

STEP SEVEN

*Humbly asked God
to remove our shortcomings.*

In Step Seven we asked our Higher Power to work in our lives, believing that God knows what is right for us, better than we do ourselves. This required complete surrender, an action even more pronounced than our initial surrender. To take Step Seven, we needed to get out of God's way. We asked for freedom from anything that limited our recovery and inhibited our relationship with our Higher Power.

Step Seven is the point where the first six Steps come together. It is the gateway to a new way of life. It is as if in Step One, we realized we had a garden thoroughly overrun by weeds. In Step Two, we realized we needed help with it if our garden was to thrive. In Step Three, we decided to ask for help from the Master Gardener. In Step Four, we identified everything living in the garden. In Step Five, we told our neighbor and the Master Gardener exactly what we had found. In Step Six, we specifically identified the weeds and became willing to rid ourselves of them. And here, in Step Seven, we sought the aid of the Master Gardener to remove them.

Step Seven is about humility. Let us first consider what is meant by humility — the fundamental principle of the Twelve Steps. The basic ingredients of humility are unpretentiousness and a willingness to submit to a Higher Power's will. Through experience, we have found that most addicts come to the program with little or no humility. Unless we find a way to practice and develop this principle,

we stand little chance of remaining clean and sober, much less of becoming truly happy.

We live in a world where there are many warped ideas of how to attain happiness. Some people believe we should always be happy. Some believe that the fulfillment of our material needs and desires is the key to happiness. For us, that pursuit often led to drugs. Some of us thought that if we had everything, then we would be free to begin our quest for culture and character, true happiness and serenity.

Materialism seemed to tell us that we had to rely on our wits and inventiveness to provide the things necessary for happiness. We who are addicts have come to the bitter realization that our best thinking and self-will are what brought us to a state of despair and incomprehensible demoralization. Our plans and methods didn't work. We demanded more than our share of wealth, prestige, and love. When things seemed to be going our way, we got loaded to celebrate or to dream more dreams. When our plans went up in smoke, either because we had simply failed or because we had never really taken any action towards realizing our goals, we got loaded and searched for an unfeeling, uncaring oblivion.

The bottom line was a lack of humility. We could not see that good character and spiritual values had to come *first*. We had it backwards. We have found that material satisfaction and self-centered gratification of our desires are not the purpose of living.

Of course, most of us thought that good character was desirable. But many of us thought that this was something one acquired, as a result of obtaining all that one needed. Some of us thought that morality and honesty were

something to be displayed so that we would have a better chance of getting what we wanted. Few of us thought that honesty, tolerance, patience, and love of our fellow human beings and a Higher Power were values that should be the foundation of our daily lives.

As long as self-gratification and acquisition of our wants and needs was our number one priority, we could *never* gain a working faith in a Higher Power. This was impossible, even if we came to the program with the belief that God exists. As long as we relied first on our own self-will, and based our lives around the pursuit of what we were convinced our needs were, reliance and faith in a Higher Power were out of the question.

The process of gaining this new outlook on life was a painful experience for most of us. Many of us found that we had to make the same mistakes over and over again before we could really start to grasp the concept. Often we were humbled by experiences brought on by our own pride, ego, and arrogance. We learned that the more we could let go of our selfishness and try to carry out what we perceived as God's will, the more we started to experience serenity in our lives.

Our admission of powerlessness in Step One was often the first feeling of liberation and freedom we had ever experienced. This is an example of true humility, and the healing that it can bring. But this was only the beginning. We had spent our entire lives and our using careers based on self-centeredness. This attitude does not change overnight. It is a lifelong process requiring the practice of perseverance. As we are so often told, recovery is not an event; it is a process. We strive for progress, not perfection.

Humbly asking God to remove our shortcomings meant we were completely open to letting God work in our lives despite our unsubstantiated fears. Humility is a continuous relationship with our Higher Power. It is the ability to calmly ask for help. Working daily on our relationship with God, we discovered that our timetable for having our defects of character removed was not the same as God's timetable. Humility is a simple request and a letting go. We take action and leave the results of our request to our Higher Power.

At this point in our recovery, we had obtained some measure of release from the obsession to use. Considering where we came from, that in itself was a remarkable, if not miraculous, thing. We had taken a clear look at the defects of character that blocked us from a better relationship with the very power that could help us. By this time we had started to enjoy moments where we experienced true feelings of serenity and happiness. They were gifts beyond value. The rewards we had enjoyed thus far were based largely on the level of true humility we had in our lives.

We began to see that humility is the key to serenity and happiness. Our outlook started to change. In the past we had always run away from the things that had frightened us. We had numbed ourselves with the drug. We never wanted to deal with pain. But now, we began to realize that some suffering could, in fact, encourage growth and develop character.

Within the fellowship, we can see and hear at virtually every meeting how people's lives of suffering have been transformed, by humility, into lives of happiness, fulfillment, and joy. Our greatest flaws and shortcomings can become our greatest assets in helping others to recover

from this disease. Pain seems to be the price of admission, but we always seem to get many more rewards than we had hoped for or expected. As the process continues, it gets easier to fear pain less and desire humility more. This pain is the pain of building character. We no longer hide behind a cloud of smoke whenever life presents us with an opportunity for spiritual growth.

One of the joys of being clean is the return of the full range of human emotions. Early on, we often confused feelings with defects of character; as our emotions returned with a new force, they frightened and disoriented us. We had not yet learned what to do with them. Some of us even asked our Higher Power to take them from us. This was not only futile but also dangerous. We found that when we denied, blocked, or buried our feelings, we usually behaved compulsively. Compulsive behavior can lead us to other addictions. When we acknowledged and accepted our feelings, we behaved moderately. We ran less risk of relapsing or of switching addictions.

The practice of humility led to healing. Step Seven was a powerful remedy taken with joy and humor. We now take ourselves less seriously. Shortcomings are human; everyone has imperfections. In concert with God, we have grown in serenity. We have choices about how we will behave because we are no longer locked into old patterns of action by resentment and fear. Self-centered fear, that we would lose something we had or that we wouldn't get something we wanted, put us into a state of perpetual disturbance that blocked us from our true goals. It follows that no true peace could be had until we found a means of reducing these demands. We asked for faith with faith, and gained clarity about God's will for us.

Step Seven**Life With Hope**

Whenever we are suffering, we pause and check to see if we have been at fault. If we have been at fault, we ask God to remove our defects of character. If we haven't, we ask God to give us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change. To be humble is to be genuinely accepting.

The true humility we acquired in Step Seven gave us the ability to look calmly back through our lives and see where we had done harm. It gave us a way to ask for the honesty and willingness to change our relationships. When we asked humbly, we discovered that a Higher Power could remove our imperfections and help us gain self-forgiveness for the harm that we had done. We were ready for Step Eight.