

STEP SIX

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

In Steps Four and Five, we had taken a thorough look at ourselves, writing our moral inventory and sharing it with God and another human being. During this process, we developed further awareness by identifying and admitting our defects of character. With Step Six, we went from being aware of these defects and the havoc and pain they had created to realizing it was necessary to have them removed.

We may have been tempted to make a half-hearted effort to work this step or skip it altogether. When we were in early recovery from our addiction, we wanted to hold on to certain forms of our sexual acting out behavior. Similarly, many of us wanted to hold on to some of our defects of character. We did this despite the fact that we had admitted that they brought harm to us and others. We may have thought, “I’m sober, I’ve identified my shortcomings, and I’ve stopped some of my most harmful behaviors. The defects I still have left are not really all that bad, so why should I have to let them go?”

When we wondered why we were unwilling to have these defects removed, it was often helpful to consider the roles they played in our lives. For many of us, our defects functioned as defenses. They had developed to protect us from having feelings we did not want to feel. For example, some of us defended ourselves from feelings of low self-worth by being judgmental. When we criticized others, we believed we were superior to them. We seemed to think more highly of ourselves when we put others down. Accepting the ways in which we used our defects as defenses helped us to have compassion for ourselves.

We also came to understand that our defects of character—whether they seemed significant or not—were, in fact, closely related to our sexual acting out. Both our addiction and our defects were rooted in our resentment, shame and fear. Just as we could not control and enjoy our addiction, we could not “control and enjoy” these defects. In fact, we found that if we continued to “act out” with our defects, we would be much more likely to act out in our sex addiction.

We may have once believed that these defects were practical tools we needed to defend ourselves. Some of these defects may even have helped us survive. But as we grew in sobriety and deepened our spirituality, we came to see that they really were destructive and not effective at all. Let’s go back to our example of being judgmental. We realized that criticizing other people never actually made us feel good about ourselves in the first place. In fact, this defect reinforced our low self-worth. It destroyed relationships and kept us isolated. As we came to understand and accept that our defects had outlived their usefulness, we became more willing to let them go. Eventually, when we truly accepted how they were hurting us and others, we wanted them to be removed.

Many of us then repeatedly tried to rid ourselves of our defects by our own power. We found that we could not. As with our addiction, the help of a power greater than ourselves was required. When we reflected upon the words “have God remove,” we realized that our defects would be removed in God’s way and in God’s time, not ours. Our job was to be ready and willing to let our Higher Power help us.

We were sometimes baffled by how to do this. The step simply says “were entirely ready.” “But how do I become ‘entirely ready’?” we asked. “What am I supposed to do?” It was suggested that we needed to sit patiently, that we did not need to *do* anything. Rather we needed to *be* something—“entirely ready.” We found that this “being” was a form of acceptance.

If we looked at this idea in light of the recovery process of awareness, acceptance and action, it became clear how Step Six works with Steps Four, Five and Seven. We saw Steps Four and Five in terms of becoming aware of our defects of character, Step Six as a form of accepting them, and Step Seven as the action of asking for their removal.

We came to realize that naming our defects and admitting them to another human being was a far cry from having them removed. We could not just name them and then toss them aside like so many pieces of old clothes. We recognized that it was crucial to sit with them, accept them, and accept the feelings they brought up in us.

“But how can acceptance help me?” we might have asked. “How can that be healing—just sitting, and not doing anything?” To understand this it was suggested that we again compare our defects of character to our addiction. We saw that when we were active in our addiction we were running away from difficult feelings. We desperately wanted to feel good all the time. We were, in fact, so desperate to feel good, we were ready to risk anything in this pursuit. It became clear that having our feelings, no matter how uncomfortable, was moving us toward our recovery and away from our addiction.

We then came to see that this was also true of our defects of character. Let’s return again to our example of being judgmental. On reflection, some of us found that it was our feelings of low self-worth and shame we were trying to avoid. With God’s help, sitting and accepting these emotions, as uncomfortable as they were, finally freed us to know we were okay when we felt these emotions. We didn’t have to try frantically to change our uncomfortable feelings by using our defects of character. We began to learn that having and accepting our feelings instead of running from them was a safe harbor from the addiction.

We found that our acceptance led us to a place where we began to let go and surrender. We did not surrender to despair, shame, or hopelessness. Instead, we surrendered to a power greater than ourselves. This reminded us of Step Two. In fact, Step Six could almost read “Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could...” remove all our defects of character.

As we progressed through the steps, our trust in our Higher Power grew. Step Six asked not if we were entirely ready to have our defects removed but whether we were entirely ready to have *God* remove these defects. While Step Two asked us to trust God with our healing in general, Step Six encouraged us to trust God specifically with the most vulnerable parts of ourselves.

How many of us completely fulfill Step Six? How many of us are really ready to let God fully remove each and every one of our defects? Few of us have claimed to possess such absolute willingness. However, it was suggested that we needed to aim for this ideal if we were to stay sober and continue to grow. The more we were willing to let go and let God remove our defects of character, the more we would be able to grow spiritually.

If absolute willingness was so difficult to achieve, let alone maintain, how did we know when to move on from Step Six to Step Seven? Like Step Two, Step Six would become a lifelong process involving the patient development of trust and acceptance over time. However, the challenge of this step did not stall our recovery. Instead, we accepted where we were in our process, prayed for further willingness, and with the guidance

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