

Oct. 10, 2005

Talk for AA Retreats- **Reflections on Steps 6 and 7**

We alcoholics have an allergy, a fatal attraction, and a cunning and baffling disease. The Steps offer us a Program for dealing with our disease.

(Handout... **I'm Your Disease**)

Steps 1- 3 help us to recognize our disease honestly and humbly, own up to it, and realize that we can't deal with it on our own... we need the help of a power much greater than ourselves.

Our best efforts got us to the rooms.

Now it's time to let God take over.

Steps 4 and 5 are about housecleaning...

beginning to clean up the mess of our past by honestly and courageously examining our past...

and sharing this with God, and another human being.

No more denial, no more inflated egos, no more lies, no more blaming –

just trying for once in our lives to be *honest* and *humble* – two key *principles* of the Program. (Handout... **Principles to Live By**)

Steps 6 and 7 are about growing past our disease,

about "character building", as the AA Book *Twelve and Twelve* describes it.

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AA is not just about stopping drinking.

It's about turning us into *better* people.

AA is not just about getting us *better*.

We get *better* so that we can be more *useful* people...

So that we can be people of character, people of virtue, people who make the world a better place, rather than a worse place.

In order to be this kind of person we need an *Extreme Makeover*. With the help of God and people in AA this can happen.

But first we need to know what has to be made over.

We need to be aware of our "character defects" and our "shortcomings."

If we have done steps 4 and 5 to the best of our ability we will be aware of some of our "character defects" and "shortcomings."

These can get us downright depressed *unless* we become aware that we're not alone in dealing with our brokenness,

And we don't have to heal ourselves.

Here we come to Steps 6 and 7.

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We need to be “entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character” and we have to “humbly ask Him to remove our shortcomings.” – These are Steps 6 and 7.

What are 2 or 3 of your character defects? List them for yourself.

Maybe ask yourself, “If I asked my spouse or a close friend of mine what 2 or 3 of my character defects were, what would they say?”

The AA Book *Twelve and Twelve* list seven main character defects. There are a lot more, but I’d like to stick with several of the 7 described in *Twelve and Twelve*. (Handout... **Fifteen Character Defects**)

Let me describe some people to you, and see if you can identify with any of them...

Joe is a pretty resentful guy who hates his job. When he comes home he’s a couch potato, watches way too much TV, and constantly complains about how others get the breaks and he gets nothing. He sits on a lot of his anger and is bitterly resentful of his older brother who has a good job and a much nicer home than Joe. Recently Joe has gotten into Internet pornography – to pass the time away. Joe is not a happy camper, and he doesn’t want any help.

What are some of Joe’s character defects?

- ❖ Anger (resentments – Don’t get them, they’re too hard to get rid of!)
- ❖ Sloth
- ❖ Lust

❖ Envy

Do you have any of these?

Jill spends way too much time shopping – it seems to be the only thing that makes her happy. She even shops on Cable Shopping Network, and her husband complains about the money she spends on things she doesn't need. But she's drawn to the new clothes, which she feels she must have, or that lovely piece of jewelry, or that exquisite Iiadro.

Jill is also very envious of her younger sister who lives in a better neighborhood and whose husband has a better job than her own. Jill is forever trying to outdo and outshine her sister, and is not above criticizing her once in awhile.

What are some of Jill's character defects?

- ❖ Compulsive (or addictive) buying - Gluttony
- ❖ Envy (resentments – hard to get rid of!)
- ❖ Anger

Of course our society takes such character defects lightly.

After all....

What's wrong with a little porn?

What's so bad about envy... after all, you have to keep up with the Jones, don't you?

Purchasing more and more *stuff* keeps the economy buzzing – isn't that what it's all about?

And won't more *stuff* make you happy? After all, it's new and improved, money back guaranteed.

But folks in AA know that we have addictive personalities,

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and we have to be careful that our character defects don't lead us into further addictive behavior,
because behind every addictive behavior is a drink...

We use our addictive behavior
to ease our brokenness,
to gloss over our pains,
to hide our secrets...
just like we used booze.

In AA we try to *honestly* and *humbly* recognize our character defects and come to terms with them, asking God to help us deal with them. (Once again, Honesty and humility are two key principles of AA.)

Why are we envious or jealous of others?

Why are we angry?

Why are we greedy?

Why are we lustful?

Why are we arrogant?

Why are we lazy and procrastinating?

Why are we so gluttonous?... Eat so much, drink so much, shop so much,
and gamble so much?

I have a friend in the program in NY. He tells others in the program that when he first came into the Program his sponsor put him on the first three Steps immediately. However, his sponsor would not let him go onto steps 4 and 5. Everyone else he came into the Program with were thru these Steps, but his sponsor would not let him past Step 3. He finally asked him why,

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and his sponsor asked him if he still gambled a lot... The answer was "yes." His sponsor told him he wasn't ready for Steps 4 or 5, and certainly not 6 and 7. His gambling was an addictive behavior, and behind every addictive behavior is a drink. Why was he gambling so much?

Character defects can lead to addictive behaviors, especially for us addictive personalities...

Addictive behaviors are usually a way we have of masking our self-centered fears, of anestisizing our regrets, our wounds, our brokenness or our dark secrets, which cause us such pain.

And we have to be careful because such addictive behaviors can lead us addictive personalities back to alcohol.

Our addictive behaviors which try to cover our pain, our fears (See Big Book, pp. 67-68), our woundedness, and our brokenness ... all of this is what needs to be admitted and healed with the help of others and God.

Sometimes a counselor can help, or a sponsor, or a good, common sense friend... God can use all of these people to heal us. I don't think we can heal ourselves.

What are some of these addictive behaviors and what are the character defects which can lead to them?

(The following is my opinion... I believe these seminal reflections can help us to recognize our character defects and the destructive addictive behaviors they could possibly lead to. These are not the final word on these topics.)

Character Defect: Gluttony

Just one more
Cookie. Just one more
Helping of food.
Just one more
Drink. Just one more

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Cigarette. Don't think.
Just one more...

They bring such
Comfort. They bring such
Surcease. They give me
What I deserve...
What I need...
Relief.

Addictive Behavior: Shoppalholism, workaholism, overeating, and gambling.

Character Defect: Greed

I know what I
Need. More
Money.
You can never
Have enough
Of that green
Stuff!

He sat back
Surrounded by little
Else,
Wanting little else,
Needing little else,
His hear in bondage,
His blindness unseen.

Would an armored
Car follow his
Hearse... a procession
Of two?

Addictive Behavior: Workaholism, busyness, and no time for anything else but making money.

Character Defect: Lust

I just serf the
Internet, a little

Porn, who does it
Hurt?... I find
It comforting
After a busy
Day, a rough
Day, a lazy
Day, an empty
Day.

Magazines...
Movies...
Who am I
Hurting?
It's in all
Motel rooms...
Check the soaps...
Afternoon TV too...
Enjoyed by many.

Addictive Behaviors: Bondage to porn movies, Internet, shops and stores;
women or men become sexual objects only; compulsive fantasizing about
sex.

Character Defect: Anger

How dare they
Say that?
Drive that way?
Talk to me
Like that?
Treat me
That way?

How dare they
Live like
That?
Act like
That?
Dress like
That?
Be like
That?
How dare they?

Addictive Behaviors: Always responding angrily; always driving angrily; constant resentments that lead to brooding and treating others shabbily; always have always sitting on our rage about everything - a toxic rage within.

(Story of old man who raged about everything.)

Character Defect: Sloth.

I'm tired,
Uninspired
Leaning toward
Couch-potato-ism.

Let me just enjoy
My TV,
My remote,
Close at hand,
Easy does it.

Why bother?
I'll get to that
Later.
Always later.
Let me just
Relax.
Always relaxing,
Nothing too taxing.

Addictive Behaviors: too much TV, procrastinating, never getting to necessary tasks, "unearned" tiredness, never motivated to do anything.
(Depression is not Sloth.)

Character Defect: Pride

My Way II

I want it my way

Do it my way

No matter what you say

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I want it my way

In bondage to self

So often angered

Frustrated

Fearful

So often others don't bend

To my way

I know the best way...

Can't you see?

Don't you agree?

Don't you understand?

I want it my way

Do it my way

No matter what you say

I want it my way

Funny... life never fits into

My way

Others don't do it

My way

They don't think

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My way

The day doesn't go

My way

God doesn't seem to want it

My way

Oh God, is there another way?

Help me in my bondage to

My way

Deliver me from my

Frustrated attempts

At tight management

Or coercive control

Help me to pray

Thy way be done

On earth, as it is in heaven...

Amen.

Addictive Behaviors... Being the Director of the Play (**Big Book**, PP 60-61); self-will run riot (**Big Book**, p 62); always wanting it our way; argumentativeness; ego inflation; arrogant behavior.

Healing of Character Defects

Character defects and addictive behaviors are not healed overnight. We need to be patient with the healing process.

Patience is another of the Program's principles.

We need to realize that we don't heal ourselves.

In steps 6 and 7 we ask God to heal us.

We also recognize that God can work through others: our sponsor, other AA members, good levelheaded friends, and counselors.

We need to realize that God loves us and that we are precious to God, and that God wants to heal our brokenness.

God wants to bless our brokenness, not curse it. We many times curse our brokenness... we put it under a curse. Others will at times put our brokenness under a curse. But God wants to put our brokenness under a blessing.

Listen to this beautiful poem...

The Touch of the Master's Hand

Twas battered and scarred
and the auctioneer thought
it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin
But held it up with a smile.
"What am I bid, good folks?", he cried.
"Who'll start the bidding for me?"
"A dollar, a dollar – now two – only two!
Who will make it three?
Three dollars once, three dollars twice, going for three!"
But no. From the room far back
A gray haired man came forward and picked up the bow.
Then wiping the dust from the old violin,
And tightening up all the strings,

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He played a melody pure and sweet,
As sweet as an angel sings.
The music ceased and the auctioneer,
With a voice that was quiet and low, said,
"What am I bid for the old violin?"
And he held it up with the bow.
"A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?
Two thousand, and who'll make it three?
Three thousand once, and three thousand twice,
And going, and gone", said he.
The people cheered,
but some of them cried,
"We don't quite understand – what changed its worth?"
The man replied, "The touch of the Master's hand."
And many a man with life out of tune,
And battered and torn with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd,
Much like that old violin.
A "mess of pottage", a glass of wine,
A game and he travels on.
He's going once and going twice,
He going and almost gone.
But the Master comes and the foolish crowd
Never can quite understand the worth of a soul,
And the change that's wrought by
The touch of the Master's hand.

(Handout...**The Touch of the Master's Hand**)

Listen to the beautiful 7th Step Prayer from the **Big Book**.

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 to my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, do your bidding. Amen. (See **Big Book**, p.76)

Let me comment a bit on this beautiful prayer.

"My Creator" – I realize that I am not the center of the universe. I'm one of God's children. God is the Higher, greater than myself.

Once on a retreat in N.Y. our receptionist asked a retreatant arriving for a retreat weekend, "What do you want to get out of the retreat?" The

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retreatant answered, "I want to find out who God is and who I am?" At the end of the retreat the receptionist asked the retreatant if their question was answered. The retreatant replied, "O yes. I found out that God is God, and I am not."

"I am now willing" – we are now humble enough to realize that being "willful" won't get it done. Self will run riot is not a way to live. We can't heal ourselves. "Humility" is truth. Humility is the virtue which helps us to deflate our ego and our self will – our "willfulness". Humility helps us to recognize that "God is God, and we are not." Humility saves us from fearing that we might have to do it all by ourselves. Humility plugs us into the source of healing power – God. Humility is not a virtue high on our society's list of desirable character traits. But humility is not about groveling. It's about knowing the truth – the truth about ourselves and about God.

"That you should have all of me, good and bad"

We are now "willing" to place ourselves into the Hands of the Master. We are broken, and we need God's help, and God is ever willing to help us because our Creator loves what is created. We've regrettably messed it up. The Creator wants us to flourish.

We are broken, and we need God's help, and God is ever willing to help us because our Creator loves what is created. We've regrettably messed it up. The Creator wants us to flourish. God wants to heal us.

I once read that "faith" in God is not us trying to hold onto God. Rather, "Faith" is about our trusting that God is holding onto us. It's not about "who we are", it's about "whose we are".

"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." – We place

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ourselves into God's healing hands. We are "willing" to have an "extreme makeover". And we know that we can't do it ourselves.

Realize that this extreme makeover won't happen overnight. We will need "*patience*" – another principle of the Program. Patience refers to the virtue of "giving time, time". "Patience" comes from the Latin word "patior" which means "to suffer". Patience means allowing the healing process to take its course, and that might involve suffering, since we will need to learn a new way of living, a new way of thinking, a new way of acting... and that can be scary and hurt our pride.

We Americans are a fast acting people. We want everything done "now". Instant gratification. If it's broke, throw it away and get a new one. That old, broke violin isn't worth much to us – until we find out that with some work, with some "retooling", with some "patience", it can be turned into a precious instrument... by the Touch of the Master's Hand.

We need to be patient with the Master's healing touch in our lives. We need to suffer others to teach us and show us, explain to us and guide us. We need to be "teachable". We need to suffer our own slowness to understand. We will need to "fake it if we can't make it" – for now. We will need to suffer the help of our sponsor and other people in the Program as they try to teach us, by word and by example... hopefully.

We humbly realize we are broken. We don't curse our brokenness. We put it under God's blessing. We don't throw away what is broke. We are patient with the process of healing, even if it takes years... and it will take years. Of course, that's really what Step 10 presumes also. As a matter of fact, we're never fully healed. But then we know that from the other Program principle... **Progress, not Perfection.**

Our continued healing and being made whole has the goal of our "usefulness to you (God) and others". We are not healed just to feel good and be happy

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– although that is important. We are healed so that we can now be useful, to God and to others. (See also **Big Book**, p.77, “Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us.”) That’s what Step 12 is about also... carrying the message to other alcoholics. But the 7th Step prayer asks God to help us to be useful to our “fellows”... To all people. We are no longer living an isolated, selfish, self-centered, self-absorbed, self-satisfied, self-hating life (and some of us hated ourselves). We now offer ourselves to God to be used as God’s instruments. How does that beautiful Prayer of St. Francis put it?

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
Where there is hatred – let me sow love.
Where there is injury – pardon.
Where there is doubt – faith.
Where there is despair – hope
Where there is darkness – light.
Where there is sadness – joy.

O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled – as to console,
To be understood – as to understand,
To be loved – as to love.
For it is in giving – that we receive,
It is in pardoning – that we are pardoned,
It is in dying – that we are born to eternal life.

Lord, make me your instrument.

That’s living a “useful” life.... A life on a spiritual plane.

As the **Big Book** says on p. 83...

The spiritual life is not a theory. *We have to live it.* (Italics in the **Big Book**)

“Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding.” – The 7th Step Prayer ends with asking God’s strength in our lives. There’s no way we can do this under our own power. Just like we couldn’t stop drinking by ourselves, so we can’t heal our character defects by ourselves, and we can’t

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be useful using our own will power. We depend on God to give us strength both to begin the process of healing, continue that process throughout our lives, and to help us to be useful.

“Amen” – So be it.

One final word... As the healing process of Steps 6 and 7 proceeds, God will begin to use our brokenness to help heal others as we seek to become useful in our lives. What do the Promises on pp. 83-84 say:

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. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us – sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.