

STEP SEVEN

Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

Now we came to taking the action for which we had prepared ourselves in the previous three steps. We had looked at Steps Four and Five as a way of becoming aware of our defects of character, Step Six as a process of accepting them, and Step Seven as the action of asking for their removal. However, in this step, we were not just asking for our defects to be removed, we were *humbly* asking for our defects to be removed.

When we first looked at the word “humbly,” many of us winced. Often, the first thing that came to mind was being humiliated. The word “humiliation” was disturbing or upsetting to many of us. We had frequently felt humiliated by our inability to control our addiction. Some of us felt humiliated just imagining what people thought of us, even if they did not know about our addiction. Some people actually had shamed us, put us down, or abused us. All of this humiliation, whatever the source, brought us tremendous suffering. So when we saw the word “humbly,” we wanted no part of it.

Then it was explained to us that the humility discussed in this step was not at all the same as humiliation. We were not being told to be subservient to other people or to put ourselves beneath them. Rather, we were being asked to accept ourselves as we were—neither worse than others nor better than others. We were being asked to be equal.

Previously we believed we either had to dominate other people or be dominated by them. The thought of being with other people on an equal basis was very uncomfortable and even scary for most of us because we feared it would make us vulnerable. For many of us this was a new idea—we didn’t know how to be equal.

However, when we did have the experience of feeling equal, we found a new sense of serenity and peace. Humility gave us this because we were no longer fighting with the world. We no longer had to defend ourselves. We did not have to maintain our position of being superior to others nor defend ourselves because we thought we were less than others. We did not have to isolate from people and the world to protect ourselves. We simply *were* ourselves. This was humility, being equal, being a part of the world and with other people, and not apart from the world and separate from other people.

Humility was recognizing that we were not running the show, that God was, and that we were receiving our strength and power from our Higher Power. Some of us thought of humility as being on a ship and recognizing that we worked the sails and our Higher Power was at the helm, steering the vessel.

We found a new sense of serenity and peace. Humility gave us this because we recognized and drew upon our true source of power, our Higher Power.

“But how do I achieve humility? How do I rely on a Higher Power?” many of us asked. “You’ve told me it’s a good thing but you haven’t told me how to get there.” We were told that there was no single path. However, we had at least one thing in common. Having worked the previous steps we were already on the path to knowing humility.

It was pointed out to us that we already had experienced some measure of humility: in Step One when we admitted that we couldn’t stay sober; in Step Three when we turned our will and our life over to our Higher Power; in Step Five when we shared our secrets. In fact, we realized that each day we asked God to keep us sober we were *humbly* asking God.

Looking back, we began to recognize our true relationship with our Higher Power. It was God who was healing us in ways that we could not heal ourselves. It was God who gave us the gift of sobriety. We came to see that *everything* we had was a gift from our Higher Power. We now understood and willingly received God's unconditional love. We became grateful and in our gratitude our humility grew.

At this point, many of us asked, "If I am already practicing humility why does Step Seven include the word 'humbly'?" As we were progressing in our recovery, many of us were feeling much better. Our health was much improved and we were becoming more confident. In fact, things were going so well that some of us began to develop a false self-confidence and we started to feel we were in charge of things. Some said, "Never mind God, I can take it from here." Others said, "I don't need to go to meetings anymore like the rest of those people." We found ourselves at risk of feeling that we were better than others. Step Seven was reminding us that we needed to *remain* humble on our path of recovery.

It was also pointed out that Step Seven asked us to approach *God* with humility. This meant seeking the removal of our defects of character by a power greater than ourselves. In Step Two we had found that a power greater than us could solve a problem that we could not solve alone—our addiction to compulsive sexual behavior. On the strength of this, it was now suggested that we ask God to remove our defects of character.

Once we came to terms with the idea of humbly asking God, many of us wanted very much to do this. But how were we to proceed? Many of us used a prayer suggested by a sponsor or other trusted member of the program, or one of our own choosing. At first, it seemed that little more than a few minutes of prayer would be sufficient to complete this step. Some of us thought that we could simply ask God to remove our shortcomings and then quickly move on to Step Eight. However, nearly all of us found there was much more to working Step Seven.

When we asked for our defects to be removed, few of us found that they were immediately taken from us. So, many of us repeatedly asked God to remove them. Some of us found it helpful to ask every day for each defect to be removed, while others worked this step by praying about a single defect for weeks or months at a time. Some were more specific in these prayers, others were more general. Some prayed in the morning, others at night. Some prayed out loud, others in silence.

Regardless of how we asked God to remove our defects, many of us grew impatient. Often many of our defects remained with us, no matter how many times we asked God to remove them. It felt like we were dialing our Higher Power and being put on "hold." Then we noticed that this step does not tell us when or how God will remove our defects. In fact, it doesn't even promise us that God will remove them at all. It simply suggests that we humbly ask God to remove them.

Already frustrated, some of us sensed that our defects were becoming more intense. Our situation seemed to be getting worse: we saw our defects everywhere we turned. We later discovered that our defects had not, in fact, become more powerful. Instead, in the process of asking God to remove them, we had simply become more aware of them. This increasing awareness brought with it considerable pain. Some of us felt so much pain that we wondered if the process of Step Seven was working to our benefit. We found it hard to understand that asking for our defects to be removed might bring more pain before it brought relief.

Then we began to see a light at the end of the tunnel. We discovered that the pain we felt was a healing pain, unlike the pain we had suffered as a result of sexually acting out. We became aware that God was starting to remove our defects by helping us as we came to terms with those defects. More often than not, hiding behind our shortcomings were powerful feelings of shame and self-hatred from our past.

As we received support and affirmation from the fellowship, developed healthier relationships with others and shared about these buried feelings, we opened ourselves to healing. For example, those of us who were judgmental found this defect began to lift when we began to heal from our shame. We found ourselves acting out with our defects less and less often. We then understood more than ever how our defects, like our addiction, had defended us from experiencing the pain and the hurt of our lives.

As many of our shortcomings grew less powerful, some of us missed them, and even mourned them. We may have missed the high of feeling superior to others when judging them. The departure of our defects left a void in our lives. We felt vulnerable. However, as our defects and their perceived protection were removed we found that our Higher Power was helping us to develop healthy qualities and behaviors to replace them. Where previously we had judged others, we now found compassion for them. So, most of us found it useful to ask God not only to remove our defects, but also to help us develop our character assets.

As we grew and changed in the process of working Steps Four through Seven, we realized that Step Seven was the culmination of the search for self-awareness that we had begun in Step Four. Having looked at ourselves and fully turned over the results to God, as we understood God, we moved on to Step Eight.

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Approved by the SRA General Service Board 10/25/09
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