

THE OUTER CIRCLE

The Spirituality of Sexuality

**10 ways to develop intimacy
with Higher Power, self and
others**

PLUS

Welcome to Reality

Shame vs. Guilt

Losing Our Religion





International Service Organization of SAA, Inc.

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The Outer Circle Mission

The mission of *The Outer Circle* is to provide information from the ISO and to share the experience, strength, and hope members have obtained from working the SAA program of recovery. As the first iteration put it in 1998, *The Outer Circle* newsletter “carries the message of hope to the sex addict who still suffers” — especially prisoners and others who don’t have the Internet.

Through *TOC*, SAA members contribute articles and poems that focus on working the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. It also communicates ISO news, regional activities, and other items of interest.

SAA meetings are encouraged to reproduce *TOC* at no charge and display it alongside other SAA literature. To keep costs down, please print out the online version.

If you have comments or suggestions, please see contact information on p. 30. To have an article considered for publication, see our Submission Guidelines on page 31.

To ensure that future issues can be offered without cost, please consider making a tax-deductible donation now to support publication of the newsletter.

July-August 2020

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FROM THE EDITOR

Let's Keep Politics Out of Meetings

BY GARY T.

**Amid protests
and a divisive
election cycle, it's
worth reminding
ourselves what
the Traditions say
about outside
issues.**

Our world feels like it's in upheaval right now, with people marching in the streets and calls for reform and reparations. I have my own feelings about these protests and my own way of making those feelings known.

But at this time of such strong political opinions, I'm more grateful than ever for the traditions that protect our meetings from the inevitable divides those opinions create.

Those protections come from our Traditions. As the protests give way to what's sure to be a divisive election cycle, it's worth reminding ourselves how important our Traditions are around keeping political speech and viewpoints out of meetings. I'm thinking specifically of Tradition One and Tradition Ten, which, like all the Traditions, work hand-in-hand.

With the First Tradition, unity is at the forefront. And anyone who's made the mistake of bringing up politics at a family dinner knows how quickly such talk can lead to loud disunity. So I urge everyone to take care when sharing their feelings about the current political climate.

With the Tenth Tradition, controversy is the concern. Again, few things are more controversial than race, religion, and politics. So once again, no matter how strongly you feel about a particular movement, cause, or candidate, please keep those opinions out of meetings, even if you're sure everyone agrees with you.

All of these reminders bring us back to yet another tradition. Tradition Five, reminds us of our primary purpose — to help the sex addict who still suffers.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Text to Donate Shows Success; New Outreach in the Works

BY PAUL M.

We at the office are very grateful for your continuing donations.

I hope these uncertain times find you healthy, safe, and well-connected. Hopefully by press time, your hometown will be opened back up and things will be looking up. Just like our recovery, we should always be hopeful, but we still must take precautions.

We at the office are very grateful for your continuing donations. We've had a noticeable drop in income, forcing us to halt all CPC projects for the time being, and we have also placed other important projects on hold. The addition of the text to donate (text SAA to 91999, if you have a United States based phone) has brought in well-needed donations and paid for itself within two weeks. We are moving our LifeLines to that platform.

As you may have heard, due to the ongoing pandemic, the ISO Board has decided to make the 2020 Area Delegate Conference a virtual event. Hopefully, your groups have started meeting in area assemblies and electing a delegate. Please reach out to the ISO office if you need any information about your area.

Two meetings in Paris recently converted from another S-group to SAA. These are the first SAA meetings in France. We hope to help them grow, as we hope to help expand the meetings all over the world. We expect there are many sex addicts out there who have no idea we exist. The Public Information/Cooperation with the Professional Community (PI/CPC) Committee is producing some exciting pamphlets that will hopefully get the word out that SAA is here to help. We hope our local groups help us spread the word.

Thank you for your support, and I hope you stay connected to your local fellowship and stay healthy.

DEAR GRACE

A 'Right' Way to Work the Steps?

BY WOMEN'S
OUTREACH COMMITTEE

It is human nature
to think that our
way is the only
way. However
there isn't an
'only way.'

Dear Grace:

I'm confused. Our Green Book says that there is no one right way to work the steps and to get sexually sober, but I've attended meetings where I've heard that if I don't do things in just a certain way, I am not going to be able to get abstinent or stay abstinent. How can this be?

Befuddled

Dear Befuddled,

Twelve-step fellowships are based on the knowledge and experience of those who have come before, and listening with an open mind can give us the opportunity to avoid certain mistakes others have made and adopt ideas which have been successful. It is human nature to think that our way is the only way. However, there isn't an "only way." Our book is very clear on this point: "There is no one correct or SAA-sanctioned way to complete the Twelve Steps" (*Sex Addicts Anonymous*, page 20).

We all come to SAA seeking a solution to our problem of sex addiction, and we can learn to respect that there are many paths on this road to recovery. Our task is to find the one that works for us.

Let's look at this question using the Serenity Prayer as our guide. **God, grant me the serenity to:**

1. Accept the things I cannot change. Sometimes strong personalities can dominate a meeting and make it difficult to work the program in a way that makes sense to everyone attending the meeting. Remember that the only requirement



for SAA membership is a desire to stop addictive sexual behavior (Tradition Three). Those who seem controlling and opinionated have a place in SAA too. We find it best to follow the guidance of our sponsor in how we work our program.

2. Change the things I can. If your meeting is costing your serenity, perhaps you can look for meetings in other towns or attend telemeetings or web meetings. There are many styles of meetings and you may meet addicts using a different format from your local meeting. Once you have achieved a measure of recovery in SAA, perhaps you and another trusted member can start a new meeting in your area or even suggest a study of the Twelve Traditions in your own meeting.

3. And the wisdom to know the difference. We have found that it is important to work the Twelve Steps of SAA in order to receive relief from our

addictive sexual behavior, as well as find peace and serenity in our lives.

Difficult situations in SAA are a time of reflection and inventory (Step Four).

Seeking guidance from Higher Power, sponsor, and other members of the fellowship will give you the wisdom to know if this is something you can or cannot change.

Blessings in your recovery.

Grace

*Statement of Purpose for Dear Grace: to reach out to all women with a desire to stop addictive sexual behavior through this printed medium and share with the fellowship the types of questions the Grace e-mail (grace@saa-women.org) receives. *Names have been changed to protect anonymity.*

LIVING IN SOBRIETY

Escaping the 'Land of Hungry Sex Addicts'

BY ANONYMOUS

**The shame was
an unbearable
heavy cloak that
was weighing me
down.**

Today I have sixteen years of abstinence from my inner-circle behaviors. But before recovery, my life felt like a vast turbulent ocean of suffering, unendurable and unbearably intense. I was filled with denial, resentment, and greed. I was disconnected, dissociated, and confused, living in self-centered fear with a big ego and no self-esteem.

On the outside I looked and said I was “fine,” but I was more like a deer in the headlights. Sometimes I looked like I had it all together and could be very charismatic and magnetizing. The highs were high and the lows were low without much stability in between.

There were so many bottoms that started in my teenage years. I came into the rooms of sexual recovery in 1989. But I didn't make it to SAA until the mid '90s. I had long-term sobriety from alcohol and drugs, but I still had a lot of delusion and confusion in relation to sex addiction.

I worked a few steps in SAA and left the program. I remember getting up to the Fourth Step in SAA and deciding I didn't need to do it, because I had already worked the steps in my other program a few times — and didn't that count?

After the breakup of a relationship, I came back to SAA in 2001. It took me three years to get one year of continuous abstinence from my inner circle behaviors. During those three years I worked Steps One through Three over and over and over. But I didn't think I really needed to do a Fourth Step or the rest of the Steps, since I had done them several times in the past through my alcohol and drug recovery. Not coincidentally, I continued to act out.

The bottom that stuck was when I had been

going to meetings for three years, only working the first three steps and unable to stay out of my inner circle. I had a therapist and sponsor as well. I was still going to AA meetings with long term AA sobriety, but I was really struggling with sexual acting out.

My behaviors stopped satisfying me, so I began to go places and do things I had not done before to get my hit. I prostituted myself and acted out in bathhouses hoping to become HIV positive. I had survivor's guilt and just wanted the pain to stop. I was contemplating throwing fifteen years of drug and alcohol sobriety down the drain and wanted to relapse with IV meth, a drug I had never tried. I was struggling with basic self-care and was mentally unstable. I was living in the land of hungry sex addicts, a Buddhist reference to beings who are driven by intense emotional needs in an animalistic way.

The shame was an unbearable heavy cloak that was weighing me down. It was so painful. But thankfully, rather than follow through on my acting out, I ended up in a treatment center for six weeks of inpatient sexual recovery. SAA and inpatient treatment saved my life.

Withdrawal was a major hurdle to my recovery. My inpatient treatment was not a lightweight program. But I had been suffering for so long from the negative consequences of sex addiction that I became willing to do anything

that was asked of me. I signed a celibacy contract in treatment and began to experience withdrawal. Compulsive masturbation was part of the problem, and my delusion was too great for me to admit it.

For a while, my inner circle was no sex with self or others. It was crucial to go through this period while working the Twelve Steps of SAA with a sponsor. I found freedom from my addictive sexual behavior through the Twelve Steps of SAA. I sponsored others and put together a plan with my sponsor and therapist for healthier sexuality.

I attend as many meetings as I can. I focus on simple self-care such as breathing, resting, exercising, and nutrition. I remind others that food is medicine and can affect our mood. And food includes what I'm ingesting through media and the company I keep, inner thoughts, and people who might be toxic for me.

Today, prayer, meditation, and a heavy concentration on service help keep me sober one day at a time. I also continue to build a connection to a Higher Power and cultivate a mind and heart of not-knowing. For me, that means just letting things just be as they are.

If you have five or more years of sobriety and would like to write a Living in Sobriety column, please contact toc@saa-recovery.org.



Why fantasy is the problem and how Higher Power is the solution

BY ANDY M.

W

Whenever I describe my life as an addict to others in my local fellowship, I frequently sum things up by saying that I was choosing to live in fantasy versus reality. As I unpack the details of what that statement means to me, I find that I'm not alone.

The details of our stories may be different, and the ways that our addictions were manifested might vary from one another. But the idea that fantasy has played a key role in fueling my acting-out behavior seems to resonate with others in recovery, and that affirmation has helped me understand that engaging life as it is — as difficult as it can be — is critical for me to live sober one day at a time.

On its face, fantasy is merely imagination. It can be a relaxing diversion, such as reading a novel, going to see a movie, or telling scary campfire stories. Or it can spur innovative ideas that help us become more productive, be more energy efficient, or find newer, better solutions that address broad societal problems. Fantasy in itself is not the cause of my addiction, and I do not consider it to be an evil that must be avoided at all costs.

Fantasy became a problem for me when I learned that I could use it to escape the negative feelings that I experienced as a child. My father, like many in his generation, was emotionally distant and a harsh disciplinarian. He left me with the impression (inadvertently, I believe) that I was not worthy of love, because I was always doing something wrong. My mother placed little value on my feelings of loneliness and incompetency and often excused my dad's actions with religious terminology and overtones.

The resulting effect was that I came to believe that I was also not worthy of God's love. Fantasy gave me an escape from my sense of unworthiness. First through cartoons and TV sitcoms, and later with pornography and masturbation, I found that I could find momentary relief from my pain through distraction and pleasure.

Of course, the TV shows eventually ended, and the pleasure would eventually fade. When it did, I would find that nothing about my environment, or my feelings of inadequacy, had changed. With no instruction or model to help me process my feelings in a healthy way, I determined that the best I could do was to make myself feel better, and by doing so, I developed an increasing obsession with porn.

As my addiction evolved, so did the glaring disparity between my medicating behaviors and my own internal sense of morality. As a person of faith

who entered vocational ministry after college, I was terrified at the thought of someone else finding out about my "bad habits." I already felt unworthy of the love of both my father and of God, and I couldn't risk the additional rejection of my friends and peers.

Therefore, I went to great lengths to hide my behaviors and to project only those parts of me that I deemed acceptable. I allowed people to see only a version of me that amplified the good and minimized, or even denied, the bad.

The resulting caricature that I created was so much more appealing to me than my real self that I embraced it and spent the next twenty-five years trying to perfect it. I rejected the reality of my humanity in favor of the fantasy of the superman. Whether I was successful in convincing anyone else that I was as flawless as I appeared is highly doubtful. But in the delusion of my fantasy world, I would have never known it if someone else was seeing right through me.

But reality is relentlessly persistent, and it has a way of finding the light in the darkest of places. When I hit my bottom in 2009, reality had invaded my fantasy and exposed me for the fraud and hypocrite that I had become.

I was despondent and hopeless, in part because of the intense shame that I felt, but also because the world that I had found comfort in for more than twenty-five years had been shattered

and I didn't know where else to turn. I felt disillusioned with God. I had spent years praying for deliverance to no avail. I internalized this absence of divine intervention as confirmation that I was not worthy of God's love. But even if I didn't deserve his help, why would he not answer the cries of first a child, and then of a young man, who so desperately wanted to be free?

My recovery journey has offered a surprising answer to this legitimate question. I entered a program that instructed me to live one day at a time, and I learned a prayer that asked for the serenity to accept things that I could not change — a reality that would not bend to my whims or demands.

For most of my life, I had presumed that God was simply there to either give me good things if he approved of me, or else to withhold things from me if he didn't like me. Now I realize that this may have been the greatest fantasy of all.

If my addiction was rooted in fantasy, then my sobriety must be grounded in reality. And if there is a Higher Power out there, a Power greater than myself who can relieve me of my addiction, then he must, by definition, be the most real thing of all. Where I had been living in the vaporous fog of fantasy, my Higher Power must be reality itself.

Hence, when my world collapsed in 2009, it was not because God had

abandoned me. It was because my Higher Power was answering all of my childhood prayers and was waging war against the fantasy that had ensnared me. The pain of the guilt and shame that I experienced during this time was not because of his disapproval of me, but rather because he loved me enough to consider me worth the fight.

My recovery has been far from perfect. I have at times chosen to return to my fantasy world to escape the difficulties of life, but I have found it to be less and less satisfying. I still battle the voice from my childhood that tells me that I am unworthy of God's love, and I frequently do not feel like he hears my prayers.

But now I know where he lives. He will never be found in my fantasy world because he does not dwell there. He lives in reality. And whenever I choose to live in reality rather than escape to fantasy, even if I can't find him, then at least I am living in his country. He will know where to find me. ●

Editor's note: The author uses the terms "God" and "He" frequently when referencing his Higher Power throughout this article. This is due in part to his own faith tradition, as well as for literary brevity and convenience. There is no intention here to discredit the many expressions of Higher Power that are represented throughout our fellowship, and the author is grateful for, and has benefited greatly from, the input of others who do not share his beliefs.

The Spirituality of Sexuality

Ten ways to develop intimacy with Higher Power, self, and others

BY BEN B.

A

s someone in SAA recovery for twenty years with more than fifteen years of sobriety, I have had a lot of practice with healthier sexuality. And I hear a lot of questions from those in the fellowship about what it is and how to achieve it. The prescription for healthy sexuality is different for everyone. Situations are individualistic so it's hard to say what it really is, although the SAA Green Book has a great chapter on it. Ultimately, each person must come to their own understanding. But here are ten of my experiences and best practices around healthier sexuality:

1 • Building intimacy. Healthier sexuality to me is not separate from spirituality. The basic perspective of healthier sexuality could be thought of as intimacy with Higher Power, myself, and others. My deep self is not separated from my Higher Power, God. When I can get quiet and really tune in, I find a connection that is operating 24/7, but that is often covered up by some type of poverty mentality. Intimacy is an important part of the path.

2. Taking risks. As a member of SAA who is healing from the trauma of sex addiction, the Twelve Steps have been a way to heal. Learning to be intimate with a Higher Power, myself, and others can sometimes be uncomfortable, because it involves risks. I can keep myself so safe in recovery that I don't allow others in.

3. Getting a sponsor. I have learned a lot about intimacy in a relationship with a sponsor. In my experience, intimacy is about growing up, becoming a healthy adult, and recovering parts that I left behind. Healthier sexuality is about learning how to self-regulate and process trauma and take care of my inner child parts. The ways I avoid this work is by becoming enmeshed (one down-victim), which makes me less than or (one-up), which makes me better than. I also can become avoidant, which shows up with rigid boundaries.

4. Being flexible. I have to be careful with being avoidant and anorexic as well. Forcing myself to abstain without doing ongoing spiritual work of the Twelve Steps can also be harmful. In my experience, forced abstinence can actually increase my sexual desire and lead to abnormal and increased sexual desire. If I am unable to follow my healthier sexuality plan, then I try to follow a different plan.

5. Staying present. For me, healthy masturbation is about connecting with my heart. I literally place my hand on my heart and take time and breathe through the experience. If I can't stay present with myself and Higher Power, it's going to be very difficult with a partner.

6. Healing wounds. Healthier sexuality is about recovering from my wounds. I see myself as wounded, not damaged, by sex addiction. Deep wounds heal from the bottom up. When I would act out, the wound would open up and bacteria would pour in; it would never heal. If I'm going to heal and experience healthier sexuality in SAA, I have to heal from the wounds of sex addiction. The wounds are visible. You can see them: they show up as a lack of intimacy with self and others. My coping strategies were to fight (aggression, control, manage, martyr, manipulate), take flight (run, dissociate, go out of my body), freeze (shut down, go numb), fawn (people pleasing, flattering, saying "yes" all the time). These all kept me from healthier sexuality, intimacy, and the ability to receive and give nourishment to others. They prevent me from opening my heart and being kind and loving.

7. Finding connection. I also think of intimacy and healthier sexuality

as the mutual exploration of a shared safe place. Abuse could be thought of as anything that destroys that safe place. Healing and healthier sexuality arises from loving relationships with my Higher Power, myself, and others, which ultimately are not separate. It's discovering that we are all truly connected.

8. Creating boundaries. The lie of my sex addiction is that I am separated from the world. Healthier sexuality requires boundaries. The three circles create boundaries around my behaviors. The opposite of dissociation is intimacy. Our SAA literature defines intimacy as a close, familiar, and usually affectionate personal relationship with oneself, others, or a Higher Power. I like that.

9. Right sizing. For me, my sexuality is a fundamental energy, which is an expression of the energetic body. Healthier sexuality dissolves barriers and enters into wide openness, which can be challenging. It's about connecting and community. Sex is a way I try to relate to the energy of sexuality. As a recovering sex addict, I have had an unrealistic view of what sex is. The Twelve Steps have helped clear up that confusion. Relationships with my Higher Power, myself, and others are the training ground.

10. Opening the heart. In my

Learning to be intimate with a Higher Power, myself, and others can be uncomfortable, because it involves risks. I can keep myself so safe in recovery that I don't allow others in.

experience, my Higher Power is always waiting to meet me. All I have to do is take a little step forward. There is no time and space to be traversed because healthier sexuality happens in the NOW. This is hard to wrap my mind around. Even if this sounds preposterous it works because healthier sexuality comes from the heart. When the heart is open, the imaginary aspects of Higher Power are able to arise and I can connect, even if I have to fake it till I make it. ●

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Knowing the difference between the two is vital to recovery

BY ANONYMOUS

A natural consequence of addiction is to feel bad about the things we have done. But it's important to determine whether what we are feeling is guilt or shame. Guilt is about being accountable for our own actions and behaviors; shame is about feeling condemned by someone else — and by ourselves. For many of us, shame is a character defect we identify in our Fourth Step, whereas guilt can be a character asset. Here are seven differences between shame and guilt:

1. Shame means “I am wrong.” Guilt means “I did something wrong.” Shame hurts our self-image and our belief that we can change things. Guilt is about feeling bad about a mistake.
2. Shame does not lead to positive change; guilt does. When we experience shame, we often will try to ignore or avoid whatever caused the sense of shame. For example, when we feel shame about being overweight, we will avoid the gym or physical activity to avoid the feeling of shame. Guilt is feeling badly

about something we have done and can inspire us to act differently in the future.

3. Shame always leads to disconnection from others. Guilt can lead to healing. Confessing our errors allows us to be vulnerable with others, so guilty feelings can prompt us to build a connection through communication or changed behavior. Shame prevents us from feeling strong enough to confess our mistakes, making us defensive when others point them out.

4. Shame is internalized and deeply connected to our sense of who we are. Guilt is often passing. Shame-based comments appear to be accurate statements about our character or lack thereof. Those comments are easily internalized as truth about who we are, haunting us long after the comment was made. Guilt, on the other hand, fades with time or after corrective action is taken.

5. Shame is never healthy or useful. Guilt can be healthy and useful. Often people will make shaming comments with the best of intentions, hoping the comment will inspire someone to change something. As mentioned, shame has the opposite effect. Guilt, however, is a useful response that helps interpersonal relationships exist.

6. Shame is about causing pain for

It's important to determine whether what we are feeling is guilt or shame. Guilt is about being accountable; shame is about feeling condemned.

an individual. Guilt is usually associated with accountability. Shame is about making someone feel unworthy, different, or less than. Shameful comments are meant to hurt. Comments that create guilty feelings are about communicating pain or disappointment, without casting negativity on the person.

7. Shame underlies a host of psycho-social problems: depression, substance abuse, sex addiction, infidelity, etc. Guilt does not. Since shame makes us feel worthless, we are more likely to develop depression and to return to acting out. Shame often traps us in our addiction. Guilt has the potential to help us admit our powerlessness, discover a Higher Power, identify those we have wronged, make amends, and monitor our future behavior. ●

Reprinted in edited form from Check-In Summer 2017, the newsletter of the Indiana Intergroup.

Losing Our Religion



Understanding the difference between religion and spirituality is key in recovery

BY BRUCE M.

It never ceases to amaze me how much I — an avowed atheist — can get out of attending a group meeting where the group conscience is most decidedly geared toward religion (mostly Christianity, but a smattering of others). Despite that religious bent, there is always something in the meeting for me, something that touches me, moves me, or helps me.

Like every other aspect of normal daily life, the religiosity of the group is just something I have learned to deal with. For me, it's like dealing with heavy traffic, bad drivers, standing in long lines, and extreme temperatures. All those things are out of my control, yet somehow I deal with them.

The same goes for religion in meetings. I have been to meetings where the leader or moderator starts with a prayer to his Christian deity. Ignoring that others think differently, forgetting that we are attending the meeting to work on our recovery, just defaulting to his own personal beliefs.

But so what?

As long as he gets help with his recovery needs and I get help with mine, so what if he thinks differently than me? Tradition One tells me that our common welfare

needs to come first — the unity of the group.

That doesn't mean I can't share my opinions. Often, when new people come into our group, I make it a point to state that I am not a believer. I do that not to brag or be provocative; I do it so the newcomers will know there are different levels of spirituality and religious thought in attendance.

That way, if they are struggling (as I did) with all the references to God in our materials, they will know the meeting — and recovery — can still be for them. It is my hope that everyone who wants help with their addiction will find it in our meeting.

There are so many ways in which the Twelve Steps focus on the idea of God, whether as a “Higher Power” or not. It is certainly clear to even the most casual observer that the program has a spiritual basis, and it is just as clear that spirituality in our society is often tied inextricably to religion. That's just the way things are.

But, thankfully, that does not mean that those of us who do not align with a religion are out of luck. To the contrary, the Twelve Steps work for everyone, as long as they give it a chance.

I am a firm believer in the power and effectiveness of the SAA Twelve Step program. With or without God in the mix, it serves the needs of so many people across the world. At this time of pandemic, the program is even more important – to ALL of us. ●

COVID Care Guide

By Anonymous

These days, it's truly one day at a time. I recently worked through the Twelve Traditions with a sponsor over a two-year period. And it's more clear than ever that the Steps, Traditions and Concepts are powerful medicine for these tumultuous times. Here's a check list of recovery practices for surviving the pandemic that I've found helpful:

- » *Pray and meditate.*
- » *Do the next right thing.*
- » *Make a “to do” list or a “to have” list.*
- » *Keep phone numbers of program contacts and people close to you and use them.*
- » *Be of service.*
- » *Get as much rest as you can.*
- » *Stay alert to what's going.*
- » *Pray for others.*
- » *Express gratitude.*
- » *Get quiet.*
- » *Go to meetings.*
- » *Make calls.*
- » *Prioritize self-care.*

DEAR WILL

What to Do When a Sponsor Slips

BY WILL

**Each person
must decide
for themselves
what a relapse
may mean to
their ongoing
relationship.**

Dear Will,

I never thought I would be writing to *The Outer Circle* to deal with an issue in recovery, but I am hoping you can help.

I have been in SAA for about eight months now, attend meetings regularly, have a sponsor, and work the steps. I am not out of the woods yet, but I look forward to the peace and serenity I see in others.

While things are going well, I have a problem. My sponsor, who has been supportive and there for me, recently told me he has been acting out.

He explained it is not into the deepest part of his inner circle, but he has acted out a handful of times none the same.

What am I supposed to do about this? Some say he can still sponsor me as he was honest, but I am just not sure.

Not sure about sponsorship

Dear NSAS,

Congratulations on reaching out for support for your addiction by coming to SAA, getting a sponsor, working the Twelve Steps, and now bringing your question to the fellowship.

I wish that this was the first time a fellow has had to or will have to deal with the question of relapse.

While I cannot tell you what to do in this matter, the fellowship has provided guidance. There are resources within the fellowship for those seeking sponsorship support.

Fortunately, we can access this experience, strength, and hope around matters pertaining to

our recovery including questions about relapse. One of the best places to turn for that kind of guidance is our Green Book.

The sponsorship relationship is personal and, like *Sex Addicts Anonymous* tells us, “it is up to the sponsor and sponsee to decide exactly how they will work with each other.”

Each person in that relationship must decide for themselves what a relapse may mean to their ongoing relationship. While there is no SAA committee that can qualify or disqualify someone from being a sponsor, our literature tells us that a sponsor serves as a guide to working the program of SAA, ideally is abstinent from addictive sexual behavior, and can teach us what they have learned from working the program.

If we believe that it is ideal for a sponsor to be abstinent to be able to guide others through the Twelve Steps, how ideal is it to have a sponsor who is struggling with maintaining their own sobriety?

I have observed some sponsors return to sponsoring from a relapse while others have found it more helpful to step aside from that role for the time being.



I would ask you to consider what you need from your sponsor at this time, what his ability is to provide the guidance you require, and if his relapse is such that it may be better for him to step back from sponsoring and allow you to receive guidance from a sponsor who is sober.

This is not meant to minimize the positive impact your sponsor has had, thus far, but ask yourself this: would you recommend a newcomer select a sponsor who had just acted out?

Remember, there are other options. Our local fellows, local groups, intergroups, areas, and the ISO can offer guidance to individuals seeking help finding a sponsor.

Will

*If you have a question for Will,
please send an email to
Men4SAA@saa-recovery.org.*

STORIES OF SERVICE

The Humility of Service

BY JIM L.

Service does not have to be grand and noticeable.

Service within the SAA fellowship has been a mainstay of my personal recovery. Hardly a day has gone by in the past sixteen years that I have not engaged in some kind of service activity. I say this, not to call attention to me, but to emphasize the profound positive effect that service has had in my recovery.

When I finally began to understand the full implications of Step Twelve, I realized that Steps One through Nine prepared me and Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve equipped me for two major tasks — carrying the SAA message of recovery to the addict who still suffers and practicing program principles in every aspect of everyday life.

Performing service within the fellowship and to addicts in our greater community is carrying the SAA message of recovery. Also, there are many ways to live out program principles, but the one that smacked me right in my self-centered face was that I should continually be looking for the needs and best interests of others. Step Twelve prompts me to look at those needs as an obligation that God has given me as the result of working this program of recovery.

Service does not have to be grand and noticeable. But service done anonymously and without fanfare proves to be the most sensitive, the most caring, and, as a result, the most gratifying. Something as simple as a phone call to a struggling sister or brother or showing up a few minutes early to a meeting to arrange chairs, make the coffee, put out literature, or welcome newcomers can be as helpful to a group as anything we could do.

Stories of Service inspire others to be of service. Send your 250-300-word story to toc@saa-recovery.org.

FROM THE BOARD

Board, Fellowship Make Pandemic Adjustments

**BY BOB L., BOARD
CHAIR**

**Our Higher Power
must have had
a grand scheme
in mind when
Zoom and other
online capabilities
became so readily
available.**

In all of America, indeed throughout the world, people have been dealing with unforeseen and, in many cases, life-altering issues. One of the primary catalysts for this turmoil is the COVID-19 novel coronavirus. Its impact has been and likely will continue to be felt by individuals, businesses, governments, and other institutions around the globe. Not surprisingly, among them is our fellowship.

The most significant effect the virus has had on our fellowship was the virtual elimination of face-to-face meetings. Although telephonic meetings continue, groups have had to make alternate arrangements to continue recovery outside the walls of their customary gathering places.

Our Higher Power must have had a grand scheme in mind when Zoom, Inc. and other online meeting capabilities became so readily available just when we needed them most. Happily, most groups have been able to adapt to virtual meetings, on at least a temporary basis.

One of the questions that groups will consider as meeting places reopen is whether to return to face-to-face meetings, continue virtual meetings, or attempt a hybrid form of them.

There have been a number of adjustments required for the new group meeting format, among them is the loss of in-person contact and fellowship, procedures for a smoothly operated meeting, and for some of us, trepidation about or issues with internet usage. Fortunately, most of us have found ways to manage and be able to attend meetings of one kind or another.

Many other issues abound. With the lack of ability to pass a real basket at group meetings, group

donations to ISO and intergroups have fallen off. At ISO, the realization of this new world created an urgency to get into action.

First, the Finance & Operations Committee formed a special subcommittee, the “COVID-19 Work Group,” to monitor the fellowship’s finances on a week-to-week basis. Composed of F & O members who have excellent accounting skills, and working with the office and executive director, the work group tracks various sources of revenue and expenses to spot trends and adjust operations based on real-time conditions. The work group recommended, and F & O and the Board approved, an immediate reduction in discretionary expenses to help keep the fellowship on track to perform our most essential functions.

Second, when group donations were seen to fall off as anticipated, the Board authorized the use of a new application, the “Text to Donate” function that many of you have found and used. The generosity of our members, through the app and regular donation channels, has helped to offset, to a significant degree, the decline in group donations. To the extent this generosity continues, the drastic reduction of expenses we had feared might become necessary may be avoided. We are hopeful that the savings we have realized to date by deferring expenses will be sufficient

to tide us over until groups are able to pass the basket once again.

Another sign of our members rallying around has been the increase in LifeLine Partners. This has resulted in a multiplier effect: each dollar of new or increased donation through October 1, 2020, is matched by \$12 previously committed by large donors. This “Giving Hope a Voice” drive is within reach of achieving its goal.

Another benefit of increased LifeLine Partner participation is the leveling of income to ISO, which is a major help in managing expenses in an uncertain world. It is much harder to plan when donations vary greatly from month to month while most expenses continue on a fixed basis.

The impact of the virus has had other direct and unfortunate effects on the fellowship. The convention simply could not be held this year, with air traffic, finances, and the prohibition of social gatherings.

The Board decided to postpone the 2020 Convention for one year and push the previously planned 2021 and 2022 Conventions each forward one year. Most recently the Board voted to make the 2020 Area Delegate Conference a virtual event. Fortunately, we have been able to make those arrangements without incurring extra costs.

ISO NEWS

Board Makes 2020 October Conference Virtual Event

The ISO Board of Trustees took several actions in response to the pandemic including making the 2020 Area Delegate Conference a virtual event. Here's a look at the rest of the board's recent actions:

April

- » Approved Phase Response Plan for addressing cost containing measures.
- » Approved the Report of the Executive Director Performance Review prepared by the Finance and Operations (ed. review) ISC.

May

- » Approved motion to grant permission for all Area Assemblies within the ISO service structure to use the ISO logo.

June

- » Approved the convening of the 2020 Conference in a virtual format (Zoom or the equivalent).
- » Approved the authority of the Board chair to create work groups, ad hoc committees and/or other committees consistent with past practices or precedent. The committee recognizes the Board's authority to override the decision of the Board Chair.
- » Approved motion that executive director's spending authority limit be raised from \$1,000 to \$5,000 and that the Finance & Operations Committee spending authority approval limit be raised from \$5,000 to \$10,000.
- » Approved motion that the executive director's spending authority limits do not apply in the case of actual expenditures for projects and/or line item expenses clearly identified as such in the approved annual budget as long as any such expenditure does not result in the total expenditures for the project/line item for the year to exceed the amount budgeted by the lesser of 20% of the approved budget or \$5,000. Any project/expense not clearly identified as such in the approved budget, or any expenditure for a clearly identified project/line item expense which would cause the total expenditures for the project/line item for the year to exceed the amount budgeted by more than 20% or more than \$5,000 would continue to be subject to the spending authority limitations for the executive director.

Individual ISO May Donations Help Make Up Loss in Sales

We are still expiring some effects of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic. The month of May was about the same as April. Cash flow income this month recovered due to individual donations almost making up for the drop in sales. We still lag

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behind our goal for individual LifeLines. We had a net income deficit of \$3,118. We had budgeted for a deficit of \$6,438. Our total income was \$12,626 lower than our budgeted income of \$69,727. Our gross profit (total income minus cost of goods) was \$7,730 lower than our budgeted amount of \$60,859. Our expenses were \$11,050 lower than our estimated expenses of \$67,297. Overall the book sales, pamphlets, chips, and medallions were down. Individual LifeLines are still down, but individual general donations are up. Both group LifeLines and general donations are above budget. Eliminating CPC initiatives and credit card fees being lower have helped the bottom line.

- » Our total SAA Green Book sales were below our estimate of \$8,325 by \$4,021 in May. Our HCI sales (April's numbers, a month behind) were \$1,483 lower than budgeted. For the year we are at 86.01% of our estimated sales. Findaway audio sales were \$25 above our budget of \$225.
- » Our book *Voices in Recovery* sales for May were \$1,351 below our budget of \$2,900 for May.
- » Our pamphlet and booklet sales were below our estimate of \$5,900 by \$4,934 in May. For the year we are at 66.84% of our estimated sales.
- » Our plastic chips sales were below our estimate of \$1,775 by \$1,427 in May. For the year we are at 67.47% of our estimated sales.
- » Our bronze medallion sales were below our estimate of \$2,700 by \$2,225 in May. For the year we are at 68.60% of our estimated sales.
- » Our total sales for May were below our estimate of \$21,952 by \$14,111 in May. For the year we are at 75.87% of our estimated sales. As the results of physical distancing in response to COVID-19 and most face-to-face meetings going electronic, continue to cause our sales to drop in May.
- » Our product inventory is valued at \$92,368.
- » Our operational reserve is funded at \$200,021. Our estimated four month reserve is \$237,350.
- » Our total expenses were lower than our budget by \$11,050, and our net income was \$3,320 above our deficit budget of \$6,438.

Individual donations were above our estimate of \$33,350 by \$431 in May. For the year we are at 99.80% of our estimated individual donations. The general donations were higher than budgeted by \$7,599 and the shortfall of the LifeLine Partners was \$7,169. LifeLines match is at \$7495/month and we are at 93.68% of the match.

Group donations were below our estimate of \$11,250 by \$2,527 in May. For the

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year we are at 118.72% of our estimated group donations. Our total donations were \$2,957, above the budgeted amount of \$44,600.

August International Women's Retreat Goes Online, Seeks Volunteers

The SAA Women's Intergroup proudly presents the 2020 International Women's Retreat. Planned for the weekend of Saturday, August 8, and Sunday, August 9, the free event will take place via Zoom, and is intended for women in recovery who are seeking the fellowship, experience, strength, and hope of other women in the program.

The virtual retreat will have keynote speakers, workshops, and breakout rooms for fellowship, sharing, and support from temporary sponsors, as well as quiet reflection and meditation.

So, save the date, spread the word and get in on this groundbreaking inaugural event sponsored by the SAA Women's Intergroup. More Registration information will be available on the ISO website soon!

Please consider volunteering for the following opportunities

- » Technical skills: PowerPoint expertise, Zoom platform, recording workshops, on-line registration, setting up PayPal for donations
- » Writing skills: articles for "The Outer Circle" newsletters, bios for guest speakers, descriptions of workshops
- » Communication skills: volunteer coordination, sharing retreat details at meetings, follow-up evaluations
- » spiritual room monitors: Zoom hosts/co-hosts for the meet & greet chat rooms

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact:

Carly in Canada 1-778-839-6035 or email us at saa.women.retreat@gmail.com.

NomCom Seeks Service Resumes from Fellowship

Service opportunities abound within the ISO, ranging from participation within one of the new ISO areas to joining an ISO focus committee to serving on the ISO Board of Trustees, ISO Literature Committee, or one of the ISO Conference committees — Conference Steering Committee, Area Coordinating Committee, or Conference Nominating Committee.

And there is an ongoing need for more trusted servants within the ISO. Toward this end, the Conference Nominating Committee is encouraging members throughout the fellowship to consider what opportunities exist and to submit service resumes.

Submitting a service resume does not obligate anyone to a service position, it simply indicates an interest. If a person's interest fits an ISO need, then a member of the Nominating Committee can explain what is involved and share the benefits of service.

If this short article has piqued your interest, go now to the ISO service website at www.saa-iso.org, and click on "International Service" near the top of the left-hand menu. Then click on the image of the service resume. You can download the form or fill it out online. Also, on that page are links to descriptions of the responsibilities and expectations of trusted servants on the Board, Literature Committee, and Area Coordinating Committee.

Anyone wishing to be considered for a position beginning in October 2020 should submit a service resume to the ISO office by July 31.

Prisoner Outreach Offers Four-Step Guide to Service

Looking for a service opportunity for yourself or a sponsee? Look no further! Corresponding with a jailed or imprisoned member of the fellowship is an activity that is both rewarding to the letter writer and helpful to a person who does not have access to face-to-face meetings.

The ISO Prisoner Outreach Committee has developed guidelines and procedures to facilitate the process and to ensure ease of use, safety, anonymity, and confidentiality for letter writers. It's as easy as 1-2-3-4.

1. Go to the ISO service website (www.saa-iso.org); click on prisoner Outreach in the left-hand menu.
2. Review the recommended process and the additional helpful hints.
3. If it piques your interest, complete the form right there on the website and submit it electronically directly to the ISO office.
4. Then standby for assignment to a prisoner.

While qualifications to participate in this program suggest at least one year in the fellowship and six months of continuous abstinence from Inner Circle behavior, persons with less experience and sobriety, who have demonstrated commitment and diligence in working their recovery program, may be granted an exception, if approved by their sponsor.

The ISO receives many requests from prisoners for literature and for someone with whom they can correspond. Serving as a letter writer meets that need and will surely

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buttress the letter writer's program of recovery.

If you have any problems logging in, call the ISO office at 713-869-4902 or email info@saa-recovery.org.

Upcoming Zoom Forums: LGBT Issues, The Group Guide, and ISA

The General Outreach Committee is offer Zoom meetings on a variety of subjects. Meetings will be the second Wednesday each month 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. Central Time. Contact info@saa-recovery.org for call in info.

Upcoming forums:

- » July 8th LGBT Issues in Recovery
- » August 12th *The Group Guide*...a handbook of suggestions to keep your meetings healthy
- » Sept 9th Sexual and Intimacy Avoidance — how to support members with these issues

CSC Offers a Variety of Assistance in Forming Areas

A big part of the work of the CSC this service year is to help areas prepare for participation in the upcoming 2020 ISO Conference. To this end, a variety of ways for SAA members to connect with others for support in getting their area up and running have been established. Here is a list of them and how to connect:

1. Check out the “Draft Area Assembly Handbook,” loaded with suggestions and ideas for your first area assembly and participation at the Conference. It can be accessed at our service website: www.saa-iso.org.
2. Join our monthly “Lets Talk” Zoom meeting where up and running areas will present some aspect of how they got started, followed by a sharing of ideas and best practices conversation open to all on the call. For the Zoom info and future dates contact us at csc.feedback@saa-iso.org.
3. A group of SAA members, each with experience in starting an area, have formed the Area Mentoring Workgroup. Each member of the workgroup is willing to work one-on-one with anyone willing to advocate for organizing their area and preparing for the conference. Contact the workgroup for assistance at our email.
4. Finally, we are currently working on holding a Zoom delegate communication meeting in August and September focused on preparing delegates for the ISO Conference. Contact us at our email and check the service website for dates and times.

CONTACT THE ISO

Want to connect with the International Service Organization website, staff, Board of Trustees, trusted servants, or special workers? Here's the contact info you need:

Office

ISO Office Mailing Address:
PO Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270

Phone: 713-869-4902
Fax: 713-692-0105

Office e-mail: info@saa-recovery.org
The Outer Circle e-mail: toc@saa-recovery.org
Website: www.saa-recovery.org

The Outer Circle

Editor: Gary T.: toc@saa-recovery.org

The ISO of SAA Board of Trustees also has an e-mail box, which may be used to register comments, positive or negative, from the fellowship about the ISO staff: board@saa-recovery.org

Board of Trustees and Literature Committee

Board

Bob L (Chair); Carl D (Vice Chair)
Bob H (Treasurer); Les J (Secretary)
Andy M; David H; Eddie N; Melissa W
Mike L; Mike S; Richard N; Richard S
Wayne B; Wayne K

Board: board@saa-recovery.org
CSC: csc@saa-recovery.org
LitCom: litcom@saa-recovery.org

Office Staff

Executive Director: Paul M.: director@saa-iso.net
Associate Director: Chris F.
Publications Manager: Cody S.
Public Information, Cooperation with the Professional Community, and 7th Tradition Manager: Phillip B.
Project Manager: Tracy R.
Information Technician and Prison Outreach Manager: Jonathan C.
Information Technician: DJ B.
Administrative Assistant: Jerry B.
Administrative Assistant: Evan E.
Administrative Assistant: Harvey A.

Literature Committee

Jim L (Chair); Doug S (2nd Chair)
Byard B (Secretary); Bruce M
Carole D; Carol R; Charlie K
Deb W; Don R; Gary T (TOC Editor)
Mike B; Neil W; Steven P

Calendar - All times are CST. To attend a meeting email info@saa-recovery.org or call the ISO

First Sunday of the month

CSC: Policy & Procedure: 2:00 p.m.
Intergroup Communications: 3:00 p.m.

First Wednesday of the month

Prisoner Outreach: 7:00 p.m.

First Saturday of the month

Intimacy and Sexual Avoidance: 9 a.m.
Author's Group: 4:00 p.m.

Second Saturday of the month

Women's Outreach: 10 a.m.

Second Sunday of the month

Literature Committee: 4:00 p.m.

Second Thursday of the month

Seventh Tradition: 6:00 p.m.

Third Saturday of the month

Area Coordinating Committee: 4:00 p.m.
CSC: Twelve Concepts Work Group: 12:00 p.m.
CSC: Charters and Bylaws: 12:00 p.m.

Third Sunday of the month

ISOP Committee: 2:00 p.m.
CSC: Communications: 2 p.m.
LGBT Outreach: 3:00 p.m.

Fourth Saturday of the month

Area Handbook Workgroup: 11 a.m.

Fourth Sunday of the month

Conference Steering Committee: 2:00 p.m.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Get Your Story Published in *The Outer Circle*

The Outer Circle newsletter relies on submissions from the SAA fellowship. It's a great way to carry the message to other sex addicts in the spirit of Step Twelve — and be of service! Articles may be submitted to toc@saa-recovery.org or to the ISO office. Please submit articles via email in Microsoft Word format with the **RELEASE FORM** at the bottom of this page.

Deadlines for Submission and Topics		
Jan/Feb:	“Taking Action”	Nov 5
Mar/Apr:	“Healthier Sexuality”	Jan 5
May/June:	“First Three Steps”	Mar 5
July/Aug:	“Prayer, Meditation”	May 5
Sept/Oct:	“Steps Six and Seven”	July 5
Nov/Dec:	“Giving Back”	Sept 5

Here are some general writing guidelines:

Living in Sobriety: For those with five-plus years of sobriety. 750-900 words on how you got sober and what you're doing to stay sober.

Stories of Service: 300-500 words on why you do service and how it helps your recovery.

Feature articles: 650-1,200 words on any of the topics listed above. It may be helpful to think of your submission as a written form of a share you'd give in a meeting — something that's working for you or that you're struggling with in recovery as it relates to the steps or traditions.

General Release Form

In consideration of being reviewed for possible publication, I hereby transfer and release to the ISO of SAA, Inc (assignee) all legal rights to the publication of my submission(s) or any edited version thereof in any official ISO publication, including Sex Addicts Anonymous, The Outer Circle, the SAA meditation book, the SAA websites, or any other SAA program material, such as pamphlets, booklets and audio recordings.

With this submission, I transfer to the assignee without limitation the legal title and all literary rights, including copyright and/or trademark and the full right and license to reproduce, copy, edit for content, modify, distribute, and create derivatives from the submitted work. I understand that every effort will be made to safeguard my personal anonymity in the publication and distribution of this material. I also understand that I may or may not receive further communication regarding my submission prior to its publication.

I hereby further attest that I possess full legal capacity to exercise this authorization, and I hereby Release the assignee from any claim whatsoever by me or my successors.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Printed name: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____

Printed name: _____

SAA TWELVE STEPS

- 1.** We admitted we were powerless over addictive sexual behavior - that our lives had become unmanageable.
- 2.** Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- 3.** Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
- 4.** Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
- 5.** Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
- 6.** Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
- 7.** Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
- 8.** Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
- 9.** Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
- 10.** Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
- 11.** Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
- 12.** Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other sex addicts and to practice these principles in our lives.