

Step Seven

It seems odd that although we are repeatedly told that each step is individual and must be approached in its own right, we are then confronted by the fact that they are discussed as rhyming couplets, four and five, six and seven, eight and nine, none more so than the “hidden steps,” six and seven. They lie nestled, hidden, between the four big “action” steps and possibly because they don’t ask us to do something tangible we feel they are merely padding, placed to provide a breather between the obvious hurdles surrounding them. This isn’t true. Six and Seven free us of the shackles of our past, allowing us to enjoy the sunlight of the new life that is on offer.

We have acknowledged our defects in painstaking detail through steps four and five, but these defects will remain active and troublesome until we take specific action to have them removed. Six and Seven are “used” together, because once we are ready to have a defect removed, it seems only logical to move onto the step that enables this to happen.

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Humbly...

Humility as a concept is frequently misunderstood, possibly through association with people like Uriah Heep in Dickens, claiming to be “ever so ‘umble” whilst in reality being scheming and arrogant. The word reeks of religion and Sunday school lessons. We conjure visions of false humility and we reject the concept before considering the real implications.

There is the well-worn cliché, “If you realise you have humility – you just lost it.” By this simple phrase, we prevent discussion of what is a cornerstone of the program. It is easier to discuss sexual perversion in a meeting than to discuss humility in a meaningful way. If we encounter somebody quoting this cliché, we should question what the person is saying. They might believe that repeating “clever sayings” like a parrot makes them appear wise, or they could have identified that we are proud of our humility. Depending upon which is true, give them a cracker or thank them. The monkey on our shoulder must be splitting his sides with laughter each time he tricks somebody into quoting it to us. Thanks to such a subtle trap, we find ourselves unable to ask people for help at a point when we desperately need it.

As with so many clichés, it is valid when used within context. We would certainly need our bubble bursting if we suggested that we had achieved the humility of St. Francis, but we can recognise when our behaviour is acceptable and we can certainly aspire to improve. The problem is how can we improve our humility without discussion?

Humility is about modestly acknowledging our true worth to society and not about vainly hoping to atone for our past behaviour by pretending to be a doormat. Through the program, we provide an effective framework to constrain our over-active ego and achieve an acceptable level of humility.

...asked Him...

A memory that always stays with me is standing in the shower, naked and covered in soap. I was beating my fist on the wall demanding that God took some action and did it now! Ironically, I was asking to have my irrational anger removed. Suddenly, I saw a snapshot of this scene as if from outside of myself, giving me the gift of seeing the arrogance in my behaviour and showing me how others see me. I had to laugh at the futility of this soapy, beached whale threatening violence against the power I had claimed to acknowledge as greater than myself. Thankfully, this vision and laughter meant that I took another step towards understanding humility.

Regardless of the form of our chosen Higher Power, it isn’t a genie capable of fulfilling unreasonable requests and a first step towards accepting spirituality is recognising how to ask for help. Help is always available, but rarely in the form that we anticipate.

If our Higher Power is the group and we don’t approach it with humility, we will almost certainly receive rapid and tangible feedback. If we try to demand that the meeting answers our personal need to get sober, we will certainly get a response. The result of such a demand is usually a dose of “tough love”, directing us into looking

at our approach and attitude. Whilst this will initially sting our pride, we hopefully recover and come to thank the group for their help and honesty.

...To remove our shortcomings

Once we understand how our Higher Power communicates, as well as starting to live with humility, we are equipped to work on the defects. As one defect falls another seems to become apparent. We can look on these as crops or phases. The first crop of defects is easy to identify, as time passes other defects of the “part of me” category become apparent.

Our cycle of progress becomes self-supporting as we recognise that by changing our way of thinking - our emotions and behaviour also change. We become aware that change is possible. We see that we don't lose anything that forms the real “us”, but we do lose the liabilities. As we acknowledge this, we become more willing to accept that change can be a good thing. Finally, we discover that we are progressing towards a faith. We have not had to accept faith blindly, but we know that our life is improving and we are not solely responsible.

We are a set of garden shears lost at the back of the shed. They are now blunt with the central pivot screw loose. The Gardener needs them for a specific job and regrets losing them. As a set of shears, we have no concept of our purpose, but the gardener does. Once retrieved, he will tighten the screw, sharpen the blades and return us into service. By removing the defects, we can fulfil our role.

It is our responsibility to identify the defects and ask to have them removed. It is also our responsibility to try to ensure that these defects do not come back. It generally appears to be true that our Higher Power doesn't intervene unless either we ask, or we blindly head too far into danger. It certainly doesn't work based on stating, “I am full of defects, you know what they are, remove them”. We have to return to our fourth step list and specifically identify them.

Practice the opposite

The world's major religions (Christianity, Islam, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhism and Judaism) all suggest Pride, Lust, Anger and Greed as damaging behaviour. There is a similar consensus about the way to avoid them by the conscious practice of the opposite. They all identify Charity, Humility and Compassion as positive character traits that we should aspire to have in our lives. It would seem impossible to damage people through lustful or angry behaviour if we viewed them with compassion. The way to acquire such virtues is the subject of many thousands of inspirational pages, but the essence is the same, quoted in no specific order:

- To treat others as we would wish to be treated
- To respect other people and humbly aspire to be worthy of their respect
- To seek to understand rather than to be understood

Keeping a change in place

Many notice a strange phenomenon that occurs as soon as we make the decision to address a defect, we are immediately overwhelmed with a feeling of euphoria and peace. Our determination to change can weaken. The pain created by the defect seems to lift and the idea of addressing the problem drifts completely out of our consciousness.

Why this occurs is difficult to explain, unless we attribute the monkey on our shoulder with the intelligence to be devious. By whispering warm and pleasant thoughts, the illness defends against us reducing its influence. This seems difficult to accept, but we all experience this during our recovery.

My relationship with my wife was bad and I started to enjoy chatting with one of the women at the meeting. When we decided to travel to meetings together the sexual tension grew. I felt alive. It had been a long time since I had enjoyed laughter and infatuation. Things seemed perfect, we both agreed that we would just have fun and that neither of us wanted more. My stomach dropped when I got the message that she wanted us to set up home together. The fun in our relationship switched to fear and recrimination. Each time my wife answered the phone I thought she was about to be told that I was living a lie.

I went to my sponsor and told him. We agreed that I had to break off all contact – immediately. I left his house and headed for my girlfriends home. I arrived and everything seemed to have changed. She was happy and alive. We laughed and as we tumbled, the idea of ending things faded. I thought, “Why on earth should I change this?”

Defects always rise again. They come back, the pain is more intense and this allows the monkey to play another trick. Regardless of the fact that we didn't actually follow our original plan, we think that we did. We recall that we have been in this position before and that we took action to remove the defect. Believing the program failed we look outside for an answer.

With practice, we learn to expect this burst of euphoria and know that we must not be distracted. As we proceed with the change, the euphoria dissolves and life becomes dismal, possibly even unbearable. The degree the monkey fights against a change has a direct relationship to the benefit that is waiting for us.

Summary:

We will never remove all of our defects and these are life long exercises. Armed with the belief that it works and that life gets better each time we work to remove a defect through the practice of step six and seven, it actually becomes a pleasure. With each character defect we remove, we put another brick into place in the fabric of the new life we are building.

- Can I identify the opposite of my defect?
- Have I a clear way to communicate with my higher power?

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