



Shares & Cares

GREATER OMAHA INTERGROUP • OVEREATERS

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IDENTITY

I shared recently in an OA meeting that I have been a compulsive overeater longer than I have been anything else—it is the oldest, most familiar, most comforting part of my identity.

Step One tells us how to begin: “We admitted we were powerless over food, that our lives had become unmanageable.” I have only very recently found the path to personal abstinence; as I write this, I am on day twelve of my abstinence. It has taken me over six months to come to a place where I was willing to surrender, to give away my control—the very poisonous control that had failed me over and over—and let my higher power direct me. I think my most common prayer, at this point, is a very simple, “God, please give me strength to walk past the donuts without touching them.”

I find that everyone has a different story, and a slightly different path to recovery, though we are all aided by the steps and personal contact with fellow OA members. I have not felt that anyone in my life has ever really known me—I have felt that, if I did let go and let anyone get to know me, they would shudder at both my physical ugliness and the horrid state of my affairs. For so long, food was my sad rudder, directing me through life. Now that I have let the loving faces in OA meetings learn about who I really am, I am both relieved and surprised, surprised to find that food is not the most important thing in my life. Food is my addiction, but it is not the entirety of my values, it is not the determiner of my strengths, and it does not have to be my preoccupation (or my occupation, for that matter).

As I start on my way toward health and serenity, I want to remember where I have been. I want to remember how hard it was to make it ten minutes without food, how so many times I starved, binged, and purged, all in the name of finding some sort of personal satisfaction. The whole time, I was lacking the ability to give over my willfulness and practice trusting a power greater than myself. I even, for many years, avoided the idea of a god, because I figured, if such an entity existed, he or she had much better things to do than be concerned with whether or not I was ingesting pounds of candy every day.

Now I know that my higher power is there for me, and I am slowly growing, and seeing who I am when I am not obsessed with the food. I may have to find a new identity, but now I have the choice to be whomever I want to be. It is hard to admit, but, once one stops playing the victim of their problems, it is a giant leap to grow into a being responsible for one’s own happiness. I am now willing to take whatever measures I must in order to survive, and to unfold.

-Emily

I put my hand in yours, and together we can do ...

I have struggled from day one with this concept of a higher power that I hear about when I go to meetings. As a person who has a tendency to recoil from any religious discussion, I held onto the assurance I received that I did not have to believe in God as anybody else understood God—that I only had to find my *own* conception of God. And yet at times, that obstacle felt too large for me to overcome.

Fortunately I am a researcher at heart. (In fact, it was research that brought me to OA!) I spent much time asking people about their higher powers and how they had come to develop their conception, etc., and sadly I spent much time critiquing such conceptions in an attempt to “categorize” them and fit them into my own pre-conceived compartments for acceptable “God-conceptions.” But after nearly four years in program now, I finally feel as though I have truly developed my own conception of God, as I understand it. (And yes, I intentionally used the word “it.”)

My higher power, which I have learned is not “terminally unique” as I of course would like to think it is (as I so often think everything about me is), is simply the program. I know, I know—the Twelve and Twelve tells us that our higher power can be the program! But nonetheless, this was a revolutionary concept to me as recently as this year. Sometimes things can be slow to really sink in for me, but when they do, the STICK.

So what has this meant for me? It means that I finally genuinely have a higher power to which I can turn when I am struggling! What an amazing feeling that is! And I did not have to compromise any of my fundamental core beliefs in order to find this higher power, nor did I have to act as if I believed something in which I did

not believe, or pretend not to question something about which I had many questions. I actually *could* resign from the debating society. It was authentic, and with that authenticity came a deeper level of recovery that I had not experienced before.

I still struggle sometimes, and removing the “personification” of a higher power that I often hear in meetings and read in the literature takes a lot of practice. I have to do a lot of translation and interpretation in my head. I particularly struggled with those steps that specifically name “God” or require me to ask for God to do something, or require me to do or say something for or to God (Steps 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 11). However, over time, I have developed a way to overcome these “obstacles.”

With Step 2, the primary obstacle for me was simply defining what the “power greater than me” was that I had come to believe would restore me to sanity. As I began to see the program and the principles within it as that power, it was relatively easy for me to “turn my will and my life” over to its “care” for Step 3. The program provides resources to me (principles to follow), as well as access to the strengths and experiences of those who have gone before me and have obtained recovery. When I decide (which for me involves taking action) to access these resources, strengths and experiences, I am in the program’s “care.” I am no longer in my own will and am allowing the principles of the program to govern my thoughts and actions.

In Step 5 we are asked to admit to ourselves, to God and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. For me, this has simply become that I have admitted to myself and to another human being the exact nature of my wrongs. But the princi-

ples of the program require that I be rigorously honest and without reservation in this admission, which is how I bring “God” into my fifth step.

Steps 6 and 7 caused me more difficulty at first, because they referenced “God” removing something from me and me having to ask “Him” to do it. Again, with time and practice, I came to understand that Step 6 simply required me to become entirely ready for my character defects to be removed as the result of me practicing the principles of the program in my life; Step 7 required me to seek having my character defects removed by humbly practicing the principles of the program in my life.

Finally, Step 11 requires prayer and meditation to improve my “conscious contact with God, as I understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will and the power to carry that out.” Another hurdle for me! But I have come to interpret Step 11 to be “sought through study and meditation to improve my conscious awareness of the principles of the program, as I understand them, seeking only knowledge of those principles and the ability to apply them in my life.” What a difference it made in my life to really work Step 11 authentically! It was no longer something irreconcilable with the notion that I could define my own conception of a higher power.

A large part of using the principles of the program as my higher power involved studying both the steps and the traditions. For me, the traditions are a large part of what the principles of the program entail. The Steps help me to recognize that I am not in control, find and utilize something other than my own will to deal with life, be aware of my part in things (of my

(Continued on page 5)

... what we could never do alone! No longer is there a sense of hopelessness,

One of the most unexpected results I have experienced in OA is the amount of spiritual growth I have undergone in the last five years. I have always believed in God but my relationship with God has changed dramatically. Before OA I prayed maybe a couple of times a year (when I was REALLY desperate); I now pray anywhere from a couple to several times a day. I let my Higher Power know when I am grateful and when I'm definitely not (oh the tantrums I've let loose on Him!!!). I've gradually come to depend on my Higher Power more.

I'm also finding that things I've heard all of my life are suddenly really meaning something to me and relate to me. I've attended church on a regular basis since the day I was born (O.K., there was a period in my late teens, early twenties when I questioned my faith and didn't attend, but things have changed and I have grown). I was recently reminded that our physical bodies are important to God and He loves the bodies He gave us. He wants us to take care of them. I've heard this before but now I really understand. God does not want me to overeat; He wants me to be healthy and will help me if I let Him!!

I've also found that God communicates to me in many different ways. I recently read a book recommended to me that talked about how God does not want us to have thoughts that harm us (i.e. negativity, worry, being anxious, judgmental, being critical of others, etc.). As I read this book, I realized how much my thinking has changed since being in OA. Before OA my thoughts were domi-

nated by those kinds of harmful thoughts, but now my thoughts are more of the kind of thoughts and feelings my Higher Power wants me to have (i.e. peaceful, positive, accepting of others, forgiving, etc.). I decided to look at other books by the same author and found a daily devotional she had written. I was amazed when the devotional for that day addressed food addiction and that God does not want us to use food when we are "spiritually empty".

So why did I struggle so much with this disease when I believed in God and had learned about Him? Because before OA I didn't get IT. I was spiritually closed off. During the course of my spiritual growth in this program, I also became more spiritually open. That is why I'm suddenly understanding things I've heard for years—why I'm suddenly hearing more and more of what my Higher Power has to say to me—why I'm seeing His messages in unexpected places.

There have been times when the messages have been painful. I recently received reminders that I don't have something for which I have desperately prayed. I now understand that those painful messages have helped my spiritual growth, forcing me to rely even more on my Higher Power and to look more closely at myself.

I know that all of this would not have been possible without this program. OA showed me how to develop the spiritual growth and openness I needed to lead me to a better life!!

-SJTD

My Whole Attitude and Outlook Upon Life Has Changed

Page 84 of the Big Book says, "Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change." This is one of the promises of following the twelve steps (which comes after working Step 9). The gift of this promise has been bestowed upon me. Since joining OA, my attitude and outlook on life has indeed changed. Once I was overwhelmed by the simplest of tasks, like getting out of bed, choosing what to wear, deciding what to eat, cleaning up after myself, being friendly to others, making eye contact, the list goes on. Before OA, life was bewildering, tedious, insufferable, demanding, repetitive, and pointless. I thought only of what was in it for me and when I wasn't being selfish, I was the embodiment of self pity. I did care for others, but I was so trapped by my own self pity and selfishness, I could never really focus on anyone else. I was obsessed with perfecting and criticizing myself, while thinking of ways to make myself thin but still get to eat anything I wanted. Life before OA was all about food or

the next diet and its empty promises of thinness and happiness.

Life hasn't gotten easier since joining OA, but coping with it has. I now have tools (my fellows and the steps) to guide and help me along. I no longer have to be isolated, alone, and numbed with food to cope with life. I don't have to feel sorry for myself or regret my past—it is behind me now. I can view the past as the stepping stones I took to get to the uplifting steps of recovery. Now I get to live a life full of privilege—the privilege to serve and help others as I've been helped. I am privileged to be present in the moment and not numbed out by the food. I am no longer focused on my regrets or shame but privileged to share my past to help others on the path to recovery. I am privileged to be surrounded and supported by my Higher Power and fellows; never am I alone. We are all accepted and loved in OA and we are always welcomed home.

Linsey B.

No longer must we each depend upon our own unsteady willpower!

WINDOWS

"I don't do windows." I'm not sure where that phrase originally came from, but it wasn't my mother! She genuinely enjoys washing windows and hates having dirty ones. Am I as diligent with my personal "dirty windows," those character defects that show up so frequently in my day to day life? Someone told me recently that the conscience can be compared to a window that lets in the light of what is true and right, and I realized that this could apply to my character defects and the Step 10 work that I have been doing. When I see even the slightest evidence of selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, or fear in my life, I need to deal with that immediately. For me, that means agreeing with God as my Higher Power that it is wrong and asking Him to remove that defect from me. That keeps my "window" clean and allows me to see more clearly when one of those defects shows up.

But what if I am having a moment or a day where I just don't feel like listening to my Higher Power, when I really just want my own way, and I choose to ignore that bit of selfishness or dishonesty? My self-will dirties up the window a bit, and every time I choose my own way and act out a particular character defect, my window gets dirtier. It gets harder and harder for me to see what my Higher Power is trying to show me, and I get distracted from being kind and loving, from doing things for others, from working my program.

With the help of my Higher Power and my sponsor, I recently completed my 5th-8th Steps and am working on making my amends. This is one of the ways that I am working now to "clean my windows," and I am finding the view is so much clearer and bright with hope. Today, I find myself still living in my character defects so much more than what I want, but as I continue to seek God's will for my life, work the steps, and make amends to those I have harmed, one day at a time, I trust that my windows will be ones that even my mother would be proud of!

How clean are your windows today?

-Janie

Fear and Inadequacy

(additional journaling from the July 2008 issue)

Do I suffer from feelings of fear and inadequacy? What actions can I take to overcome these?

I find the answer to these questions in the BIG BOOK—our "Basic Text." Page 84 tells us, "Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, (O.K., here are the instructions!!!) we ask God at once to remove them. We discuss them with someone immediately, and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone. Then we resolutely (fixed and firm in purpose; determined) turn our thoughts to someone we can help." How do I know this works? Because I have lived on this page quite a bit since following the "precise" instructions in the first 164 pages of this book. Precise means accurately stated; definite. That tells me that when it says on page xiii in the Forward To First Edition, "precisely how we recovered," that this is it. There is no interpretation. This is the real deal! We have instructions on what to do when we have fear, or feel inadequate....INSTRUCTIONS!! This is COOL! I am so excited. This is OUR program of recovery, not MINE, not YOURS it is OURS. These instructions are the same for you as they are for me!

May God guide us all to these precise instructions!

-Kim

Journaling Topics

1. How did I identify myself before coming to OA? How has my identity changed since coming into recovery?
2. What is my conception of my Higher Power? How has it changed? How do I communicate with my Higher Power and receive direction from my Higher Power?
3. Am I open to the spirituality that OA and recovery offers to me?
4. Have I received those things the Big Book promises I will receive after working Step 9? What differences have these things made in my life?
5. How do I keep the "windows" of my life "clean"? Do I work Step 10 on a daily basis? What benefits do I receive from doing this?
6. Write about each of the "5 P's of Program" (practice, prayer, perseverance, patience, progress) - how does each of these fit into my daily life? What actions can I take to implement them more in my program of recovery?

We are all together now, reaching out our hands ...

(I, Agnostic, continued from page 2)

own selfishness and self-seeking behaviors), stop causing harm and right those harms that I do cause. The Steps also teach me how to focus on turning my thoughts away from myself and onto being of service to others.

But the Traditions add so much more to the recipe when I apply them to my daily life. I have learned that I need to put the common welfare of those around me first—that my way is not the only way. I have also learned to be conscious of a group conscience—that my opinion is not the only one that matters and that I need to allow those who have a voice to use that voice; I also have to respect those decisions made in a group conscience. And when speaking my voice, I consult the principles of the program beforehand. I am not the leader—I am a trusted servant. My life is better when I behave as such.

From the Traditions I have learned to define what the only requirement to be in a particular situation is and to respect others' right to be somewhere or to be doing something. For example, the only requirement to drive on the road is a desire to drive on the road. I personally like to invoke additional more stringent requirements on my fellow drivers (such as a desire to always yield to me!), but this is not my right. Tradition 3 helps me to be a more courteous driver, respecting others' right to co-exist with me in this world.

The Traditions have taught me to be an autonomous

Miraculous Living

I have been noticing lately the changes I have undergone since starting OA five years ago.

There have been the physical changes. I've maintained a ten pound loss that occurred in my first year and have lost an additional ten pounds over the last several months. I can walk into a store and wear the "cute" clothes on the rack. My clothes are no longer so tight that I'm afraid they'll burst open if I bend over or take a large breath.

There have been the emotional changes. I no longer blame others for my frustrations or anger. I have become more accepting of others realizing that if others need to change that God will handle it, that is not my job. My thoughts are no longer overwhelmed by thoughts of food: *What am I going to eat next? When am I going to eat? Where? I'll feel so much better if I eat something!!!*

Finally, there have been the spiritual changes. I now speak and/or pray to God several times a day. I not only let God know about my frustrations, I ask for help, and let

person except if it affects others negatively; to always have and identify my primary purpose in any given situation (in OA it is to carry the message; at work it is to do my job, etc.); to refrain from doing things that might divert me from my primary purpose; to be fully self supporting; to remain "nonprofessional" in my interactions with others (I am not an expert on anything, and thus should not act as though I am!); to be responsible to those I serve; to refrain from expressing my opinion on "outside issues" and steer clear from controversy; to behave with a spirit of attraction rather than promotion (I don't have to sell people on my opinions or ideas); and above all, to place all of these principles before personalities (I need to treat people with respect regardless of whether I "like" them or whether we're "best friends").

All of the Traditions, as well as the Steps, have provided me with a new solution to my problems so that I no longer have to use food. For this reason, they are a power greater than myself, and they restore me to sanity, when I commit to live my life in accordance with their terms. That is why I continue through study and meditation to improve my conscious awareness of these principles and seek only knowledge of them and the ability to apply them in my life. I can now honestly say that I have had a spiritual awakening, and that I do my best to carry this message to compulsive eaters and to practice these principles in all my affairs. For this I am eternally grateful!

-Barb P.

Him know when I am grateful. Leaving issues and decisions to God has become easier because I know the He will take care of me and give me what I need when I need it. I can "feel" God's presence at times and know that He is always with me.

My life has become easier and freer. I feel peace and at times true happiness, the kind that doesn't depend on who you are with (if anyone) or what you are doing. My life is not perfect, I still feel stress and frustrations at times, but I recover from those times more easily and quickly.

These changes did not happen at a magical moment for me. They happened gradually, bit by bit, over the last five years. They happened because I kept coming back, I kept working the steps, and I kept using the tools.

I see now how truly miraculous the changes in my life, the way I live life, have been. Five years ago I knew that something was wrong. That my attitude toward

for power and strength greater than ours, and as we join hands ...

A Parable by a Sponsor

A member of the program of recovery, who previously had been attending meetings regularly, stopped going. After a few weeks, her sponsor decided to visit her. It was a chilly evening and the sponsor found the sponsee at home alone, sitting before a blazing fire.

Guessing the reason for her sponsor's visit, the sponsee welcomed her, led her to a big chair near the fireplace and waited. Her sponsor made herself comfortable but said nothing. In the grave silence, she contemplated the play of the flames around the burning logs. After some minutes, the sponsor took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember and placed it to one side of the hearth all alone.

Then she sat back in her chair, still silent. The sponsee watched all this in quiet fascination. As the one lone ember's flame diminished, there was a momentary glow and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and "dead as a doornail."

Not a word had been spoken since the initial greeting. Just before the sponsor was ready to leave, she picked up the cold, dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow once more with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it.

As the sponsor reached the door to leave, the sponsee said, "Thank you so much for your visit and especially for the fiery sermon. I'll see you at the meeting in the morning."

- Author Unknown

THE FIVE "P'S OF THE PROGRAM

Practice—Prayer—Perseverance—Patience—Progress

I had seen the 12 Steps several times before joining any group. I thought that I could follow them and I would be able to overcome my compulsive overeating without having to admit to my disease with a group of strangers. The first problem was that I wasn't sure how to do most of the steps, or at least the right way to do them. I believed in God. I knew that God had the ability to cure me of this disease. But for some reason I felt so unworthy of His love, that I never asked Him to show me a better way.

I prayed to lose weight. I prayed to be able to be like others. I prayed that someone would like me the way I was. Then I would come across those 12 Steps again. I never looked at them as a direction from God. But as I look back, now that I have become a member of OA, I see things a lot differently. I have lost weight, only to celebrate that loss with, what else, FOOD! I found others who are like me right here in these rooms. Others who know the battles that arise within from this compulsive overeating. Others who know of the way I lived; hiding my eating, sneaking food, planning my next eating episode before the one I was in even ended. Here in OA I have found people who like me for who I am, not for what I will be like when lose my extra weight, and not for what I will be like when I can go out with others and eat a 'normal' meal, but just for me as I am today.

I continue to practice the steps of the program. I continue to pray for guidance and knowledge, knowing how easy it is to slip back to where I was. I persevere. If I slip, I accept it, and start again. I don't give up like I did on all of the many diets I have tried. I try to be patient as I move through the steps. I try to be patient and listen for the answers to my prayers, realizing that some of the answers may be different than what I want them to be. I watch for the signs of progress—not the cure, but the small signs that I am gaining on this affliction.

Personally I think there should be a 6th "P"—Pass it on—being there for others with this disease of compulsive overeating. I can help let them know that there are people who will accept them as they are and will share with them the steps and hopes of a program of recovery.

I would like to thank all of you who are here, in these rooms. Your caring and sharing keeps me coming back. You make me feel I am welcome, and to feel that there is a better way than to fight this all alone.

Barb S.

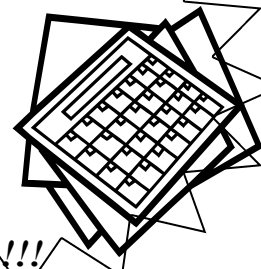
Send your article

Mark Your Calendar ... Upcoming Intergroup Meetings

- Monday, November 10, 2008
- Monday, December 8, 2008
- Monday, January 12, 2009

Come Join Us for the Business Side of OA
6:15 p.m. at Unity Church
3424 North 90th Street

BABYSITTING AVAILABLE!!!!



... we find love and understanding beyond our wildest dreams!