



## **Working Steps 6 - 7**

*“I like to think of it this way. In Steps 2 and 3, we start to go ‘steady’ with our Higher Power. We give It a chance to see if a relationship is possible. By the time we get to Steps 6 and 7, we are ready to commit to our Higher Power because we know It will be there for us.”*

David C. of Raleigh NA  
Guest Speaker in 2012  
SAA Saturday Morning Step Class

**Triangle Area SAA  
Recovery Manual Steps 1 - 9  
Track 4**

### **Introduction to Steps 6 and 7**

If you read Steps 6 and 7 in the AA *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (usually called the *AA Twelve and Twelve*), you probably noticed how short they are, how the discussions lack the detail, the call to action, of previous Steps. Appearances are most definitely deceiving. Excellent lectures have been given and books written on the deep, transformative nature of these Steps. In this manual, we will begin to explore the nature of this transformation, a process that is the true work of a lifetime. Two popular books you might like to read at some point are:

1. *Drop the Rock: Removing Character Defects – Steps Six and Seven* by Bill P., Todd W., and Sara S.
2. *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Search for Meaning* by Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Hetcham.

At this midpoint of the Steps, we are asked to stop, take a deep breath, and return to those questions of a Higher Power raised in Steps 2 and 3 where we “Came to believe” and then “Made a decision.” But why revisit those questions now?

[What would happen if we worked these Steps out of order and made a list of all the people we have harmed, made amends to them all and THEN were entirely ready to have God remove all our defects of character? This is an excellent group discussion question.]

We can best understand the return to the question of our relationship with our Higher Power if we consider the Program as a process.

- Step 1 – Embraced the principle of **Honesty** and admitted we were powerlessly living an unmanageable life.
- Step 2 – Practiced **Hope** by making room for the *possibility* of a loving, healing Power greater than ourselves.
- Step 3 – Invoked **Faith** when we decided to trust this unknown Benevolence with our will and our life – even if all we did was to *Act As If* we trusted.
- Step 4 – Demonstrated **Courage** by conducting a thorough morale inventory of ourselves.
- Step 5 – Regained our **Integrity** by admitting that inventory to God, to ourselves and another human being.

Steps 1 – 3 are about survival. Admit defeat. Identify a Higher Power. Ask for help.

During Step 4, the addict employed a stressed and foggy mind to examine his stressed and foggy mind in hopes of discovering something new and true about himself.

What happens next goes something like this. Events previously isolated in time slowly merge into patterns of compulsive and destructive behavior and the fog begins to lift.

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In Step 5, the sponsor asked the addict to focus on these compulsive and destructive patterns. With a sponsor's guidance, the conversation helped the addict take apart and understand how the psychological forces keeping the patterns in place, empowering the addiction. And the fog receded further.

A thorough moral inventory introduces the addict to himself; to his addict mind and to a lesser extent, his healthy mind.

The addict mind is devoid of hope, operates in isolation, feeds on fear, and never tires of victimhood. The addict mind reframes important memories to support a negative worldview. Love is fiercely desired but hopelessly unattainable. Praise is sweetly craved but hollow when given. Punishments – real or imagined - are simultaneously unjust and deserved.

The addict mind fixates on physical intimacy, on base and worldly pleasures. When an addict is triggered, the addict mind reacts by gorging on what it knows, and then wonders why the hunger pains never go away.

At the end of this inwardly focused journey, the addict can admit his part in the tragic moments in his life. His character defects – universal, really - inhabit the landscape of a sad and ruined life. Willfulness and pride strut about, masquerading as self-confidence. Self-loathing is passed off as an elevated form of humility. Cloying co-dependence insists that it is true love while a lack of proper boundaries promotes victimhood.

At the close of Step 5, the addict sees - finally sees - how his shortcomings aided and abetted his addiction. Clearly, his ruination is a result of “superior” reasoning and best intentions. He realizes he must change, but has no idea how. If he cannot trust his mind, his intelligence, to guide him, where does he turn? What can he trust?

In her book, *Help, Thanks, Wow*, Anne Lamott writes, “Sometimes the first time we pray, we cry out in the deepest desperation, ‘God help me!’ This is a great prayer, as we are then at our absolutely most degraded and isolated, which means we are nice and juicy with the consequences of our best thinking and are thus possibly teachable.”

It may not be immediately obvious but the fact remains the first five Steps guide an addict on an *inward* journey of self-examination by the light of a tentative faith. With Steps 6 and 7, the entire Program pivots from an *inward* focus to one pointed *outside* of us, to our Higher Power.

Using no uncertain terms, the Program declares that this is the teachable moment to surrender to our newfound Higher Power and to exchange and upgrade the light of a tentative faith for the brighter one that comes with commitment. To continue developing as healthy human beings and to take our rightful place in the larger community, we must learn to practice **Willingness** in Step 6 and **Humility** in Step 7.

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**What Is Step 6?**

Write Step 6 from memory:

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If you have not committed it to memory, stop now. Memorize it.

It makes no sense for you to try to work a Step if you do not know what it says.

This is no time for half-measures.

Remember what is at stake.

Find someone in the Retreat to help you memorize it. This should take all of five (5) minutes.

Write Step 6 from memory

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Continue when you have it memorized.

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**What Is Step 6 Asking?**

To be effective, this manual must be used in combination with dedicated reading of recovery literature. If you have not already done so, take a moment to read Step 6 in the *SAA Green Book*, the *AA Big Book*, and the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of AA* (usually referred to as the *Twelve and Twelve*) several times beforehand.

Write Step 6:

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Draw a circle around the words you think are the most important in Step 6. Be prepared to discuss why you select them. What in this Step will you find the most difficult or challenging? Why? Discuss this with someone at the Retreat.

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Keeping the words you circled in mind, what is the Step asking you to do? Please write this out.

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Discuss this with a facilitator.

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### **What Does a Good Step 6 Look Like?**

We learned that addiction is a disease of the spirit, a corruption of our best nature that makes a mockery of intimacy. Further, we came to understand that if our spirit is corrupted then it is our spirit which must be healed.

Steps 2 and 3 started the healing by asking that we practice **Hope** and **Faith** by making room for the *possible* existence of a healing, loving Power. We soon added **Courage** and **Integrity** to the list of virtues we practiced in Steps 4 and 5.

Step 6 says, “*Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*”

Later on we will consider what this Step asks of us and various ways to demonstrably work it but here are three of the common sticking points.

Some people approaching Step 6 will over-think the word “*entirely*.” Doing so leads to needless worries over the quality of the commitment. This can be avoided if attention is paid to the phrase “entirely ready.” After the hard work of Steps 4 and 5, Step 6 asks if we are *entirely ready* to be free of the resentments, fears, hurts, and shame of our past. Most addicts are.

The *AA Big Book* makes clear the one and only Step we can work perfectly is the First. The other Steps are ideals we adhere to and work towards, imperfectly, every day.

Quoting Bill W in the *AA Twelve and Twelve*,

*If we ask, God will certainly forgive our derelictions. But in no case does He 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. He asks only that we try as best we know how to make progress in the building of character.*

*So Step Six—“Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character”—is A.A.’s 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. The key words “entirely ready” underline the fact that we want to aim at the very best we know or can learn.*

The second obstacle many encounter is the fear of change, of living without our addiction. The addict craves control. There is a strong pull to continue a familiar, if destructive, way of life rather than live in a world of uncertainty.

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The *SAA Green Book 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.*, page 40 puts it this way,

*It is hard to let go of beliefs or behaviors that once helped us cope, or even kept us alive. [...] Our problems did not begin with our sex addiction nor do they end when we get in recovery. Step Six builds on the recognition that our malady has roots that run deeper than just our acting-out behavior. It requires willingness to change fundamentally, to be free of the failings that continue to create serious problems in our lives.*

A third shared difficulty arises when we select what defects to give up and which to keep. The *AA Twelve and Twelve* artfully describes how eager we are to be rid of those defects we hate and how slow we are to be free of those “minor” defects we secretly enjoy. Gossip, for example.

As you work Step 6 you will need to work through these three obstacles in a way that is honest and healthy. You will also encounter obstacles particular to you. When you do, talk about them with your facilitator. He will help you to understand your hesitation and to see that refusing to give up a harmful character defect is just your addict fighting to maintain control.

There are several ways to work Step 6 and regardless of your approach, keep this in mind as you write.

- **You cannot work this Step perfectly.**
- **You work it daily.**
- **It gets easier with time.**

The Step 6 principles are:

- **Willingness**
- Honesty
- Faith
- Trust
- Hope

How do you define these principles? How can you use these principles to work Step 6? What can you begin to do **now** to invoke these principles in your life?

Next, we review different approaches to working this Step.

This is a good time to remind you of something important.

**Do not underestimate the power of the pain you have forgotten.**

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**Different Ways to Work Step 6**

Read the *SAA Green Book* **and** the *AA Twelve and Twelve's* discussion of Step 6 twice and discuss it with your facilitator. If you get the chance, bring it up at a discussion.

This is especially effective when your reading is combined with prayer and/or meditation.

We discuss four related but distinct ways to work Step 6.

Each will be described in greater detail.

- A systematic analysis of the language of the Step.
- A question guided self-examination
- Daily journaling and meditation.
- Write your own Step 6 prayer.

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**A Systematic Analysis of the Language**

This approach asks that we break the Step down into its component parts and evaluate what the separate, individual parts mean to us. As we proceed from one key phrase or word to the next, deep truths are revealed, widening our appreciation for the ideas contained in the language. The exercise concludes with a final declaration about our reaction to this deeper understanding of the Step.

This process is often used to gain wisdom from Scripture. An analysis of a psalm, for example, would critically examine every important word or phrase in that psalm, the goal being to unearth from within the Scripture that buried treasure of wisdom which only deep reflection and study can yield

Step 6 is not Scripture but when we apply the method, the results can be as extraordinary as any found in theology. We come to understand the Step, identify what stands in the way of our doing what the Step asks, and then overcome those barriers.

If we examine the Step's principles under the same light, their relationship to the action required is similarly enhanced.

This technique is best explained by an incomplete example using a table that breaks down the words of the Step.

You can complete it as an exercise if you are working this Step. The table consists of three columns.

The first is the key word or phrase. The Step can be divided in many ways. Discuss with your facilitator how to separate the phrases in the Step. You are free to break the wording down into an arrangement that makes most sense to you. It is helpful to ask others to help you chose a different arrangement.

The second column contains your definitions of the words or phrases; its connotations as well as its denotations. This helps us peel back the many layers of meaning of each phrase or idea.

In the third column you write down your reactions to each part of the Step, how it inspires or challenges you. What stands in the way of your taking the action this Step asks? How can you overcome the inertia to change?

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**Exegesis of Step 6**

<b>Step 6</b>	<b>What this word or phrase means to me.</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<i>Were entirely</i>		
<i>ready (to have)</i>		
<i>God</i>		
<i>remove</i>		
<i>all (these)</i>		
<i>defects of character</i>		
<i>Willingness</i>		I practice willingness by
<i>Honesty</i>		I practice open-mindedness by
<i>Faith</i>		
<i>Trust</i>		

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<i>Hope</i>		

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**A Question Guided Self-examination**

This method is popular across the spectrum of 12 Step programs and shares many of the same features despite differences in programs. All programs that use a self-examination guidebook address each Step individually.

The guidebook combines the discussions in the *AA Twelve and Twelve* with material specific to that Program. The result is recommended template to be worked by a sponsor and sponsee.

Each Step has its own section which is a combination of descriptive narrative and questions the sponsor asks the newcomer about life as an addict.

The narrative section discusses the Step, explains what it means, and then describes what that specific Step program (NA, AA, etc.) believes is the best way to work the Step. The narrative goes on to anticipate the common objections newcomers have to working the Step and overcomes those objections with reason and compassion.

The guidebook anticipates the newcomer's internal resistance to change and also identifies the common character flaws that underlie the resistance, pointing out how they keep addicts enslaved to addiction. Some examples help to clarify this approach. "What does my addict tell me I get from acting out? What do I actually get from acting out? Why I am afraid to even try to change?"

The narrative helps the sponsor guide the sponsee to realize that change is possible and worth it.

Lastly, the guidebook juxtaposes the common and destructive defects of character with their opposite virtues and principles: Greed v. Generosity or Pride v. Humility. With each Step, the addict is asked to practice a (slightly different) set of virtues. Practicing these virtues may initially involve "Acting as if," however permanently adopting them is the goal of the Steps.

Your facilitator will help you if you decide to use this method.

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**Journaling and Daily Meditation**

These topics were covered briefly as part of writing a sobriety plan and are here expanded to become tools for daily practice of Step 6.

None of us improves without feedback and reflection. Keeping a daily journal of your effort to surrender your defects of character provides feedback and an opportunity to reflect.

To begin the day mindfully meditating on your true nature quiets and prepares the mind. Quietly meditating on being a flawed, imperfect creature capable of improvement can profoundly impact your day.

Combining daily journaling with mindful meditation is a powerful way to insure you stay the course.

Your facilitator will help you if you decide to use this method.

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### **Write Your Own Step 6 Prayer**

There are many ways of expressing our commitment to this Step, of showing that we “worked it” but few are as powerful and concrete as writing a prayer to God that we then memorize and recite daily.

Part meditation, part conversation, a prayer is an intimate act of surrender and can be a plea for help in times of trouble or a celebration of a personal victory.

If you decide to write a private prayer, remember it should express your true convictions, (religious beliefs, and/or personal convictions) and demonstrate all of the principles the Step asks us to put into practice.

This is the AA Step 6 prayer.

### **Step 6 Prayer**

Dear God,  
I am ready for Your help in removing from me the defects of character which I now realize are an obstacle to my recovery. Help me to continue being honest with myself and guide me toward spiritual and mental health.

### **Closing**

We addicts know that blind self-will leads to depravity. We forget that an informed self-will can also lead us from it. All we need do is to choose *change at all costs*. We have to be willing to abandon the unworkable strategy of escapism with its broken tools of isolation, deception, and self-will, and then make up our minds to choose *change at all costs*.

Step 6 calls us to remember that a Higher Power capable of removing our destructive sexual behavior stands ready to reform our character and make us into the open, honest, and selfless people we long to be. Marshalling our courage, when we are entirely ready to let the God of our understanding remake us, we are ready for Step 7.

## **Step 7**

*“The blessing of being an angel is that they cannot be corrupted.*

*The curse of being an angel is that they cannot improve.*

*The curse of being human is that one can be corrupted.*

*The blessing of being human is that one can improve.”*

Unknown Ancient Hebrew Scholar

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**What Is Step 7?**

Write Step 7 from memory:

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If you have not committed it to memory, stop now. Memorize it.

It makes no sense for you to try to work a Step if you do not know what it says.

This is no time for half-measures.

Remember what is at stake.

Find someone at the Retreat to help you memorize it. This should take all of five (5) minutes.

Write Step 7 from memory

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Continue when you have it memorized.

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**What Is Step 7 Asking?**

To be effective, this manual must be used in combination with dedicated reading of recovery literature. If you have not already done so, take a moment to read Step 7 in the *SAA Green Book*, the *AA Big Book*, and the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of AA* (usually referred to as the *Twelve and Twelve*) several times beforehand.

Write Step 7:

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Draw a circle around the words you think are the most important in Step 7. Be prepared to discuss why you select them. What in this Step will you find the most difficult or challenging? Why? Discuss this with someone at the Retreat.

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Keeping the words you circled in mind, what is the Step asking you to do? Please write this out.

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Discuss this with your facilitator.

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**What Does A Good Step 7 Look Like?**

The discussion of humility and its role sustaining our recovery found in the *AA Twelve and Twelve* is most enlightening. All we do here is reframe that discussion, synchronizing SAA with it.

For the addict, humility is an acquired taste.

We become acquainted with it early on. A life squandered pursuing the pleasures of the flesh leaves in its wake episode after humiliating episode. Our lies revealed, our deceit uncovered, we spend what feels like geologic ages apologizing to those whose only fault is to love us. It is a bitter brew, and we resent having to drink it.

Time and again, humiliation humbles us but that does not make us humble. It makes us desperate. Those “sick and tired of being sick and tired” who devote themselves honestly to the Steps experience improvement. Humbling ourselves before the God of our understanding brings blessings.

This newfound sobriety allows us to see that we have mistaken humiliation with humility. Humiliation is a consequence; to be humble is a choice. The first is bitter, the second, sweet.

As the *SAA Green Book* puts it,

*Humility is a result of the self-honesty we have gained working the preceding steps. It comes from a realistic view of ourselves, a knowledge of both our strengths and limitations. We recognize that our shortcomings are not unique, and that we are not better or worse than anyone else. When we live with this knowledge, we do not expect perfection from ourselves or others. We know that we are bound to make mistakes, and we choose to learn from them rather than punish ourselves for them. Humility means being teachable, vulnerable, and open.*

Addicts working Step 7 will again feel the pull of perfectionism, wanting to get it *right* from the start. This is the same shortsighted thinking that lead us to a hard chair in a church schoolroom. Avoiding this trap is **the** primary challenge of working Step 7.

The addict mind measures success by the results.

Step 7 is about humbly asking; it is not about the results.

The exercises that follow will help you understanding this deep difference.

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The other challenge most addicts encounter working Step 7 is a reluctance to turn over all our shortcomings. For some it might be gossip. For others, it might be rage. Whatever the defect, we are foolish to hold on to them.

Try to keep this in mind as you work Step 7.

- **You cannot work this Step perfectly.**
- **You work it daily.**
- **It gets easier with time.**

The Step 7 principles are:

- **Humility**
- Willingness
- Honesty
- Faith
- Trust
- Hope

With Step 7, we steadily increase our acquaintance with the oddly invigorating taste of humility.

We ask God to make us better men, better women, better people. We ask to be made useful to the God of our understanding and to others.

With Step 7, we pivot further away from a self-centered existence to a life of humble concern for the people and the world around us.

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**Different Ways to Work Step 7**

Read the *SAA Green Book* **and** the *AA Twelve and Twelve's* discussion of Step 7 twice before discussing it with your facilitator. Bring it up as a topic for discussion at one of the gatherings.

We work Step 7 using the familiar techniques we did Step 6.

The methods are:

- A systematic analysis of the language of the Step.
- A question guided self-examination
- Daily journaling and meditation.
- Write your own Step 7 prayer.

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**A Systematic Analysis of the Language**

To review, the exegetic method directs that we break the Step down into its component parts and evaluate what the separate, individual parts mean to us. As we proceed from one key phrase or word to the next, deep truths are revealed, widening our appreciation for the ideas contained in the language. The exercise concludes with a final declaration about our reaction to this enriched understanding of the Step.

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In the third column you write down your reactions to each part of the Step, how it inspires or challenges you. What stands in the way of your taking the action this Step asks? How can you overcome the inertia to change?

Do not settle for the easy, pat answers of the past. See yourself as our Higher Power does - with care, love, and forgiveness.

From this humble perspective you can be honest about your unwillingness and fearfulness. Unwillingness confessed is more readily overcome. Fearfulness expressed loses its hold on us when it is named.

Honesty is oxygen to the program, the atmosphere that sustains us. The more honest you are in your daily interactions with others as well as in your internal conversations with yourself, (self-talk) the deeper your soul can breathe.

Finally, you come to understand the Step, why taking it is necessary for your healing, and how it furthers your journey to full recover.

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**Exegesis of Step 7**

<b>Step 7</b>	<b>What this word or phrase means to me.</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<i>Humbly</i>		
<i>asked</i>		
<i>God</i>		
<i>to remove</i>		
<i>our</i>		
<i>shortcomings.</i>		
<i>Humility</i>		Humility means ...
<i>Willingness</i>		I practice willingness by working the Step(s) as written, withholding nothing of myself. I will push against the fear and commit myself to trying this new way of being.
<i>Hope</i>		
<i>Faith</i>		
<i>Trust</i>		
<i>Commitment</i>		

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The narrative helps the sponsor guide the sponsee to realize that change is possible and worth it.

Lastly, the guidebook juxtaposes the common and destructive defects of character with their opposite, life-affirming principles: Greed v. Generosity or Pride v. Humility. With each Step, the addict is asked to adopt a (slightly different) set of virtues into their daily lives. Doing so – even if it means faking it until the addict makes it - is the goal of the Steps.

Your facilitator will help you if you decide to use this method.

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**Journaling and Daily Meditation**

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Talk with your facilitator about this approach if it interests you.

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**Write Your Own Step 7 Prayer**

If Step 7 is about “humbly asking” then what better way to work it than by writing a prayer we memorize and recite daily?

Your prayer should express your true beliefs and demonstrate all of the principles the Step calls us to adopt.

**AA Step 7 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 bidding.

Amen

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## **Closing**

There is an account of a group of explorers lost in the jungle that met and befriended a tribe of indigenous people. The tribesmen and women spent their entire lives in a wooded world always busy with the sounds of wild things. But they knew where the edge of the forest could be found, and they agreed to guide their new, lost friends to it.

When the group reached the edge of the forest, the tribesmen held back. They did not step out of the forest despite assurances from the visitors that it was safe to do so. The indigenous folk were too terrified to walk in a world without a comforting canopy overhead. Those brave few who stepped out of the shelter of the trees grew dizzy beneath the endless blue sky and ran back to the world they knew and understood.

The analogy is straightforward. The addict who finishes Step 5 will experience a similar disorientation and a strong current of fear will accompany this new status as an honest person. After a lifetime of isolation in the forest of our diseased thoughts, to stand suddenly in the bright light of the truth about who we are will be blinding and scary.

But the analogy is imperfect. While the jungle is the natural realm of the forest dweller, addiction is not natural for anyone. We must walk away from our old life. Though the course itself is uncertainty, we must stay on the path to sanity and recovery.

We need help to do this. Unless we have a guide whom we trust and know in our heart of hearts seeks only to help us, we might well run back into the forest, back to those familiar, easy, self-destructive habits, back to a life of lies.

Steps 6 and 7 invite us to cement our relationship with our Higher Power, to take the Creator by the hand, to trust that we will be safe and given all that we will need. These Steps asks us to trust the God of our understanding to lead us away from self-loathing, hidden agendas, and childish behavior to self-acceptance, transparency, and emotional maturity.

Steps 6 and 7 are the work of a lifetime and cannot be worked perfectly. Some of the tangible signs of someone devotedly working these Steps include prayer and meditation, journaling, and service work, to name a few. Once you have incorporated these or other similar practices into your daily life, you will be ready to move on to Step 8.