

STEP SEVEN

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

In the middle of the Twelve Steps, after the relief of admitting our powerlessness over nicotine and a searching moral inventory, we put ourselves on the line and asked God to remove our shortcomings. We asked our Higher Power to take away the roadblocks we had constructed which kept us unhappy and afraid and incapable of meeting life without our drug, nicotine.

The Step itself required only that we humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings. Let's first think about the word "humbly." Some of us were put off by this word because it so closely resembles the words "humiliate" and "humiliation." These words seemed too negative. We came to understand that the word "humbly" did not mean debasing ourselves. What it meant was seeing our proper place in the grand scheme of things. We acknowledged our Higher Power as a higher, more complete, more encompassing entity than ourselves. We saw that our Higher Power was more, and that we were less. But we were not less in a bad or pejorative sense. We were less in respect to our Higher Power. This is the correct understanding of humility. It is the acceptance of our very true and very human limitations.

Accepting our ultimate humanity and our human limitations is different from acknowledging our shortcomings, which we had done in Step Four. As we progressed from Step Four through Step Six, we identified, admitted, considered and began to psychologically detach from these shortcomings. We called them "inventory" in Step Four, "wrongs" in Step Five, and "character defects" in Steps Six. Whatever the label for these ineffective behavior patterns, we realized that our addiction itself was the prime example. We also realized that the guilt and shame we felt about our shortcomings was part of the reason we used nicotine. As we accept these shortcomings as normal human failings, our extreme responses to basic instincts, we acknowledge our imperfection. We realize our previous behavior patterns have not worked for us or for others. We see that they have made our lives unmanageable.

Reflecting back on Step Two, we came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. Here is where we ask that Higher Power to do so. Having explored various alternatives to our shortcomings, we are now ready to take the Seventh Step.

Some of us took this Step by saying the following words, *"My Higher Power, I place myself in your hands and humbly ask that my character defects be lifted from me so that I may help others. Please grant me willingness, courage, and strength so that through my actions I may reflect your love and wisdom. Amen."*

We have found that there are many ways to take this Step. What works best for many of us is to pray aloud in a quiet room where we can hear what we are saying and reflect on it as we say it. In bed, upon awakening and before getting up, works well. On our knees works, too. The important thing is to say our words. They can form the basis of a worthwhile daily meditation alone, or together with other prayers or affirmations.

We have found that these words can do more than get our day off to a strong start. They can take the edge off situations and feelings long enough for us to forget the urge to use nicotine. When we think about the many times our resolve not to use nicotine has crumbled in the face of tough situations and intense emotions, we recognize our limitations. Steps Seven reinforces our sense of powerlessness and our willingness to ask for help.

Asking for help was often difficult for us. We wanted to believe that we were totally self-sufficient and independent. Our willingness to see ourselves as needing help, which was an essential part of the First Step, left us with a feeling of emptiness. It was when we started to work the Second Step that this emptiness was filled with our faith in a Power greater than ourselves. To our great surprise we found that our decision to surrender our will, and our willingness to ask for help from a Higher Power, or even from our fellow human beings, was a liberating experience. Not only did it remove the unrealistic pressure we had placed on ourselves, but we also began to make progress. In fact, our very definition of the word progress began to change. We leave it up to our Higher Power to remove these shortcomings. We learn that whether and when they will be removed is up to our Higher Power, and not up to us.

As we increase our conscious contact with our Higher Power, we also hope to increase our knowledge of our Higher Power's

will for us. Perhaps in this way we will come to understand why our Higher Power leaves us the capacity to behave ineffectively. After all we have "made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a Higher Power" as we each may come to understand.

Nicotine is cunning, baffling, powerful, and patient. We are never free from our addiction. By working Step Seven and reciting the Seventh Step prayer, we ask for *willingness, courage, and strength* from a Power greater than ourselves so that through our actions we may reflect our Higher Power's *love and wisdom*.

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