

The Outer Circle

The Newsletter of the
International Service Organization of SAA, Inc.

PO Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270

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ISO Board Actions

The following actions were taken by the Board of Trustees at the Saturday, November 21, 2009 Teleconference:

- **Avoidance Outreach Subcommittee**: Motion approved "That the ISO Board endorse the formation of Compulsive Sexual Avoidance Outreach Subcommittee as a part of the General Outreach Committee."
 - **Avoidance Outreach Subcommittee**: Motion approved "That the Board authorize the Compulsive Sexual Avoidance Outreach Subcommittee to conduct direct outreach like the GLBT subcommittee does."
-

The following actions were taken by the Board of Trustees at the Saturday, December 19, 2009 Teleconference:

- **Finance & Ops Spending Authority**: Motion approved "That the Board grant spending authority to the F&O ISC to the limit of \$5,000.00 requiring a majority of the F&O ISC voting members to vote in favor in order to approve the expenditure. Any such approval would be reported to the Board at its next meeting. Any unresolved proposals would be forwarded to the Board."

Literature Committee News



Interested in writing or editing?

The ISO Literature Committee welcomes the participation of volunteers in the process of developing SAA literature.

If you are interested in writing, editing, or proofreading, consider serving as a volunteer on a LitCom work group.

For a list of opportunities, contact us at

litcom@saa-litcom.org

“Pocket” Edition of *Sex Addicts Anonymous*

Now Available from the ISO!

The SAA Green Book, *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, is now available in a convenient size that fits easily into pocket or purse.

Now you can discreetly carry your recovery program with you.

Order one for yourself or your sponsee from the ISO office or through the online SAA Store.

Personal Story Submissions for *Sex Addicts Anonymous*:

Do you have a personal story to tell?

The ISO Literature Committee continues to accept personal stories for consideration for future editions of the SAA book, *Sex Addicts Anonymous*.

Guidelines for Submission of a Personal Story

Stories in the SAA book, *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, are an intensely personal way to help carry the SAA message to the addict who still suffers. While there are no absolute requirements for the content of a personal story, the Literature Committee recommends that a story describe:

- What it was like before entering SAA.
- What happened to bring you into SAA.
- What happened within SAA.
- What it is like now with the ongoing experience of SAA recovery.

It is recommended that a story emphasize the experience, strength, and hope found in SAA recovery. It is further recommended that the writer disclose his or her length of sobriety (or abstinence from addictive behaviors).

Personal stories are intended to help carry the message to the addict who still suffers. As much as possible, highly explicit descriptions of places, people, or acting out behaviors should be avoided. The best stories provide sobering details of unmanageability contrasted with the hope of recovery from sex addiction.

The preferred format for manuscripts is double-spaced with one-inch margins on all four sides in MS Word (or similar). Each submission must be accompanied by a signed release conveying ownership to the ISO of SAA, Inc. The release form is available on the last page of this newsletter, or from the ISO office or SAA website. (www.saa-recovery.org).

Submissions and a signed release form may be emailed as attachments to the ISO Literature Committee at info@saa-recovery.org.

They may also be sent in hard copy by postal mail to the ISO Literature Committee at ISO of SAA, PO Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270.



IMPORTANT

**Please carefully read the following
before submitting a personal story for
Sex Addicts Anonymous:**

Every story submitted for possible inclusion in the SAA book will be thoroughly reviewed and given in-depth consideration by the ISO Literature Committee, which is deeply grateful to every member who takes the time to write and submit a story.

The ISO of SAA, Inc. and the ISO Literature Committee do not guarantee that any particular story will appear in a future edition of the SAA book. Once submitted with a signed release form (located on the last page of this newsletter), the written story becomes the permanent property of the ISO of SAA, Inc., and may be edited or modified as deemed appropriate by the ISO Literature Committee.

Please also note that, while the ISO Literature Committee will acknowledge the initial receipt of a story, the ISO may or may not communicate further with the author about the suitability of the story or the likelihood of publication in *Sex Addicts Anonymous*.

ISO Literature Committee Guidelines for submission of entries to be considered for the *SAA Meditation Book*

The ISO Literature Committee welcomes submission of entries from the fellowship-at-large for possible inclusion in the SAA Meditation Book. The Meditation Book will consist of 366 entries, one for each day of the calendar year.

To ensure consideration, submissions should follow these guidelines:

A short quotation should be taken from SAA publications that are Literature Committee approved or Conference approved (see list below). The quote must be exact and followed by a citation that includes the name of the publication and page number, using the following style: *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, p. 20. Submissions using quotes from other sources will not be considered.

The main body of the entry should be a thought-provoking expansion of the topic or principle expressed in the quotation, ideally including some fresh perspective on a particular aspect of SAA recovery from your own experience, strength and hope.

At the bottom of the page, a concise statement in the author's own words should summarize the main idea of the meditation or offer a poignant challenge or affirmation.

Each entry should be 200-300 words including the quotation and the closing affirmation, so that each meditation will fit on a single page. Multiple entries may address slightly different aspects of the same subject.

Submissions must include your name and contact information and be accompanied by a signed release. By signing the release, the author grants the ISO of SAA, Inc. sole rights to edit, alter, publish, or reject any submission. A blank release form is available in this newsletter or may be obtained from the ISO office or downloaded and printed from the SAA website.

SAA Literature

Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA Book)

Abstinence and Boundaries in SAA

First Step to Recovery

Getting Started in Sex Addicts Anonymous

Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA Pamphlet)

Sexual Sobriety and the Internet

A Special Welcome to the Woman Newcomer

Abstinence

The Bubble

From Shame to Grace

Group Guide

Tools of Recovery

Three Circles

**Send your meditation, contact information,
and signed release form to the ISO.**
(release form is located on the last page of this newsletter)

Send by postal mail to:

ISO
PO Box 70949
Houston, TX 77270

OR

Scan and email to:

meditation@saa-recovery.org

**You will be sent confirmation that your
submission has been received.**

Interested in helping with the *SAA Meditation Book?*

Yes, you can write meditations for the new book!
Are you not quite sure how?

Come to one of the LitCom teleconference workshops
to learn how to write a meditation.

These teleconferences are based on the workshop
presented at the Oakland convention.

Learn step-by-step what is involved,
and practice writing a meditation during the workshop.

Please join us at one of these times
for an hour and a half of creative service.

**Meditation Writing Teleconference Workshops:
Sundays, 5:00 p.m. Central Time**

March 28

April 25

**The workshops last approximately 1.5 hours
and include time for writing.**

To register, call 1-800-477-8191
or email:

meditation@saa-recovery.org

Committee Reports

Announcement from the International Development Committee (IDC)

Language Service Request

Do you speak another language other than English?

Would you like to practice our Fifth Tradition of *carrying the message to the sex addict who still suffers*?

The International Development Committee (IDC) is looking for S.A.A. members who are fluent, or fairly fluent, in another language other than English who are available to carry the message to newcomers or inquiries in the target language.

Interested?

Please contact the IDC via e-mail at:

intdev@saa-recovery.org

In the subject line, please write, "Language Service," and in the body of your message, please indicate what language or languages you speak.

If you have questions, feel free to contact us at the aforementioned e-mail address.

ISO Income/Expense Summary

As of January 31, 2010

	Jan '10	Monthly Avg	Jul '09 - Jan '10
Income			
Sales	17,129.31	17,009.11	119,063.74
Shipping & Handling	1,631.64	1,483.84	10,386.91
Donations	16,299.28	23,355.83	163,490.84
Delegate Meeting Registration	0.00	7.14	50.00
Interest Earned	1,509.45	221.89	1,553.21
Convention Revenue	4,120.00	717.35	5,021.46
Total Income	40,689.68	42,795.17	299,566.16
Total Cost Of Goods Sold	8,544.58	8,659.26	60,614.84
Gross Profit	32,145.10	34,135.90	238,951.32
Expense			
Wages	7,735.89	15,497.44	108,482.11
Employee Benefits (Not Wages)	2,742.94	1,939.31	13,575.20
Payroll Taxes	647.49	1,183.04	8,281.27
Insurance	264.25	264.25	1,849.75
Depreciation	175.00	160.71	1,125.00
Postage/Shipping	3.69	58.58	410.09
Communications	451.63	458.80	3,211.58
Office Expense	731.53	745.69	5,219.86
Occupancy Expenses	1,244.64	1,419.56	9,936.94
Board/Committee Expense	1,424.06	1,568.71	10,980.94
The Outer Circle	2,439.67	1,374.26	9,619.79
Financial Charges	1,440.35	1,109.72	7,768.03
Bad Debts/Refunds	100.80	154.03	1,078.18
Translating/Literature Projects	0.00	167.21	1,170.48
Miscellaneous Expenses	0.00	183.80	1,286.57
Delegate Meeting	0.00	122.95	860.65
Annual Business Meeting	560.00	149.67	1,047.70
Convention Expenses	2,724.37	456.05	3,192.38
Total Expense	22,686.31	27,013.79	189,096.52
Net Income	9,458.79	7,122.11	49,854.80

Financial Results for January 2009

In January we showed a surplus of \$9,458. We were budgeted to have a surplus of \$2,208. This is a difference of \$7,250 between what we budgeted and what we actually received. The reason for the majority of the increase is again related to the implementation of our new payroll schedule. In December our payroll budget was over by \$5,603 and in January our payroll budget was under by \$8,264. In the month of February our payroll will be back in sync with our budget.

Individual donations were under the budget by \$1,986 and group donations exceeded the budget by \$235. Our Annual Appeal is underway and is estimated to raise \$9000. Though January we have raised \$7,140 from the Annual Appeal.

Our sales for the SAA Green Book were \$480 over budget, and are \$2,555 under budget for the current budget year. Our sales of the SAA Green Book through our book distributor (HCI) remain steady. In the last ten months we have sold an average of 156 books per month though HCI.

Our pamphlets and booklets sales exceeded the budget by \$512, and are \$3,900 over budget for the current budget year. Three other significant sales areas are the workshop CDs, which are \$2,077 over budget, our Bronze Medallions, which are \$1,058 over budget and our chips, which are \$862 over budget. The sales of outside literature are under budget by \$2,129.

Our product inventory is valued at \$52,062.

In taking a look at how we are doing against our current year budget, which runs from July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010, we have done very well. In the first six months of our budget year:

- Sales exceeded the budget by \$3,283
- Donations exceeded the budget by \$17,340
- Expenses are under budget by \$4,359

Our operational reserve amount was changed from \$109,000 to \$118,322. This is the estimated amount needed to run the office for four months and is reset each January. Our other reserve accounts, which are funded based on sales, were all fully funded.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

In Your Service,
Joe H.
Director of Operations
director@saa-iso.org

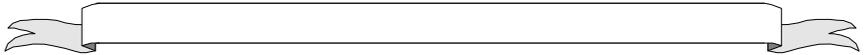
[Editor's Note: The ideas expressed in the literature section of The Outer Circle reflect the opinions of the authors of those articles, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the ISO or of the SAA fellowship as a whole.]

From the Editor

by Mike L.

Greetings. I hope that you had an enjoyable holiday season.

My holiday was one of the more interesting ones I have had lately. I took advantage of an unused plane ticket to go and visit my brother who still lives in Baltimore where we grew up. I had not seen him and his family since April of 1998, so was a bit nervous about the trip, nervous enough that I scheduled a train/bus trip to New York in the middle of the trip to Baltimore, just in case I found that I needed to get away. As it turned out, the trip to New York was not necessary from that standpoint, as I had a wonderful time in Baltimore.



The topic for November/December of this year
is "Coming to Trust in My Higher Power."



While there, I had a chance to look at an old behavior from childhood. My brother reminded me of something I used to do and had completely forgotten about. My response was, "I wish you hadn't reminded me about that," and I thought that was the end of it. But to my surprise, after I had gotten back from New York he brought it up again. This time I was somewhat more direct and replied, "I don't do that any more." His response was, "Why? Because you're all grown up and mature now?" I said, "I don't know about the grown up and mature part; I just know I don't do that any more."

I had a chance to revisit this experience this past Sunday morning when I was chairing a step meeting at an alcohol and drug rehab near my house. We devoted this past Sunday to Step 9 and, listening to some of the others tell their Step 9 stories from over the holidays, I told the guys about this incident, taking a risk and briefly describing the behavior my brother was referring to. Even though my brother brought it up both times as a happy childhood memory, one of his other behaviors while I was there indicated to

me that it may indeed have affected him in a negative way; obviously, he hasn't forgotten the behavior, which I had long ago. Or it could have just been my magic magnifying mind playing tricks on me. Either way, I felt as though telling my brother that I had stopped that behavior was in a sense an amends, an amends I had never thought to make. And sharing the story with the guys at the halfway house also brought me closer to them; far from rejecting me, more of them came up and said something to me after the meeting than is normally the case.

Now that I have finally broken the ice and gone back to Baltimore after eleven and a half years, I will probably start visiting my brother more frequently. I'm of course hoping that he'll eventually come to believe that I really have stopped that behavior, and that I'll see that belief in his actions. And, as I told the guys at the rehab, the important thing is that I cleared my side of the street on an issue that I had completely forgotten about.

I'm hoping that you will notice, while going through this issue of *The Outer Circle*, that we have articles on Steps and Traditions Three and Four. Moving into the future, I want to keep these, as well as the topic articles, as an ongoing feature. So please consider writing articles on the Steps and Traditions whose numbers "relate" to the months of the year (July and August, for example, will be Steps and Traditions Seven and Eight). Writing articles on the topic or on the "relevant" Steps and Traditions is the best way to have an article take precedence over other articles I have received that are sitting in the hopper.

And speaking of topics, the topic for November/December of this year is "Coming to Trust in My Higher Power." This topic comes to mind from an old article in another recovery-based publication that I recently read. The article reminded me that coming to believe was a relatively easy thing for me, whereas I had to put a little more effort into trusting my Higher Power. It began with hearing the experiences of others, although I eventually found that I had to do some of the work myself as well. Hmm. I may write an article on this myself. In the meantime, I would love to hear your experiences around this matter. And if you trusted your Higher Power from Day One, I want to know about that too.

Well, I've gone on for way too long, so I'll close for now. And since this is the March/April issue, the convention is coming up soon. I'm starting to hear more and more about what the committee has planned for this year's convention and it sounds pretty exciting. I hope that you are planning to attend, and that I'll see you there.

In Gratitude for Acceptance – the Opposite of Rejection

by Jim L.

Perhaps the greatest motivation for keeping sexual obsessions and behavior secret is fear of rejection. If anyone finds out what I am thinking or doing, I will lose... Complete the sentence! I will lose friends, reputation, job, profession, wife, family, church, or perhaps all of these or more. Such was my disordered thinking – rationalizing the necessity of keeping my addiction secret. In effect, I created a mental prison where I found myself trapped without hope of escape.

When I attended my first SAA meeting, acknowledged my addiction to sex, and conceded my inability to stop on my own, I felt as if an enormous weight had been lifted from my mind and spirit. Much to my surprise, no one in the room gasped or even shuffled in their seat. Though total strangers, they seemed already to know why I walked through that door. Suddenly, I felt as if the stifling, self-imposed blanket of secrecy had been ripped away, and I could safely take a deep breath of fresh air for the first time in years. I felt instant acceptance.

That was ten years ago, and, although I have not been totally free of slips for that entire period, I have continually been the beneficiary of acceptance by members of my home group and many others whom I have met through SAA. Sadly, my wife, my sons, my church, and many of my professional colleagues were not as accepting, so I have experienced first-hand the stark contrast between rejection by many I thought were friends and acceptance by total strangers in this fellowship. Serendipitously, many of those “strangers” have subsequently become my best friends.

Just before Christmas, I received a telephone call from a man who was in that room the night I first walked through the door. He called to see how I was doing, to tell me that he loved me, and to share with me his ongoing progress in recovery. His continuing interest, concern, and encouragement are gifts of indescribable value – growing out of his acceptance of me as I am and his appreciation of me as a fellow traveler on the recovery road. Through many examples like his, I have learned to accept others and to reach out to the addict who still suffers.

I am convinced that the love and acceptance I have experienced in this fellowship have been life-saving gifts from God – allowing me to improve my conscious contact with God and to reach out to others in acceptance. Without acceptance, I may well have not survived to experience the blessings of recovery. With acceptance, I am free to be honest and real, and in showing acceptance I experience a genuine desire to serve others.

Thank you, dear God – and thank you, brothers and sisters in recovery – for the beautiful gift of acceptance!

Step Three

by Jim T.

Step Three: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand God.

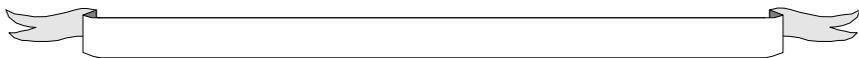
Reflection:

My challenge is about asking for God's help when I would rather avoid Him. The Third Step suggests that we "begin to practice opening ourselves up to the guidance of a Higher Power" (*Sex Addicts Anonymous*, p. 30).

I have this prayer that I first learned about when a member of the fellowship gave me a copy of it. It is printed on a slip of paper I keep in my closet. The words in the prayer convey a desire to know God's will and ask for the strength to do His will. My friend suggested I read the prayer before starting each day.



My challenge is about asking for God's help
when I would rather avoid Him.



Most mornings I look at the paper and decide I am too rushed to stop and read the prayer. I also feel resentful about feeling obligated to read the prayer. I feel detached from God; it feels like a meaningless ritual. Reading the prayer isn't going to change anything. Reading it will obligate me to not act out. Reading the prayer will remind me that I am a sex addict. I don't want to read it; I am in defiance. I don't want to surrender, to subjugate myself. I will not act out today and I will do it on my own terms.

The prayer seems cold, artificial and I don't want to be judged by it. The prayer annoys me. God, I feel better for having gotten that off my chest.

And here is that prayer that has been so difficult for me:

"God, I offer myself to Thee—to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help, of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do thy will always."

Why Step Four Is So Hard! or No Pain – No Gain

by Ed W.

Step Four: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Recovery required me to give up the old ways in which I nurtured myself by living in the extremes. I found that:

1. Step Four is not done in isolation – support is critical to get through the emotional roller coaster.
2. Grieving Process: includes discomfort, anger, fear, shame, sadness, and loneliness.
3. I recognized the:

Good	Bad
Positive attributes	Imperfections
Successes	Failures
Courage	Mistakes
Efforts	Harm Done

4. I possess counteractive strengths. I asked myself: Was my addict strong? enduring? clever? willing to risk? resourceful? I used the same traits to aid in my recovery.
5. I didn't just focus on the bad, but acknowledged the Good – and rejoiced.
6. The Fourth Step is a draining experience. I paced myself and took gentleness breaks. I reached out to others for help and guidance.
7. Fourth Step Inventory: I elaborated on each of the following topics (note the negative and positive signs before each topic):
 - a. –Avoiding Personal Responsibility
 - b. +Taking Personal Responsibility
 - c. –Misuse of Anger
 - d. +Positive Expression of Anger

- e. –Paralyzed by Fear
- f. +Respect for Fear
- g. +Taking Healthy Risks
- h. –Shameful Events
- i. +Pride in My Achievements
- j. –Losses and Painful Events
- k. +Learning from Sadness
- l. –Beliefs About My Unworthiness
- m. –Self-Hatred (negative traits)
(I have been _____)
- n. +Self-Affirmations (positive attributes)
(I am _____)

Prayer: Realizing that I'm a person within a person is really challenging, scary, and kind of a relief. I know I'm a good person with good qualities, but I have an evil side or portion of me that struggles to manifest itself and control the good side. I must always be *alert*, *vigilant*, and *proactive* in my work with God and in the Program to manage the evil side (the obsessive, compulsive side of me). Only through *conscious, proactive efforts* can I be open to God guiding my life to *spirituality and righteousness* and pushing back the beast of my compulsive urgings. I must let God in and work with his guidance.

Affirmation: I can never forget my past or my problems, but I can set them aside and live today as a child of God. I can grow spiritually! I can have self-respect! I can be a loving person! I can be kind! I can be righteous again! With God's help – I will.

Tradition Three

by Tony X.

The only requirement for S.A.A. membership is a desire to stop addictive sexual behavior.

In its discussion of the Third Tradition, the SAA Green Book makes the statement that the tradition “is based on trust rather than fear” (*Sex Addicts Anonymous*, p. 82). When I initially read this statement, I had little trouble understanding the “fear” part, although I had a little more difficulty with the “trust” part.

I'm thinking back to the discussion of the Third Tradition in the book of another Twelve Step fellowship, a discussion that remains one of my favorite pieces of recovery-based literature. To summarize: It was in the early days of that fellowship, and current members had tasked themselves with decisions as to whether any given potential new member could join. One day a prospective new member came knocking at the door. He was honest enough to tell those responsible for deciding his case that he suffered from another addiction even more stigmatized than the one the fellowship was formed to address. Out of hearing of the newcomer, the members engaged in an animated discussion. The majority felt they could only help those suffering from the one addiction alone, and that somebody bringing in a different issue could cause problems. One member of the group helped the others to see that they were really more concerned (read “fearful”) about how the reputation of the group might suffer if they were to admit this man. Nevertheless, they eventually concluded that there was only one answer. It turned out to be the right answer, as that individual presented the program to others who went on to present it to still others, while his other issue never became a problem for the group.

I think back to the early days of my involvement in SAA. I think of one man in particular who joined our Sunday night group. When I learned of the reason that he had turned to SAA for help, my reaction was that his “problem” was a non-issue. What's more, it was a behavior that at least some considered to be normal; I had even read advice columns in the newspaper that stated as much.

Even though our group didn't pass judgment on whether newcomers would be permitted to join SAA, still I believed in my heart of hearts that this newcomer did not have a problem. Just as I had done when I was initially trying to decide whether SAA was for me, I was focusing on the differences rather than the similarities, a focus that had kept me away from joining SAA for at least a couple of years.

Also, while coming to this hasty conclusion about the newcomer, I completely forgot that one of the responses I had received after giving my First

Step was “I’m not going to say that you don’t have a problem, *but...*” That “*but*” sent me out of SAA altogether, except for a very occasional meeting, for the better part of a year. So I was left wandering around out there, and my willpower was only good for a month or two before I started sinking back into my addiction. I had to face another confrontation by the police resulting from one of my behaviors, a confrontation that fortunately did not result in my arrest. That was when I realized that the issues that had originally brought me into SAA were eventually going to land me in prison or possibly kill me, and at that point, it would not matter if another member of the program thought that I didn’t have a problem.

The newcomer I mentioned stayed in SAA and was able to achieve release from the behavior that was troubling him. I don’t know whether he presented the program to others, as did the man whose story I summarized above, or indeed whether he is still active in SAA. Nevertheless, I do know, from occasionally crossing paths with him, that he went on to fulfill his dream of becoming more creative in areas that were important to him, something that I don’t believe would have happened if he hadn’t gotten a handle on some behaviors that he detested and that I thought were at most minor.

As to the “trust” I mentioned, the SAA Green Book goes on to relate the Third Tradition to “the compassion of a loving Higher Power” (*Sex Addicts Anonymous*, p. 82). It has been a very long time since I have passed judgment on another’s desire to belong to SAA. And I like to think that, should the situation ever arise again, I would remember to trust that the newcomer had a Higher Power who had led him or her to SAA. Further, I hope that, merely by crossing paths with the newcomer, I would trust that my Higher Power intended me to learn something from him or her, just as I did in the case of the newcomer with the problem with which I didn’t sympathize.

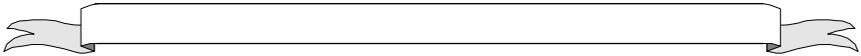
A statement I have made to others who were expressing fear over a life experience that they were about to undergo is to “trust the process.” Looking back, I realize that one of the great benefits I have received from SAA is learning to move in the direction of trust when a situation causing me fear arises. Applying the Third Tradition to others as well as to myself has taught me to trust rather than fear in specific instances that I think I have been able to apply to other areas of my life.

Tradition Four

by Javier F.

Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or S.A.A. as a whole.

One respected dictionary defines the word “autonomy” as “independent, free and self-directing.” In the years I have been a member of SAA I have found that this word certainly describes each of the various meetings I have attended. And this autonomy is key to the success of SAA. On page 84 of the SAA Green Book, *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, the importance of “access to the full range of help available in our fellowship” is stressed, and since most people know the fellowship primarily through meetings, meetings are the area where the concept of “the full range of help” is most readily noticeable.



The differences between one group and another are the lifeblood of SAA or indeed any Twelve Step fellowship.



Simply by listening to the opening readings in a variety of meetings in my area, I have seen the principle of autonomy in action. I doubt that there are any two meetings who do the opening in exactly the same way. One group might indicate the use of a timer to keep the sharing of attendees to a certain limit, while another might state that it will destroy the sign-in sheet at the end of the meeting.

It is easy for me to think that these little differences from one meeting to the next are of no importance, and that they just reflect the idiosyncrasies of the members of that particular group. And yet, I ask myself if that is really the case. Don't we recommend that if a newcomer doesn't like one meeting, to try another? I can easily envision a situation where someone might feel safer writing down a name and contact information on a sign-in sheet, thus facilitating contact with others at the meeting, after having received the assurance that the sign-in sheet would never leave the meeting. I have little trouble conceiving that a particular individual could base the decision to attend one meeting rather than another over what might seem simple administrative matters such as this.

I have attended meetings in parts of the country other than the area where I live, and what has always struck me is how much variation there is between meetings in my hometown and meetings elsewhere. While meetings in my area tend to follow the pattern of readings/introductions—topic/speaker—sharing—announcements/chip presentation—conclusion, I have been to meetings where the chip presentation and announcements occurred around the midpoint of the meeting, or where the sharing stopped for ten minutes near the end while the members silently meditated on what they had heard at the meeting. Being an addict and resistant to change, I could easily tell myself that these meetings have less validity than the meetings in my hometown with which I am more comfortable. And I would be wrong, as the Fourth Tradition teaches.

The differences between one group and another are the lifeblood of SAA or indeed any Twelve Step fellowship. I have heard it said, admittedly more in relation to another fellowship than to SAA, that “if you don’t like what you hear at this meeting, get a coffeepot and go start your own meeting.” At least in my area, coffeepots are not a feature of a lot of SAA meetings (although the soda machine in the hallway might be), and yet the idea of going out and forming another meeting is certainly not foreign to us. And it might be that the new meeting that is formed, with or without a coffeepot, helps this newcomer or that in a way that an already existing meeting might not.

Looking ahead to Tradition Five, we see that one of the primary functions of SAA is “to carry its message to the sex addict who still suffers.” Since one of the principal ways in which we carry this message is through meetings, we support the autonomy of meetings in order to increase the likelihood that the suffering sex addict will find a beneficial meeting and the help being sought.

Writing Meditations for HP and Recovery

by CP

Our primary purpose is to carry the message to the still suffering addict. Writing a meditation submission is an effort towards that service. By giving away the message of recovery, I get to keep it. And what a gift that is!

At the time of this writing, we have a little over two hundred meditation submissions for our very own SAA Meditation Book. Very exciting news—a meditation book written by sex addicts for sex addicts!

How do you fit into this picture? You could prayerfully consider writing and submitting a meditation.

From my own experience, strength and hope, I can share that every time I write a meditation, it enhances my own recovery—really helps me to get in touch with some core issue. For example, Step One and powerlessness. Or Tradition One and unity. These are both topics I've used in writing meditation submissions, and they are both topics that are crucial to my own personal recovery.

How does one go about writing a meditation submission? The instructions for what should be included, how many words, etc., are printed in *The Outer Circle*, and they are available on our website. And for those who may come to the writing table looking for a little more direction, here is an example and some ideas for topics.

In the case of writing about powerlessness, I picked my favorite quote from the SAA Green Book:

"In taking the First Step, we admit that our addiction is destroying us, and that we are unable to stop it. We surrender, raise the white flag, and accept that the battle is over." *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, p. 22

This is a quote that has always been very powerful for me—the vision of raising the white flag, because it took me so many years to admit to this addiction.

After getting the quote down, then I wrote about my experience of admission:

I was twelfth-stepped into Sex Addicts Anonymous thirteen years before actually going to my first meeting. I knew I had a problem; but at the time, I just did not want to admit it, did not want to go to any lengths. I did not really want to stop. I was not ready.

Today I know I have a problem called sex addiction that I am powerless over. Returning to SAA a little over a year ago, I was ready to raise that white flag and admit that I needed help. My last acting

out took me to places inside myself I never want to go to again. My outer life was in shambles; I had no money, no job, and my son was crying out for help in a way that brought home my need for a drastic change. I pulled the dark secret of my sex addiction out of a shameful corner of my being and gave it to God. Thus, I began the first step to freedom.

Surrender is a continual process. If I am ever tempted to act out today, I can revisit what it was like right before I came in. I surrendered my sex addiction sixteen months ago, and I have to surrender it every day. I have to remember I am a sex addict; and without the help of my Higher Power, the Twelve Steps and this fellowship, I will die of this addiction.

I think of the writing of the body of the meditation as akin to sharing in a meeting my experience, strength and hope—the only difference is that it is written, and it is focused on one topic. I find it most helpful to begin my writing with a prayer for guidance from my HP about what HP wants me to write.

For the affirmation/meditation portion, I find it easiest to write an affirmation in the present tense with the word “I.”

Affirmation:

I raise the white flag today, and surrender my addiction to a power greater than myself. What freedom!

Remember that the quotation must come from SAA literature. A list of approved literature is included with the instructions in *The Outer Circle*, and on the SAA website.

And remember also that your submission does not have to be perfect! We are looking for your unique experience, strength and hope. We will have an editor to iron out the rough spots in all our submissions. My way of looking at the meditation submission process is that I write what I believe my HP wants me to write, and then I surrender it. Whether or not it gets published in some edited form or not is up to HP, not me.

If you are looking for a topic, here are some suggestions a fellow member sent to me:

Twelve Steps	Joy
Twelve Traditions	SAA fellowship
Sponsorship	Service
Spirituality	Meetings
Defining Abstinence	Three Circles
Withdrawal	Relapse
Healthier Sexuality	Action
Acceptance	Loneliness/Isolation
Anger	Slogans
Character Defects	Faith
Emotional Sobriety	Family
Fear	Freedom
Forgiveness	Higher Power
Gratitude	Hope
Honesty	Identification
Humility	Primary Purpose
Prayer/Serenity Prayer	Resentments
Powerlessness	Self-Centeredness
Sanity	Spiritual Awakening
Self-Will	Willingness
Surrender	Your favorite topic

If you would like to write in a group setting, feel free to join us at our monthly tele-workshop. Feedback from the workshops has been very positive—we not only have a chance to write, but also to share. It has absolutely brought me to tears of joy to listen to my fellow recovering addicts share their beautiful and heartfelt meditations.

I look forward to the day when I can open our meditation book and receive your experience, strength and hope every day!

The Program Really Works

by Henry N.

I'm a sex addict and a sex offender. I am currently serving time in prison for an offense related to my addiction. I was out on bail for four months before I was sentenced to prison, during which time I joined my home group and started my journey of recovery, which is continuing while I am here in prison. I have over eighteen months of freedom from all my old acting-out behaviors.

There is no SAA in my prison, so I have had to cobble together a program from lots of pieces. Some of those are: calling and writing my sponsor, step work with my sponsor's suggestions, reading the basic text and *The Outer Circle*, letters to and from my home group and individual group members; prayer, meditation and a relationship with my Higher Power.

Well, yesterday I suffered another consequence from things I did in my old life related to my sex addiction. I pled guilty to the charge and got an extra eighty-seven months in federal prison. It was a difficult day for me.

I thought my recovery was slipping away from me, that I was giving up on the program, and here's why: the last few days I have been having a lot of negative thoughts. I have a lot of resentment for the law enforcement people who lied and broke rules to put me in prison. I wanted bad things, such as diseases or accidents, to happen to them.

I was also doubting the program in general. I was having lots of trouble keeping to my routine of recovery activities, such as meditation, prayer and writing. I was even starting to engage in stinkin' thinkin' that since I'm going to be in prison for so long, why bother with all that recovery work? It won't get me out of prison, so why waste time with all that busywork? I was sad, losing hope, and I had big, big doubts.

But then last night, I realized something. Even though I was having revenge fantasies, depression and all kinds of negative impulses, it never occurred to me to act out. It wasn't something I had to make the conscious decision not to do, because I didn't even think about it in the first place. It just never entered my head as an option for dealing with my pain. Wow. That realization was very powerful. This stuff really works.

Before recovery in SAA, acting out to self-medicate would have been the first thing on my mind as a solution for my bad feelings.

That "a-ha" moment gave me renewed faith in my program. It was working for me even when I thought it wasn't. I have been working my program long enough now that the old thought patterns that used to be automatic just don't work like that now.

It is wonderful to be free of what used to be a constant obsession. I am nowhere near perfection, but this program has taken me a long way toward serenity and happiness.

Dreams Unmet

by Larry

 Laboring so much to realize my dreams
 Of health and love, but to me it seems
 Not so much a final state;
 Not a simple end of fate.

 More like a path that carries me
 Through a gate that opens slowly,
 Creaking and whining on rusted hinges
 Crying for someone to clean its fringes,
 Oil to smooth its secret workings,
 Gentle hands to sooth the hurting.

 Myself alone a man so weak.
 If only I would listen for God to speak;
 Although His words, or Hers if you prefer,
 Might not be spoken, but still observed
 To fill my heart full of joy instead of fear.
 It's only when I listen that I can hear.

[Editor's Note: The following is the first part of the text of a talk that was given at the 2009 SAA convention in Oakland. As it was not taped, the author is offering it for publication in The Outer Circle. The talk will conclude in the May/June issue.]

Healthy Spirituality

by Francie E.

Hi, I'm Francie, a grateful recovering sex addict. By the grace of God I have twenty-three years and four months of sobriety from my sexual addiction.

Page 3 of our SAA Green Book, *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, describes our problem: "Sex addiction is a disease affecting the mind, body, and spirit." On page 5 it says, "Our problem was that we lost ourselves in these compulsive fantasies, becoming more and more isolated from others and from reality."

I grew up Catholic and I thought that I was spiritual. But for a ten-year period of my life when I was acting out sexually, my spirituality became warped. I was praying to God, as I acted out, to send me a man, so that I could have a sexual partner. That night, a drunken man, whom I had met at a party, came to my house. He carried me off to bed and I have such shame about my acting out sexually that I have blocked those three hours from my memory.

Only now, looking back, I can see, in myself, one of the main signs of an unhealthy spirituality: insane thinking. I know that I am made up of a body and soul. I prefer to use the word "spirit." My spirit holds my mind and heart together, it makes me one. Its energy gives me life; it is the fire inside of me that drives me.

In my sexual addiction, my spirit started to fall apart; I became unglued. As I lived in my inner fantasy world and continued compulsively to act out, I hated myself and felt that there was something wrong with me. I stopped feeling and ran on auto-pilot. Despair and depression paralyzed my spirit. I was confused as to who I was, what I really wanted.

I had made many little choices that formed a habit which became my addiction. When I was tired or angry I used masturbation not to feel those feelings. It affected how I related to myself, others, God, and my whole world. In my unhealthy spirituality I had no energy because I was so focused on my addiction. I lost my zest for living, sense of beauty, and joy of living. I functioned in a daze from one acting out to the next. I was becoming unglued! As I fell apart, I had thoughts of suicide. I never acted on them but I lost my real identity. My self-conscious identity was my life principle within me. It was my life pulse. What was wrong with me? Something is wrong with me!

Why couldn't I stop? Why was I doing the things that, deep down, I did not want to do, but kept doing them? My spirit was in chaos. I no longer felt in control; I was out of order. My life was absurd! In Latin the word "surdus" means "deaf." I was deaf to the voice which spoke to me in the silence of my inner self. I cut myself off from the Inner Voice of God, my Higher Power. I was isolating, yet I could not tolerate to be alone, so I went into my unreal world of fantasy and that became my reality.

To cover up my acting out, I was lying to others and blaming others. But what really shocked me was when I realized that I was lying to myself. I was believing the lie! When the enslavement to being sexual with men and women, which was against my own personal morals, compulsive masturbation and self-hatred became so overwhelming, I reached out for help. A therapist gave me the knowledge that I was sexually addicted. I remember feeling relief. "If I am compulsive," I thought, "that means I can't help it and there is hope for me!" As the SAA Green Book says, that was our problem. I could go on and share my personal story, but you can read it in the SAA Green Book, *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, story number eight.

Knowledge was my first sign of a healthy spirituality. This year I read a book whose author said, "Spirituality is what we do with our unrest. It refers to something vital and non-negotiable lying at the heart of our lives. Everyone has spirituality, either a life-giving one or a destructive one." He goes on to say, "We are born on fire with desire, with madness, and what we do with that madness is our spirituality. We all have spirituality whether we want it or not. It is about being integrated or falling part, about being in fellowship or isolation, about being in harmony with Mother Earth or destroying her. We act in ways that leave us healthy or unhealthy, loving or bitter. What shapes our actions is our spirituality."

When I started attending SAA meetings, I saw the serenity and spirituality of the oldtimers. I wanted that same inner glow. It was at these meetings that more knowledge was given to me as I learned about the Twelve Steps of recovery. I first learned about the Twelve Steps in an outpatient treatment program. But it was at my SAA meeting that made me realize that I could not do it alone. The SAA Green Book states it well as part of Steps One, Two and Three (*Sex Addicts Anonymous*, pp. 26, 27 and 28).

Yes, there was a power greater than myself that was there to help me, if I accepted that help. Acceptance! Facing the reality that I was addicted to sex and that I had no control over my actions caused me to be honest with myself. As I reread my journal of those first months in recovery I saw entries like, "This morning I felt hopeless, as if it can't be done." Another entry: "I feel so depressed. I'm confused as to what is happening to me." I don't want to be sick! Why me? I'll never change!" But with the help of my sponsor, nine months after I started SAA, I gave my first step. During those nine months I started to accept myself as sexually addicted. I realized that there was no cure, that I would always be a sex addict. I remember the anger. I hated being a sex addict. What! Does that mean that I have to go

to a meeting every week for the rest of my life? But with the acceptance came an interior peace.

Another piece of knowledge that developed my healthy spirituality was my spiritual awakening. From my perspective, my spiritual awakening happened when I accepted myself as a sex addict. It was my realization that I was compulsive in my sexual behavior. I started to see that I no longer had a free will. That is why I couldn't stop. SAA was giving me back my free will to chose. The integration of my body and spirit started to happen. Spirituality is about making choices and living with the choices I make. That first year there was part of me that wanted to end the addictive cycle and than another part of me that did not want to give it up. My sponsor helped me to form the spiritual practice of praying. Pray that you will be willing "to be willing" to give up your addictive ways. Reluctance is a human trait. We all have it. I needed to find a way to overcome it, so my sponsor also told me to "act as if." What that meant was to pretend that I could do it. That I could change! Well, it worked. Pretty soon I was beginning to like myself. I remember that specific moment. I was washing my hands in a bath room, looked up in the mirror and caught my eye. I said to myself "I think I'm beginning to like you!" During the next two years my compulsive sexual thoughts began to lessen and finally stopped. I was no longer living in a world of fantasy. I could recognize reality!

Another part of my spiritual awakening was when I realized that I could no longer do it alone. I needed the God of my understanding and I needed others to stay sober.

My concept of God is at the heart of my spirituality. My spiritual awakening and point 2, "Heart," on my outline [see p. 29] are so closely connected that I should not have separated them. My idea of God was distorted or underdeveloped. Therefore every other dimension of my spiritual journey was adversely affected. My concept of the God of my understanding was developed as a child. I had a great fear of God, as I did of my own biological father. After five years in the program, when I started to have flashbacks that my father had sexually abused me from the time I was three until I was nine, I realized that I needed to change the image I had of God. My idea of God was distorted when I came into the program. It was the love, total acceptance, hope and spiritual models of recovery that I received at the meeting that helped me to develop a new concept of God. My God is a promise maker and a promise keeper. My God sends messengers to me in the form of members of the fellowship, especially my sponsor.

A recovering father, who shared how he was making amends to his daughters for sexually abusing them, helped me come to know that my God is a loving, caring, compassionate God. The daughters in turn forgave their dad and led me to forgive my dad and to know that my God is a forgiving God, too. My mind and heart were so limited, narrow in those first years of recovery that I was slowly led to experience God in new ways at meetings,

retreats and conventions. The God of my understanding is constantly instructing me in new ways, if I am just open to the experience. With God's guidance, I am led into a deeper commitment of recovery and joyful service. I perceive God as loving, merciful, forgiving, gentle and kind. The wonderful Creator of the Universe, who shows up in the splendor of sunlight or in the magnificent fragrance of a flower, fills me with gratitude for life. My God is also challenging me.

Who is the God of your understanding? We will take ten minutes for sharing. Share for five minutes with the person next to you and than let the other person share.

[The talk will conclude in the May/June issue. Following is the outline intended to accompany the talk.]

Healthy Spirituality Outline

Signs of unhealthy spirituality

- Insane thinking Sex Addicts Anonymous, pp. 3, 5, 8
- Compulsivity
- Fantasies (reality vs. unreality)
- Lying/dishonesty/blaming
- Enslavement
- Isolation
- Self-hatred

Signs of healthy spirituality pp. 19,21, 22

1. Knowledge
 - Acceptance of my addiction and self as addicted
 - Spiritual awakening pp. 29-30
2. Heart
 - Love and forgiveness of self pp.45
 - Honesty
 - Gratitude
 - Generative: twelfth-stepping others pp.58-61
3. Spiritual Practice
 - Regular prayer (private and communal) pp.55-57
 - Practice of self-sacrifice and charity at home and in wider world pp.95-96

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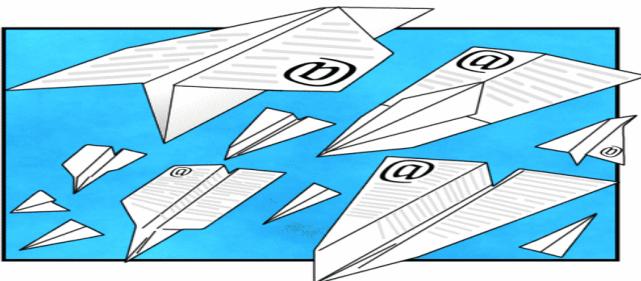
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