



## Step Six – “Soul On Ice”

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### ***Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character***

*“Every act of conscious learning requires the willingness to suffer an injury to one's self-esteem. That is why young children, before they are aware of their own self-importance, learn so easily.”*  
Thomas Szasz

This was an intimidating prospect to be asked to surrender control and become entirely willing to change your thoughts, your behavior and your actions. In Step Four, I took a thorough painful moral inventory and assembled my garbage. In Step Five I admitted to God, myself and another human being the exact nature of my defects and wrong doings and then, by that very action, took responsibility for my behavior and came to understand that I am accountable, responsible and not alone. I was relieved of that feeling of terminal uniqueness and isolation which opened the door to change and continued recovery. Here, in Step Six, I was asked again to relinquish control and become willing to have God remove my defects of character, which I equated with ‘self.’ The essence of this step had catapulted my mind into an endless stream of what if scenarios and left me with a feeling of impending doom. I felt naked and defenseless. Not only was I stepping off a precipice into the land of the unknown, I was also casting my identity into exile. The old saying frequently heard in the room – “keep an open mind something might fall in there” kept taunting me and my mind would answer back, “yeah but something might fall out.”

My defects, my red badges of courage, had played an important role in my survival. Born out of pain and suffering over the years, they had evolved into a finely honed armor that shielded me from the emotional and spiritual horror of my addiction and alcoholism, and from the world I had conveniently labeled as cruel and merciless. My thought processes, behaviors and actions while I was active had literally kept me alive in the streets. Giving these up was akin to asking me to throw aside my crutches with a badly fractured leg and have faith that I would walk normally. I couldn't envision being able to navigate life without my trusted, maladaptive behaviors and attitude. Just the thought of giving these up made me feel about as functional and effective as Bambi on an icy pond. The logic underlying this reservation obviously was flawed, as if my life prior to getting sober had any semblance of being effective and functional with all my broken relationships, homelessness, acute addiction, endless voluntary and involuntary admissions to rehabs and hospitals, incarcerations, cirrhosis and hepatitis c, et ad infinitum.

Once again, I was faced with what I felt was an impossible decision. Yes, there was an upside but there was no way to hedge this one. This one involved willingness and transformation. “Entirely” and “all” were clearly absolutes, and what if I needed to get them back to survive? If God removed them, chances were He wasn't going to give them back. So, what if I lost my self, and who would I be without them? I could hear the prayer of Doubting Timothy: Lord, I have tried to follow this program to the best of my ability. I have stopped drinking and drugging and I have turned my life and will over to You. I have gone to my meetings, followed suggestions, worked the steps with my sponsor, done service work, carried the message, asked You for help in the morning and thanked You at night. Lord, I know You are very busy dealing with all the

plagues, starvation and wars, and my problems don't even appear on Your radar. But, if You can hear me over the screams of anguish from the tortured souls and bombs and mortar fire, could You please assure me that I will have a few options to recall my attitudes and behaviors before I take this step, just in case I need them when You are busy? This might be a dope fiend's Sixth Step prayer. The words of Karl Marx wafted through my Swiss cheese brain – "religion is the opiate of the masses."

It was one thing to recognize and admit that God could restore me to sanity and to turn my will over to His care as I thought I had pretty much figured that one out and it made sense. Taking the inventory, although a somewhat distasteful task, and committing my wrong doings to paper certainly weren't esteem builders, but they were prerequisites, I was told repeatedly, to maintaining continuous abstinence and sustainable recovery; therefore they had to be done. The same was true with the 5<sup>th</sup> Step. After reviewing the wreckage resulting from my attitudes and behavior during my addiction, and then compiling it into a tidy little heap of garbage, I had no choice but to do the threefold admission, otherwise my soul would be poisoned and I would undoubtedly be either trapped in existential hell or I would use again.

But this Step, as Fred Sanford used to say, was "the big one": Casting aside all reservation and becoming entirely ready. This presupposed a state of willingness rooted in faith that was totally foreign, and as such, I reacted in a somewhat typical manner. I pulled out my defense mechanism tool kit that had been reduced to rationalization, minimization and procrastination. Denial was no longer a credible tool. I then reflected on the reams of philosophical, psychological and theological literature that I had consumed over the years desperately seeking an alternate path aka "an easier, softer way." I was later to understand that my level of awareness and my ability to identify my defects was tied to time and was a product of continuous vigilance and commitment to following the program. Therefore, being entirely ready was a reflection of my current spiritual state. Progress not perfection is the program tagline; however it was important for me to understand that progress was an ongoing process. An old timer in New Haven, always shared – "you can't live on yesterday's sobriety." It took me years to truly comprehend the wisdom of these words.

It is written in the *Twelve & Twelve* on page 63 that "This is the Step that separates the men from the boys." This was the crossroads in my journey towards sobriety. For me to change direction, I had to be willing to change my path. For me, the fear of the unknown had always trumped the fear of the known, since with the known, I believed at least I would survive. But mere survival was not my vision. I did not come into the program and make a commitment to be miserable. I did not want to live with my "soul on ice." My vision was to live as one amongst many, to have a meaningful, spiritually and emotionally rewarding existence without the demons of my past at the helm or those defective thought patterns and behaviors, that they spawned during my years of addiction, determining my destiny. Once again, my commitment to sobriety and to life determined my decision, gave courage and inspiration to my vision, and my soul began to thaw.

"In life, many thoughts are born in the course of a moment, an hour, a day. Some are dreams, some visions. Often, we are unable to distinguish between them. To some, they are the same; however, not all dreams are visions. Much energy is lost in fanciful dreams that never bear fruit. But visions are messages from the Great Spirit, each for a different purpose in life. Consequently, one person's vision may not be that of another. To have a vision, one must be prepared to receive it, and when it comes, to accept it. Thus when these inner urges become reality, only then can visions be fulfilled. It is a fact that the spiritual side of life knows everyone's heart and who to trust. How could a vision ever be given to someone if that person could not be trusted to carry it out. The message is simple: commitment precedes vision."

~ *J.C. High Eagle*

When you take the Sixth Step, you are not only walking a spiritual path, you are, in essence, unveiling your true spirit. There is no place for doubt or fear, and there can be no question of the outcome.

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## About the Author

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