

Origins of Moral Inventory

Origins of Moral Inventory in Alcoholics Anonymous. By Archie

The opinions expressed on this page are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of The Original Way Group.

This page is about Moral Inventory and it's historical roots in AA. In order to "thoroughly follow" the path of the founders we need to know the context of the Big Book instructions. To know the context it is important we know some of its history. In this way we can tap into the incredibly successful program of the founders and carry that message to the still suffering alcoholic.

Merriam Webster lists the definition of MORAL:

[of or relating to principles of **right** and **wrong** in behavior :ethical, moral judgments.]

Step 4

"Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

4th Step AA pg 59

It appears there was no one set way the founders and pioneers worked a 4th step but...

There were basically two original 4th step styles:

The Assets and Liabilities List- *Resentment, Fear and Harms.*

The 4 Column Inventory - *Resentment, Fear and Sex.*

Either one is good. Some of us do both. In AA everyone is free to do whatever kind of Step work they want.

The instructions we offer in the 12 step guide work for either 4th step.

If you do both it doesn't matter which one is done first. Experience has shown that it helps someone to go back through the steps after a few months or so. This way they learn it better and learn to pass it on to others. It's pretty amazing how many things come to light after a second working of the steps. Much good comes from this.

We offer a thorough [4 Column 4th Step Inventory](#) on the download page. (*Actually shown as 3 columns in the Big Book but then adds a fourth column for "our own mistakes", "selfish, self seeking, dishonest or frightened" saying "...we listed them".*) This guide has been circulating for quite a while among recovering folk; 50 years

or more. It is self explanatory. A newcomer could fill this out in advance of the 5th step or do it with the sponsor. It follows the instructions in the Big Book in an easy to follow way. The Resentment section has a 5th column for character defects that is optional. It is powerful to see the wreckage of our past written out so clearly in our own handwriting. For this it is hard to beat the 4 Column Inventory.

[The AA The Original Way - 4th Step Inventory](#) is an **Assets and Liabilities** type of 4th step. This 4th step consists essentially of one page that is duplicated as needed. How many copies needed will depend on how many names the person has on their resentment, fear and harms list. One of the great things about using this list is that it becomes very easy to do. Everything needed to take a person through steps 4 thru 9 is right there on one page. Once it is learned it is very simple to take a person through the steps and to show them how to take someone else through the steps. Self Will is all lined up on one side and God's Will is all lined up clearly on the opposite side of the list. The amends are all listed right there with all of the the harms as well. It's easy to see why the founders preferred to use this style of 4th step to work the steps.

Listing Harms

One of the main differences between the two styles of 4th step is that the 4 column addresses Resentment, Fear and Sex, whereas, the Assets and Liabilities addresses Resentment, Fear and Harms; all harms including sexual and financial are covered. Somehow in the Big Book many of the instructions for harms got put under the main heading of "Sex" but really they were looking for all harms not just sex. This is still frequently passed on through the word of mouth program transmitted today.

Pg 70 says:

"If we have been thorough about our personal inventory, we have written down a lot..."

"We have **listed the people we have hurt** by our conduct, and are willing to straighten out the past if we can."

Then it says it again on page 76:

"Now we need more action, without which we find that "Faith without works is dead." Let's look at Steps Eight and Nine. **We have a list of all persons we have harmed and to whom we are willing to make amends. We made it when we took inventory.** We subjected ourselves to a drastic self-appraisal."

"We made it when we took inventory"

We made a list of "Harms" when we took inventory is what they are saying. They most likely say this because the Assets and Liabilities list they were using had three parts Resentment, Fear and Harms. All harms. Not just sex. This becomes more apparent in the 9th step when it talks about

creditors as well. We need to list all of the people we harm; sexual, financial, legal etc. They tell us to do it in the 4th Step and then again in the 8th step. It doesn't really matter when we do it. If using the 4 column inventory the harms obviously must be done in Step 8. However, there are some benefits of listing all of the harms when we do the 4th step. Primarily because the Moral Inventory shows us where selfishness causes "harm" to others. To list harms then makes sense which is why pg 70 and 76 say they did it when they took inventory.

Progress not Perfection

*"Without some **tolerance**, we might tend to become a bit smug or superior - which, of course, is not helpful to the person we are trying to help and may be quite painful or obnoxious to others. No one of us wishes to do anything that might act as a deterrent to the advancement of another - and a patronizing attitude can readily slow up this process." - Dr. Bob*

Avoid Rigidity. There are a lot of suggestions here. Trust God. Everyone has to find their own way. Each person's Higher Power is the true Guide or Ultimate Authority. It's not about exact reproduction of the past it's about connection to the God of our own conception. There are no rigid, or exact methods. According to the founders and pioneers things varied a great deal.

They generally did the 4th and 5th step together, sponsor and newcomer. Usually in one or two sittings working Steps 1 thru 8. Often the sponsor told his story first, paving the way for the sponsee. Sometimes they just talked about a list of liabilities or character defects. Sponsors usually did the reading and writing and the newcomer stayed focused on sharing. Sometimes both 4th and 5th steps just happen at once as years of pain unravel. All paths lead to the same place.

We have a new Director for this show. Let go and let God. It is intimate 12th step work for the sponsor and thorough 4th step work for the sponsee. They kept it simple. Surrender self will and accept God's Will. "Your way doesn't work. Why don't you try Gods way." as Dr Bob would say.

Moral Inventory Backdrop

The Touchstone and The Birth of Step 4



Rev. Sam Shoemaker is credited by Bill Wilson as the source for the teachings that became part of AA's program. Bill attended Oxford Group Meetings that Rev. Shoemaker ran in NYC. Rev. Shoemaker is said to have been heavily influenced by Henry B. Wright. Mr. Wright taught at Yale.

Henry B Wright - *The Will of God and A Mans Lifework*, 1909, was an integral book for Rev. Shoemaker and Oxford Group Founder Frank Buchman. It is comprised of studies written for theological students. The book discusses God's Will and living in God's Will using Absolutes Standards.

The Four Absolutes were used by the Oxford group to find God's Will. They got them from Henry Wright who developed them; utilizing the work of Mr. Robert E. Speers. Wright arrives at the 4 absolutes by asking,

"Are there absolute standards of right and wrong? How did Jesus find out the particular will of God for himself?"

Dr. Speers in 1902 had already outlined how Jesus found God's Will:

Purity, Honesty, Unselfishness and Love.

In 1909, Henry Wright expanded on these calling them:

"The Absolute Standards of Jesus".

The Absolute Standards are presented by Wright as God's Will. He cites "Absolute Self Surrender" as the key to living in God's Will. The Absolute Standards of Jesus became known as the Four Absolutes in the Oxford Group and early AA. These were the original "Assets" that our Moral Inventory sprang from.

The "**Touchstone**" - Perhaps, the very birth of the 4th Step can be found in the following snippet from Wrights- *The Will of God and a Mans*

Lifework:

SIXTH DAY

The Paradox of the Touchstone—an Absolutely Rigid Touchstone to Which no Exception may be Made and yet an Infinite Variety of Results, Some Exactly Opposite

Luke 7 ²¹⁻²⁵.

This touchstone helps young men to reach a decision in the most perplexing question as to what to do in regard to the so-called doubtful pleasures—smoking, drinking, theatre, dancing, etc. Let a young man ask himself, Can I do these things and remain pure, honest, unselfish and loving? A man must be absolutely honest with himself, however, in deciding whether he is pure, honest, unselfish and loving. Let us take a practical example, e. g. smoking.

Shall I smoke? 1. Does it affect my *purity*—excite the sensual? If it does it must go—the alternative is given in Jesus' own words (Matt. 5 ^{29, 30}).

2. Does it affect my *honesty*? Granted that I can remain pure, am I deceiving some parents or relatives who hold narrower views about it? If so, I must stop—a lie is damning.

3. Does it affect my *unselfishness*? Granted that I am pure and honest in it, do I forget the rights of others in my own personal self-gratification? am I selfish or irritable without it? If so I must stop—selfishness is the death of the soul.

4. Does it affect my *active service* of others? Granted that I am pure and honest and unselfish in it, does it take my time and energy? Life is short—one must use all the motive power. Waste is a crime and lovelessness is death

The Touchstone to find God's Will: #4 above is referring to Love (service of others) very similar to "Working With Others" isn't it?

The Touchstone uses The Four Absolutes as a Moral Compass or Moral Inventory. The Moral Inventory presented in the "Touchstone" above is as much a "Moral Comparison" as it is an inventory. "How does **self will** compare to **God's Will**?" Seems to be in essence what Wright is saying here. It's easy to see how Rev. Shoemaker could have become accustomed to using this simple Moral Inventory. It's practically identical to how Dr Bob describes using the Four Absolutes. Simple. However, this inventory on it's own was insufficient to produce sobriety for Dr. Bob in the Oxford Group.

Rapid Evolution: Oxford Group members report folding a paper in quarters, putting the Four Absolutes in each corner and writing about how they measure up to these. A simple Moral Inventory. As AA departed from the Oxford Group the Assets and Liabilities list developed. It had just the Four Absolutes on one side and the opposites, Anger, Dishonesty, Selfishness and Fear across from them, in the liabilities column. This way a deeper look into each relationship could be done with a newcomer still learning honesty. In the Hospital, before Bills Awakening, Ebby had Bill include a list of people he Resented and Harmed. At some point Fears were included in the list. The 4 column inventory appeared when the Big

Book was written but the founders reportedly continued to use the Assets and Liabilities list. By this time there was a variety of assets and liabilities being listed besides the Four Absolutes. It's interesting that our 4th step actually came from the Assets (Four Absolutes) and not the Liabilities.

The Vital Nature of Surrender to the Moral Inventory

It's all about living in God's Will. There is a statement made in one of Wright's studies that seems vital to the origins of AA's entire program.

"Study IV The Principle of Surrender of Self Involved in Doing God's Will a Reasonable One and Fundamental in Other Departments of Life"

Wright says clearly:

"Solution of the Dilemma; Full Self-Realization only Possible Through Self-Surrender."

William James, in Varieties of Religious Experience writes:

"Given a certain amount of love, indignation, generosity, magnanimity, admiration, loyalty or enthusiasm **for self surrender** the result is always the same. That whole raft of cowardly obstructions, which in tame persons and dull moods are sovereign impediments to action, sinks away at once, our conventionality, our shyness, laziness and stinginess, our demands for precedent and permission, for guarantee and surety, our small suspicions, timidities, despairs, where are they now? Severed like cobwebs, broken like bubbles in the sun - "

The greatest American psychologist promoting spirituality above psychology! James is saying here that a full self surrender and the ensuing Spiritual Experience wipes out character defects like bubbles breaking in the sun! This passage comes more than halfway into the book after a wealth of examples.

There is a section in the Big Book that is similar to what Wright and James have observed. The Big Book section on Step 10 tells us what happens when we Surrender in the 1st to 3rd Steps, Moral Inventory in 4 & 5, Surrender again in 6 & 7 and make Amends in 8 & 9, now at Step 10:

And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone— even alcohol. For by this time sanity will have returned. We will seldom be interested in liquor. If tempted, we recoil from it as from a hot flame. We react sanely and normally, and we will find that this has happened automatically. We will see that our new attitude toward liquor has been given us without any thought or effort on our part. It just comes! That is the miracle of it. We are not fighting it, neither are we avoiding temptation. We feel as though we had been placed in a position of neutrality—safe and protected. We have not even sworn off. Instead, the problem has been removed.

It does not exist for us. We are neither cocky nor are we afraid. That is our experience. That is how we react so long as we keep in fit spiritual condition.

These two sections above, written by William James and William Griffith Wilson, are describing the same thing. A Spiritual Experience after Self Surrender. Character defects dissolve in the sunlight of the spirit. The shadow of self will disappear as the light of God's Will enters the forest.

God's Will and Surrender

A. INTRODUCTORY

Study I. God has a Plan for Every Human Life.
Study II. Jesus and the Will of God.
Study III. The Apostles and the Will of God.
Study IV. The Principle of Surrender of Self Involved in
Doing God's Will a Reasonable One and Fundamental in Other
Departments of Life.

Above is a snippet from *The Will of God and a Mans Lifework*. Of prime interest is the sections on God's Will and "The Principle of Surrender of Self Involved in Doing God's Will..." Surrender is regarded as essential to see where self or "human will" blocks us from "God's Will". Wright contends that "Full Self Realization" (Spiritual Awakening) is "Only Possible Through Self Surrender." This statement is a kick to the teeth for an alcoholic desperately seeking a spiritual experience to conquer alcoholism. If only there was a program to make this simpler...

...Jump forward 30 years to AA 1939. Surely some providence was operating in AA's development to grow so powerfully and inclusively from these covered roots of Self Surrender, Moral Inventory, God's Will and subsequent Awakening. Only Providence could make this palatable to a self-will run riot alcoholic!

No man, who through the deliberate act of **surrender** of the human will to absolute standards of purity, honesty, unselfishness and love, has once felt the coursing of these immortal powers in his spirit can ever after find any experience of this new life tame or commonplace.

Why should we hesitate to make the act of enlistment or **surrender** complete? Just the other side of complete **surrender** is God and the power of an endless life.

Henry Burt Wright clearly describes surrender in direct relation to the 4 Absolutes. Surrender to God's Will.

Self surrender is not mentioned in exactly those terms in the Big Book but the principle of "surrender" is dense in the book. Oddly the word "surrender" never appears in the 1st Edition Text of the Big Book. Perhaps Bill and the New Yorkers had an issue with the term "surrender" because clearly they were familiar with both the principle and the term. They find dozens of other ways to say "surrender" essentially spelling it out in the 3rd and 7th Step Prayers. Dr. Bob and Ed Webster obviously had no issue with the term "surrender" since it is often used in The Little Red Book.

Self Surrender is welded to the Moral Inventory. It keeps an otherwise complex topic, utterly simple and gives it purpose. Nothing short of "Full Self Realization" which could also be called a Sudden Spiritual Awakening. Most AA's are content with sobriety and a gradual but sustainable Spiritual Awakening. This is a miracle in itself, but the AA design for living can also be used for a Sudden Awakening at any point in a persons sobriety.



Self Surrender was the foundation for the Moral Inventory. "You want to quit drinking? Well, what are you willing to do? Are you willing to do God's Will? Then Surrender your **self** and look fearlessly at how you measure up to God's Will. Are you absolutely Pure? Honest? Unselfish? Loving? Now that you see how you measure up are you willing to fix the mess? Surrender to God's Will? Stop drinking?" Well anyone who knows any drunks knows that we don't tend to clean up our "Moral" baggage so often or so easy. It's easy to see why the inventory grew from the 4 Absolutes to include other Character Defects and "ideals" as well.

The founders discovered that Moral Inventory, when sandwiched between self surrender, is effective as a tool leading to "Spiritual Experience". Moral Inventory on its own would do little more than depress a still suffering alcoholic. Without a "Spiritual Experience" most alcoholics would not stop drinking based on a Moral Inventory alone. This is probably why long drawn out 4th steps are notorious for precipitating relapse among the newly sober. Not to mention the painful nature of constant cognition of negative memories.



...But to use the the 3rd Step Surrender, "**at once**" followed by a Moral Inventory and then to bring the hammer home with the 6th and 7th Step Surrender! Pow. That is a knockout punch for self. Sudden Spiritual Experiences have been known to occur when this process is followed **wholeheartedly**. Gradual awakenings are pretty much a guarantee, especially if steps 8-12 get worked soon afterward.

Two Psychological Giants & Bill's Sudden Awakening



Carl Jung was probably the 2nd most famous psychiatrist of all time. Only his mentor, friend and eventually [nemesis](#), Sigmund Freud has had a bigger impact on the field.

Carl Jung made a powerful statement when he told Rowland H. that psychology was not going to save chronic alcoholics like him and that only a **Spiritual Experience** would work. Rowland told Ebby and Ebby brought a copy of Varieties of Religious Experience (1902) to Bill in the hospital. In that book, **Self Surrender** is cited by William James as the key to most if not all spiritual experiences that he studied. Ebby came one day and took Bill through what we now know as steps 4 thru 8. Bill surrendered and had a tremendous spiritual awakening experience shortly afterward.



[William James](#), "The Father of American Psychology" and one of the greatest American philosophers. He is the author of *Varieties of Religious Experience*. The masterpiece that is cited twice in the Big Book.

Now, Bill was convinced that psychology was not the way and that self surrender combined with Moral Inventory leads to the spiritual experience required to conquer alcoholism.

Moral Inventory passed on from the Oxford Group evolved substantially in AA becoming a list of character defects then the Assets and Liabilities list and then the 4 Column Inventory the New York / New Jersey members included in the Big Book. Moral Inventory became part of deep self surrender. Serving as a way to see where self was "blocking" a person from a spiritual experience; looking for freedom from the bondage of self with God's help. With the blocks (self) now removed a sudden or gradual spiritual experience could occur.

Moral Inventory was not intended as a long, arduous process of self introspection. That would have been considered grandiose or self centered; the opposite of what the founders were trying to do. Daily inventory continued afterwards and a yearly 4th Step was often employed, but the initial 4th step was pretty simple and fast. See and share where self is blocking us from God's Will, turn it over in 6 and 7 and then get out of **self** with 10, 11 and 12. It is one simple, fluid movement of **self surrender** that leads to deep spiritual experience that can conquer alcoholism. To psychologize this process is to miss an enormous opportunity.



[Rowland Hazard](#) probably had his last binge in 1936. He recovered through therapy with Courtenay Baylor and fellowship with the Oxford Group. He died sober in 1945 of a coronary occlusion.



Younger Ebby (left). Bill and his sponsor Ebby (right). Edwin Throckmorton Thatcher was a chronic relapser; according to Lois this was probably due to his sense of entitlement (the rules don't apply). Beloved friend of Bill. He was sober 2 or 3 years when he died in 1966 of emphysema the same disease that killed Bill Wilson in 1971.

Selfishness, Self Centeredness!

Pg 62 of the Big Book points out "**decisions based on self**":

"Selfishness—self-centeredness! That, we think, is the

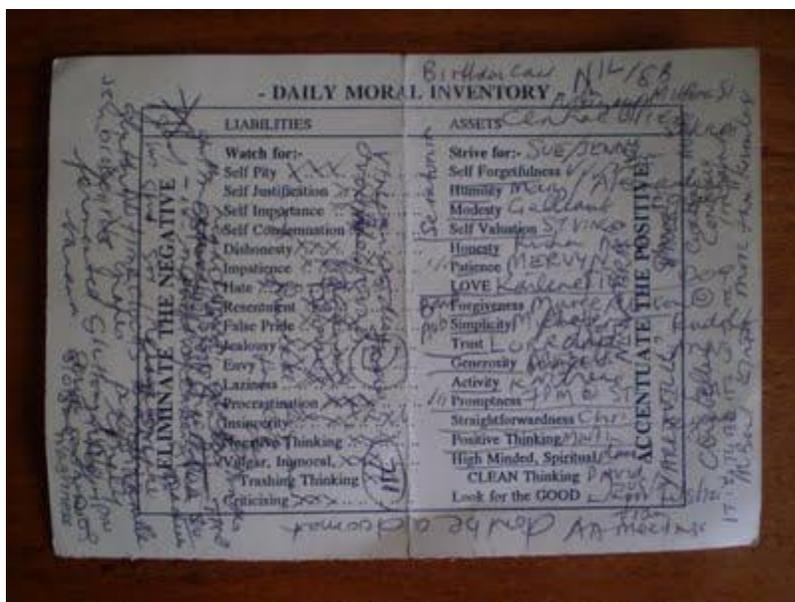
root of our troubles. Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate. Sometimes they hurt us, seemingly without provocation, but we invariably find that at some time in the past we have made **decisions based on self** which later placed us in a position to be hurt."

"So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so. Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us! God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely **getting rid of self** without His aid."

Self surrender is built up masterfully by Bill in the Big Book. He really starts to hammer it home by the time he gets to page 62. There is an important question that helps to weld self surrender into the 4th step. We included it in our 4th step in the AA The Original Way 12 Step Guide. The question is "**Did a decision based on self later place you in a position to be hurt by this person?**" This keeps the focus on self. The point of Moral Inventory is to see where self-will defeated us and where God's will could fix the mess we are in. "Self will fails you. God's Will can save you." Self Surrender is the key.

In discussing these things a revolutionary thing begins to happen. It's not just that we stop focusing on others and begin to look at our own part. But we see where **thoughts of self** caused us to harm others. Every single one of our character defects stem from this habitual thought of self. It is nothing but thoughts. The problem centers in our minds. Our thinking. Our problem is self. Selfishness, Self Centeredness! Then we surrender self with complete abandon in Steps 6 & 7. Suddenly, we can we start to experience something far more powerful than our **self**. Practicing the powerful program laid out in the 12 steps continues to wear away at this habit of thinking about self. In this way we can see deeper and deeper into an initial awakening experience. Ever deepening...

A Rare Example of a USED Assets and Liabilities List



Example of an old Assets and Liabilities 10th step someone worked with. Judging from the amount of marks on it, this one may have used for the 4th step as well. Notice the x marks next to certain character defects. Some have more than others possibly indicating things that needed more attention. Also, there are many names on the list indicating Amends. Too bad more of these incredible documents aren't available. Not too many people want their 4th steps being published.

Members speak of their sponsors using similar lists as the one above when they did their 4th steps. Earl T discloses a different list of character defects than these; he documents specific character defects that Bob brought up with him (Earl lived with Bob for a while so some of these defects Bob may have customized for Earl). Clarence S wrote out a list of 20 defects to bring up in AA's first Sponsorship Pamphlet. In fact, many AA's seem to have developed their own list of liabilities.

Flaws

"First, we searched out the **flaws** in our make-up which caused our failure. Being convinced that **self**, manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us, we considered its common manifestations.

"Resentment is the "number one" offender." -pg 64 AA



Pioneers also called liabilities "shortcomings or character defects" (Chuck C. in his great book A New Pair of Glasses, said that Bill used these words interchangeably, he asked Bill about this and Bill told him that they meant the same thing to him when writing).

"Flaws" and "grosser handicaps" were also considered the same thing although many people list flaws separately. However, when Bill and Hank put "flaws" down on pg 64 they were referring to the manifestations of self, meaning the Liabilities, Shortcomings or Character Defects that were about to be reviewed. Of these flaws "Resentment is the number one offender".

In a simple way, The Assets and Liabilities list and the 4 Column Inventory clearly reveal all of these "flaws" as emanating from self centered thinking. We surrender this flawed self to find freedom.

Where are "Assets" mentioned in the Big Book?

(Asset = God's Will or desirable qualities)

*"Today the remarkable unity of AA is one of the greatest **assets** that our society has."*

-Big Book forward to the 2nd edition pg. xix

Merriam Webster lists the definition of MORAL:

*[of or relating to principles of **right** and **wrong** in behavior :ethical, moral judgments.]*

Therefore, a Moral Inventory would by necessity be an inventory of right and wrong: self will and God's Will, Assets and Liabilities. What we did

wrong what we could do instead, selfish behavior and God's Ideals, Undesirable Qualities and Desirable Qualities. Wreckage and Corrective Measures.

Assets, as the founders used the word, are not something we write down to say how great we are. They are **moral**: *ideals* or *desirable qualities* that represent "God's Will" and something we can strive towards. They are what we could "do instead" of our character defects and they are always rooted in *a power greater than ourselves*.

Listing assets is by no means mandatory but it is certainly an AA Tradition as sure as Dr. Bob is a founder. Our 4th Step was actually born out of Assets, [The Four Absolutes \(link to old AA Pamphlet that includes a Four Absolutes 4th Step\)](#). The Absolutes were the Assets side of the early AA moral inventory.

Surrender is never mentioned in the Big Book and "Assets" are seldom mentioned. "Assets" are not actually missing but they are only mentioned twice in the 1st edition and 3 times in the 2nd edition. Make no mistake. Both of these are implied. Since we already covered "Surrender" above we might as well look at "**Assets**" or the things to "strive for" that were such a prominent feature of step work the founders and pioneers did. These are also a vital part of the Big Book.

It's important to make clear that the Assets side of the Assets and Liabilities list is "God's Will", "Desirable Qualities". The Big Book talks along these terms from beginning to end they just avoid the word Asset probably for the same reason they avoided the word "surrender". They spell each thing out in clear terms. Assets are just another way of saying "God's Will". Surrender is just another way of saying "...to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him". Really, all of the steps are about surrendering self will for God's Will.

Assets in the Big Book...

Assets are mentioned specifically on pg 124 in the Big Book:

"We grow by our willingness to face and rectify errors and convert them into **assets**. The alcoholic's past thus becomes the principal **asset** of the family and frequently it is almost the only one!" pg 124 Big Book

Assets in the 12 & 12

The 12 & 12, Step 4, page 46 is very clear about Assets and Liabilities:

"The sponsor probably points out that the newcomer has some **assets** which can be noted along with his liabilities."

To take these two statements in context we need to refer to the 12 & 12 again since it is written by the same author and says nearly the same thing as the Big Book:

"A continuous look at our **assets** and liabilities and a real desire to learn and grow by this means, are the necessities for us." pg 88, Step 10 in the 12 & 12.

We grow by Assets.
They are Necessities for us.

So both the Big Book and the 12 & 12 are saying the same thing in practically the same way. We grow by looking at our Character Defects and converting them into Assets. Bill obviously felt it was important to clarify what is to be done in regards to Assets. Especially, since "Assets" are mentioned many times in the 12&12. These are not "Daily Affirmations". He is not saying, "Pat yourself on the back for how great you are." He is not saying, "You are wonderful just as you are." or "Nurture your inner child."

He is saying: **It is a necessity for us to learn how to face our character defects and turn them into Assets.** The Assets and Liabilities list makes this very simple since the polar opposite of every character defect is directly across from it on the Assets side of the page. Whoever wrote the old 4 Column Inventory worksheets indicated Assets as "optional". Here they essentially ask for strengths you had before drinking however, that is **not** how the Assets and Liabilities list worked that the founders used. For the founders Assets were ideal qualities representing God's Will. Liabilities represent self will. Obviously these are nothing but suggestions. No musts. Nothing mandatory.

DAILY MORAL INVENTORY	
LIABILITIES	ASSETS
Watch for--	Strive for--
Self Pity	Self-Forgetfulness
Self Justification	Humility
Self Importance	Modesty
Self Condemnation	Self Valuation
Dishonesty	Honesty
Impatience	Patience
Hate	LOVE
Resentment	Forgiveness
False Pride	Simplicity
Jealousy	Trust
Envy	Generosity
Laziness	Activity
Procrastination	Promptness
Insincerity	Straightforwardness
Negative Thinking	Positive Thinking
Vulgar, Immoral	High-Minded, Spiritual
Fear	Courage
Trashy Thinking	CLEAN Thinking
Criticizing	Look for the GOOD
Eliminate the Negative	Accustom the Positive

Old AA Assets and Liabilities List.

*The Big Book says, "We grow by our willingness to face and rectify errors and convert them into **assets**." pg 124 Big Book*

Assets Implied in the Big Book

The above examples are quite specific. There are also many examples of "assets" that are implied in the Big Book instructions for the 4th step.

Commercial Inventory

On page 64 in the Big Book a "**Commercial Inventory**" is suggested for Step 4. The basic reason for a Commercial Inventory is to find out what we have and what we don't have; what the company needs and what it doesn't. This implies looking at the company's goods aka "assets" (literally called **Assets** in a Balance Sheet) and finding items that are running low, defective or otherwise "unsalable" (liabilities). It's unlikely that any businesses use a "Commercial Inventory" to only list things wrong with the company and nothing good.

Lets take an example we can all relate to. Now don't get thirsty!

If a bar is losing money and is considering bankruptcy a **commercial inventory** is done to see what we have in stock. Sometimes it makes sense to focus mostly on defective items that are losing us money. If we find out our beer is defective we can see what it'll cost us to replace it and how many kegs we need to buy. Of course, once the flaws in the company are discovered the inventory does not stop there. That would be called a "We Suck Inventory". It's always about finding out what we have in stock and what we don't. If we have plenty of wine and liquor and all we need is beer then wouldn't we want to know that? Of course. What are our assets? How much wine and liquor do we have? Plenty! Ohhh. That's good news. Maybe we don't have to go bankrupt after all.

Most of us don't come into AA with an abundance of "Assets". For this reason we primarily focus on character defects in the Moral Inventory. But listing things to grow and aspire towards is an old AA tradition.

Ideals

Ideals are mentioned often in the Big Book. In step 4, ideals are mostly mentioned in relation to God's Will. This is also how they used Assets. The most basic example of an "Asset" (in the definition the founders were using) is "God's Will". This is because we know that the original Assets were the Four Absolutes. And we know these were tools used to discern "God's Will" as shown above in the Touchstone. The entire purpose of these "Assets" was to help people see where they were falling short of "God's Will" and where they could do better. This is transmitted in the Big Book in various ways.

The Third Step Prayer closes with "May I do Thy will always!" pg 63. Then the Big Book gives us instructions in numerous ways for finding out "Thy Will" even going so far as telling us exactly what to ask God for:

"We ask Him to remove our fear and direct our attention to what He would have us be." pg 68

What would he have us be? What is his Will? The Book specifically tells us to find these Ideals from God. Dr. Silkworth first uses the term "**Ideals**" in the doctor's opinion- "*In nearly all cases their **ideals** must be grounded in a power greater themselves if they are to re-create their lives.*" The book goes on to explain **ideals** in the section covering harms and sex.

"We asked God to mold our **ideals** and help us to live up to them." pg 68

"Whatever our **ideal** turns out to be, we must be willing to grow toward it." pg 68 (*similar to pg 124 on Assets*)

"Suppose we fall short of the chosen **ideal**" pg 70

"We earnestly pray for the right **ideal**, for guidance in each questionable situation, for sanity, and for the strength to do the right thing." pg 70

God molds the ideals. We grow toward it. We ask for Guidance, Sanity and Strength. So here they are referring to "**Ideals**" in exactly the same way as an "**Asset**". Both are considered "**God's Will**". Both are "grounded in a power greater than (ourselves)". Both we grow towards. These are desirable qualities to strive for. Replace the word "ideal" in the examples above with the word "asset" and you get a good picture of how they were using the Assets and Liabilities list.

Remember, the founders considered the Four Absolutes to be God's Will. The "Assets" side of their list consisted of the Four Absolutes. So when the Big Book is referring over and over again to the **ideal** they are talking about Assets which is exactly the same as saying "God's Will". These are things to "Grow towards", "Strive for..." Not things we are already perfect at.

An Entirely Different Angle

"We turned back to the list, for it held the key to the future. We were prepared to look at it from an entirely different angle." pg 66

In effect this is saying we stop looking at the list in a negative way and look at it from a positive direction. Moral Inventory means right and wrong. Not just wrong. They go on to describe understanding and compassion as ways to deal with resentments. They list tolerance, pity and patience, kindly and serenity. Certainly these traits could be considered "**God's Will**" which is just another way of saying "**Ideals**", "**Asset**" or something to "**Strive for...**" or "**Grow Towards**". What a beautiful thing to present to a newcomer as they come to terms with their self centered life.

"This was our course: We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick." pg 66 (*compassion*)

"We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance,

pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend." pg 67

"God will show us how to take a kindly and tolerant view of each and every one." pg 67

"We are in the world to play the role He assigns. Just to the extent that we do as we think He would have us, and humbly rely on Him, does He enable us to match calamity with serenity." pg 68

One of the most clear examples of listing positive or desirable qualities such as "Assets" is when it says "what should we have done instead?"

"Where were we at fault, what should we have done instead? We got this all down on paper and looked at it." pg 69

They are clearly saying to write down what we could have done instead. What are our faults? What would God have us do instead? It's not just asking what our strengths or skills are. It's asking, "**What is God's ideal?**" If I was dishonest I could be Honest. If I was Angry I could be Pure. If I was Selfish I could be Unselfish. If I was Frightened I could be Loving. These were literally things the founders were doing. This is the context in which the Big Book was written. [Dr. Bob gave talks about this way of working with the Four Absolutes](#), which were his favorite list of Assets. He attempted to pass on this tradition throughout his entire sobriety.

But we must be careful not to drift into worry, remorse or morbid reflection, for that would diminish our usefulness to others. After making our review we ask God's forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken. pg 86

In the above snippet it is clear that God's Will is our guide. Whatever "corrective measures", Amends, Ideals, Assets, Action God wants us to have, we ask for. It doesn't matter if we call it "Assets", "Ideals", "corrective measures" or "cabbage" as long as we seek out God's Will above our own and repair the damage.

We have begun to learn **tolerance, patience and good will toward all men**, even our enemies, for we look on them as sick people. pg 70 Big Book

Isn't the above list a good list of "Assets"?

We gauge AA personality by AA maturity that is evidenced by such qualities as strength and understanding from a Power greater than ourselves, surrender of self-centeredness, the practice of honesty, humility, gratitude, forgiveness, promptness in admitting wrongs, making amends, service to others, and the example of a happy, sober life.

A list of Assets or desirable qualities from the Little Red Book, Step 4.

Assets Were Used to Help Promote Fearlessness

*"The sponsor probably points out that the newcomer probably has some **assets** that can be noted along with his liabilities. This tends to clear away morbidity and encourage balance. As soon as he begins to be more objective the newcomer can **fearlessly**, rather than fearfully, look at his own defects." - Step 4, 12 and 12, page 46*

Fearlessness is a significant part of the original path the founders walked. They discovered "God's Will" using the ideals, assets and desirable qualities; gaining encouragement. This lays the foundation for the actions about to be taken in Step 6 and 7 as well as 8 and 9. Along with the 3rd Step Surrender, the Assets are where Willingness comes from for the Steps following Moral Inventory, especially Steps 6 and 8. A Moral Inventory that omits Assets would be missing part of the accelerant that propels one fearlessly through the remaining Steps. Assets are only one part of this accelerant. The other parts are Surrender; the sponsors open sharing of their sordid past and the example of a spiritual experience operating in the sponsors life.

Focusing on Assets is an extremely powerful exercise that the founders laid out for us. Lingering too long on character defects is depressing and self centered. We surrender those to God. They melt away with a Spiritual Experience. This goes a lot faster and is much more enjoyable when we keep focused on God's Ideals, Assets, Desirable Qualities and Corrective Measures. There's an old saying, "**Put away the bat!**" meaning quit beating yourself up. It's time to enjoy life and be of maximum service to others. What better way to help others than striving for Assets founded on God's Will?

AA Founder in Chicago Describes Sponsorship with Dr. Bob



Excerpt from Earl T's Big Book story He Sold Himself Short:

"Wednesday and Dr. Bob's afternoon off, he had me down to the office and we spent three or four hours formally going through the Six-Step program as it was at that time. The six steps were:

1. Complete deflation.
2. Dependence and guidance from a Higher Power.
3. Moral inventory.
4. Confession.
5. Restitution.
6. Continued work with other alcoholics.

Dr. Bob led me through all of these steps. At the moral inventory, he brought up some of my bad personality traits or character defects, such as selfishness, conceit, jealousy, carelessness, intolerance, ill-temper, sarcasm and resentments. We went over these at great length and then he finally asked me if I wanted these defects of character removed. When I said yes, we both knelt at his desk and prayed, each of us asking to have these defects taken away.

This picture is still vivid. If I live to be a hundred, it will always stand out in my mind. It was very impressive and I wish that every A.A. could have the benefit of this type of sponsorship today. "

