

September 25, 2008

Seventh Step Prayer

Prayer

My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen.

Reflections

I My Creator...

By the time we get to step seven we realize that we can't get sober nor enjoy serenity under our own power.

We need help, the help of a power greater than ourselves.

Just before our third step the Big Book says this:

Our description of the alcoholic, the chapter to the agnostic, and our personal adventures before and after make clear three pertinent ideas:

- 1. That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives.*
- 2. That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism.*
- 3. That God could and would if He were sought. (P 60)*

Now let's go to the seventh step prayer...

The seventh step prayer begins with the words *My Creator*.

We recognize that our God is our Creator.

What does a Creator do? Gives life.

This reminds me of a story...

Story... The Wise Man and The Bandit

Once upon a time there was a very wise man who was on his way to a village on the other side of the mountain to teach, to beg, and to call more disciples to follow his way. He intended to take a shortcut over the mountain pass to save time. But immediately the people and his friends said, "No, don't go that way. The pass is filled with bandits lying in wait for you and if they find you don't have money or jewels they will kill you brutally.

The wise man couldn't be bothered with such warnings, and he continued on his way.

Well, no sooner had he climbed high into the pass when a notorious bandit appeared, bearing down on him with sword in hand and shouting, "Your money or your life!"

The wise man looked up at the man astride his horse, pulled out his empty pockets and said, "I guess it's my life, since I have no money."

As the bandit moved toward him, sword in motion, the wise man stopped him in his tracks: "You know the rules. If you take my life, then you must at least grant me a last wish!"

The bandit stopped. "Alright. What do you want? Make it quick old man."

The wise man said, "My wish is simple and has two parts. First, see that great tree over there and the limb that extends far out over the path? Cut it off!" The bandit grinned and in seconds the limb lay on the ground. "Alright old man, what is the second part?"

The wise man turned toward him and said very quietly and steadily, "Now put it back on again."

The bandit was speechless and then started laughing uproariously. "You are the stupidest man I've ever met! No one can put a limb back on a tree after it's been cut off! Insane! You're idiotic."

The wise man looked at him and said, "I am not the one who is stupid. You are. Anyone can destroy. Any child without knowledge can cut things up. Anyone can main, kill, mutilate and undo reality. It takes no power or intelligence whatsoever."

The bandit was caught off guard. The wise man continued, "What takes power, real power, is to be able to heal, to bring life, to restore, to stand in the breach, to undo the evil and the destruction that you've done in the past. That takes real power, imagination, and creativity. What you've done takes nothing at all. Anyone can do what you've done.

They eyed each other for a long time. Then the bandit got off of his horse, laid down his sword at the wise man's feet, knelt in respect before him, and humbly asked, "Teach me that kind of power."

“That kind of power” comes only from our Creator for us alcoholics.

We humbly ask our Creator for new life.

We are not our own creator, despite what our culture might say. So often our culture preaches that we create our own lives, by our self-will... our willfulness.

Let's go the next words of our seventh step prayer...

II “I am now willing...”

We are now willing... not willful.

On the same page of the Big Book as the “three pertinent ideas” quoted above, we read this...

The first requirement is that we be convinced that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success.

On that basis we are almost always in collision with something or somebody, even though our motives are good.

Most people try to live by self-propulsion.

Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show;

is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in his own way.

If his arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as he wished, the show would be great.

Everybody, including himself, would be wonderful.

In trying to make these arrangements our actor may sometimes be quite virtuous. He may be kind, considerate, patient, generous; even modest and self-sacrificing.

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On the other hand, he may be mean, egotistical, selfish and dishonest. But, as with most humans, he is more likely to have varied traits.

What usually happens? The show doesn't come off very well...

Is he not the victim of the delusion that he can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if he only manages well? ...

Our actor is self-centered. (PP 60-61)

That old American favorite hymn might be playing in the background... "I did it my way."

We run into self-will run riot.

We run into *willful* rather than *willing*.

In the seventh step prayer we ask that we now by *willing*.

Let's continue with the prayer...

III I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad.

What are the good and bad parts of ourselves? These are the parts we are willing to yield to our Creator, our giver of life.

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly.

The Good...

Our gifts, our virtues, our strengths.

What are the good parts of yourself...

Sometimes we don't want to blow our own horns.

We think this is humility.

This can result in shortchanging ourselves.

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St. Augustine taught that humility is truth,
and our gifts, our virtues, our strengths are all blessings from God.
Rather than arrogantly *listing* these,
we thankfully *recognize* these.

Are you intelligent? Thank your Creator and use this to help others.
Are you gifted with humor? Thank your Creator and use this to help others.
Are you patient, kind, compassionate, thoughtful, fair-minded, honest,
prudent, courageous, strong? Thank your Creator and use these to help
others.

We need to recognize our giftedness so that we can thank our Creator and
use our gifts to help others.

What are *your* gifts, *your* strengths, and *your* virtues?

What are *your* blessings...

Are you financially well off?

Do you have time on your hands?

Do you have a wonderful family or friends?

Let's take a moment of quiet...

Think about what are some of your blessings and gifts.

What are your strengths?

What are your personal gifts?

What virtues do you possess? ...

A virtue is an enduring, stable quality of character or intellect through which a person is enabled to act in a praiseworthy or morally good way.

If you're not sure, then ask your sponsor, or your spouse, or your friends.

Recognize your giftedness and your blessings, so that you can then thank your Creator, and use your gifts to help others.

Lets continue with the prayer.

IV The Bad and the Ugly

I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character...

What are the bad or ugly parts of ourselves that we pray to our Creator to remove?

The Big Book does not enumerate or describe these when it deals with step seven.

The AA Book *Twelve Steps and Traditions* describes the vices as character defects when it deals with Steps six and seven...

The basic vices described are:

Envy, greed, pride or arrogance, lust, sloth or laziness, anger, and gluttony.

Many times our society does not look upon these as vices.

Let me just say a word about them...

- Envy or jealousy – of course, we must realize that in our society envy is not considered an evil – rather, it is a spur to have us continue to consume – to get what the next door neighbor just got, whether we need it or not.

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- Greed... Our desire to have more and more. Do we really need more? Of course, our society doesn't consider greed necessarily bad – after all, look at Enron, WorldCom, or executive compensation packages. How much money is enough money? And can you do anything you want to get more? Can you bend the rules, or push the envelope? “Of course,” say Greed and Arrogance.
- Pride... Let's talk about Pride a moment. Pride is not self-esteem - recognizing our worthwhilness and our giftedness, and giving thanks to our God for our blessings. Pride is thinking that we have done it all by ourselves, that it's our way or the highway – it's arrogant self will run riot – “I did it my way.” – being the center of our universe, and not even taking others into consideration.
- Lust... What's a little bit of lust anyway? It's not adultery, it's fooling around. It's not porn, it's freedom of choice. Lust is now a 12 billion dollar a year industry that often becomes addictive, and leads many men to treat women as boy toys and objects to fulfill selfish fantasies.
- Gluttony... Heh, what's so bad about pampering yourself a bit? And so we eat too much, drink too much, snack too much, shop too much, consume too much. And we pretend not to know what gluttony is.
- Sloth... Ah, the couch potato syndrome... I'll do it later, I'm resting now... and later never comes! We just get cozy in our own little world, and never even bother to reach out to help anyone. “Let them take care of themselves.”
- Anger... this is a tough one, because it seems that so many people are angry today. Our society tends to express anger through violence to solve problems – you see it on TV and in the movies... Violence is used to solve international problems – too often, some would say. Is violence and war the only solution? Our own Pope thinks not. It's a

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tough, complex problem... there is no simple answer. But the question for ourselves that I would pose right now is, has violence and anger become a part of my life-style? Do I walk around with a hammer all the time? If you walk around with a hammer all the time, everything you run into you'll see as a nail.... And what about resentments. Do I let them simmer? Am I a forgiving person?

Anger and Resentments are a special problem for alcoholics.

We cannot abide them.

Be careful of them.

One friend of mine says of resentments...

I work really hard at not getting resentments, because they're so hard to get rid of.

Amen to that brother!

The Big Book quips,

We alcoholics are sensitive people.

*It takes some of us a long time to outgrow that serious **handicap**. (P 125)*

When dealing with our character defects I am reminded of another story...

Story

Once in a far off kingdom there was a precious diamond, the largest ever known, hundreds of carets in weight, brilliant, flawless and perfect in every way.

People from all around came to the kingdom to admire its famous diamond. The king and his subjects were rightfully proud of the diamond.

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Then one day a servant of the king burst into his chambers with terrible news. The diamond now had a crack in it. The king rushed to see this tragedy and was stuck speechless at the sight. The entire kingdom mourned.

The king then sent out word that he would pay a king's ransom to anyone who could fix the diamond.

Many diamond merchants and diamond cutters came from near and far, but no one would dare touch the diamond – they pronounced that the crack could not be mended without destroying the entire diamond.

Then one day an elderly gentleman appeared who told the king that he could fix the diamond. If the king would allow him to take it home with him he would return it lovelier than it had been.

The king looked a long time at the old man, then told him that he would not allow the old man to take the diamond home with him, but he would allow him to work on it in a basement room of his castle, and he would give him food and drink while he worked, and a handsome payment if he was successful. The old man accepted the offer of the king.

After a month in the closely guarded basement room of the castle the old man came to the king and announced the diamond was ready to be displayed.

The king invited all of his subjects into the large courtyard of the castle for the unveiling of the refurbished diamond. The old man pulled the covered diamond on a wagon into the courtyard, then unveiled the diamond for all to see.

Everyone gasped, and the king was beside himself – with joy. For now the diamond was more stunning and attractive than ever. The old man had carved the diamond into a beautiful and delicate rose, and the crack had now become the stem of the rose. Everyone cheered and rejoiced. The old man had indeed saved their precious diamond.

How do we handle our own weaknesses and our faults,

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our emotional scars and disappointments,
our intellectual incapacities and dreams unfulfilled,
our potentials wasted and our regrets,
our sicknesses and failures?

These are the cracks in our diamond.

What do we do about them?

Some deny them...

Many times we Americans have a need to appear perfect, to be in charge, to have all of the answers – and we have a hard time dealing with our “cracks”. We reject them, deny them, or hide them.

What does the Big Book say about our character defects and the other cracks in our personality or our experiences in the past?

Read the Promises on P 83...

There may be some wrongs we can never fully right. We don't worry about them if we can honestly say to ourselves that we would right them if we could...

We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness.

We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it.

We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear...

Are these extravagant promises? We think not.

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They are being fulfilled among us – sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly.

They will always materialize if we work for them.

On the same page in the Big Book we are reminded
Yes, there is a long period of reconstruction ahead.
We must take the lead.

Step seven reminds us that the “lead” begins by humbly praying
“That God now remove from me every single defect of character.”

Let’s move on to the next phrase of our prayer...

V Usefulness

We pray that God remove every single defect of character that *“stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows”*

We are now moving along the way, our journey is progressing, one day at a time.

Our past can help us to be *useful...*
once we have offered it to our Creator,
and with our Creator’s help and the help of others in the Program we have turned our lives around.
We can then share what we have learned from our past.

And we can understand others and have compassion on those who have similar experiences to ours.

AA is not just a self-help program...

We are not in it just for ourselves.

As a matter of fact, we can’t keep AA unless we give it away.

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AA challenges us to be *useful*...

To let our Creator use us to give life...

Remember the story about the monk and the bandit...

The bandit says to the monk...

Teach me that kind of power...

The power to give life.

Note the end of the seventh step prayer...

Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen.

We end by asking our Creator to give us the strength to do the Creator's bidding... to be a giver of life... something far different than what we did while we were actively drinking.

Conclusion...

Let's pray together the seventh step prayer...

Prayer

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