

## Step Seven: Pride-Humility-Shame

### The Golden Mean

By Rick R.

Defining the word Humility was not an easy thing to do and it took a long time to settle on an understanding that put it to rest for me. I thought that Pride and Humility were Opposites. The final piece of the puzzle came to me when in my 22nd year of sobriety, I was on the phone with a man who was trying to engage me in an argument, and when he realized that I wasn't going to bite, he fired his last volley by saying: Well, I've heard stories about you, and you're no angel." I thought about it for a few seconds and replied, " *I have done things in my life that I am not Proud of, but I am not Ashamed of anything that I have done in the past 22 years.* The phone call ended peacefully.

Several years later, in a step study meeting on Step Seven the topic was Humility. I remembered that phone call and realized that Pride was not the opposite of Humility, that *Pride was the opposite of Shame* and that *Humility fell right in the middle of the two.* When I boiled it all down, I concluded that I should not be proud of, or ashamed of the things I do and that I should be in the middle somewhere. This applies to my receiving as well as my giving.

On Page 62 of the Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous) It says, "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." In Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) I learned that if selfishness was the root of my problems, I could solve them by examining my motives for all my behaviors and staying on the unselfish side of every decision I make. That one challenge has taken all the shame out of my conscience and has replaced it with compassion and empathy and as a result I receive unselfish comments in return. Aristotle referred to this as "The Golden Mean" where, for example, when we are in the habit of giving compliments to our friends when they deserve it, we should not be so stoic that we cannot accept a compliment with the proper amount of appreciation, when we deserve it. To me this means finding the *Mean between the extremes* and exercising it until it becomes second nature.

I have known some humble people in my lifetime, and they have many things in common: They seldom bring attention to themselves, they never criticize others, they are always comforting, and they are always an asset and never a liability. Humble people do the things they were taught as a child. They treat others with respect. They are: trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient... Sound familiar? I learned it in the boy scouts. I learned the Golden Rule in church, but I was never strong enough to live by it. Today, I am stronger. If you are not sure what you are supposed to be doing, Read the 11<sup>th</sup> Step Prayer in The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (12&12) or The Boy Scouts Laws, or try practicing The Golden Rule. That should be a good start. When I found A.A. I was reintroduced to these values that helped to rein in my ego, and today I am at peace with myself and with the world around me.