

Halfway There

Step 6: Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

Step 7: Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.¹

Steps 6 & 7 straddle the halfway point of the 12 steps. They fall between the “major” steps of 4/5 and 8/9, and it’s not unusual to skip through them quickly. After all, we need only assess our readiness (I’m ready!), check our humility level (I’m humble!), and say a short prayer. We can then move on to the important work of making amends. Steps 6 & 7 focus on a “state of mind”, and we can easily convince ourselves that we have it. The Big Book of AA, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, doesn’t help the situation—it devotes only one paragraph to each step.

While it is easy to breeze through these two steps, I’ve gained quite a bit of appreciation for their importance. In fact, I find them to be vital. The purpose of this article is to share some of my insights.

Step 6

As sexaholics our initial problem is compulsive/obsessive sexual behavior fueled by lust. Early in the program, possibly before we even came to our first meeting, we were entirely ready for God to remove our addiction. By the time we reached Step 6, we had attained some level of freedom from lust and were ready to deal with other problems in our lives. *Twelve Steps and 12 Traditions* (12x12) says, “Having been granted a perfect release from alcoholism [lust], why then shouldn’t we be able to achieve by the same means a perfect release from every other difficulty or defect?”²

At this point, we run into several problems. The first is simply identifying all our defects. In step 4 we had completed a thorough moral inventory, but by no means had we found everything. The Big Book calls the 4th step an “inventory of your *grosser* handicaps”³ (italics added). I equate it to shoveling out a stable that was knee-deep in manure. There are small piles left in corners, and there may be a few stalls that were overlooked—but in general the place is much, much cleaner than before.

How then do we identify all our character defects? The answer to this problem is that we simply work with what we’ve got. Later, when we become aware of additional defects or difficulties, we promptly deal with them. Step 6 becomes a “lifetime job.”⁴ We continue to make progress in this area for as long as we live.

We may have to consciously search for our difficulties and defects, but in many cases they will automatically come to the surface. Recovery requires us to continuously move forward. The Big Book tells us we cannot “rest on our laurels.”⁵ My threshold for tolerating pain has decreased as I get rid of the big-ticket problems. Things that never used to bother me are now a source of irritation and must be dealt with in order to maintain spiritual fitness.

I visualize this process by using Mount Fuji to represent my defects and difficulties. Lust is at the very top. I can no longer tolerate it, so I work the steps and the uppermost part of the mountain is

removed as if cut off by a sword. My life gets better, and my ability to tolerate pain decreases. Now I begin to have problems with the next highest part of the mountain. These defects were insignificant compared to my sexual acting out, but now they're on top. So once again I work the steps and am relieved of the problem. Whack!—off goes another chunk of the mountain. My pain tolerance decreases, and I have to repeat the process again. And so on... There is a similar analogy in *Recovery Continues* that uses the concept of a spring-loaded plate dispenser. Whenever the top plate is removed, another one replaces it.⁶

We will never be able to identify all of our defects of character. We must, however, maintain our willingness to deal with them as they are revealed to us. In addition, we can help the process by doing daily step 10 inventories and by actively working the program.

The second problem has to do with the readiness. Most of us want to give up the really bad stuff. As the 12x12 says, "Practically everybody wishes to be rid of his most destructive and glaring handicaps."⁷ It's the not-so-bad things that are difficult: "What we must recognize now is that we exult in some of our defects. We really love them. Who, for example, doesn't like to feel just a little superior to the next fellow, or even quite a lot superior?"⁸

Once we truly understand the scope of step 6 it's easy to say, "How can I do this step? Here I thought it was so easy, and suddenly I'm finding it impossible!" But wait... we've dealt with the impossible before. Wasn't our sexual acting out another such situation? In my personal recovery, I've found it necessary to surrender the entire 6th step to my Higher Power. I trust that God will make me aware of my shortcomings and will give me the desire to be rid of them. If I am blind to my defects and difficulties, how can I see them? I cannot. If I do not desire to have my defects removed, how can I create that desire? I cannot. I depend upon my Higher Power to open my eyes and foster the desire. Is it any wonder the 12x12 states, "This is the step that separates the men from the boys?"⁹

Step 7

I was upset after first reading about step 7 in the 12x12. All it talked about was humility. I wanted more information about asking God to remove my shortcomings. Eventually I realized that humility was the most important part of the step. When we ask God to remove our shortcomings, what we ask for is not nearly as important as our mental state while asking. In order for this step to work, we must be humble.

It is easy to confuse humility with humiliation, so let's be clear about what we mean. I define humility as *the willingness to set aside my own will in favor of God's will*. The 12x12 says the "basic ingredient of all humility"¹⁰ is "a desire to seek and do God's will."¹¹ The opposite of humility is self-will, which acts as the Sunblock of the Spirit. God will only relieve us of our defects if we approach in a state of humility.

How does one attain humility? In some cases it is simply a decision. In others, we ask for it and receive it. And sometimes it is pounded into us by our own destructive actions.

As sexaholics, we use this latter method all too often. How many times have we heard the phrase, "My best efforts got me here in SA." This is an admission of humility that was fostered by our inability to deal with lust. When our addictive actions put us in that place of powerlessness and unmanageability, we have the opportunity to discover true humility. Only when we finally say, "Thy will, not mine, be done,"¹² are we ready to ask God to remove our shortcomings.

Conclusion

Steps 6 & 7 are a lifetime project. In order to work these steps effectively, we must cultivate an attitude of willingness. This is an impossible task, but we can do it with God's help. It's worth the effort.

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¹ Sexaholics Anonymous, July 1989, pg. 6.

² Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 1991, pg. 64.

³ Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th Ed., pg. 71.

⁴ Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 1991, pg. 65.

⁵ Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th Ed., pg. 85.

⁶ Recovery Continues, "The Top Plate", pp. 49-51 (available from SA).

⁷ Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 1991, pg. 66.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., pg. 63.

¹⁰ Ibid., pg. 72.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., Pg. 103.