

6th and 7th Steps... Feb 2014

Introduction

As I've done some study and reflection on the Sixth and Seventh Steps the main impression I am left with is this:

Recovery is not just about abstinence. It's not just about not drinking. It's also about growth.

I Transformation

You're at a crossroads. You're lost. Which way should you go? Turn one way and you will encounter a dead end. Turn another way and you are now on a road that leads to life and happiness. It's not an easy road, but it is the road of life. It's called the AA Program.

AA involves transformation and transformation is difficult. After a lifetime of self-centeredness and "do it my way or stay out of my way," change and growth, or what the Big Book calls a "spiritual awakening", is not something that happens automatically.

The **Big Book** puts it this way, just before describing Step Three:

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.

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)

The Prayer for Step Three asks that we be delivered from this "bondage to self."

(I came into the Program in Yonkers, N.Y. My sponsor and the meetings I attended were pretty strict about doing it the Program's way. In the groups I attended there was a pretty strict rule – not in the **Big Book** - but a rule learned from hard life experiences - no relationships in the first year, so that you could focus on yourself and the Program in your life.

There was one young man I remember who came into the rooms. After six months he began to beg, harass and bother his sponsor to allow him to date a young woman whom he met in the rooms. His sponsor finally said ok. The young woman was in the Program for several years. After six months she dropped him. He was devastated. He went back out. I never saw him again for the next six years in was in New York. I could only pray that somehow, somewhere he got back into the rooms. It's a matter of life and death. Our disease wants us dead – don't forget that.)

In the AA Program if we want to advance in recovery and in serenity, if we want to grow and experience the "Promises" on pages 83-84 of the **Big Book...** we need to change. These "Promises" come after steps 6, 7, 8 and 9.

Step 5 looks to the past. Steps 8 and 9 are about cleaning up the wreckage of the past. Steps 6 and 7 look to the future.

II Steps 6 and 7.

We don't stay sober just out of fear of going back to our old self. What are our goals in sobriety? Where are we headed? Where is this road we are traveling on leading us?

Steps 6 and 7 deal with these questions.

The Big Questions:

- What are my goals?
- What are my values? (See *Principles to Live By* handout.)
- What do I want to change?
- What's holding me back?
- How do I want to act?
- Can I act "as if" for now?
- What do I not want to give up?
- What are my fears?

I want to begin looking at some of these important questions.

But first we must talk about humility, a spiritual part of the Program.

Then we will look at character defects.

Finally we will look at other spiritual principles of the Program.

Humility

Life in the Program is about transformation... change. As I said above, change is not easy. Once again we remember:

After a lifetime of self-centeredness and "do it my way or stay out of my way," change and growth, or what the Big Book calls a "spiritual awakening", is not something that happens automatically.

We want to get to the point where we are "entirely ready" to have our Higher Power remove our character defects so that we can change and grow and reach our goals.

We can't get to this point without humility.

What is humility?

Wikipedia describes humility this way:

Humility (*adjectival form: humble*) is variously seen as the act or posture of lowering oneself in relation to others, or conversely, having a clear perspective, and therefore respect, for one's place in context.

One author described humility as "right sizing."

St. Augustine said that humility is "truth."

I would describe humility as recognizing that life is not about us. We are not the center of the universe.

Humility reminds us that we are not God. We have to dethrone our ego. Ego deflation is a good description. We don't have to be in control all of the time and have all of the right answers – that's reality.

A few lines from a beautiful poem by Jessica Powers says it for me:

*I rose up from the acres of self
That I tended with passion and defended with flurries of pride
I walked out into the woods of God's mercy
And here I abide.*

Can we trust our Higher Power? That can be a tough one and it takes time and it takes prayer and it takes humility.

Humility expresses itself in the virtue of "docility," – being teachable. If we are not teachable how will we learn a new way of thinking, of acting, and of living? "Our way" got us where we are. Our character defects are "our way." How have they worked for us?

A fellow in AA that I know shared how "pain" got him teachable... what he was doing was causing him a lot of pain – there must be some other way of living life!

Character Defects

Let's talk about character defects.

In Step 5 we begin to recognize our character defects:

- *Lying*
- *Manipulating others*
- *Selfishness*
- *Being pig headed*

- *Always having to be right*
- *Lust*
- *Self-centered fear*

(See *Fifteen Character Defects* handout)

Self-centeredness / blaming / resentment / envy or jealousy / phoniness / procrastination / self-pity / worry / perfectionism / indifference or apathy / people –pleasing / withdrawing / dishonesty / lustful sexual behavior.

There are many ways of describing or listing character defects. When **Twelve and Twelve** deals with character defects in its treatment of Steps 6 and 7 we encounter the traditional *Seven Deadly Sins* as a way of describing character defects:

These basic vices are:

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

(See **Twelve and Twelve**. pp. 65 – 74)

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

Let me just say a word about them...

- Envy or jealousy... 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. Envy can poison a relationship. It can cause us grief and self pity. It keeps us self-centered. Envy smothers gratitude for our gifts and blessings – there is very little thought about our gifts and blessings.
- Greed... Our desire to have more and more. Do we really need more? Our society doesn't consider greed necessarily bad. In our consumer society our needs are multiplied forever – guaranteeing that new and improved stuff will bring us happiness. We forever “need” more... there's a hole in our heart and only our Higher Power can fill that hole, not stuff.
- Pride (arrogance)... Let's talk about Pride for a moment. Pride is not self-esteem. Healthy self-esteem recognizes 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 2 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. Lust leads women to fantasize and act seductively around some men. What can that do for a mature, healthy relationship? (I am reminded of the daughter of a buddy of mine who finally got into the Program. An older gentleman who had 15 years in the Program took her under his wing. With all of his expertise he would help her. He even took her to a cabin in woods for a weekend retreat. She ended up leaving her husband and kids to live with him. She had some money and ended up paying for the apartment and a car for him. My buddy, the woman's father, asked me why someone in AA for so long would take advantage of his daughter like that? I asked my sponsor how someone in the Program for 15 years could do that. My sponsor said that the man was in the Program one year, fifteen times. He hadn't grown. Lust is not something that dies easily.)
- 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 spend too much time on the internet. 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." What happened to the AA teaching about service... "You have to give it away to keep it." One fellow in AA mentioned that he was feeling tired and stressed and decided not to go to a meeting but to stay home and take it easy. His sponsor reminded him that when he was drinking if there was a keg of beer some place he would be first there and last to leave.

When speaking about "Sloth" I sometimes like to look at "spiritual sloth" – a disinterest in spiritual growth and development in our lives. There seems to be so many more important things to do and we don't pray that much and we don't do spiritual reading at all. Steps 10 and 11 wither on the vine of our lives. Do we have enough time to watch TV, but not enough time to read the Big Book or other spiritual materials?

- Anger... this is a tough one, because it seems that so many people are angry today. Our society tends to express anger through use of 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? It's a tough, complex problem... there is no simple answer. But the questions for ourselves that I would pose right now are, "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.
Be careful of resentments..

(I used to be the boss. I liked things done my way. Of course, my way was the best way. I would get resentful when others didn't follow my way. Now I am no longer the boss. Guess what. At times others don't even want to listen to my way. They pretend to listen and understand. But, things don't get done my way. I found myself getting resentful and angry because I wasn't being recognized for my expertise and experience. If they would just listen to me... and sometimes my way is the best way, or it's another way or just an adequate way. But I found out that others will probably do it their way, despite my excellent advice. I have a new saying: "they'll figure it out." They don't have to do it my way. My resentment quotient has fallen.)

A 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)*

Character Defects... a lifelong surrendering.

After Step 3 we have hopefully begun to be freed from some character defects, especially the defects that pose a threat to others: the blindness and denial that leads to drinking ourselves to death, driving while drunk, drunken rages, black outs and what we might do during our black outs, and stealing for our addiction.

In Step 5 we hopefully begin to recognize other character defects. When we recognize some of them we might become worried and even depressed. How can I deal with them? I've been acting that way for so long?

How can I not manipulate others?

How can I not lie?

How can I not use others to pleasure myself?

Now we begin to see why Steps 6 and 7 bring our Higher Power into the picture. God will help us if we turn to God and ask for God's help. We have to be "entirely ready" and "humbly" ask.

We might not be aware of many of our defects as first. It takes time. Remember, what are our goals and values?

How do we want to act?

What's getting in our way?

Why is it so hard at times to change... to achieve our new goals and act in accordance with our new principles?

Fears

The **Big Book** speaks of self-centered fears. What are our fears? Are we afraid to change?

What don't we want to give up?

Are we afraid that we will lose control, that we'll make mistakes, that people will laugh at us, that we'll lose what we have or won't get what we want?

(See **Twelve and Twelve**, p.74)

What are you afraid might happen if you surrender your character defects to your Higher Power.

Afraid your Higher Power can't really help.

Can you trust your Higher Power?

Do you pray?

Remember, you can't do it yourself. Are you "entirely ready?"

Surrender

Here's what the 7th Step Prayer says...

*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. (**Big Book**, p. 76)*

You have to surrender to win.

You have to die to be alive... die to your old self.

In surrendering our character defects to our Higher Power I believe that we are moving in the direction so often spoken of in the Big Book as "doing God's will."

Steps 6 and 7 look to the future. Remember the 3rd Step Prayer. Part of God's will is to heal our character defects, our "bondage to self"... sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly.

Remember, God cannot remove our character defects if we keep practicing them.

Our Gifts

Here's another way of becoming "entirely ready" to have God remove our character defects.

Rather than letting our character defects paralyze us, we might try recognizing *our gifts, our virtues, our strengths. They are all blessings from God.*

Rather than arrogantly *listing* these,
we thankfully *recognize* them.

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. That's part of the "spiritual awakening" the **Big Book** speaks of.

We need to be careful of staying in the Program because of fear of returning to our past. As we work the steps we recognized that we have to give it away to keep it... this means serving others. We can do this by sharing our giftedness with others.

If you are not sure of your gifts, ask your sponsor...
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?

A fellow in AA remarked that since he's been in the Program he has a wonderful relationship with his son and his grandkids, and a healthy and happy relationship with his wife. She even told him that he has the gifts of compassion for others and the ability to listen with care... Gifts!

Useful Suffering

Even our character defects and our past suffering and pain can help us to be useful to others...

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.

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 think about our character defects,
our weaknesses and our faults,
our emotional scars and disappointments,
our intellectual incapability 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.
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 7 reminds us that “the lead” begins by humbly praying
“That God now remove from me every single defect of character.”

We humbly ask God to remove our defects, but we also ask that God help us to learn from them so that we can help others.

Other Spiritual Values

Humility is a spiritual value that is necessary for growing in Steps 6 and 7.
Other spiritual values include:
Prayer and meditation
Service

Doing God's will

The 7th Step Prayer says it all...

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. (Big Book, p. 76)

An important goal is to be of service to others... we can't keep it if we don't give it away.

We pray for strength to do God's bidding... Prayer and doing God's will.

The 10th and 11th Steps will deal more with Prayer and Meditation.

Remember, the 12th Step...

Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry the message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

*The spiritual life is not a theory – we have to live it. (See **Big Book**, p. 83)*

Conclusion

What have we touched upon this afternoon?

I Transformation... It's about change

Big Book, pp 60-61

II Steps Six and Seven

The big Questions... What are my goals?

Humility... Right sizing

Character Defects... The Seven Deadlies... (Twelve and Twelve, pp 65-74)... envy, greed, pride/arrogance, lust, gluttony, sloth and anger/resentments

Character Defects... a lifelong surrendering... fears and surrender

Gifts... What are my gifts? How can I use them to serve others?

Useful Suffering... The story of the cracked diamond

Other spiritual values... prayer and meditation, service, doing God's will

May our loving God help each of us to grow and develop on our journey of recovery.

Extra... do not include in the talk

Character defects...

De-formity of the ugly

Mutilated, grotesque, repulsiveness, distortion instead of elegance and proportion and unity.

Beauty is radiant form springing from the inner depths – this is what is missing from the ugly.

The ugly is repulsive rather than delightful and attractive.

The beautiful appeals to what is noble, lofty and sublime in a person.

From the Desk of Donald Ware, C.P.

The ugly, when it attracts at all, appeals to what is selfish, wretched, squalid and sordid.

The seamy side of our fallen state turns our vision to the deformed which is loathsome: hatreds, cruelties, betrayals, avarice, arrogance, lust, sundry dishonesties. *That old American favorite hymn might be playing in the background...* "I did it my way."