SAA of New York City

Workshop Handout

Garment District
Sunday July 5th, 3:00 pm

A Practical Approach to Steps 6 & 7

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Workshop Overview

- Introduction: Serenity Prayer
- Steps 6 & 7 in context of the 12 Steps
- What are character defects and why do they matter?
- Steps 6 & 7 teachings from the Big Book, 12/12, and Green Book
- Drop the Rock's approach to Steps 6 & 7
- Conclusion: 7th Step Prayer

Steps 6 & 7 in Context

● In the context of the 12 Steps, Steps 6 & 7 come after Steps 4 & 5 and before Steps 8 & 9, which seems obvious, but is spiritually significant.

○ Our “searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves” (in Step 4) and our admission to “God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs” (in Step 5) allow us to get honest and to build awareness about the ways in which our current thinking and behavior is self-destructive and harmful to others.

○ In understanding that we have caused the harms outlined in our Step 4 inventory, Steps 6 & 7 prepare us spiritually for the work of cleaning up the wreckage of our past asked of us in Steps 8 & 9 - i.e., in making a list of all people we have harmed and becoming willing to make amends to them all (Step 8); and making direct amends to such people wherever possible except when to do so would injure them or others (Step 9).

What are Character Defects and why do they matter?

● Addiction is a behavioral disease characterized by obsession and compulsion, but which masks a deeper reality - flaws in our character that result in a "spiritual malady."

● "Our [alcohol, sex, drug, etc.] was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions." BB, "How It Works," p.64.

● The Big Book of AA refers to them as "flaws in our make-up which caused our failure" [in life, with people, with ourselves, and which made the drug attractive].

● "Being convinced that self manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us, we considered its common manifestations." BB, "How It Works," p.64.

● They are the "exact nature of our wrongs" as revealed in Step 5.

● The 12&12 calls character defects natural instincts gone awry -

- "Since most of us are born with an abundance of natural desires, it isn't strange that we often let these far exceed their intended purpose. When they drive us blindly, or we willfully demand that they supply us with more satisfactions or pleasures than are possible or due us, that is the point at which we depart from the degree of perfection that God wishes for us here on earth. That is the measure of our character defects, or, if you wish, of our sins." 12&12, "Step Six," p.65.

● The Green Book calls them "undesirable traits, attitudes, and beliefs," which may have originated in their appearance to help us cope with life.

- "Character defects are undesirable traits, attitudes, and beliefs make our lives unmanageable, cause pain to others, and block our spiritual growth." Green Book, "Our Program," p.40.
- "Often we find that our character defects started as ways to deal with difficult circumstances, in childhood or later. It is hard to let go of beliefs and behaviors that once helped us cope . . ." Id.

Examples of Character Defects

● The Big Four: the Big Book highlights four character defects as being more detrimental than others to our spiritual condition and growth –

- ❖ "Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear." BB, "Into Action," p.84.
- ❖ When these crop up, we:

(1) ask God at once to remove them;
(2) We discuss them with someone immediately;
(3) make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone; and
(4) Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help. Love and tolerance of others is our code." Id.

Examples of Character Defects

- Selfishness: Selfishness is maybe the most poorly understood character defect because it encompasses so many harmful behaviors. It is not just demanding more than one's fair share and putting one's interests above others, but a fundamental way of looking at the world.
  - "Selfishness - self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles. Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate. Sometimes they hurt us, seemingly without provocation, but we invariably find that at some time in the past we have made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt. So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making" BB, "Into Action," p.62.

- Dishonesty: Honesty is the first prerequisite for working the 12 steps as emphasized in Chapter 5 of the Big Book; in fact, Honesty is so important that the book explains that only those people who are constitutionally incapable of it are those who cannot or will not recover.
  - "Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born that way. They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty." BB, "How it Works," p.58.

- Resentment: Resentment is uniquely harmful to our spiritual condition. It is a way we relive past traumas and grow increasingly embittered. It serves the delusion of adopting a victim mentality, which cuts us off from the experience of God's love, which manifests in inner peace and serenity. It is both the process of reimagining the past harmful event and the psychic pain that results.
  - "Resentment is the "number one" offender. It destroys more [addicts] than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease, for we have been not only mentally and physically ill, we have been spiritually sick. When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically." BB, "How it Works," p.64.

- Fear: If Resentment tends to pull us into the past and embitter us to our current circumstances, Fear has a way of projecting worry into the future. We imagine that the worst will likely come true and convince ourselves that such projections are reasonable based on certain facts. Similar to Resentment, Fear is both the process of imagining future events and the psychic pain that results.
  - "[Fear] somehow touches about every aspect of our lives. It was an evil and corroding thread; the fabric of our existence was shot through with it. It set in motion trains of circumstances which brought us misfortune we felt we didn't deserve. But did not we, ourselves, set the ball rolling." BB, "How it Works," p.67.
  - "[T]he chief activator of our defects has been self-centered fear. Mainly the fear that we would lose something we already possessed or that we would fail to get something we demanded." Drop the Rock, "Step Six" p. 54.

Examples of Character Defects - 12 & 12 & GB

- Examples of Character Defects in the 12&12:

  - Pride (Superiority), Greed, Anger (Self-Righteousness), Lust, Gluttony, Envy, Sloth (i.e., the Seven Deadly Sins).

- Examples of Character Defects in the Green Book:

  - Attitudes: Resentment, Grandiosity, Self-Pity, Perfectionism, Blaming Others, Feeling Like a Victim, Entitlement, Judgemental, Expectation;
  - Behaviors: Raging, Isolating, Lying, Manipulating, Avoiding Conflict;
  - Traits: Greed, Envy, Selfishness, and Self Hatred.

Character Defects - Which are the ones you suffer from?

- Please take out your handout.
- Refer to question #1.
- Please list out the top 5 character defects.
- If you are struggling to identify them, ask your Higher Power to reveal them, ask your sponsor, or refer to your 4th step inventories.
- After you've completed question #1, please refer to question #2.

Step Six

"Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."

Our part: TO BECOME ENTIRELY READY

- "Readiness" is the central concept of Step 6.
- Although the Big Book discusses this concept in terms of "willingness," in our experience this step iis not synonymous with willingness.
- Readiness builds upon the awareness we developed in Steps 4 & 5 through our inventories and honesty and requires some additional shifts in attitude.
- In addition to awareness, we need humility to understand and accept that our old ways did not serve us and the willingness to try a different approach - i.e., to surrender our desire to act in accordance to our old attitudes and behaviors to God.
- Finally, Readiness appears to also be a function of consistent spiritual action.

- Big Book of AA: The Big Book emphasizes the key to Step 6 as "willingness" -
  - "We [the founders of AA] have emphasized willingness as being indispensable [for working Step 6]. Are we now ready to let God remove from us all the things which we have admitted are objectionable . . . [i]f we still cling to something we will not let go, we ask God to help us be willing." Big Book, "Into Action," p.76.
- **Taking out your handout, please refer to questions #3 & #4.**
- **Please answer whether you are ready to give up your top 5 character defects, and whether you are currently willing to surrender them.**

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (the "12&12"): Addresses some common issues that come up in practicing Step 6 -

- (1) Can God (and will God) remove defects of character?
  - "So in a very complete and literal way, all A.A.'s have "become entirely ready" to have God remove the mania for alcohol from their lives. And God has proceeded to do exactly that." 12&12, "Step Six," p.64.
- (2) Where do these character defects come from?
  - "Since most of us are born with an abundance of natural desires, it isn't strange that we often let these far exceed their intended purpose. When they drive us blindly, or we willfully demand that they supply us with more satisfactions or pleasures than are possible or due us, that is the point at which we depart from the degree of perfection that God wishes for us here on earth." 12&12, "Step Six," p.65.

The 12&12: Addresses some common issues that come up in practicing Step 6-

- (3) Does God keep us defect free despite our actions?
  - "[I]n no case does [God] render us white as snow and keep us that way without our cooperation. That is something we are supposed to be willing to work toward ourselves." 12&12, "Step Six," p.65.
- (4) What is Step 6 about and do we take it once?
  - "[Step 6] is [a] way of stating the best possible attitude one can take in order to make a beginning on this lifetime job. This does not mean that we expect all our character defects to be lifted out of us as the drive to drink was. A few of them may be, but with most of them we shall have to be content with patient improvement." 12&12, "Step Six," p.65.

The 12&12: Addresses some common issues that come up in practicing Step 6-

- (5) Why are character defects so difficult to give up?
  - "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?" 12&12, "Step Six," p.66.
- (6) How may a successful approach to Step 6 be characterized?
  - "[The difference between a successful approach to Step 6 and a failed approach] is the difference between striving for a self-determined objective and for the perfect objective which is of God . . . [d]elay is dangerous, and rebellion may be fatal." 12&12, "Step Six," p.68-69.

The Green Book: What does the Green Book have to add?

- (1) How does the Green Book characterize character defects?
  - "The negative patterns uncovered in our inventory represent a lifetime of ingrained beliefs, attitudes, and habits of behavior . . . Often we find that our character defects started as ways to deal with difficult circumstances, in childhood or later. It is hard to let go of beliefs and behaviors that once helped us cope, or even kept us alive. Character defects are undesirable traits, attitudes, and beliefs that make our lives unmanageable, cause pain to others, and block our spiritual growth . . . rather than solving these problems or accepting our lives, we [sex addicts] hunkered down with our addiction." Green Book, "Our Program," p.40.
- (2) Why are we resistant to change?
  - "Much of our resistance to change is based in fear." Green Book, "Our Program," p.40.

The Green Book: What does the Green Book have to add?

- (3) Why is Step 6 so important?
  - "Step Six builds on the recognition that our malady has roots that run deeper than just our acting-out behavior." Green Book, "Our Program," p.40.
- (4)HowisStep6"linked"toSteps3,4&5?
  - "It is important to realize that the words "these defects of character" [in Step 6] refer to the "exact nature of our wrongs" admitted in the Fifth Step . . . [o]ur Step Four inventory revealed to us how defects such
    as resentment, self-centeredness, and self-pity led us time and again into our addictive behaviors . . . [t]he readiness in the Sixth Step is one of the practical results of our Third Step decision to turn our will and life over to God's care." Green Book, "Our Program," p.41-42.
- (5) How may our Higher Powers help?
  - "It is also helpful to ask our Higher Power to reveal our character defects to us. When we pray or meditate on this step, new insights about ourselves and our shortcomings will often come to us." Green Book, "Our Program," p.41.
- (6) What help does "self-help" have to offer the addict in defect removal?
  - "Many of us had tried to purge ourselves of our worst traits, and our efforts failed, just as our attempts to be free of our addiction failed." Green Book, "Our Program," p.42.
- (7) What are the role of character assets?
  - "On the other side of every character defect is a character asset. Part of the process of becoming entirely ready is to practice these character assets in our actions and choices . . ." Green Book, "Our Program," p. 42.

Step Seven

"Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings"

Our part

TO HUMBLY ASK

This is an ACTION.

To practice this step we have to ask over and over through prayer.

Green Book

Humbly

"It takes humility to truly ask for help. It means admitting we are not wholly strong and self sufficient. It means that we are not too proud or ashamed to believe that we can be helped."

"Humility means being teachable."

Ask

"Asking... expresses a deepening surrender on part."

12 & 12

"For us the process of gaining a new perspective was unbelievably painful. It was only by repeated humiliations that we were forced to learn something about humility.

- Our way doesn't work. I am powerless.

"Refusing to place God first, we had deprived ourselves of His help."

- HP is powerful. Let HP lead.

"Perspective to see that character building and spiritual values have to come first, and that material satisfactions are not the purpose of living."

- We learn that an honest desire to seek and do God's will if a form of Humility

Drop the Rock's approach to Steps 6 & 7

- Drop the Rock is a recovery book published by Hazelden Publishing. It focuses primarily on practical approaches to working Steps 6 & 7.
- It was written by three members of Alcoholics Anonymous and was first published in 1993.
- The central metaphor is that character defects are like rocks that weigh us down in life, but which we cling to obstinately mainly from fear of a different way of living - i.e., fear that we do not know a different way or what our life will be like if we give up the attitude/behavior.
- There are two sections in the "Introduction" to Drop the Rock that are instrumental to growing in our understanding of the ways in which we sabotage ourselves from working Steps 6 & 7 and one effective way to practice "readiness".
  - (1) "There are four basic reasons we won't be "entirely ready" to work the Sixth and Seventh Steps. The first is a conscious decision that we will never give up a specific character defect. Next, we blame our defects on others: people, situations, or institutions. Third, we rationalize. Our capacity to rationalize is unlimited. Before recovery we spent years on this one - throwing up barriers against unpleasant realities. Finally, it's denial: we are totally unaware of our own contribution to our problems." Drop the Rock, "Introduction" p.xiv.
- **Take a look at Question #5 in the Handout. Please answer it.**

Drop The Disease – A practical Approach to Step 6 & 7

There are two sections in the "Introduction" to Drop the Rock that are instrumental to growing in our understanding of the ways in which we sabotage ourselves from working Steps 6 & 7 and one effective way to practice "readiness".

- (2) "In recovery, we try to take the opposite of our character defects and shortcomings and turn them into principles. For example, we work to change fear into faith, hate into love, egoism into humility, anxiety and worry into serenity, complacency into action, denial into acceptance, jealousy into trust, fantasy into reality, selfishness into service, resentment into forgiveness, judgementalism into tolerance, despair into hope, self-hate into self-respect, and loneliness into fellowship. Through this work, we learn to understand the principles of our program." Drop the Rock, "Introduction" p.xvii.

- Please refer to the Handout. Looking at Question #6, please list what character asset is the opposite of each of your top 5 character defects. How can you act instead in accordance with that character asset?

- "Surrender" is key:
  - "For the Sixth Step, a spiritual surrender is necessary . . . a total surrender of mind (thinking) and body (doing)." Drop the Rock, "Step Six" p. 2.
  - "[T]he pain of living the way I have been becomes greater than the fear of change." Id. at 3.
- God uses both defects and assets:
  - "God uses our defects and our assets in many ways to accomplish His will." Id at 3.
- Getting rid of character defects as a central focus is "false pride":
  - "It is important to get over and beyond the false pride of making 'getting rid of character defects' a central focus of our lives. This approach is just one more way of not living life on life's terms." Id at 4.

Drop The Disease – A practical Approach to Step 6 & 7

- Change is God's job, not ours:
  - "I don't get to choose which defects God will remove. I find that living with my defects continues to teach me humility . . . [my defects] remind me that there is a God, and it isn't me . . . we do supply the willingness, but it is God who supplies the changes and the reasons for our willingness." Id. at 5-6.
- Defects of character arise out of issues of control:
  - "Defects of character are our best attempts to get our needs met . . . [t]he hole in me, the neediness, the hunger, the ache in my life that I tried to fill or stay distracted from by using addictive behavior is actually the perfectly logical result of not knowing and therefore not accepting myself as I am . . . often it isn't until we are 'sick and tired of being sick and tired' that we become willing to change." Id. at 5-9.

- "Insight" is cheap:
  - "[P]eople who analyze themselves to death . . . know exactly what makes them do the things they do: tyrannical mothers, the abusive husbands, the poverty they were raised in, or the childhood of extreme indulgence and privilege. They have great insight, but instead of using that insight as a means to develop new and hopefully better behavior, they use it as a reason to continue with old, destructive behavior. They are not willing to go through the pain it takes to change, even though the pain of staying the same is killing them." Id. at 7.
- Acting "as if" is authentic:
  - "Acting 'as if' [character defects are being removed] can raise questions of genuineness and authenticity. Is there a conflict with the person I am choosing to become and the person I currently am? Authenticity is being true to a vision and purpose . . . I have discovered in my case that knowledge often follows action rather than vice versa . . . [t]he key to acting 'as if' is faith" Id. at 10, 20.

- Depression, in the context of the program, is another form of "Playing God":
  - "[D]epression [at being blind to our character defects and how they have harmed us], I discovered, was not humility but another form of "playing God," believing my character defects were more powerful than my Higher Power's forgiveness." Id. at 11.
- Character Defects are similar to active addiction:
  - "[C]haracter defects are like active addiction. I couldn't keep using and expect God to relieve my disease. Neither could I keep practicing my character defects and expect God to remove them." Id. at 11.

- Character Defects are different from "Personality":
  - "[We may develop] resistance to surrendering [our character defects] . . . because [our] self-concept [may be] that [our] personality was [our] character defects . . . Believing there's something more and better [than who we have been by virtue of our character defects] is the essence of faith; it is trusting that God will reshape me into what I was meant to be in the first place - a decent human being . . . We've spent a lifetime building an image of who we are and how we operate, a fantasy story, then we are asked to put it aside when it is in conflict with the new principles we've decided to follow in the Program . . . In becoming entirely ready - in deciding to be willing to surrender - we must examine our hearts and work with prayer and meditation to set aside self-image and move into self-awareness." Id. at 12.

Drop The Disease – A practical Approach to Step 6 & 7

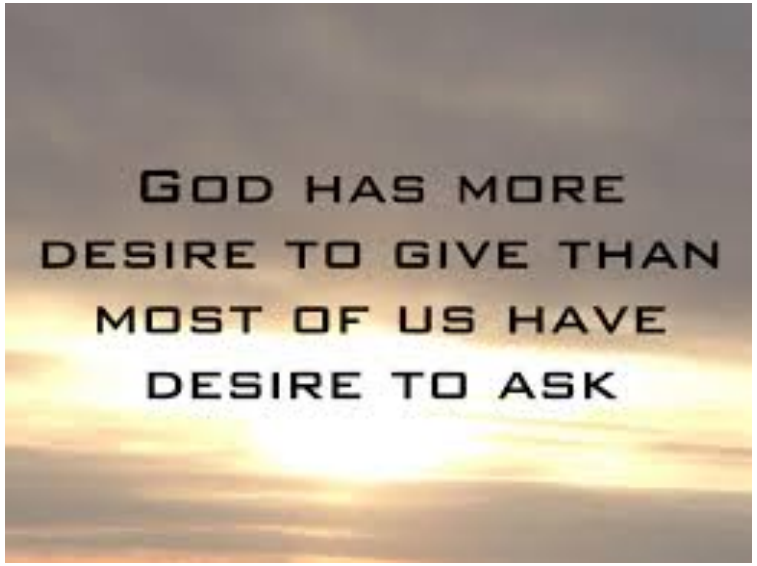
- Humility means more than talking about steps or character defects in meetings:
- Step Six can be hard because it means facing ourselves:
  - "Talking about the Steps at meetings is much different than working them . . . [w]e must become willing to take action - continuous action - to become who we can become." Id. at 15.
  - "The Sixth Step means facing ourselves, and that is usually more difficult than being honest with another person. I have found it difficult to lie to others because of practicing the principles of the Program but still easy to lie to myself." Id. at 17.
- Ritual, prayer, meditation, and cleansing are four ways we can act to practice becoming "entirely ready":
  - "Ritual, prayer, meditation, and cleansing are four things we can do to make the process of self-examination move more quickly and easily." Id. at 21.
- Drop the Rock adopts the 12 & 12's approach of discussing major character defects in light of the Seven Deadly Sins:
  - "The last area we may wish to take a look at concerning Step Six is the Seven Deadly Defects or the Seven Deadly Sins." Id. at 33.

- Pride: “[T]he pride that ‘goes before a fall’ is an unhealthy state, a symptom of character defects of egotism, grandiosity, and arrogance [or false pride].” Drop the Rock, “Step Six” p. 35.
- Envy: “We fear we won’t get the ‘good things’ and resent when others do ... when we envy others for what they own, for their standing in the community, or for the people who care about them, we are on our way to self-pity” Id. at 36.
- Gluttony: “Many of us do not balance our dietary habits ... [w]e are greedy in our eating habits, which affects our health. We’ve not examined the mix of exercise, nutrition, and spirit that is necessary to formulate a plan for living that provides energy, health, strength, and endurance.” Id. at 38.
- Sloth: “Sloth is the thief of time ... putting off actions ‘until things get better’ is one of the most destructive detours we can make. Delays never make problems go away; they only make success harder to attain.” Id. at 39.
- Covetousness (i.e., Greed): “To inappropriately desire another or a thing is to covet.” Id. at 41.
- Lust: “Sex, and many issues surrounding sex, may be the most misunderstood and confusing area in recovery. Most of us never learned or were never modeled intimacy, so we confused sex with love, and lust with desire.” Id. at 42.
- Anger: “[We typically deal with anger] one of two ways: [we were] hot, explosive, enraged, hostile, or furious; or [we were] cold, denying and suppressing [of our] anger ... [additionally], [w]e become very dangerous to ourselves and others when we [act out of self-righteous anger].” Id. at 48-50.

- One principle to remember when dealing with sex and our sex lives in the context of character defects (taken from the Big Book, “How it Works”):
  - “We remembered always that our sex powers were God-given and therefore good, neither to be used lightly or selfishly, nor to be despised and loathed.”
- The goal of Steps 6 & 7 is a positive sobriety:
  - “We have to want the Program out of a desire for a new life, not out of a fear for the old. Positive thinking and behavior will be in charge if we are to make any character growth.” Drop the Rock, “Step Six” p. 54.

Humility:
People with humility have a sincere desire to become the best they can be. Humility is an attitude. It must be practiced to be maintained.
Example: We are as humble as we are grateful.

How do we let God remove our shortcomings? Willingness
“Are we willing to change? Or do we want to hold on to old ways of doing and being?”
“God can’t help us remove our shortcoming if we keep practicing them.”



Asking!
The bible says, “ Ask and you shall receive. Knock and the door will be opened.”
“Most of us never ask. Or when we do ask, it is self centered and self-serving. Prayer is not about self centered requests. It’s about becoming who we can become.”

TRUST

We must learn to trust.

Many of lost our ability to trust.

It takes action to trust.

Are we putting trust in the things we are addicted to or in the program of recovery. We can trust through practicing it. Knowing help is available IF I SEEK IT.

Self centeredness vs my usefulness..... My will vs. God's will

Conclusion: 7th Step 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 [will]/bidding. Amen.

It's NOW

Time for SHARES!