take it. But resentment is not required for action.
2. **Focus on what is right rather than what is wrong.** Resentment is the perverse focus on the negative. Deliberately foster gratitude.
3. **Forgive.** This means:
   - Stop taking the universe personally — nothing is about you, even if it seems to be
   - Recognize that everyone and everything has the right to be defective — you won't be comfortable until you accept this
   - Refuse to engage in attack thoughts; surround the person in your mind with blessing
4. **Trust God** that there are sufficient resources in the universe to be OK even if things don't go your way.
5. **Seek God's will** in making the most of your contribution to the day.
6. **Stop thinking and talking about it.** If you inadvertently think about it, bless it and return to your day.

The Acceptance Fallacy

(From the parent guide's analysis of victimhood and resentment.)

Sometimes we advance spiritually to the point of not engaging in damaging behavior and accepting that we can't change people — but we retain the victimhood. The script sounds like: *"I accept that this person is terrible and will continue to be terrible and that I must tolerate suffering at their hands."*

This is the **acceptance fallacy** — using acceptance as a way of solidifying victimhood into a pseudo-spiritual permafrost of misery.

If I am upset, I have a demand. It is that demand which must be dropped.

What is the demand? Usually: their approval, respect, or acknowledgment.

As soon as I become indifferent to whether or not they approve of or respect me, I am free. I need not even be with them. The realization then dawns that I was just as manipulative and controlling — I wanted their approval and was willing to compromise my integrity to get it.

Then forgiveness arises and I am free. The person can no longer control me because I am no longer handing them the keys to my soul. I was the gaoler and prisoner the whole time.

> *"Our troubles are of our own making."* (◆ BB p.62)

When to Seek Help

A stubborn resentment may need:

- **Sponsor or spiritual advisor** — to identify blind spots in the inventory
- **Step 5** — sharing the resentment with another person often breaks it open (the BB says this is the immediate next step after Step 4)
- **Professional help** — when the resentment involves trauma, abuse, or mental health conditions that the inventory alone cannot address
- **Time** — continue the prayers and exercises while proceeding with the rest of Step work; the resentment may resolve as the overall spiritual condition improves

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Sources & Attribution

Direct Big Book text:

- p.62: “Our troubles are of our own making”
- p.66: “We could not wish them away any more than alcohol”
- p.66-¶4: “tolerance, pity, and patience… a sick friend”
- p.67: “This is a sick person… Thy will be done”
- p.67-¶2: “Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done… we tried to disregard the other person involved entirely”
- p.552: “Acceptance is the answer to all my problems today”

Supplemental teaching (Tim M Step 4 materials):

- The four forgiveness exercises (Step 04 13)
- The distinction between identification and judgment (Step 04 09, Step 04 13)
- Reality-checking principles (Step 04 08)

Parent guide material:

- Bridge Passage questions derived from p.66-67
- The six-point process for dealing with resentment
- The Acceptance Fallacy analysis
- “Arrangements that refuse to stay put” — the actor metaphor applied to persistent resentment

Analytical work:

- The “Narcissist’s Handbook” passage — illustrative writing, not from any cited source

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 stubborn-resentment.md