

# Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous

FINAL DRAFT – for discussion and review

## SLAA 12 & 12

### The Twelve Steps & The Twelve Traditions

Text includes final working draft of the 12 Steps and the 12 Traditions (Oct 2020).

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# The Twelve Steps

## Step One:

***We admitted we were powerless over sex and love addiction  
— that our lives had become unmanageable.***

We attended our first meeting of SLAA because we were in pain. Perhaps we were directed here by a therapist or a relationship partner, but this was never a place we had intended to be. The trajectory we had envisioned for our life did not include membership in any 12 Step program, especially one focused on sex and/or love. This was not a Fellowship we were looking forward to being a part of. But the pain had become too much. We realized we needed help. What we found here was remarkable.

When we finally walked into a SLAA meeting, we heard members sharing intimate details about their lives. For some of us it happened slowly and for others quickly, but all of us have become part of the WE that makes up this Fellowship. We were no longer alone. We recognized people who were like us. We had had the misconception that we were the only ones who thought and acted like we did, but now we found a whole Fellowship of similar people. And we found a program which, when practiced diligently, would not only relieve our addiction but also provide us with a contented and satisfied life.

The pain was slow to go away. Coming to our first meeting was certainly a big part of working Step One, but we also needed to admit and accept the reality of our situation. We needed to face and accept our powerlessness. We needed to understand how life was unmanageable for us. We needed to break through our denial. We needed to become part of the Fellowship.

Many of us landed at the doors of SLAA following a long, winding quest for control. We felt we needed to handle our disease by ourselves. We felt we could fix ourselves. We sought control over the circumstances of our lives, and we sought control over other people. More than anything, we sought control over our own emotions including fear, anxiety, boredom, loneliness, resentment, worry. But we failed. Our lives were out of control. We needed help.

We call the compulsive and obsessive behavior that characterizes our addiction either acting out, or acting in. Acting out is avoidance of life by escaping our emotions; we act out our feelings rather than feel them, rather than address them in a grown-up way. When we act in, we also avoid life by restricting ourselves from living; we use negative emotions such as guilt, shame, and unpleasant memories to prevent ourselves from pursuing relationships and sexual pleasure. We feel we don't deserve happiness. On the one hand, we do things that cause harm (acting out), on the other hand, we do nothing, also causing harm (acting in). The motivation is the same: to avoid our feelings.

The manner in which our sex and love addiction expressed itself was as varied as our individual personalities. Our obsessive/compulsive behaviors shared a common feature: our acting out, or acting in, altered our emotions and thoughts. We were able to escape from life. Our behaviors could take many forms, including but not limited to: compulsive masturbation; romantic obsessions/emotional attachments; fantasy; habitual use of pornography; avoidance of both sexual and emotional intimacy; exchanging money, resources or favors for sex; infidelity; having anonymous sex; and repeatedly engaging in sex that involves deceit of others. Some of us compulsively avoided sex and relationships while others compulsively moved from one relationship to the next or maintained multiple relationships concurrently, with, or without, the knowledge of our partners. This list is not exhaustive. Many of us have engaged in some, or several, of the behaviors listed and others not listed. Many of us exchanged one behavior for another, cycling through one after another, switching when the pain became too much.

Whatever forms our acting out or acting in behavior took, we were isolated. We lived a secret life. We were alone. We were afraid of being alone, but we were also afraid of being with people, at least in any emotionally intimate way. We confused sex with intimacy, blocking any chance for a healthy human relationship. We confused abstinence and isolation with health. We confused fantasy with reality. We had no idea what a healthy relationship looked like, no idea what a normal relationship could be.

The central feature characterizing SLAA members is that we eventually reached a point of powerlessness: a point at which we lacked the ability to choose whether or not to engage in these behaviors. Most of us felt at moments, sometimes for years and decades, that we were in control and doing what we wanted. In fact, one of the major highs that our acting out, or acting in, behavior gave us was the sensation of control. We had the brief illusion of being free, powerful, and safe.

Eventually, we began to experience episodes where we promised ourselves we would not engage in a behavior, yet we did it anyway. We could not stop. Many of us realized that our behaviors were harmful, yet we were not prepared to give them up entirely. We tried to control and enjoy our sex and love behaviors. Our idea was that we would do just enough to feel a thrill, but not enough to spiral out of control.

But once we entertained the possibility of acting out, or in, for any period of time, it set in motion a train of compulsive thoughts, rituals and behaviors over which we had no power to stop. We were defenseless against the ideas and thoughts that came from our memories, from our fantasies, and from the culture around us. We each paid a terrible personal cost in terms of emotional well-being, sense of self-worth, and mental health. The harder we tried to control our behavior, the more we came to realize just how out of control, how powerless, we were.

We were unable to manage our time. We were unable to manage our money.

We experienced legal troubles. We failed to meet work commitments and often shirked such responsibilities that would get in the way of our acting out or in. We spent considerable sums of money in pursuit of our addiction, wiping out savings and even going into serious debt. Some of us even acted out viewing pornography at our workplace or making advances to coworkers. Some of us lost our jobs.

In our relationships with partners, we were alternately impatient, temperamental or doting. We manipulated situations, frequently convincing others something was wrong with them. We falsified reality to protect our pride, our self-esteem, our honor, and to conceal our shame. If we were questioned about our lying or behavior we might say, “You’re paranoid because of your own insecurity” in an attempt to redirect attention away from us. All of this was done in an effort to protect ourselves from consequences. We were fashioning an alternative to the havoc in our lives by lying, by creating a falsified, imaginary reality.

Many of us spent years in self-deception. We simply told ourselves we could quit if we really wanted to. If we really wanted to, we could find and establish a healthy relationship. We adopted philosophical or religious outlooks that gave greater meaning or legitimacy to our self-destructive behaviors. We denied that we had a problem, rationalizing our behavior with any number of self-justifying defenses. We insisted to ourselves that our behavior was normal, that we would stop if events got out of control. We were in denial. We would often decide that we would not engage in a specific behavior yet engaged in the behavior shortly after our resolution. We would reason that perhaps engaging in the behavior was OK after all. Our boundaries were forever changing because, in truth, we were largely incapable of establishing boundaries for ourselves or respecting those of others.

By the time most of us arrived in a meeting of SLAA, dishonesty had become a way of life. We lied to partners about where we were, or who we were with. We lied to ourselves to bury our pain. Often, we lied for no apparent reason. Deception had become the manner in which we lived. Underneath all of it was a profound and enduring sense of shame: a belief that we lacked basic worth or were somehow “less than.” This dishonesty, this inability or unwillingness to acknowledge and accept reality, was a core driver of our disease.

The emotional and mental pain produced by our powerlessness over our addiction was suffering enough. However, in order to recover, we needed to dig deeper. It is clear that our acting out, or in, behaviors adversely impacted every area of our life and the lives of those around us. We wanted to stop but did not have the power. We realized that not only were we unable to control our addiction, our lives were filled with chaos. We needed to change not just our behavior but our whole approach to living. The fact was that our lives were, and are, unmanageable.

Acknowledging this truth — that we could not manage our own lives — is critical to our recovery.

Some of us wrote out a history of our sexual and relationship experiences. Once we could see what we had done and what had been done to us, there was no room for denial. Once we inventoried what we had avoided, what we had run away from, we could not deny our situation. We shared our Step One inventory with our sponsor, or at a meeting, reducing the chances of our denial resurfacing.

Once we acquired the willingness to look at ourselves and our lives honestly, healing became possible. We accepted life as it is, allowing ourselves to have hope and engagement. We admitted defeat. We found we were not alone. We admitted we were powerless over people, places, and things. Sobriety became possible. The ability to live, and accept life as it unfolds, on a moment by moment basis, became possible. We surrendered our need to control and began a life filled with acceptance of the reality that surrounds us. We recognized that we were addicts. We were powerless and our life was indeed unmanageable. We had worked Step One. We started on the process of recovery.

If by recognizing our problem, and stopping our addictive behaviors, we could regain the ability to manage our lives, we would not need to work the next eleven steps. Unfortunately, much of life is outside of our control. We can determine our behavior to some extent, but we are powerless over what results. We can make good choices; with help we can stop lying to everyone around us, we can stop acting out, or in, one day at a time, but until we admit that our lives are ultimately beyond our control — until we admit that we are sex and/or love addicts and cannot manage our own lives — we remain in the grip of this destructive disease.

We realized we must practice this Step every day. No matter how many twenty-four hours we have in the program, when we wake up each morning we are still sex and/or love addicts. For our own well-being we admit each day that we cannot manage our lives, we need help from a Higher Power, and we are powerless over this disease. Although we are powerless, luckily, we are not helpless. Step Two, the very next Step, provides the hope, the power, the solution to our difficulties.

## **Step Two:**

***Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.***

There was a definitive moment when we admitted to ourselves – or were forced to admit by others – that our desires for sex, love, or sex and love were far from right-sized. Or that our desire to isolate from others was not a reasonable approach to living. We had passed from believing in our dominion over life to seeing that we were completely powerless. Our lives had become unmanageable. We did not know the exact instant we went from master of our addiction to its slave. What we did know is that we were in

tremendous pain. And we wanted it to stop. We really had no choice. Our alternatives were limited, each sadder and more desperate than the last.

In the past, we had tried on our own to stop the behaviors we found most troubling. In some cases we were successful. For a moment. Or a day. Or perhaps even a month or more. But inevitably, the harder we pushed away at the very parts of our being that we found most troubling, the greater their strength in pushing back. It was as though we were wrestling a gigantic, unrelenting, tireless beast — one with no conscience and no thought other than to completely destroy its opponent. Our addictive beast was an equal-opportunity destructive energy. And one that no human force could slay. In this spiritual mismatch, it was inevitable that we would be forced to surrender. And eventually, grudgingly, we did.

Having admitted our powerlessness and that we could not manage our own lives, we realized we had to find a new approach. We needed to find a routine and learn to trust guidance from others. We needed to find a power we could trust to guide us through this life.

Yet the idea of a power even greater than our strongest inner demons seemed implausible. Many of us already had much experience with traditional religious practices. If the iconic figure of the faith we'd practiced (sometimes for many years) had not protected us from ourselves, we wondered why we should trust it now? If insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results, isn't placing faith in the same deity that watched passively while we destroyed ourselves misguided at best?

Some of us had no traditional faith. Others were virulently opposed to even the concept of a Higher Power. "The universe is random," we would say. "Why would I put my faith in something that does not exist?" And yet we had put our faith in acting out, or acting in, as behaviors that would make us feel better, that would solve our misery. We made that person, or that other one, a higher power. Some of us had a conception of a God that we believed in, but when we really thought about it, we did not trust God would save us. At other times, we made a song, a book, an aphorism, or a place our higher power — something that had more power than we did. We tried self-help programs, systems of philosophies, exercise regimens, all without success. Why, then, when we were offered a way out by finding a spiritual Higher Power, did we balk?

For most of us, the idea of relying on an invisible being, concept or spirit was an action that we took not in faith. Or even in hope. It was literally an act of desperation.

We had long ago checked the final item on our "try this" list. We had run out of options.

And so we went to meetings. We went to our first meeting. It was something we never had imagined as our path, never in a million years. Then again, neither was our addiction. As we went to more meetings, we recognized that we had not traveled our path alone, that countless others had been to their first meeting long before we came to ours. We realized that the path, both into recovery and along its Twelve Steps, was well trod by the feet of those whose actions prior to entering the program might have been very different from ours but whose pain and desperate need of relief from it were very much the same.

In time, we saw people getting chips. Some for a day of sobriety, others for a year or more. And we experienced that the very real joy shared by those witnessing these important milestones was as exuberant for those claiming 24 hours of sobriety as it was for those who had earned 24 months. Sometimes even greater. As we thought about our own inability to stop acting out, or acting in — sometimes after years of trying — it became clear why a single day was as important as a dozen years.

Sobriety can only truly be measured one day at a time.

The very real successes of others awakened us to the reality that a better, more fulfilling life awaited us, if only we were willing to work for it. We'd seen the Twelve Steps work for others. Maybe they would work for us. It was at this point that our relentless "Why me?" / "Why am I an addict?" underwent a metamorphosis, blossoming into an insistent "Why not me?" / "Don't I deserve a life that is as content as the recovering addicts I have met?"

With an honest, if hesitant, yes, we sought greater understanding of how other addicts had realized their relief from their acting out, or acting in, behaviors. We saw that while in each case many of the same tools (sponsorship, meetings, step work, service) were used to secure even a day's sobriety, in every case, the bedrock of their recovery was spiritual. We found something beyond our ego that allowed us into the world, that joined us in community with people, with the whole diverse universe. Our ego wanted to keep us separate, but we broke through the partition our ego created and joined the human race. We developed a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves which could now guide and sustain us in recovery.

And to our surprise we did not need to understand this Higher Power. We did not really even need to define it unless we wanted to. We did not need to worry about anyone else's idea. This was a Higher Power of our own. The important idea was that we began to understand that we were not in control, that we did not have the power.

It was at this moment that we came to believe that our addiction was less a behavioral disorder than a spiritual one. Our thinking had been flawed, but we could, aided by a Power greater than ourselves, add an all-important positive positioning to our thinking. And if thoughts become actions, then it was only by constructive thoughts that we could – and would – act our way into a new way of being. It was in this moment that a belief in a Higher Power became essential. We knew that since it was our best thinking that created the insane behavior that brought us into the program, it would certainly take a much loftier power to restore us to sanity.

Realizing our need for a Higher Power to restore us to sanity, the question became, what exactly is a Higher Power? We know it is not us, nor the object of our obsessions, nor any other individual. Fortunately, we needn't struggle searching for an agreed upon definition of our Higher Power. Just as we honestly defined our own bottom lines in SLAA, so too, do we create our own definition of a "Power greater than ourselves." Some defined that Power as God, Jesus, Krishna, Allah, Muhammad or another traditional religious deity. Others worked within Buddhist concepts, Native American concepts, the Tao or other "non-Western" traditions. Some considered their SLAA home group, or the whole Fellowship, as their Higher Power. Still others didn't confine a Higher Power to any single thing, insisting that a Higher Power is too big to be defined. It's a Great Mystery. These folks considered all of nature, science, the Great Reality or the astonishing kaleidoscopic universe as a Power greater than themselves.

Regardless of exactly how each of us defined our Higher Power, two suggested attributes of any Higher Power were that it is loving and caring. And this only makes sense. After all, why would we want to be guided by a power that didn't have our greatest welfare at heart? It was our misplaced faith in the belief that we were unworthy, that we were less than everyone else, that brought us into the program in the first place. Now, we had come to believe in a Power that loves and cares for us. We are worthy. We are imperfect. We are frightened much of the time. Nevertheless, we are accepted. We are loved and forgiven. We had come to believe.

We had found a Power we trusted, a power that would restore us to sanity. Now the question was – just what is sanity? We had several sources to which we might look for guidance. The most obvious one was our sponsor. We chose our sponsor because he or she had what we wanted. And while we may think that what most attracted us to our sponsor was their status in the group, their years of sobriety, or their

personal or business success, the greatest force pulling us toward our sponsor was his or her undeniable sense of calm.

While we may not yet know exactly what sanity looks and feels like, we certainly remembered our experience with insanity. And with growing confidence, we embraced a brighter, more hopeful path, one that filled us with as much optimism as our old ways had burdened us with shame.

In our days of acting out, we went from one addictive hit to the next, often stopping only to fuel our bodies with just enough food and rest to allow us to act out again. In recovery, we were learning to take it easy. We were learning to do the next thing in front of us without the stress of contemplating all the things we have to do. We were learning we could go slowly without feeling the stress of the world around us demanding results. We were learning to look for balance and harmony. We were learning to find serenity in small things. We felt free to start over whenever we needed to.

What is most heartening is that we realized that our Higher Power – however we defined it – had been with us all along, just waiting for us to be willing to allow Him, Her, It or Them to support us on our miraculous journey. Remember the countless times that the planets aligned just right to help us avoid a slip, make a meeting, support other addicts in their recovery or simply do the right thing? We had heard it said that, “A coincidence is just God’s way of staying anonymous.” Not coincidentally, the longer we were in recovery, the more coincidences we encountered. And the more we reflected upon it, the clearer the reason for our ever more frequent good fortunes became. We suddenly realized that our Higher Power was doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

We now allowed our Higher Power the opportunity to help us in ways that we could not, or would not, help ourselves. We remembered that, before recovery, we thought we had all the answers and knew what to do and the result was our addiction and the intense pain we caused to others and ourselves. Now, we allowed our sponsor, program readings, the support of other addicts, and thoughtful prayer and meditation to offer new ways of thinking, of acting, and of being. We allowed our Higher Power to direct us. We welcomed the Great Mystery into our life.

It was with this realization — it was with the desire to fill our lives with the positive guidance provided by our Higher Power — that led us to Step Three.

### **Step Three:**

#### ***Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.***

We admitted we were powerless and we could not manage our own lives. We came to believe that there was a Power — a power that was not me — that could give us a life without addiction. We realized doing things our way had not ended up well.

We found a Fellowship. We asked for help. What do we do next?

We could go back to our addiction — its pull remained strong — but despite any belief to the contrary, the consequences would be worse than those we had had before. We were no longer in control of the outcome of our actions — the illusion that we ever were had been abandoned. And even if we were not concerned with the consequences, the peace we had found in this Fellowship was something we really wanted to keep. We were no longer alone. We had been led to these rooms by a power greater than ourselves. There was a power that cared for us and somehow brought us here. There was a power that already intervened in our lives to get us to the Fellowship. Our understanding of this Higher Power was our own concern. It mattered not what religious affiliation we might have, or if we had no affiliation at

all; it mattered not if our Higher Power was female or male, or one or many, or a concept such as the Fellowship. Many of us had strongly held allegiances to a formal religious organization, but many of us did not. It made no difference; we were bound together by our common disease and our common solution.

We realized that we could decide we want what those in the Fellowship have. We wanted what those folks — those folks we see at meetings — have: peace and serenity and spiritual presence. They seemed so calm, so centered, so aware. We found hope and peace in the rooms. We began to trust that a solution was available to us. We began to believe that there was a way out for us. We decided to turn our lives over to that solution. We made a commitment to work the rest of the Steps, to do the work, to practice the principles. We made a decision.

We were learning how to be honest with ourselves and others. We were learning to see. We were slowly developing healthy relationships with others inside and outside of the program and beginning to feel comfortable with who we were and with those around us who also had this disease. We were told to “keep coming back,” which was not something anyone, anywhere, had been eager to say to us before. With each meeting we attended, we felt more hope. We came to believe that there was a Higher Power that could help us, and now, in the rooms, we saw the evidence of that Power moving with and through people whose problems were like our own. We found a place where we could openly share our guilt, our shame and the feelings that had possessed us for so long. We found a place where we could talk openly about our acting in or acting out.

But meetings were not enough. The solution was a continual practice of the Steps. We hesitated. Did we have to turn over our entire life to this Higher Power? Could we just turn over the sex and love part and keep managing the rest? After all, the rest of our life was not in such awful condition. Well, at least not yet. We reflected on this monumental surrender. If we turned everything over to God, would we end up with no possessions, helping people in the desert or in the jungle? Would we still be able to go bowling? Finally, we realized the decision had been made for us. If we wanted a better life, we had no choice but to surrender entirely. We could not live as we had been any longer. We could not go back to our addiction. Our only choice was to move forward into recovery. As painful as it was, we realized that the solution had to come from outside our limited selves. We had to be humble, open-minded and willing. We were totally defeated. We were totally hollowed out.

We made a commitment to do the next right thing and let go of the results.

Letting go was hard; simple maybe, but not easy. It made no difference how much we read, how much we studied, how much we learned or even how much we talked about letting go. Recovery had nothing to do with figuring out our predicament or what got us here. We needed to let go of all these things. We needed to hold our hands out palm down, open up our fists, and drop the garbage. We needed to trust that the world was as it should be and that our Higher Power would guide the future. We needed to let the world be. We needed to put Step One into practice by accepting the reality around us and trusting the Higher Power we found in Step Two to show us the way. If we were to find the serenity and peace we saw around us, we had to turn over our control to a Higher Power.

We had come to believe that repeating the same behaviors and expecting different results were never going to work out for us. We had come to believe. Now the question was: Had we learned to trust our Higher Power? Trust was the fundamental question. Without trust, we could not let go, we could not commit, we could not turn over our thoughts and actions to a Higher Power. How could we trust our lives to a power that we could not fully comprehend? We found some way to make the leap. We renewed our trust, making that leap anew, over and over, every morning and throughout every day.

It was disturbing to realize that sex and the blind pursuit of love and approval were enmeshed in so many areas of our lives. And, on the flip side, for the anorexic, the denial of contact with others, the deprivation of the joy of companionship and the withdrawal from human involvement was entangled in every stratum of our existence. No bit of our life had escaped the contamination of our addiction. We feared intimacy, and it showed. We literally were possessed by our addiction on every level of our being. We had no choice but to surrender all of our life and our will to the care of our Higher Power.

But we did have that choice to make: on the one hand, absolute surrender of every facet of our will and our life over to the care of our Higher Power, or, on the other hand, continue to deny, rationalize, control and eventually get pulled back into the insanity. We were taught growing up that surrender was for cowards and that we should fight back. Now we learned that surrender was the only successful strategy. We needed to change our attitudes as well as our actions. As painful as it was to face, we were powerless over our entire life. We realized that as addicts we could not manage our own life. We realized we had not grown up yet. Only our Higher Power could help, if we let that Higher Power in.

We were not passive. We took the action of letting go. We took refuge in our Higher Power, in our Fellowship and in recovery literature. We made the decision to work the rest of the Steps, certain that we would be aided in our recovery. We faced the reality that we did not have to recover alone; in fact, we could not recover by ourselves. We grasped that our life was beyond our self-centered control, but we still had choices to make. We used our will to let go, to surrender. We chose to put the care and control of our lives in the hands of our Higher Power. We chose to put all the little triggers and payoffs in the hands of someone or something else. We chose to put all the negative energy aside. We made room, little by little, for the positive power as it showed up in our lives.

Often, during the day, we took back control of our thoughts and actions. At first, these were subtle resurreptions of control over small things. We thought we had made some progress and could handle life. We tried again to manage our life on our own. We seemed to be cured. We began to rely more on self-propulsion. Before we knew it, we were in full relapse, acting out or acting in more severely than before.

Despite renewed shame, we returned to the Fellowship. We went back to a meeting. We made the leap again. We turned over everything to some Higher Power who was loving and caring. We made progress. We stumbled into the future with our ego taking back control from time to time and then relinquishing it again. We avoided relapse. We repeated our attempts to manage and control. We let it go again. We repeated the back and forth with our Higher Power, as often as we needed. The exchange became a form of communication with God.

And we took action. We moved our feet. We moved forward. Unlike the Major League baseball player who, after coming back from drug rehabilitation, went up to bat for the first time and watched three perfect strikes whiz past him. In the dugout the manager asked, "What happened?" and the player responded, "I was waiting for God to tell me to swing...." No, we would not be passive. It was up to us to take the swing to the best of our ability; we left the results in God's hands. We did not wait for God to tell us what to do. We had our recovery literature and we had meetings. We had our Fellowship. Our instructions were simple: Don't act out (or in), go to meetings, work with others, and practice the steps... Practice them again.

While the action of letting go seemed small, the effect was immense. We began to focus more on what we could add to a situation, how we could help. And we stopped thinking in terms of what we could get out of each situation. We eventually even thought about what we could bring to a meeting rather than what we could take from it. We began to think in terms of how we could help another addict instead of

only how the Fellowship could help us. We took the action of deciding to work the program, completing the work of Step Three. Now we were faced with more action.

In our recovery each new day brought new challenges. Everything changed. Our completion of Step Three one day only meant we needed to work it again the next. We woke up each morning faced with a decision. We once again committed to recovery.

We asked for help. We meditated and prayed as best we could. We asked for help to focus our thoughts on having a simple attitude. We admitted that we were powerless, that we could not manage our own lives, that there was a Power that would care for us, and we committed to following the suggestions laid out in our program of recovery.

We made a decision. Our intentions were clear. We would practice Step Three on a daily basis and begin our work on the remaining Steps starting with Step Four.

## **Step Four:**

### ***Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.***

In the first three Steps, we faced our reality. We began to develop an attitude of humility, admitting that we could not manage our own lives, but that a power greater than ourselves could. We made a commitment to recovery. Now, in Step Four, we dug deeper. We sought to discover the causes and conditions that led us to our addiction, that prevented us from recovery, and the tools we could carry with us to lead us out.

We were addicted. Hopeless, but not helpless. We were told there was a solution. Old Timers told us this Step would provide relief. We had to be thorough. We became willing. Willingness was the key to a fearless look into our past. Until now we had hidden our heads in the sand when forced to look at our own behavior. Unless we wanted to go on living exactly as we had been — living a life filled with misery and despair — we had to make a beginning. With the help of our friends in recovery and our Higher Power, we started. However tenuously, we began to write.

We made a decision, a commitment, in Step Three to be willing to work the following Steps. It was an opening up to a Higher Power. Getting started, we may have felt dread, confusion, fear and anxiety. Step Four appeared overwhelming, confusing. There were so many different ways to work this Step, and a number of good templates to choose from. Step Four needed to be written. We worked with our sponsor. We chose a method, a framework to use for the inventory. It didn't matter which method as long as we got started. We jumped in. If we were afraid, we asked for help. We started writing with whatever courage we could rally. We had doubts, but we continued to write.

We checked in with our sponsor and other program friends regularly. Working with a sponsor was critical for this Step and, frankly, for all of the Steps. As we went through our day, we thought of things that we needed to inventory. We spent more time writing. When we came to something we had hoped would never see the light of day, we asked ourselves how free we wanted to be. We wrote it down.

To start, perhaps we focused on one relationship. We wrote down the name of that girl or boy from school. Or we started with our family. We wrote down our father, mother, or siblings. We listed some names and what they had done to us. Or we organized our Fourth Step around categories of behavior — for example, lies we had told; secrets we had kept. We talked to our sponsor and other program friends.

Many of us suffered from perfectionism. So, we decided not to worry about how flawed our first attempt might be. To inventory is simply to make a list. We looked to inventory some of our glaring handicaps,

our failings. We made a list of, for example, our resentments, our fears, and our harmful behaviors. Or we made a list of how we had failed to live up to the spiritual tenets of our faith. Or we made a list of our troubling emotions — for example, fear, loneliness, self-pity, shame, anxiety, jealousy. We made a list of the sex behaviors that had caused us trouble. We realized our inventory would not be perfect, and we pressed on. While sex and love were our main problems, we did not neglect to inventory our financial failings, our aggressive behaviors, our avoidance techniques.

Avoiding perfectionism, we balanced our inventory with our assets as well as our defects. No inventory is complete without noting the positives as well as the negatives. We listed our positive attributes, perhaps noting specific instances when we were living up to our highest ideals. These positive attributes and actions were important to help provide a complete and balanced inventory of who we were.

Our inventory included what we had done and what had been done to us. In some situations we had no part at all, but we were harmed. We listed those things, perhaps unforgivable, that were done to us and that we had been carrying around in our head. We realized that we were continuing to hurt ourselves by hanging on to this anger and resentment. We had to be rid of this poison or it would kill us. The original act that hurt us might have been hard to forgive. Nevertheless, for our own peace of mind, we needed to stop turning the event over in our memory again and again, which only repeated the injury. We needed to let go of what was done to us. So we wrote it down. This was a beginning toward forgiveness. Forgiveness did not mean approval. Rather, it meant letting go of resentments — resentments we had carried around to our detriment for years. Resentments had poisoned our souls. We acted out over them.

They tainted our world: everything we said, thought and did. Everyone we came across, all of them; all of our relationships were warped by our resentments. The disease of our soul found temporary release in our old friend — sex and love addiction. But only for a while, and then its soul-crushing devastation took over again. This was why we were here, why we must work the Steps, and why we must work a Fourth Step. We uncovered our part which was hanging on to the resentments.

We began to realize that our problem was our inability to form a true relationship with another human being. At work, at play, at home, we continually failed to be a partner. Our egos, our self-centeredness, prevented healthy human connection. We finally understood that we needed to change. We understood we were finally on the right path. We began to see how we inflicted emotional pain in order to meet our own selfish needs. We unmasked our self-delusion, we identified our self-centeredness, and we added these to our list.

At times we got caught up in shame as we described our past behaviors. While relief and liberation were close at hand, the pain of our memories may have caused us to hesitate. We were in danger at this point. We called someone. We stayed in close contact with our sponsor and the Fellowship. It was important to press on. We attended as many meetings as possible. We stayed centered and maintained our willingness and hope.

We saw how fear had driven our behaviors. Underlying every dishonest statement, every secret, every emotional outburst, every act of avoidance, there was fear. We had been afraid of life. We were afraid of failure. We were afraid of success. As we assembled our inventory, these insights into our makeup became clear.

We saw how shame had shaped us. Shame and fear were tightly linked. Shame includes embarrassment and guilt. We were afraid that we would be ridiculed. We were afraid we would be excluded. We saw that shame brought us to despair. At times the feeling of shame was so profound that we were desperate. We would do anything to escape despair. We saw that we were driven by fear to cover up our

shame. We saw how shame and fear drove our addiction. As we inventoried our behaviors, we also saw that shame was a waste of time. It was another detour that prevented us from living a contented and useful life. We brought our painful burdens into the light. Ultimately, we released our shame by becoming aware of it through the inventory process.

We saw how our dishonesty had not only sabotaged our relationships with others, but wounded us as well. We prayed for honesty and more honesty. We saw how truthfulness led to acceptance. We saw that integrity was the basis of sanity. We recorded our dishonest behaviors. We became dependable and trustworthy by doing our Fourth Step. We were rigorous about listing all of our behaviors no matter how painful they were to contemplate.

At the same time, however, we quit beating ourselves up. We realized we were not our disease. We began to let go of shame, guilt and remorse. We began healing. Truthfulness became an urgent goal. We remembered to list our positive traits. We learned we were driven by a disease — we were human beings, frightened and self-centered. We gained a renewed dignity, no more nor less than any other human being. We were free to love others. We saw that at times we could be honest and helpful, not self-centered. We were worthy. We realized we were sick people who sometimes behaved badly. We were not bad people.

We had found our way back into the light. But we could not stop here. It would be dangerous to stop here. We needed to keep growing. We would make amends to ourselves and others by working the remaining Steps and by making sobriety our number one priority. We needed to expand the spiritual connection that we had started. We needed to practice the rest of the Steps.

The most important thing was that we kept moving forward; we kept working the program — no matter what. We kept building this list, this inventory. When we had our most obvious problems captured — and we had acknowledged our positive traits — we were ready to share. We needed to move on to Step Five.

We trusted our Higher Power to manage our life, all of our life. We had committed to turning our thoughts and our actions over to our Higher Power.

**Step Five:**  
***Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being  
the exact nature of our wrongs.***

Most of our lives we were in hiding. We created masks to camouflage who we truly were. We were frightened that someone might see us directly. We were ashamed of who we were and, therefore, we built up a curtain, an illusion, to keep our real selves secret. We hid behind this curtain. Eventually our faux selves became so hardened and inflexible that we had difficulty seeing our true self. Stripping away the disguises was painful. After all, our ego had created them to keep us safe. Nevertheless, in order to be free, we needed to reveal our secrets. We needed to overcome our shame, our guilt, our false self. Step Five lets us break through these guises. Once we had the courage and humility to ask for help — from our Higher Power and from another human being — we began to reveal our human self.

This is the purpose of Step Five. It was a turning point in our recovery. We rejoined the human community. We overcame shame and isolation. We learned to live with ourselves and to respect ourselves. We shined a light on who we truly were and strengthened our connection with our Higher Power. The work was hard, but worth it. Working Step Five provided us with an assurance of sobriety and freedom. As a side benefit, we gained humility as we learned to face the world on the world's terms.

Prior to practicing the steps, we were incapable of intimacy. We were unable to form a true partnership with another human being. We began to see that the way we compartmentalized our lives, the way we camouflaged our feelings, the way we disguised who we really were, was a fundamental deceit. It was, in fact, an insanity. We thought at first we had built a sensible defense against the outside world, but that defense also locked us in and kept us separate from our fellow humans. We lived in a constant state of fear and insecurity. It turned out that instead of being frank and honest, we were underhanded and our dishonesty increased our shame.

Through the program of the Twelve Steps, specifically through Step Five, we were provided with a way out based on the unconditional love and support of our Higher Power and each individual in the SLAA Fellowship. We had made a commitment in Step Three to work the rest of the Steps and turn our will over to a Higher Power, a Higher Power we may or may not understand. We had our Fourth Step inventory. We made the initial steps toward rejoining the human race by preparing to share our inventory with God, ourselves and another human being.

Many of us found the prospect of doing a Fourth Step for the first time frightening, never mind a Fifth Step. As hard as it was to admit our faults to ourselves and then to review them, we struggled with the fear of sharing them with another. As addicts, we were good at masquerading our true selves into special compartments. We were not good at being honest. We tended to not want to be known for who we truly were, fearful of being judged as detestable, unsavory people, liars and cheats. The fear of rejection that had haunted us our whole lives flared with a vengeance in many cases. Our shame attempted to hold us back. Having spent many years shying away from vulnerability, we found it hard to jump into sharing our life story, especially our secrets and our shortcomings. We also knew we could not share our story with just anyone.

What if they told someone else about our past actions? We would never be able to feel safe again.

When we talked with our sponsors about these concerns and when we listened to others share in meetings, we found again that we were not alone. The fear of being “found out” was common to all those in recovery. These were all risks that many before us had surmounted with success — and so could we. As our time in the program passed, some of us did additional inventories, additional Fourth and Fifth Steps. The fear removed, we began to look forward to them, invigorated by cleaning up our lives each time.

The choice of whom to pick to share our inventory with was relatively easy if we had a sponsor. We had chosen them before, so why not now? If we did not have a sponsor, or they were unavailable, we looked for someone we could trust and whom we felt would be compassionate and understanding. This could be a friend or other trusted person, or even a professional counselor or spiritual advisor. We chose to share our inventory face-to-face, either physically in the same room if possible, or through a digital video connection.

Now that we were ready to share with someone, we found a way to include our Higher Power. Most of us invited our Higher Power in, as we had been learning to do since Step Three. Some of us found the Third Step Prayer<sup>1</sup> helpful for this work. Some of us recited the prayer out loud with our sharing partner before we began. We were looking to find the patterns in our makeup that led us to our addiction. We asked for

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<sup>1</sup> The Third Step Prayer: “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!” Copyright © Alcoholics Anonymous. Third Step Prayer. Page 63 of the AA Big Book.

the open-mindedness to take advice and accept direction. Perhaps too, we recited the Serenity Prayer<sup>2</sup> as we were looking to see what was ours to change.

With the proper pieces in place, we shared our inventory. We took our time, neither rushing nor dwelling over it. We were thorough, holding back nothing. If the person we were sharing with had been through the process of the Fifth Step before, they may have good suggestions on how to share our inventory with them. If this was a first for both parties, just sitting together in a place where there would be no interruptions or chances of being overheard, and then reading the list of our findings, was a way to start the process.

We opened ourselves to our Higher Power and another person without running away in fear or shame. Our past was laid bare before us, and we found that we survived. Not only had we survived, something in us had changed. We had come clean, or cleaned house of the refuse we had been toting around for so long. We felt the beginning of liberation from our past acts.

This act of sharing our secrets opened the closet door and let the light of life shine into the darkness we had kept as our own for so long. Having had someone listen to our inventory, some patterns of our behaviors started to reveal themselves. Whether we saw these ourselves or the person we shared with brought them to our attention, we took note of them for the next steps ahead of us.

When we had finished sharing our inventory, we realized that the person we had shared with had not run away or condemned us for what we had shared. On the contrary, they shared compassion and understanding with us and saw who we truly were and the frightened child we had been. They accepted the whole of us with love.

This act of being honest and vulnerable allowed us to rejoin the rest of the world. Asking for and receiving help from others and our Higher Power allowed us to heal from our shame and accept ourselves. We also found that the liberation gained from our sharing these long-hidden pieces of ourselves led to our sharing more openly and honestly at all of our meetings. We found ourselves letting people into our lives in more healthy ways now that we had started to clear out the issues of our past behaviors.

We found a new sense of humility and learned that humility is essential in healthy relationships. Once we learned and practiced vulnerability, we were able to experience true intimacy with others. We had feared being humiliated, instead, we found liberation. We had indeed rejoined the human community.

As we completed this Step, many of us felt a sense of relief. Before, we had felt that we belonged to the Fellowship of SLAA; now, we absolutely knew we were in the right place. We had found a sense of contentment with ourselves. We understood that we belonged. And our relationship with our Higher Power was now stronger, more comforting, more comfortable. We found that we were feeling a deeper connection to our Higher Power through this work.

Now we were aware of what we had done, shared it with another and with our Higher Power. We found that we were ready to approach letting our defects go and letting the God of our understanding take them from us. We were ready for Step Six.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Serenity Prayer*: “God, Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; Courage to change the things I can; And the wisdom to know the difference.”

## Step Six:

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

As the result of working Steps Four and Five, we saw our character defects clearly. For some of us, the defects were many — starting with selfishness, dishonesty and a lack of consideration for others. For most of us, our defects, regardless of their specifics or their number, all blossomed from the same fertile soil: fear. Fear that we were unworthy and unlovable, fear that we would never get what we needed, fear that we were unacceptable, broken, incapable of receiving or giving real love.

Fear had run our lives during our addictive acting out or acting in, but, paradoxically, it was fear that brought us to the rooms of SLAA. We feared that our addictive actions were unstoppable and unabated would continue their fatal downward spiral. We feared the repercussions from the harms we had done to others and to ourselves. Our greatest fear was that our defects of character would make tomorrow worse than today. At least now, fear had become a positive force by bringing us to the program that would change our lives for the better.

As we looked at our appallingly long list of character defects, our first thought was, “I can never manage it!” Hadn’t we been trying our best every single day of our lives to be the “good” people we knew we should be? Hadn’t we bargained, bartered, struggled and promised to stop our addictive behavior, our selfishness, our self-destructiveness? We knew, looking at this list, that there was no hope for a self-powered cure. We knew that only God as we understood God was capable of healing our hearts.

With these thoughts in mind, the logical answer to the question “Are we entirely ready to have God remove all our defects of character?” would seem to be an immediate and unflinching “Yes, of course!” But the truth for many of us was that while we may have been ready to let *some* of our defects of character go, we weren’t ready to let them *all* go. Not just yet.

In this way, Step 6, like many aspects of our program, was both simple and difficult.

Our character defects had inspired addictive responses to life that had become trustworthy old friends. We could always turn to our addictive behaviors when the inevitable or unexpected difficulties arose — when we were hungry, angry, lonely or tired. Our addiction was there for us in bad times and in good; when we felt we needed it to make it to the next day and when we had earned its company. It was there for us when we felt we simply needed a reprieve from the mundane — or the horrific — reality of our lives. Or when we felt we didn’t deserve the abundance that waited to greet us each and every day.

Why would we willingly let go of character defects whose reflexive addictive thoughts and actions had often seen us through our toughest times? Had they not provided momentary respite from our deepest pains, even if ultimately adding to them? Had they not brought what seemed like order to our chaotic world, even if only for a moment? We asked ourselves a difficult question: were we entirely ready to let go of our character defects if that meant letting go of their payoffs?

Most likely we *were* ready to have our addictive thoughts and actions stilled long before we entered program. Like an unsuccessful attempt to quit smoking, many of us had quit our addictive behaviors countless times, sometimes more than once in a day. But our efforts to reform our lives based on our unaided will had resulted in failure.

It was only in working the previous steps that we came to realize that the very things we had turned to again and again had unquestionably turned against us. The payoffs had become empty, ineffective, or even destructive. Our character defects had stopped being there for us and were simply there, whether we wanted them or not. Our actions had become our masters. They were not thoughtful responses to

life's events but involuntary reactions to them. The exact moment when the status of our relationship with our addictive behaviors changed was immaterial. What was important was that it had changed.

In partnership with our sponsor and our Higher Power, we looked at each character defect. Isolating individual defects helped us remove the seemingly invincible power of all of them when viewed as a united monolith. We discovered that our chain of character defects, like a chain that is only as strong as its weakest link, might more easily be broken by dismantling it one link at a time. Were we entirely ready to have *one* character defect removed? If so, we could start there.

Some of us recoiled at the word *entirely*. It sounded like perfection. If we completely let go of our now well-ingrained coping mechanisms, how could we possibly fix, manage, or control life? The answer was that we never could. Our character defects had only provided us with the illusion that we were masters of the moment. In truth, control was one of our most insidious character defects. Until we let control slip away we could not feel God's gentle embrace and receive our Higher Power's thoughtful guidance.

Ironically, struggling to rid ourselves of control — or any character defect — was precisely the time it seemed its most powerful. It was as though our character defects knew that their time was short and, like a wretched cancer, would fight with all they had to continue to feed off us. They whispered to us that things would not be OK if we let their awesome power slip away. But they were wrong. In Step Three we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God. Having surrendered our will, we knew that we need not worry about what would fill the space our character defects once claimed. Filling our lives was God's province and exactly what our Higher Power had been waiting for: to be allowed to fill our lives in loving and miraculous ways. We had found a power greater than our character defects and had already experienced how, when we turned to this Power, we were cared for in ways we couldn't have begun to imagine.

It was only when we realized that God was eager to do for us what we could not do for ourselves that the intervention we so desperately sought could, and would, begin. This helped us work through the enormity of *entirely*. *Entirely* did not require immediate perfection but meant only that God was asking for our complete willingness. Were we willing to offer it? Having realized that the problems caused by our shortcomings far outweighed their payoffs, were we willing to let our Higher Power guide us down a more joyous path?

Sometimes the answer to this question was a "Yes!" that was so certain that the question never needed to be asked again. More often, it was a question we had to ask ourselves regularly. Step Six, like all the steps, is rarely finished. Rather, it is part of an ongoing, lifelong recalibration. Just as we must always be in touch with the powerlessness and unmanageability of our disease, so, too must we regularly be reminded of how we maintain our sobriety — by letting go and letting God.

It was no coincidence that as soon as we found ourselves willing to be free from the defects that had brought us to our knees we began to see how they no longer served their purpose. Having turned to our Higher Power for support, we had found a new and infinitely more powerful way to feel safe in an unsafe world. By being willing to let go of the belief in our need for our old ways of coping, we were amazed by the newfound freedom we felt. We experienced greater kindness and compassion for others — and ourselves — even as we let shame and guilt become past chapters of our earlier lives.

Some of us practiced Step Six on a daily basis. We learned that beginning each day with an honest willingness to have God remove our defects of character — even if just for one day — was a buoyant way to begin the morning, one that could help us float above the most challenging moments of the next 24 hours. Some of us utilized a God Box to place slips of paper that contained our character defects, perhaps one at a time as we became ready, at least in that moment, to have each one removed. By doing

this, we were practicing one of our program’s most powerful maxims, *Let Go and Let God*. A wonderful thing about a God Box is that it was not limited to character defects. Like God, it would accept all we gave it; fears, prayers for others, troubling or confusing situations, and visions of how we could be of greatest service.

In our growing willingness to have our character defects removed, we realized that we had already started replacing our addictive actions or inactions with positive, life-affirming moments — with prayer and meditation, with meetings, with helping other addicts. We willingly chose the tools we had learned in recovery that would help remove our character defects. Aided by our Higher Power, we had made a conscious choice to follow a higher path. Our defects were still with us, but we had found ways to release our grip on them. As a result, these old habits could begin to fade from us like distant memories.

In using these tools we worked with our Higher Power not only to remove our character defects, but also to discover or rediscover our character assets. We began to act differently in situations that used to baffle us, following our Higher Power’s guidance and the suggestions of our sponsor or other trusted SLAA members. We asked ourselves, “What would a loving, compassionate, healthy person do in this instance?” We chose to take *this* action, knowing that what we had done in the past led to our destruction and that *any* positive action could not only help but also be an improvement. Our self-worth and self-acceptance grew as we discovered our ability to act with dignity, integrity and honesty in the world and have the world respond in kind.

And so, being entirely ready, we realized it was time to humbly ask God to remove our shortcomings and to open the door to the new life we had been working hard to create. We did not know what this new life would be, but we knew that we trusted our Higher Power to bring us exactly what we needed. We had heard others in meetings share that by working these steps, their lives had been transformed from despair to joy. We were willing to take a leap of faith toward this life by being entirely ready to have our Higher Power remove all of our character defects. We were willing to be transformed. We were ready for Step Seven.

## **Step Seven:**

### ***Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.***

The Twelve Steps are a spiritual program, not a self-help program. If we were working a self-help program, we wouldn’t need Step Seven. But our help comes from a power greater than ourselves. We admitted our powerlessness, and the unmanageability of our lives. We came to believe that no human power could relieve us from our sex and love addiction. Yet, even in our powerlessness, we saw our acting out behavior halted by trusting in something greater than ourselves. We took stock of our lives and shared it with another, with the intention to change. The Seventh Step, simply put, is a prayer and an attitude. The attitude is humility, and the prayer is the asking. We humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

Few of us joined the program really believing we could change. Primarily, we wanted the consequences of our actions to go away. We wanted the heat off. It was obvious that our addiction had negative effects, but that was all we could see.

Reluctantly we agreed that our acting out behavior had to change, but fundamental character change seemed like asking a lot. We saw that we were behaving badly in regards to sex and romantic obsession, but we felt that otherwise, we were decent people. If we could get our acting out or acting in under control, we’d be alright.

And, anyway, how did we expect to change our character — our identity? In the first five Steps we became willing, and we identified those aspects of our character that were objectionable. In Step Six, we wrote a list of positive traits that we wanted to enhance and character defects we wanted to relinquish. The more we attempted to eliminate our shortcomings on our own, the more we struggled, failed, and realized we needed help. However, we had to put in the effort. With Step Seven we worked together with our Higher Power. We tried to better ourselves, but ultimately the removal came from outside us.

Once we established our intentions, our desire to change, and we aligned our goals with our Higher Power, we took action. But what were the actions of Step Seven? How were we supposed to work on our character defects? The step itself provided the answer: We “humbly asked” through prayer. It was not our work, but our Higher Power’s.

Being humble is to accept ourselves as we are — with strengths, weaknesses, positive attributes and shortcomings, successes and failures. As human beings we will never be perfect; humility is to accept our need for change. And yet, we believed that by working these Steps day by day, again and again, over and over, change could happen. We believed our character was improved by practicing these Steps. We believed we could be more helpful, cause less harm, and become useful citizens of our community, our workplace, and our world. Step Seven opened the door to remove those barriers to happiness and success which were revealed in our inventory.

Unfortunately, for some of us Step Seven seemed like an invisible step. We simply said a prayer and skipped to our amends Steps. This was a dangerous attitude. Some felt we had success in sobriety and could handle it from here on our own.

Recovery risked becoming a self-improvement project, rather than a way of life. The attitude of humility remained elusive. Slowly our meeting attendance lessened; we spent less time with other recovery partners, and we thought we could handle the obsession and broken bottom line behaviors. Eventually, the disease regained a foothold and we found ourselves back at Step One.

If, however, we took a closer look at Step Seven, experienced a broader surrender, and remembered to ask for help, our program expanded. The spiritual principles of the program began to be applied in all areas of our lives — not merely our addictive behavior.

Just as we all had our own understanding of the Higher Power, we each found a means of communicating with this power that worked for us. Through our experience in recovery, we learned how to reach out to that power greater than ourselves. Whether our method of prayer came from a traditional religious source, a spiritual guide or we wrote our own, there were many prayers that could be used to help us focus on this Step. Many of us said AA’s Seventh Step prayer every morning:

*My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad.  
I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character  
which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows.  
Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen.<sup>3</sup>*

Another prayer that we found helpful:

*I can't do this on my own;  
Higher Power I need your help.  
Give me the strength today to eliminate harmful behaviors.  
Show me how to be helpful to others.*

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<sup>3</sup> *Alcoholics Anonymous*, Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Inc., New York City, 2001, Fourth Edition, page 76

*Show me how to appreciate my strengths.  
Help me to grow and flourish in the spiritual world.  
I can't do this on my own.  
With your help I can.*

The Seventh Step prayer in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous<sup>4</sup> asks our Higher Power to remove “every single defect of character that stands in the way of [our] usefulness to God and to our fellows.” One way we understood this was that God would remove the defects that stand in the way, but sometimes our defects may serve some usefulness. This was not an excuse to continue our character defects, but the principle of this step is humility and asking for help. Part of humility was accepting that we didn't know what was best for ourselves.

One member shared this story: “One winter day, I had errands to run, but instead I spent time reading. I ended up setting out an hour later than I had planned. While driving to the store, I spotted a fellow member walking on the road. It was a bitterly cold day, and I offered him a ride. I shared this story with my sponsor later, and he said ‘That's the Seventh Step.’ I didn't understand, so he explained: God was able to use my character defect of procrastination to put me at the right time and place to be useful to another addict. Now, that doesn't mean I'm allowed to sit around all day reading, but it does mean that I shouldn't be too hard on myself when my character defects surface, and I fail to reach perfection. If it seems that one of my defects has not been removed, it could be that my Higher Power has some use for it. God always uses what I offer — even my weaknesses.”

Perhaps punctuality was something we needed to improve. We tried to be on time, just for today. We made written plans and tried to keep them. We might not have been successful, but we knew what we were working on and we were making progress. Being human, we often failed. And in the spirit of humility, we practiced forgiveness of ourselves. We honored our commitment and our aspirations to change, and returned to prayer.

If anger was a problem, we practiced forgiveness ahead of time knowing that when tempted, we had a choice to not get angry. We had the choice to pause and decide to let it pass — just for that day. We said prayers for who or what angered us. Instead of practicing gossip and being judgmental, we practiced generosity. We learned how to be silent instead of promoting ourselves. Shame held most of us tightly; we practiced self-acceptance, self-forgiveness, and grew in the knowledge that although we were imperfect, frightened human beings, we were all in this together, and we were fine.

Progress came slowly in recovery, but we saw successes in small moments when we'd give a compliment, forgive a slight, lend our time and our treasure to someone in need, or not be so hard on ourselves. Often, we didn't see improvement in ourselves on a daily basis. Our partners in recovery, however, were our mirror. They could show us that we were working the program and making progress, even when we didn't feel recovered. We trusted in our Higher Power that the path we were on was correct. We gave ourselves credit for the work we'd done, and we shared our victories in meetings to give hope to those still working the program along with us.

At this point in our program, we were not acting out. However, our recovery was about more than this. Step Seven was a pivotal deepening and expanding of our sobriety. Acting out was merely a symptom of our character defects. We noticed an unease and discomfort in our mind and our body when our defects flared up again.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Surrendering the temptations of our shortcomings brings a peace of mind that comes from our Higher Power. If we did not surrender these shortcomings, as we did our addiction, they would surely lead us back to the obsession.

Each of us had our own personal character defects, and our own weaknesses to surrender. Step Seven is a step toward a more peaceful, serene sobriety and a useful, contented life. Through the process of recovery, we found freedom from anxiety, experienced peace of mind, found we could become contented members of our human society. We never had to return to the pitiful despair that led us here. Step Seven is a prayer for help and an attitude of humility.

While we knew Step Seven would remain an ongoing practice, we were ready to move on to Step Eight. We had focused on humility and what it meant in our lives. We had identified and examined, and were working to remove, our character defects through prayer and a changed attitude. We strengthened our relationship with our Higher Power, and began the process of repairing the past offered to us in the next steps.

## **Step Eight:**

### ***Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.***

We had turned our will and our lives over to the care of our Higher Power, and we had asked for the removal of our shortcomings. Through honest introspection and commitment to the program we had achieved a welcome degree of recovery. We saw that our Higher Power was leading us to a new life, free from the life-threatening compulsion to act in or to act out. We were now ready to review our past relationships, asking ourselves where and to whom we had caused harm.

What do we mean by “harm?” We had to think about this in depth. There were some actions that were obvious to us: we had lied, cheated, stolen; we exploded in anger at a spouse or child. We may even have committed acts of physical violence. There may also have been subtler instances of our actions causing others ill effect or damage. We had ignored a loved one, manipulated others for our own gain, or used our sexuality or emotional appeal to get others to rescue us in spite of the cost to them. Our hubris or insecurity prompted our mistreatment of those closest to us, as well as injury to ourselves and others.

So we made a list. We found that working with someone who had been through the process was essential. Our sponsor was the obvious candidate to act as our guide — an impartial view that would not allow us to get bogged down or paralyzed by perfectionism. Our list would never be perfect, but it could be honest.

To be thorough we made a list of **all** the people and institutions we had wronged. Our list had already been started with the writing of our fourth step inventory. We added others we had harmed, as well as those people we feared or avoided — we often discovered that we had hidden resentments against these individuals. There were those, too, whom we judged, criticized, and to whom we felt superior — a sign of our own feelings of inferiority. We added them as well. In recovery we were aiming to be able to meet anyone from our past without fear.

For many of us, our list had to also include ourselves. This was a controversial notion. Through our addiction we certainly harmed ourselves, but our own self-absorption allowed no thought of the harm we caused others. Some thought that adding our own name to the list of those we had harmed was more self-centeredness, but we believed there could be a balance.

We included our name on our list with the deliberate focus on our need to rebuild relationships with others first — as well as with ourselves. In the past, guilt and remorse weighed us down, and caused us to return to our addiction for relief. To avoid relapse and correct the harms we'd done to all, we needed to clean up the damage we'd done to others as well as to ourselves. Our course of action was the diligent practice of the Twelve Steps.

In one member's experience, "In a second round of working the steps, my eighth step list was short. Gratefully, working the steps had limited the people I'd harmed over the years. So I turned the paper over and wrote my name — and filled the whole page. In my addiction I damaged my personal finances, my health, my career and my relations. Once I cleared away some of the outward damage, and saw past my self-pity, I could identify where I needed to make amends."

As we prepared our list, we examined how we personally had harmed each person or institution, and whether the damage was physical, emotional, spiritual or financial. Even if they had harmed us in the past, we still focused only on how we had harmed them. We contemplated the harm, and the nature of the damages. We realized that while some of the harm we had caused was deliberate, some was caused by negligence or was unintended damage. Even so, we could not pretend we were innocent or engage in other denying, rationalizing or justifying. We had to take responsibility if we were truly going to recover.

Once our list seemed complete, we met with our sponsor and reviewed each entry to make sure we were approaching the task with a compassionate and humble perspective, and not as a form of self-punishment. We indicated if we were willing to make amends now, later, or never.

What do we mean by "amends?" To amend is to change, to improve, to make better. It is not merely an apology, but the action to put things right as best we can. We take the actions that modify our character and our behaviors. We attempt to make right the damage we had caused.

We now worked on becoming willing to make amends to all those on our list. It was difficult to contemplate making amends to everyone we had harmed. We felt some of these people or institutions owed us amends. Yet, we could not put off our own recovery. We could not wait for these others to make amends to us. The reason we worked Step Eight was for our own recovery, not theirs. We were working toward building a contented and sober future for ourselves and those around us. The writing of the list itself held a kernel of willingness — we would not have started if part of us were not willing. If we decided that we were not yet willing to make amends to one or more people, we could keep praying for the willingness. This kept us humble.

We were now accepting responsibility for the harm we had done. We had accepted that we caused the harm. We now accepted the fact that we owed amends. Moving forward required getting rid of the baggage of the past. With this new spirit, we focused on our unconditional willingness to make amends to each and every one.

As we continued with the practice of Step Eight, we realized that we would have to take our willingness further; we would have to actually forgive those people or institutions against whom we had harbored resentments. We had to forgive everyone we had harmed for whatever we perceived caused us to harm them to begin with.

Forgiveness did not mean approval or excusing bad behavior, but acceptance of another person's failings and release from our own resentments. This was the foundation of our amends. Most importantly, we had to forgive ourselves by being willing to make things right.

Whether the harms we caused were direct or indirect, we addressed our own actions so that we would avoid such behavior in the future. In contemplating making right our own wrongs, we found our attitude

towards others changing to one of forgiveness. We saw their harms in the light of our actions, accepting their humanity, and our own. Forgiveness did not release us from the responsibility of what we had done. It allowed us to move forward with a humbler and more generous attitude.

In making the list, we may have experienced a new wave of regret, shame and fear. Sharing our feelings with a sponsor or friends in the program helped to prevent becoming entangled in those feelings that could lead to relapse. By leaning on our fellow members for support we had grown closer to them. We found that we were changing. We were becoming accountable for our actions. Step Eight built a sense of trust in ourselves and in our ability to make healthier decisions. Our willingness to repair and cultivate relationships was a sign that we were attending to the will of our Higher Power. We were being remade. We took responsibility for our actions and became more reliable, more trustworthy individuals. We desired humility. We had faith in our Higher Power, and prayed for the willingness to make amends. Our recovery and growth was managed by our Higher Power.

Once we had our list written out, even if imperfectly, we saw a course of action ahead of us. As a result of practicing this Step, we recognized our addiction and its consequences with increased clarity. We felt a deeper intimacy with ourselves. We continued our transformation from restless, irritable and discontented toward happy, joyous and free. We became willing to attempt mending those damaged relationships despite our fears and resistance. As a result of our determination to make amends, our sense of isolation diminished. We built a deeper understanding, and a more generous and humble attitude. In Step Eight we prepared ourselves for meeting face to face with those we had harmed. Step Nine appeared daunting, but we forged ahead with clear intentions.

## **Step Nine:**

***Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.***

In Step Nine, we found ourselves at an action step once again. This time it was an action that sent us out into the world to interact with other human beings. Many of us had been dreading this Step since we first became aware of it. We could not imagine how we would be able to accomplish this task, or even attempt it.

To recover alone and in our meetings had seemed somewhat safe. It was quite another thing to carry that recovery bravely into our relationships with others. Before we came to the program, we felt lonely and isolated, unable to have or maintain real intimacy. We were frightened to show our true selves, or to see and accept the truth of others. We were unsure what was acceptable to say, think, or do. We had no idea how to love or be loved, or even if we could love. Against this backdrop, the idea of admitting our mistakes and making amends face to face seemed overwhelming if not impossible.

While initially daunting to most of us, to others Step Nine seemed like a quick absolution. We were in a hurry to fix things and get on with our lives. We were people-pleasers at heart and we wanted to be forgiven as soon as possible. We felt sorry for ourselves — we wanted what we had lost. We wanted things to be smooth, problem-free, and we thought an apology might just do the trick. Our sponsors helped guide us, counseling patience. Healing took time, they said; we needed to wait. After we'd spent time in recovery and worked the steps in order, we realized the wisdom of this guidance. Our selfish attempts to get back into the good graces of those we had harmed would surely have been doomed to failure. Amends are about a changed attitude and behavior, which are the result of refraining from bottom lines, working the Steps, trusting in a Higher Power, and taking an honest inventory of ourselves. This process could not be rushed.

A fear many of us had when contemplating making amends was the fear of what others would think of us when they learned we were sex and love addicts. Making amends, however, did not require us to reveal our membership in SLAA. We were simply to address the wrongs done with each person or institution, and attempt to make things right, if possible. If the issue at hand was stolen property, we returned the property or repaid the debt. If we lied to a friend or family member, we told the truth — we did not need to explain the Twelve Step process or our new-found sobriety. This simple approach reinforced our humility; we focused solely on our own wrongs and did not try to paint ourselves as victims, or explain how we were bettering ourselves in order to elicit sympathy.

Some of us worried about possible legal ramifications. Would we be opening ourselves to lawsuits, bankruptcy, jail time? Each of these circumstances would have to be considered carefully. We would need to discuss at length with our sponsors, and perhaps with legal counsel and/or our families. Making amends that would indirectly harm our dependent family, for example if we were to lose our livelihood, was exactly what was referred to by the phrase “except when to do so would injure them or others.” These types of amends were complex and often confusing, but our Higher Power would guide our decisions if we asked.

In Step Eight, we made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all. Reviewing our list with our sponsor in Step Nine, we determined one by one what our amends might be. We examined the nature of the wrongs we committed, whether financial, physical, emotional or spiritual, and discussed the outline of each amends. Though we could not control the outcome, a wise plan of action would help us refrain from creating more harm, and improve our chances of a successful interaction.

When it was time to move forward, we marshalled as much courage as we could in preparation for facing those we had harmed. Having a sponsor and fellowship encouraged and supported us. Prayer and meditation helped us receive guidance from our Higher Power. Hearing others’ stories of successful amends gave us hope that we could do it too. And so we began, however tentatively.

The financial harms were perhaps the easiest to evaluate. We owed money and we made a plan to repay it. We contacted the person or institution and let them know how we were going to proceed in order to make right the wrong. The desire to hang on to our money was strong, but our fellows reminded us that if we stole from people or institutions, it was not our money — it was their money we were returning. Though painful, these amends ultimately allowed us to hold our heads high, knowing we had taken responsibility for our actions and paid our debts.

Our financial harms may have been of a subtler nature — we may have spent significant amounts of money on dating sites, pornography or prostitution, cheating our family of financial resources that were rightfully theirs. At work, we may have used company time to practice our addiction. Our sponsor helped us determine the right course of action for these types of amends.

Physical harms required a great deal of discussion with our sponsor. These were often sexual or violent in nature. We needed to assess carefully if contact from us would cause additional injury to the person to whom we hoped to make amends. We made sure we were not protecting ourselves, but honestly evaluating what our contact would mean to the other person. Would reentering their life cause further pain? If yes, we would have to forego contact. This was not about avoidance or fear of acting out. There was no advantage in protecting ourselves from the interaction. Our decision was based solely on what was best for them. In some instances, the best amends was to have no contact at all. If this was the case, we had to choose another option, such as writing a letter of apology and sharing it with our sponsor and our Higher Power, doing service for others in a similar situation, or supporting an appropriate charity, organization or project.

Emotional and spiritual harms were harder to assess. Our disease, characterized as it is by a fear of intimacy, often left us incapable of healthy relationships with other human beings. Being emotionally unavailable to partners, family and friends, we had cheated them and ourselves out of a loving connection. Our acting out may have resulted in the deep betrayal of a spouse, friend or loved one. We may have failed to support our loved ones in a time of need, neglected or rejected them, shirked our responsibilities as spouse, parent, child, or friend. Some of us had been critical, judgemental, or verbally abusive. We had run away. We caused harm to others that we were not even aware of at the time. With the help of our Higher Power, sponsor and supportive fellows, we examined each wrong and determined an appropriate amends.

Some of us thought that amends to our significant other, or those close to us, meant full disclosure of all we had done. However, disclosure in itself was not making amends. We were reminded that freeing ourselves of our burdens could not be done at the expense of others. We understood that full disclosure to a spouse, for example, could harm them and possibly our children or other family members. If asked by our partners, we were completely honest — if they asked, they were ready to hear. If they didn't ask, we did not unload our trespasses on them. Our amends were offered in an attempt to make things right, to heal a wound, to accept the responsibility of acting differently in the future — to change. The amends to those closest to us took time. We rebuilt trust and mended those relationships by living the principles of the program on a daily basis, depending on the guidance and direction of our Higher Power.

There were some amends that could not be made; some wrongs that would never be righted directly. If the person we harmed was dead, or the institution no longer existed, we took positive actions that benefited a person in a similar situation, or donated to a charity that supported a relevant cause. We put positivity into the world. We became givers rather than takers. With faith in our Higher Power, we trusted that our actions would heal the damage done on a spiritual level.

Amends to ourselves were discussed with our sponsor, spiritual advisor or other trusted person. These often took the form of changes we made to our lifestyles, choosing to live our lives with integrity, honesty and self-care. These amends were an ongoing and lifelong commitment. Many of us wrote a letter of forgiveness to ourselves with the compassionate understanding that our harmful actions were the result of our own profound suffering and need for healing.

There were a variety of responses to our amends. In some cases, the other person readily forgave us. This was a welcome surprise that filled us with gratitude. Sometimes the other person praised us for the courage it took to admit our past transgressions or for the maturing that we had done. In some cases, not only did the other person forgive us, they even asked how they could help us in our healing. We cherished these truly exceptional people.

Some people used our amends as an opportunity to vent their feelings. They were still carrying the hurt and anger that our actions had caused. They may have berated us, inflamed our guilt and shame, or tried to take some sort of advantage. We did not allow ourselves to react with fear or anger. We were able to accept them for who they were in the moment. We were able to make our amends gracefully, and walk away.

Some people were skeptical. Due to our past weaknesses and behaviors, they doubted our ability to change. However, we were now able to accept their skepticism and didn't feel a need to react or defend ourselves. We understood that we would have to show true behavioral change over time in order to overcome their doubt, and we had the patience to do so. This was one of the reasons the amends process was at Step Nine rather than sooner — a solid period of recovery was required in order to develop the maturity needed to make appropriate amends and accept the results.

There were those to whom we owed amends who would not accept them. For any number of reasons, they could not forgive or accept restitution. We did not force ourselves upon them, but we did our best to leave the door open for reconciliation in the future. Prayers were offered for these people and we continued on.

During our amends process, some of us used book-ending as a helpful tool — speaking with our sponsor both before and after each individual amends. This gave us the opportunity to review how we were feeling going into a particular amends, and how we felt about the interaction afterward. Our feelings about our amends took many forms — we may have had a feeling of relief, having attempted and completed what was, for us, a difficult and sometimes painful task; sometimes we felt satisfied, a feeling of closure that was unfamiliar but welcome; in some instances there was a feeling of incompleteness, either because we were unable to make amends the way we wanted, or because the other person did not react the way we hoped they would.

Regardless, we accepted the results with the understanding that we truly did the best we could and that we could not control the outcome of our attempts.

Our goal in Step Nine was to make right the wrongs we had done, to come into alignment with ourselves and our Higher Power. We understood that the best approach was to truly accept responsibility for our actions, learn from our harmful behaviors, and change in positive ways so that we did not repeat them. We grew to take satisfaction in this process, knowing we were growing along spiritual lines each time we made an amends. We no longer walked with the weight of shame and guilt. We built courage, trust, and self-esteem. We began to rejoin the world and end our isolation. We began to rebuild or revive our relationships, or learned to let them go. The spiritual process of amends-making, of changing, led us to reclaim our humanity. We found increasing intimacy with ourselves, with our Higher Power, and with others. We came to see that making amends was the road to a new freedom.

## **Step Ten:** ***Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.***

We had made substantial progress toward mending the damage we had done in the past, and we were soberly committed to completing any outstanding Step Nine amends needed. It was time to embrace living a life of integrity in the present as well. This was the goal of Step Ten.

Diligently working the first nine Steps had provided us with a spiritual foundation. We had achieved a level of responsibility and maturity, as well as a degree of self-awareness. Our sense of longing and isolation had been substantially removed, not by *our* willpower (or we would have removed it long ago), but by surrendering to a Power greater than ourselves. We had experienced a measure of peace, and it seemed that this peace could continue to grow. We embraced our humanity, and felt, at last, that we belonged. With considerable effort and commitment on our part, and with the grace of our Higher Power, we had been granted a daily reprieve from our addictive behaviors. We wanted to reinforce and sustain this. There was reason to believe that our lives could continue to expand and deepen with previously unknown serenity and beauty. We were ready to move forward into this promising future.

It had become clear, however, that simply maintaining our current measure of sobriety and serenity would not be enough. We had identified and grappled with our character defects, helped by our Higher Power and our recovery partners, and we had seen many of these defects transformed. And yet, we had also seen these same character defects pop up suddenly, seemingly out of the blue, in spite of our best efforts to redeem ourselves, or our expectations that now we were healed. As imperfect human beings,

we would continue to make mistakes and to commit wrongs from time to time. We needed to continue our spiritual growth or these flaws and failures would imperil our recovery and risk the return of our addictive behaviors.

Having come so far, we were not willing to abandon our hard-earned recovery.

So we set out in Step Ten to build upon our foundation of sobriety and serenity.

A daily inventory was a necessary part of that undertaking. It would be impossible to preserve this personal serenity if we were to construct a *new* set of resentments, fears or suppressed feelings. The desire to escape stress, loneliness, guilt, grief or other uncomfortable states of being could still arise. If we did not identify our feelings about our current reality and learn to accept the sorrows as well as the joys of living, old patterns of acting out would occur. We needed to continually reconfirm and re-experience our commitment to intimacy with ourselves, our Higher Power, and others. We needed to stay emotionally and spiritually current, and continue to practice the tools of our spiritual recovery.

In spite of our hard work through withdrawal, self-examination, and cleaning house, we still at times found it difficult to determine *what* we were feeling, or whether our resulting actions were warranted, appropriate or harmful. Sometimes we had no clue that we were off track. And so we spent time with ourselves in stillness at the end of each day, allowing our feelings and thoughts to arise within us. We examined our part whenever we felt that a situation was uncomfortable or seemed to go sour. We kept our minds open to the possibility that our own flaws or mistakes were to blame, and asked our Higher Power to reveal to us any wrongs we had committed, and an appropriate form of amends.

We were careful to approach Step Ten as a tool to stay in touch with our innermost selves and as an opportunity to see and to set right any harms we had committed, not as a bludgeon with which to harm ourselves. Our old ways of self-blame and self-harm were no longer useful. “...When we were wrong promptly admitted it...” did not mean that we were wrong as people — bad, defective or unworthy. It simply meant that we had not perceived clearly or acted appropriately from the spiritual values we had adopted and grown to depend on. We had a new attitude toward our humanity and our imperfection, modeled on our Higher Power’s unconditional love for us. We practiced our new-found honesty, humility, and responsibility by promptly accepting our doubts and failures without self-loathing. We asked God to remove these defects of character, and continued our spiritual journey.

We found that life was full of opportunities for reaction, fear, and anger. Often, our part started with our negative thinking, which led to our negative behaviors. We may have misinterpreted the words or actions of others. We may have distrusted ourselves or our Higher Power, or forgotten about our Higher Power completely. We watched our motives for signs of dishonesty, manipulation, self-interest, or fear. Did we lash out? Did we harm another? If our thoughts or actions were suspect, we reached out to our sober recovery partners and our Higher Power. This perspective could help bring clarity to our situation. Recognizing our wrongs and admitting them allowed us to move forward with more positive thoughts and behaviors.

Writing about a resentment or fear could open our minds and change our attitude as well. Many of us used the inventory format we learned in Step Four. There were many ways to go about taking inventory — we chose one that worked best for us. We were able to see our part in the situation, to see where our thinking had gone astray. We took responsibility for our actions and feelings, and corrected our course.

If we had already caused harm, we proceeded to make amends promptly. Taking these actions moved us from negative thinking to humility, generosity of heart, and sober behavior. In this way we were able to stay sober and appropriate with those around us.

An inventory could be taken on the spot. If a sexual or romantic craving arose, if we were tending toward dishonesty with ourselves or others, we stopped. We examined what had happened and how we were reacting. Were we unclear with someone? Did we allow subtle intrigue to encroach on the relationship? Were we stressed by work or family? One member was asked to interview a prospective employee. The member felt a strong romantic attraction to the interviewee; she wanted to hire him immediately. She caught herself in romantic obsession, a familiar addictive urge. She paused. She realized she was feeling insecure about her ability to choose the best applicant. Once she admitted this to herself, she called her sponsor and prayed. She recognized her insanity and thereby avoided obsession, flirting or worse with a possible co-worker.

A craving for pornography, anonymous sex, or internet stalking could arise suddenly. We looked at what was happening in our personal life, whether there were unpleasant or difficult situations that we were trying to escape. Once we identified the issue that was generating the craving or fear, we calmly assessed the situation, talked with someone else about it, and planned an emotionally sober response so it didn't lead to sexual acting out or acting in.

By examining our fears, resentments, and thoughts, we experienced a degree of separation from them. That tiny space, that pause, was magical, spiritual, holy — the space where our Higher Power stepped in. We found ourselves becoming more conscious as we went through our day. We began asking ourselves questions when we had these negative thoughts and feelings: “How important is it?” “Is it true?” “What would my sponsor do?” “What would my Higher Power have me do?”

As we performed a nightly review of the day's events, some of us used a short set of simple questions to discover our inner state: What gifts have I received today?

What gifts have I given today? What trouble, inconvenience, or difficulty have I caused today? This examination was a quick method of assessing our actions and attitudes, and determining where we needed to make amends.

It was also helpful to make a gratitude list: three things I'm grateful for; something I did to be of service; something that I savored today. This gave us a balanced outlook, which kept the tendency for negative thinking at bay, and helped us to enter the realm of the Spirit. We were able to reconnect with our Higher Power, and the goodness of our world.

We became mindful of our daily behavior. We promptly admitted when we were wrong, whether it was in action or attitude. Having practiced dishonesty for so long, we were painstaking in our desire to avoid even little lies which could damage our relationships. The ability to say, “I made a mistake. What really happened was...” and to continue with the truth was a substantial improvement in our dealings with others.

When stopped by traffic enforcement, for example, instead of making excuses as we might have in the past, we admitted that we were speeding and accepted the consequences without complaint.

If we had caused harm, we quickly determined an appropriate method of making amends. We followed the course we had learned in Step Nine — consulting with our recovery partners and our Higher Power, and offering our prompt amends to the injured party where appropriate. We were keeping our side of the street clean on a daily basis.

We might choose to do a Step Ten overview, periodically assessing a particular segment of time or subject matter. We rated ourselves on our behaviors and attitudes, like a doctor assessing a patient by giving lab results. We might address various topics, such as bottom line behaviors, blaming, taking responsibility for our actions, resentment, or forgiveness. Each member's list dealt with their specific

concerns. We went over these with our sponsor and discussed our progress or difficulty regarding each of them. We found this to be a useful way to measure progress and determine how we could replace negative behaviors with positive ones.

In these ways we committed to taking personal inventory as Step Ten instructs, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. As we practiced this spiritual way of life, we found increased harmony with those close to us, and greater compassion for all people. We grew in patience, love and tolerance in our interactions. We were able to break down any barriers in our attitudes and behaviors that kept us isolated. We were willing to admit, to accept, and to correct our mistakes. We continued to ask God to remove our shortcomings and direct us how best to proceed. Through much struggle, pain and discipline, we had developed this new way of being in the world; the growth, love, and joy we experienced was an unexpected and precious gift. We were grateful; we were ready to move on to Step Eleven.

## **Step Eleven:**

***Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with a Power greater than ourselves, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.***

Having practiced the Steps to this point — working Steps One through Ten in order — we had begun living a spiritual life. We had made a decision, taken an inventory, and cleared away the obstacles that were blocking us. Even though our conception of a Higher Power may have changed since entering the program, and our daily existence continued to hold both positive and negative experiences, we followed through on our decision in Step Three. We carried our Higher Power with us as we practiced the spiritual principles outlined in the Steps and the Traditions. We learned to trust God, whatever we understood God to be. We came to rely on a Spirit that was greater than ourselves.

Having developed our relationship with this Power — with the God of our understanding — we now sought to improve that relationship through daily spiritual practice. That practice included many powerful prayers. We memorized formal prayers like the Third Step Prayer<sup>5</sup>, the Set Aside Prayer,<sup>6</sup> the Serenity Prayer<sup>7</sup> and others. “Help, I can’t do this by myself” is a prayer we continued to use often. It made no difference if our prayers were from the program or not. Prayers from any tradition, in any form, could be spiritually nourishing. We also learned to speak casually to our Higher Power at any time, at all times, just as we would to a good friend. We nurtured that relationship.

Meditation, like prayer, is a common spiritual practice. For those who were unfamiliar with meditation there were many sources of instruction. We investigated. We learned to sit quietly, contemplating a slogan, an aphorism, a prayer, an image. We counted our breaths. We might use walking meditation, or sitting meditation. We read books, used guided meditation, or sat quietly without instruction. We sat

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<sup>5</sup> *Third Step Prayer*: 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!

<sup>6</sup> *The Set Aside Prayer*: Dear God, please set aside everything I think I know (about myself, my disease, the Big Book, the Twelve Steps, the Program, the Fellowship, the people in the fellowship, all spiritual terms, and especially about you God) so I may have an open mind and a new experience (with all these things). Please help me see the Truth. Amen. Source unknown

<sup>7</sup> *Serenity Prayer*: God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; Courage to change the things I can; And wisdom to know the difference.

for three minutes, then five, then twenty. We learned to be still and listen. Meditation became a part of our daily practice.

As with all of the Steps, we took the suggested actions. Prayer and meditation helped us spiritually and emotionally. Just as exercise helped us physically only if we regularly worked out, prayer and meditation worked best if we practiced on a regular basis. Starting the day with prayer and meditation was a spiritual axiom for those who had achieved long-term sobriety. It kept us focused. It opened our hearts and our minds to our Higher Power's love and light.

Creating rituals for ourselves was part of building a spiritual life. We found places where our connection was especially powerful, wherever we felt closest to our Higher Power. We incorporated these locations into our prayer and meditation practice. We also prayed at work, in the car, walking on the street. We prayed out in nature or at home in the kitchen. We prayed while locked in the restroom, angry with our boss. Some of us got down on our knees during prayer, finding a posture of humility satisfying. Prayer and meditation became second nature. We prayed, we meditated, anywhere and at any time. We created these practices, these routines, as part of our program of recovery. We each found the balance that worked best for us — one day at a time, one moment at a time.

Each of us, in our own way, experienced a relationship — a conscious contact — with a Higher Power, a Spiritual Being, with a God of our understanding. Whether we encountered this relationship in arresting moments, in dreams, in everyday familiarity, or when going through painful growth experiences, we saw that our recovery depended on this intimacy with a Power other than ourselves. Like all relationships, conscious contact with this Power required consistent attention. We started each day attending to the growth and maintenance of our spiritual life, nurturing this reliance with prayer and meditation.

Even though we discovered purpose and contentment through these connections, at times we became complacent. We slowly stopped doing the work. We prayed less, became too busy for meditation. We stopped going to meetings. Little by little we attempted to take back control of our lives, forgetting that we never really were in control. Rather than trusting our lives to the care of a Higher Power, we attempted to arrange things for ourselves. Our will kept showing up, our self-will. Rather than turn our recovery over to God on a daily basis, we wanted to manage life on our terms.

To develop healthy intimacy and a vibrant sober life we needed to keep growing.

To live on a spiritual basis we needed to keep searching. To reinvigorate our spiritual practice, we increased our commitment. We found it helpful to return to our breathing, recalling our Higher Power's presence within us. Some of us joined a formal religion.

We expanded our service commitments focusing on others rather than on ourselves. We added a new prayer to our daily ritual. We renewed our meditation time, went to more meetings, reached out to our program friends, reached out to a newcomer. We repeatedly developed and improved our relationship with our Higher Power. As we worked the program, improving our spiritual relationships, we regained a sense of presence, newness, and authenticity inside our practice.

Even then, in both the spiritual and the material life — even as we were thinking our program was solid — we could be surprised by adversity or misfortune. Life was impermanent and unpredictable. It had a way of interrupting our plans. So, we asked for help again. Successful spiritual living required self-searching and sacrifice. We inventoried our situation. We had learned to examine our behavior clearly and honestly. Intimacy, with God and with others, required consistent communication, and consistent action.

A spiritual life required creative imagination. We started each day admitting we were addicts, and enlisting a joyful surrender to whatever was in store for us that day. Although life's dilemmas challenged us, our healthy imagination lifted us up. Through imagination we were able to see the path to a better life. We asked our Higher Power for direction. We were given the opportunity to start each day afresh.

We trusted that God's will for us is to stay sober, to help others, to be of service.

In our prayers we asked for the power to carry this out. In our meditation we listened for direction. We found directions in our literature, in spiritual readings, through the words of others, at our meetings. We learned again to stop, to look, and to listen. We asked upon awakening each morning for direction from our Higher Power and for the strength and the power to take the right actions. We prayed from that place deep within us that yearns for a better life.

We found strength — we were provided strength almost miraculously — as our focus moved away from following our will to following our Higher Power's will. We asked and then moved out of the way. To our surprise we were granted harmony and balance in our daily interactions. We were surprised also to find the strength to do the next right action. This was not our energy at work, but a Power inspired by something other than ourselves. It was a Power that set a course in the right direction and provided serenity on that journey. It provided us with the capability to keep marching forward with integrity and courage.

We had come a long way. Our diseased desires and behaviors had been removed from our lives — at least for today. We had learned to accept the reality of events making up our lives as well as appreciate the mystery underlying those events. We had surrendered. Coincidence no longer surprised us. Finding a Power that restored us to a life of sobriety and wonder, we learned to live life on life's terms, to practice honesty, to practice tolerance. We re-learned these things every day as we exercised these Twelve Steps in our daily life. We had been granted, on occasion, the wisdom mentioned in *The Serenity Prayer*. We had learned to let go, take inventory, and take action.

We continued to improve our spiritual contact. We continued to nurture our relationships with God, ourselves, and others. Throughout the day we stayed connected. We remained grateful. Our prayers for the strength to overcome addictive behaviors had changed into prayers of thanksgiving. We had found the strength to love ourselves and to love others. We realized we belonged. Our lives had become filled with joy and enthusiasm. Grateful for the blessings of this new life — a life beyond anything we had thought possible — we embraced the adventure of a new day.

## **Step Twelve:**

***Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to sex and love addicts and to practice these principles in all areas of our lives.***

Arriving at the Twelfth Step, we realized our lives had changed. The greatest promise of all — having a spiritual awakening — had been granted. An awakening happened, and continues to happen, as the direct result of working all the Steps. It happened as a byproduct of recovery from sex and love addiction. We were not striving for an awakening; we were only seeking relief from the pain, the consequences, the demoralization of our addiction. And yet, as we were liberated from our compulsions, we recognized life as joyful; we became grateful; we found freedom. The awakening and discoveries came, perhaps gradually, perhaps spectacularly, as we completed each step along the way.

We had been in a deep spiritual sleep. We had been in denial. Some of us had lost any connection with a caring Higher Power. In SLAA we become mindful as we practice the Twelve Steps. With Step One, our denial was blunted. We admitted we had a problem. We faced the reality of the unmanageability of our lives. We admitted we could not manage our lives alone. In Step Two, we found hope that some power could show us the way out. In Step Three, we made a commitment to a new way of life, one in which we were not in charge. We trusted the management of our lives to a Higher Power. In Step Four, we reviewed our lives, assessing what characteristics in our personality caused trouble and in what ways we tried to control life. With help from our sponsor, we put on paper the difficulties and blockages in our character that had caused trouble in our lives. In Step Five, we shared our intimate behaviors and traits with another human being with the goal of improving who we were. We laid all of our secrets bare. In Steps Six and Seven, we were ready to make changes based on our discoveries. We asked for help. We acted as if. We changed a little, day after day. In Steps Eight and Nine, we became willing and took action to repair the harms we had done in the past. We worked on forgiveness for all those in our life who had harmed, or we presumed had harmed, us. We continued in Step Ten to inventory our character and behavior on a daily basis. We expressed our gratitude and made amends daily.

With Step Eleven, we pressed on. We continued seeking spiritual connection and improving our spiritual life. As we progressed with each Step, we became more aware and more awake. Our recovery and sobriety improved. We did the work of the Twelve Steps each day, and our Higher Power delivered the results.

With Step Twelve, we strengthened our appreciation for where we had been and where we were now. We were grateful for all that we had. We accepted life's difficulties. We felt a sense of connection now; we felt a part of something rather than apart from everything and everyone. Now there was a Higher Power present in our lives; God guided us as we worked this program. When we first arrived, we felt an overpowering sense of aloneness and isolation. Slowly our isolation broke down. Our new sense of inner-connectedness prompted us to reach out and share with others our experience, strength and hope and to share our joy in living. Whether consciously or not, we had already been sharing ourselves with every person with whom we came in contact. We had been helped. We were ready to help others.

Our interdependence became clear when we reflected that the recovery of others had been, and continues to be, the stepping stone in our own journey. When connecting with others, who understood us just as we understood them, we experienced relief from our own pain. As we practiced Step Twelve, we continued to grow spiritually. We practiced all the Steps, thus keeping our easily reawakened addiction in remission. With each Step, with each day, we awakened; our spiritual condition improved; our Higher Power was with us. We found that practicing healthy vulnerability with other human beings strengthened our own sobriety.

We shared the joy of our recovery with others. Grateful to be sober, we carried with us a genuine contentment which we could not help but share. We were told that nothing ensured our sobriety, our contentment, our well-being, more than working with other sex and/or love addicts. By reaching out to others with the message of the program, we chipped away at the egocentric pursuit (or avoidance) of sex and relationships that previously controlled our lives and would again if we failed to practice these Steps on a daily basis. Today, our Higher Power is in control. Reaching out to those who asked for help strengthened our program, fortified our recovery. We desired sobriety more than anything. The need to work with others was transcended by the desire to share this joy. We had found great satisfaction by working these Steps, and we wanted to share it with everyone who came into our path.

There was no greater satisfaction than seeing someone we've helped, even indirectly, catching the program, finding freedom from the addiction, achieving peace of mind. It was an incredible gift. An addict comes into the program filled with despair, sadness and anger. A few months later he or she can

laugh again, find the goodness in life and begin to help another. We watched this process over and over. If we were lucky enough to have a sponsee who also had sponsees, we saw our influence indirectly helping others. We felt at home, we felt useful, we were content. The joy of watching that person helping someone else, perhaps working with a newcomer, was unparalleled. We saw that we had purpose. We saw that our life had meaning, that we had made a difference. This was what service was all about.

Service freely given and the direction of our Higher Power will keep us sober. It began at the simplest level: showing up at meetings, simply being present, smiling, listening. This was Twelfth Step work. Sharing in a meeting was a powerful form of Twelfth Step service. We were grateful for those who kept coming back day after day, sharing their experiences and how they relied on the program one day at a time to get through the tough times as well as the easy times. We helped each other. Newcomer or long-timer, we each had something to share, something that would help another.

Without realizing it, we started working Step Twelve when we walked into our first meeting. No matter where we were in our journey with the Steps, we could work parts of Step Twelve every time we showed up at a meeting and every time we connected with another addict. We shared our experience of practicing the Steps, no matter how many twenty-four hours we had. Many of us became sponsors, finding that working with others, helping others work through the Steps, helped us to stay sober. We also found it rewarding. It was a pleasure. It was an example of the joy we found in these Twelve Steps.

We welcomed newcomers. Whether we had just a few twenty-four hours sober, or many years, we all had something to add. We all helped to make newcomers welcome to our Fellowship. We said hello, really listened to them, and shared our own experience. We offered hope and explained what we had done to confront our disease. Conveying our message, welcoming newcomers, inviting all to come back, made everything else possible. It was amazing that when the thought of acting out entered our minds, talking with a newcomer helped us stay sober. In fact, working with others was like fire melting through ice. The desire to act out vanished.

Fellowship after meetings was also Twelfth Step work. We remembered when we were new in recovery, sitting and thinking, “This is the hardest thing I’ve ever done in my life.” How helpful it was when someone said, “Would you like to go out for coffee after the meeting?” Making things easier for the newcomer, expressing welcome and community, was meaningful Twelfth Step work. Making a phone call, reaching out to another member of our Fellowship, was another example. While we were helping others, we were also breaking down our isolation, our inability to connect. Whether our disease was characterized by acting out or acting in, the connections we made with others at meetings, after meetings, by phone or in person were part of our recovery.

By living our recovery day by day, we were ready at all times to share what we had learned. Carrying the message of SLAA was difficult. We were careful about broadcasting our membership because of the stigma associated with sex and/or love addiction. Many of us felt we could never disclose that we were in SLAA other than by living a new way of life that reflected the principles in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. We waited for someone to ask about our serenity, our peace of mind, our ability to stay calm in the midst of chaos. If we were whole, others would notice. If they were curious, and it was the will of their Higher Power, we could always show them a meeting list.

As part of our awakening, we achieved more humility. We helped others not for notoriety or praise, but because it was now part of our job description. Service and humility were both characteristics of a spiritual human being. Step Twelve, like all the Steps, demanded humility. We tried to carry the message and we practiced these principles in our daily lives—no matter how many days we had in the program. And, we watched for the temptation to carry the “mess” instead of the “message.” We avoided

telling others what to do: “Sober up! Grow up! Go to a meeting! Stop doing this! Or start doing that!” If we started to feel resentful when the intended recipient of our message didn’t act upon the message we carried, we were carrying the mess, not the message. We remembered that we gave away the message in order to keep it; it’s not about whether they got it, but that we shared our experience, strength and hope.

By doing so, we got to live another joyful day.

We also carried the message by performing service. We performed service outside of the Fellowship or within. We stayed sober by getting out of ourselves, by taking time to focus on others. We chipped away at our self-centeredness, our self-involvement, little by little, by helping out in all sorts of ways. We could work at a food pantry. We could do volunteer service with a church. We could help out in our neighborhood. We could carry a service position in the Fellowship such as greeter, coffee maker, literature chair, meeting liaison, treasurer, meeting chair (or secretary), intergroup representative or service at the Conference level. We could help write literature. We could serve on any number of committees. A quick check of the SLAA website (<https://slaafws.org/>) and a search for “service” provided many opportunities. Service refined our perspective on life and gave us to a robust sense of well-being.

Our understanding of the principles we practiced — honesty, powerlessness, forgiveness, humility, service, courage, willingness, openness, wisdom — expanded as we carried the message of recovery to others. Our service to the Fellowship and our availability to reach out a helping hand to those looking for recovery were all part of the spiritual awakening, were all part of our Higher Power’s presence in our lives. The spiritual dimension in Step Twelve was ever-present.

We applied the Twelve Steps in all areas of our lives, using them to help us through every situation. We inventoried and then we took action. We practiced love and tolerance, patience and good-temper. We stayed in the moment. The Steps, if we practiced them, permitted us to give away what we had received from those who had gone before us. We remained sober, grew spiritually, and amplified our recovery.

We were not finished. We woke up every morning, still an addict, still addicted to sex and/or love. So, we got up, thankful for another day, and began practicing these principles. And it was practice. We never reached perfection, but by practicing we got a little better today than we were yesterday. We grew — we were willing to grow — along spiritual lines. We had worked all Twelve Steps. We now worked them again. We helped someone else work them, and we continued to improve, we continued to grow. Today, with twenty-four brand-new hours to work with, we carried our recovery, our goodwill, our unconditional love, into every new encounter.

# The Twelve Traditions

## Tradition One:

***Our common welfare should come first;  
personal recovery depends upon SLAA unity.***

Our challenge is how to maintain, how to preserve, and how to grow the Fellowship of sex and love addicts we know as SLAA. We are a society of human beings with a common illness and a common solution. As human beings — fearful, self-centered, imperfect — our natural tendency is to split apart. In general, the pursuit of prestige, power and wealth characterize our behavior. This Tradition guides us in a different direction.

Group unity is required for our individual recovery. Without the Fellowship, most of us would be unable to get sober; without the Fellowship, most of us would be unable to stay sober. Without sobriety, we lose our lives. Without the Fellowship, most of us would tumble into that darkness and despair we were so happy to escape from not so long ago. Without the Fellowship, those still mastered by the addiction would not have a lifeline, would not have a way out.

The first word of the First Step is We. I cannot stay sober by myself, but we can.

If the We of the Fellowship is lost, so am I. We often hear that sobriety always has to be our first priority, in every situation, but it is actually our common welfare, our common daily striving toward sobriety, that is our first priority. We must relinquish our own self-centered goals for the sake of the group. Without the group, our individual sobriety is at risk.

Our Fellowship gave us a new life. We make a commitment to SLAA, to the members of our Fellowship. We place the health of our Fellowship ahead of our individual needs and wants. The survival of our Fellowship is essential to recovery.

Alone we cannot recover, but as a group we can. And so, we sacrifice our self-centered goals in favor of the group, as expressed by our group conscience.

The Traditions demand self-sacrifice. We are asked to put aside our egos for the sake of the community. We put aside our desires in order to happily live and work together. No surrender is too great for the preservation of our society. Unity is preeminent. Without our Fellowship, we will surely fall back into shame, isolation and despair. By caring for the well-being of all sex and/or love addicts, by having less judgment and more compassion for each individual member of our society, we are actually caring for ourselves.

From time to time, for any number of reasons, our meetings need to find new locations. I may prefer to find a space that is more convenient for me, closer to where I live and with more parking. I state my preference but listen to the rest of the group.

Others bring up health issues and cost issues. For others there is a site closer to their work or home. What is the best solution for this meeting, this group? What is best for the majority of group members? I don't have to take care of the group at my own personal expense, but neither do I take care of myself at the expense of the group. We come to a mutually acceptable solution.

Tradition One is about commitment. Instead of trying to inflate our individual reputation, or power, or self-satisfaction, we commit ourselves to focusing on maintaining the health of our Society.

Harmoniously living and working in groups are not natural skills for us. We have never felt comfortable with the word or the idea of commitment. But now we see that we cannot survive on our own. We need the group. While we never muzzle our thoughts or our beliefs, we do submit to the decisions the group makes. We engage in open discussion and debate, but after thorough airing of issues we accept the opinions and actions of our groups. We commit to the success of the Fellowship.

Unity does not mean uniformity. The flexibility of the individual within our Fellowship is cherished. We insist on the freedom of each member to work the Steps and the Traditions to the best of his or her ability and understanding. We insist on the autonomy of each group. Every member of SLAA has the right to say, think and act as he or she wishes. Every group has that same freedom. We do not prescribe or proscribe. We encourage discussion. Disagreement can be widespread, but after discussion, no matter how long it may take, we, as a Fellowship, will come to agreement and action.

Our common well-being is possible only if we are unified as a Fellowship. As a Fellowship, we have one purpose and we avoid outside issues. But we are also concerned with each member's personal welfare. Without a solid focus on the sobriety and welfare of each individual member, we could not adequately nurture the health and security of our community. Within SLAA, individual freedom is cherished. We make no rules nor do we insist on any particular beliefs. The prosperity of our Society is strengthened when each member is free to think and act as he or she thinks best. We have no authority over our members. Our disease is the authority that will kill us if we ignore these instructions.

Our first priority is to stay sober. We stay sober by trusting in a Higher Power.

We stay sober by realizing the Fellowship, the collection of recovering addicts, is more important than any individual addict. Our first priority, then, is the active guardianship of our Society. By focusing on the health and fortune of SLAA, we provide each individual, including ourselves, the chance to recover. The paradox is that we focus on the group in order to protect the individual. We are able to stay happily sober when we admit our own defeat, trust in our Higher Power and attend to the support of the society of sex and/or love addicts. Affirming the Fellowship as a daily practice is part of our spiritual practice. Our spiritual life includes those who are traveling the road of recovery with us. Our first priority is the mutual well-being of our Society; it is what comes first; it is what keeps us sober.

We are no longer alone. We are united in a common focus: dealing with our addictive sexual and emotional behavior. We have found a common denominator in our obsessive/compulsive patterns, which transcends any personal differences. We cherish and protect personal differences. We protect the rights of the individual. We honor personal welfare as much as we honor our common welfare. Within our Fellowship, we are provided the tools of recovery. We are a unified Society reaching out to help the next addict, thereby preserving our own recovery. We are committed to helping all sex and/or love addicts.

The effectiveness of our program, if it is to continue, depends on group unity.

Only a few decades ago, there was no remedy for our disease. With our Higher Power's guidance, and conscientious practice of our Steps and Traditions, our program will be available for the time to come; our Fellowship will remain whole; it will continue to be a lifeline for the addict wishing to recover.

## **Tradition Two:**

***For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority***

***— a loving God as this Power may be expressed through our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.***

Who's in charge here? The answer is clear and precise: our Higher Power as expressed by our group conscience.

Our leaders at all levels are servants who do the chores, not bosses who direct the operation. We do not have a government. No one gives orders. We have a service organization, a hierarchy, to support our Fellowship. We turn to the consciousness, expressed by democratic action, by majority vote and extended discussion, of the entire Fellowship for the decisions to maintain and grow our Fellowship.

The old saying rings true for us: Leaders should be on tap, not on top.

The Traditions are characterized by self-sacrifice, by humility and by letting go. We are guided by a power greater than our individual selves. And yet there is work to be done to keep the Fellowship operating. Who decides which work takes priority?

Who decides how our meager financial resources are used? Who directs the volunteer efforts needed to do things to support our Fellowship — for example, how does this collection of essays on the Steps, Traditions and Concepts get written, come together and get published? These questions are answered in the following Traditions.

The point here is that we do not have a director or a leader who tells us what to do. We are not governed. We live the principles of the Steps, as we each practice them, and they guide our behavior. The Traditions will provide us with a path of working together in unity. We trust that the spirit and practice of equality will guide our decisions. We believe that, even as we make mistakes, we will be guided by a Spirit of the Universe that will ultimately lead us to unity in our recovery. Our goal is to help sex and love addicts recover and each one of us grow in recovery. After all, this disease is fatal if left unchecked. We have a responsibility to share the solution that has been shared with us, the solution of the Steps and Traditions. We can only do that if we are in Fellowship.

We have endless gratitude for those who do the chores to keep our Fellowship functioning. In addition, we cherish the example of those who have many twenty-four hours in our program and provide real examples by the way they live the program day by day — those are our true leaders.

Elsewhere in this volume [on page xx], you will find the upside-down triangle that describes how we are organized for service. The highest level is the individual meeting. Each meeting elects a chairperson, a secretary, a treasurer or similar roles plus a representative to the Intergroup or the Conference. These folks, our officers, are not our leaders; they are our servants. We trust them to fulfill their roles, and we show our appreciation. They believe in the Fellowship and donate their time, intelligence and effort to help keep things running.

The same is true for lower (not higher) levels of service: the Intergroup, the Conference, the Conference Committees, the Board of Trustees. These are our servants, not our leaders. We trust them to make decisions using democratic practices, to serve the health of the Fellowship.

To make it all work, volunteers step up to take on service roles. We believe in those volunteers. We call them “trusted servants,” and each of those two words carries heavy meaning. All of us are expected to be

mindful of the faith that the Fellowship bestows on each of its members. And each of us, as members of this Fellowship, is responsible for honoring that conviction. We are all representatives of the principles of our Fellowship. We serve, and we are trusted. We trust, and we are served.

We are reminded from time to time that we are in a life or death situation. The disease of sex and love addiction, if left unchecked, can steal away the worthwhile hours of our lives, drive us to prison or suicide, and eliminate togetherness and friendship from the hours of our days. We have found a way out and have an intense interest in the survival of the Fellowship that supports our well-being.

In Tradition One, we made a commitment to the program and to our Fellowship. In Tradition Two, we trust that our Higher Power will nourish and grow our Society. The guidance we receive comes from our Higher Power. With patience and tolerance we do the footwork, expecting little other than the satisfaction of providing service to those who are suffering from this disease. We get out of ourselves when we provide service to the Fellowship.

We have many tools to help us stay sober. Our slogans, often corny but always appropriate, keep us sober. One favorite: "Anything worth doing is worth doing slow."

How unlike the world we live in! Our program is often the reverse of what we see at our jobs, on the news, even in our homes. This is not modern, everyday life in which we need to increase the speed, increase the customer satisfaction, increase the profit. We are, instead, in the Fellowship of SLAA, living on a spiritual path, trusting our Higher Power. Our process is slow; it is representational. We believe that ultimately, through democratic processes and ample discussion, our Higher Power will guide us to the decisions that will maintain and grow a vibrant Fellowship.

And while this is a selfish program — we work it to find peace of mind, satisfaction and a contented, useful life — it only works if we are unselfish. It is unlike the world outside where each individual is driven by self-interest. Instead, with Tradition Two as our guide, we are driven by a God-interest. No matter how we individually view our Higher Power, we are willing to sacrifice what we want for what is best for the Fellowship. We take part in discussion and debate, often vigorous debate, in order to find a common ground to protect and grow our Society.

We are living on a spiritual plane, and therefore, we trust that our Higher Power will take care of the results, will guide us, will guide our servants ... to make the best decisions for the continued existence and unity of our fellowship.

### **Tradition Three:**

***The only requirement for SLAA membership is a desire to stop living out a pattern of sex and love addiction.***

***Any two or more persons gathered together for mutual aid in recovering from sex and love addiction may call themselves a SLAA group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.***

Every sex and/or love addict is welcome and encouraged to join SLAA. Every sex and/or love addict everywhere would benefit from being a member of SLAA. . We are a Fellowship of equals, a Society of addicts helping addicts. Membership in our Society is not restricted. Anyone who wants to recover from addiction to sex and/or love is a member if they declare themselves so.

Within this Fellowship we are all equals. There is no distinction between us. Rich or poor, whatever spiritual approach we might take, whatever cultural background we may have, whatever politics we think right, we all have the same disease. We all have a desire to recover.

We recover from sex and love addiction by helping each other: one addict talking to another addict. Any two addicts talking together can declare themselves a SLAA group. There is however, one exception: Any two members gathered together may call themselves a SLAA group as long as the group is not affiliated with a cause, a church, a religious tradition, a political party, a therapy group, a profession, or other organization that would exclude some of our Fellowship. We exclude no one. No matter what one believes, no matter how much money one has, membership is available. The only requirement is the desire to change our behavior.

In order to do this, we suggest practicing a program of recovery. We suggest attending meetings; we suggest working the Steps and following the Traditions; we suggest contributing a small amount of money to help our service organization stay afloat; we suggest trusting a Higher Power, cleaning house, and helping others.

However, if we don't do any of these things, no one can kick us out of this Society. The only requirement is a desire to stop living out a pattern of sex and love addiction.

As a Fellowship, we welcome everyone. We know that we cannot recover alone. Each newcomer that shows up for their first meeting is a blessing for us. We go out of our way to congratulate the newcomer on attending their first meeting. We provide meeting lists and may provide contact information. We dedicate the meeting to the newcomer, sharing our First Step stories. We embrace the newcomer with the unconditional love of the program.

Those who have the courage to walk into a meeting for the first time, asking for help, admitting they have a problem, are a gift to each of us and to our Fellowship.

Without knowing it, and wondering whether they will be accepted, they are the lifeblood of SLAA. . No matter who they are, we open our arms to welcome them. And those who keep coming back after countless relapses are also our brothers and sisters, teaching us how deadly and persistent this disease can be. We welcome them with gratitude.

When we first come into the rooms, some of us don't know whether we belong or not. We know we have an issue with acting out or acting in, but we are not aware of how mind-altering sex and love addiction is. We are confused and in tremendous pain. We need help, so we declare ourselves a member of the Fellowship. All we want is to stop the behavior that was making our existence agonizing, even if we had no idea how far the tentacles of addiction had reached into our lives. Our Higher Power brought us to the rooms. Our Higher Power brings every person we find at our door to the Fellowship.

We believe that every human being brings something to our Fellowship that makes us better, and that without those individuals, we would be diminished. During the time at meetings—the spiritual time between the opening and the closing—we are anonymous sufferers with the same disease. We are gathered to help each other recover.

We do not require anyone to pay anything to be a member. When we say that anyone is a member if they say they are, it also means they are not required to pay dues. There is no cost to be a member of SLAA. There is no financial requirement. We do need members to contribute — both time and money — to the support of our service organization, but it is not required of any particular individual.

Each SLAA group is free to conduct their business in accordance with the principles of the Steps and Traditions as their group conscience dictates. They are a SLAA group if they say they are, as long as they have a common desire to stop living out a pattern of sex and love addiction. There are no financial requirements; there are no meeting format requirements; there are no activity or registration requirements. No one can order a meeting to disband.

Some meetings, however, may decide to restrict attendance. We have meetings specific to gender, to sexual preference and/or gender identity, for those with legal troubles only, for those with a specific bottom line behavior such as anorexia or porn addiction. We feel these meetings are acceptably aligned with the spirit of the Tradition. The point is that when we start taking sides about issues in society at large we threaten the unity and potential survival of SLAA, and thus depart from the guidance of this Tradition. But meetings designed for safety and support of a specific segment of our Society fit into our guidance.

There are times when a meeting needs to address the behavior of an individual member. Someone may be perpetually late; someone may talk too long or talk off topic or about outside issues; someone may preach or patronize. There are times we need to protect the safety of our meetings. Someone may attend a meeting drunk or high; someone may engage in flirting or attempt to pick up sex partners; someone may be threatening or irrational in a way that is disconcerting to the meeting; someone may engage in stalking. For the safety of all, we must address these situations. We keep in mind we can never revoke anyone's membership in our Fellowship, in our Society. We know from personal experience that change is possible. Someone who causes trouble today may be a contributing member tomorrow.

When inappropriate behavior happens in a meeting, we (usually the meeting secretary, or an older member, or a sponsor, guided by the group conscience of the meeting) can ask the offending member to change their behavior or leave the meeting for a period of time. The group may dedicate a business meeting, or even multiple business meetings, to discuss the situation or situations. Group conscience will direct appropriate actions. How we respond to threats to our safety, our unity, our general well-being is an indication of how healthy we have become.

These are difficult situations, but the principles of our Fellowship — including the Steps, the Traditions, the Concepts, and all of our conference approved texts — provide clear cut ways of handling them. The point is, no person — and no meeting — can be kept out of SLAA. However, not every meeting needs to accommodate every member. While the meeting itself can restrict members attending a special interest meeting — and we may exclude members from a specific meeting who are a threat to other members or to the safety of the meeting as a whole — we cannot exclude anyone from the Fellowship.

Tradition Three builds on our first two Traditions: unity and a Higher Power as our ultimate authority. We keep no one out. If we did, we would be playing God and might be sentencing such an outcast to a life of misery and perhaps no life at all. We are made stronger, we increase in hopefulness, with every new member of SLAA and with every new SLAA meeting. We need to feel safe at meetings, but we are often driven by fear rather than by our trust in our Higher Power. We need to allow those who are different from us to attend. We firmly believe we must look for the similarities, not the differences. Tradition Three, as guidance, prevents us from creating rules that restrict membership.

Sex and love addiction including anorexia carry a stigma which discourages people from seeking our Fellowship. As addicts, our lives are filled with secrets. Our shame restricts our ability to connect with others. As a Fellowship, we learn to trust and no longer fear. Because we do not judge or restrict others, we feel safe to open up and to share. We learn to practice the principles of the Steps and open our hearts to those who are different from us. We show compassion and share the hope that has been given us.

We are told to “keep coming back.” We have found a Fellowship that welcomes all sex and/or love addicts desiring recovery. We have found a home.

## **Tradition Four:**

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

“Don’t take yourself too damn seriously.”<sup>8</sup> Tradition Four reminds us that the Traditions are not rules or regulations or commandments or requirements. They are spiritual guidelines to help us, as a Society, work together for our long-term survival and serenity and for the recovery of all sex and love addicts. Within that spirit of working together inside and outside of the Fellowship, we are encouraged to grow. To grow we need to try new things. We need to make mistakes. We need to allow others to make mistakes.

The Traditions address the unity of our Fellowship — the unity of all who suffer from this disease whether by acting out sexually or romantically, or by acting in through avoidance. We cannot stay sober alone. Each one of us, each individual, needs the Fellowship of sex and love addicts. And we each need the group. We need groups that are autonomous. Whether we are sex addicts, love addicts or anorexic, the group is our recovery foundation.

Autonomous groups are self-governing, independent, and free from control. Tradition Four guides us to allow groups to operate independently from the entire Fellowship, to operate without the authority of a central office. After all, we, as individuals, do not govern, nor do our service organizations govern.

Questions often come in to Fellowship Wide Services, the Board of Trustees, or the Conference Committees regarding how to handle certain issues such as: who can attend meetings, what literature can be read, what language can be used, including what words and what content, what announcements can be made, and what the boundaries are between individual and group responsibility. Invariably the answer is no answer. It is up to the group to decide on each of these issues. We expect the groups to be autonomous.

And yet, regarding autonomy, without fail we respond with a fear of too much freedom. Won’t we fall apart if we don’t control the groups? Won’t we descend into anarchy? No. We are a functioning anarchy, but we do have a higher authority. Our benevolent higher power protects us and guides us to proper group conscience decisions. The addiction itself will punish us unmercifully if we become close-minded, controlling, or prideful. The disease seeps in whenever we allow fear to control our lives.

We know of a group that loved disorder. They met at noon Monday through Friday. There was never a chair, never any boring business meetings, and never anything else to distract from sharing. The church basement was always open, the envelopes went into a secure slot, and somehow the rent was magically paid ... until one of the members got into some trouble on church grounds, and the church kicked the meeting out cold. The group thought about meeting in a park, just to be able to continue together. Then they started to grow up. A committee was formed to find another church. A general chair was elected and general officers and chairs for each day of the week. Each daily chair was responsible for the key to the new church, and had to physically hand it to any replacement in advance, or there would be no meeting.

The reason the church had kicked them out was that there was no contact person when things went wrong. Because there was no business meeting, there was no forum to discuss the responsibilities the

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<sup>8</sup> *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, Alcoholics Anonymous, 1952, page 149.

members had to the church. Because the group was not being sober, it was hard for members to conduct a meeting in a sober way. As individuals assumed positions of responsibility, their program improved. Their service to the group helped the group improve. Even though the group initially shrank in size, it gradually rebuilt. It became larger. It also became more sober. As a healthier meeting it was able to reach still-suffering addicts as it had not been able to do before. By exercising its right to be wrong, the meeting learned that autonomy is not equivalent to irresponsibility.

The individual SLAA meeting is on its own as far as what it wants to do. With this freedom comes responsibility. Our directions are in the Steps. As individuals and as groups we need to practice these principles in all areas of our lives. This job description applies to us as individual addicts as well as to our meetings.

Responsibility to SLAA as a whole means responsibility for examining our group's actions in light of the principles of the program. At the same time, no decision of any SLAA group or FWS committee is ever forced upon another, even when we believe a practice is clearly in conflict with the Steps and Traditions.

The key word is autonomous. Many groups choose to practice autonomy through regular business meetings. Business meetings help each group develop their own identity and also help the group be accountable to each of its members. This Tradition, as with all Traditions and Steps, is forged out of the diverse ideas, interests, and needs of individuals struggling to survive and live. We respect diversity; we do not reject it, even though it often does not look "correct" from our particular perspective. For our groups' health, tolerance is required.

A meeting can focus on the Steps and Traditions, reading from program literature (or, for that matter, non-program literature, non-conference-approved literature). A meeting can have speakers. A meeting can be a discussion group. Tradition Four allows any individual group or intergroup to operate even in flagrant contradiction to the Traditions, if they choose to do so. There are no rules imposed by the Intergroup, the SLAA, Board of Trustees, or Fellowship Wide Services. The group can send money to Intergroup and/or to FWS ... or not. It is completely up to the group's members. The group is self-managed. The only authority, as explained in Tradition Two, is a loving and supportive Higher Power as expressed in the group's conscience. The disease itself will deliver a painful outcome if and when we fail to follow spiritual principles as individuals or as groups.

The wisdom of the guidance in the Fourth Tradition is subtle. It is through innovation that we grow, and as spiritual entities we need to grow. If we stop growing, we die. However, if any innovation is contrary to spiritual principles, the disease will grab a foothold and point this out. As with most of our efforts in this Twelve Step program, we need to find balance and harmony. If the service organizations of the Fellowship imposed rules, it would lead to stagnation. Thus, each meeting must be free to make its own mistakes.

But some may object to a meeting that reads non-conference-approved literature on the grounds that it might send the wrong message to a new member. We take that risk, believing that the group conscience of the meeting itself can determine whether the message is right or wrong. If the message is not consistent with the principles of the Twelve Steps, the meeting will eventually fail. A meeting that fails to be self-supporting will eventually fail. Meetings that ignore the guidance of the Traditions will fail, just as an addict who ignores the guidance of the Steps will fail to recover.

Just as individuals grow in their understanding of the principles, so too do groups grow in their adherence to the spirit of the Traditions.

The strength of our Society, our Fellowship, is built through the diversity of our meetings. We need meetings of all types: meetings that only discuss the Steps, meetings for women only, closed meetings, open meetings, meetings for wide-ranging discussion, meetings that strictly enforce the Traditions and meetings that try new things. As individual addicts we vote with our feet by attending those meetings that are best for growing and enlarging our sobriety. Meetings that act outside the spirit of the Steps, the Traditions, and the Concepts will naturally fail.

The Traditions suggest self-sacrifice and humility. If we take ourselves too seriously, if we restrict the ability for meetings to change and grow, we choke off the creative force of our program. We do not believe we have all the answers. We are open to new ideas within the framework of our principles. Just as we grow and change as individuals, meetings change and grow. We have a primary purpose and the directions in the Steps and the other Traditions that will keep us safe. With autonomy, we truly become a “we” program.

Unity does not mean conformity. We cherish diversity. We cherish enthusiasm.

We trust that many meetings will grow and flourish. We trust they all govern themselves and try new things with the guidance of a loving Higher Power. We are led by our Higher Power’s will that is made clear through our group conscience. We trust that SLAA will continue to blossom into a Fellowship helping all those sex and love addicts everywhere who are seeking recovery.

## **Tradition Five:**

### ***Each group has but one primary purpose***

***— to carry its message to the sex and love addict who still suffers.***

Let’s keep it simple. We have but one purpose, and that is to carry the message of recovery to the next addict. Tradition Five is the expression of our unified purpose. This Tradition is essential in leading us to a contented, useful, and happy life as individuals and as a Fellowship.

Tradition Five is our mission statement. It distinguishes our meetings from therapy, from self-help, from social or political groups, and from religious communities. Tradition Five keeps our groups on track. By focusing on our one primary purpose, we carry our message of hope. That message — of humility, honesty, tolerance, generosity and love — is found throughout the Steps, Traditions and literature. We carry the message of recovery. This is our primary purpose.

We practice Tradition Five in our groups by welcoming newcomers, by making sure our meeting times and places are published and can be found, by starting our meetings on time, and by focusing only on the program of recovery during our meetings. In the sacred time between the opening and closing prayers, this ensures a safe environment for all. This is our responsibility.

At our meetings, we empower each other. We openly share our stories and feelings. We share, one addict to another, the ways this disease affects us. We share what has or has not worked for us. We encourage each other and show understanding when one of us is hurting. We refrain from judging. We try to make a difference by reaching out in non-addictive ways. We offer understanding when others cannot. We share the sexual, social, and emotional aspects of our addiction, our withdrawal, and our recovery.

We all have a similar disease. Our acting out, or acting in, will not be the same from one addict to the next, but we identify with each other. We identify with the feelings if not the specific behavior. We each have a trail of damaged or broken relationships; some of us have burned out from fantasies, and some of us have experienced jail time. We are learning that this disease is progressive for us. We share the

strength we receive from using the tools and the hope we gain as we recover each day. For many of us, we realize we have found a home as we hear fellow addicts tell their story — a story that sounds much like ours.

Even though we have different personal histories, diverse interests, and a variety of economic and cultural backgrounds, Tradition Five enables us to have blinders toward all our differences, including those of sexual orientation. We are heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, transsexual — our ranks include representatives from the entire human family. We are all welcome to the Fellowship and to recovery. The only thing that matters is that we carry the message of recovery to sex and/or love addicts, regardless of the types of romance, relationship, avoidance or sex addiction we encounter.

Tradition Five is clear that our job is to carry the message. We let go of the results. Each newcomer decides whether SLAA is right for them. The success of our Fellowship — even our personal recovery — does not depend on their decision. We merely plant the seed by offering our experience, strength and hope. Recovery is the responsibility of the addict, not the sponsor, counselor, spouse, partner, coworker, parent, friend, sibling or SLAA member.

As we recover and grow, we learn to build healthy relationships and to become good citizens in a complex world. We grow spiritually by practicing the Steps and Traditions. Our meetings offer an extraordinary and powerful space for sharing, appreciating, and consolidating our personal transformations. We may or may not have a personal religious affiliation, but as a group we have a spiritual path, guided by our Higher Power, as expressed through our group conscience.

Living sober, we are faced with many challenges and many concerns. We need to earn a living; we need to work and live with other people. All of the practical daily activities we do to survive as individuals are important. But as members of SLAA, we understand that they are not our primary concern. Our most important purpose is to help another sex and/or love addict or anorexic. We extend our support to all addicts who walk through the door, newcomer or long-timer. Our payoff is in understanding ourselves better and enhancing our own recovery. As individuals we have one overriding goal, and that is to maintain our sobriety today. As members of SLAA, and as groups, we know we must carry this message of sobriety to those who are still suffering. We do this for ourselves as well as for them. We do it so we can keep this gift we have been so generously given.

We carry our message outside of our meetings by being examples of sober, contented people. We may also help with SLAA outreach committees, start an open meeting, or reach out to those in prison. We may pass a pamphlet such as 40 Questions for Self-Diagnosis to a therapist, a member of the clergy, or an individual in trouble.

Just as the Steps are suggestions for how to keep ourselves sober, the Traditions are suggestions to keep our Fellowship sober. Without a sober Fellowship our individual chances of maintaining sobriety are poor at best. The Traditions provide us — the Fellowship of sex and/or love addicts and anorexics — with suggestions on how to interact in a healthy, sober way as a group, a Fellowship, a Society.

The Steps are only suggested as a program of recovery for the individual. The Traditions, too, are only suggestions for the group. Just as each of us has the option to ignore the Steps and return to the misery of addiction, each group has the option to ignore the guidance of the Traditions. Without practicing our Traditions, however, we fail to carry the message of recovery so desperately needed by the suffering addict or anorexic. As individuals, sobriety is our primary focus. As groups, carrying the message is our obligation.

How can we as groups and individuals be obligated to carry the message in a program that is suggestion only? An obligation is, among other things, “a debt of gratitude for a service or favor.” Sobriety is our gift from our Higher Power. As we have discovered, in order to keep the gifts of this program, we must give the program away — we are obliged to do so. We must carry this message to others if we wish to stay sober.

Sobriety and recovery are not accomplished in isolation. This idea of carrying the message is counter to our tendencies to isolate and withdraw. The obligation to carry the message to others keeps us engaged. When we incorporate the experiences of others into our lives, we begin to embrace a broader view of life and recovery.

The Steps and Traditions provide a path to recovery that is spiritual in nature.

This path requires self-sacrifice, humility and faith. We rise above fear by relying upon a Power greater than ourselves. It is this Power, expressed by our group conscience, that keeps us sober and our Fellowship unified.

It is easy to think, now that we have overcome a condition that was, indeed, hopeless, that we could solve any problem. However, if we as a group set out on any other campaign, we lose our focus on the one thing that saved our lives. Every morning we wake up to find that we are still sex and love addicts. To stay sober, we go to meetings and we help others. The focus of each meeting, each group, is to carry our message of hope and recovery to the next addict. Only by doing so are we able to maintain a consistent, contented life in sobriety, and to offer this possibility to our fellow sex and/or love addicts and anorexics.

### **Tradition Six:**

***A SLAA group or SLAA as a whole ought never to endorse, finance, or lend the SLAA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.***

Filled with gratitude for the relief we have experienced as a result of working the Twelve Step program offered by our Fellowship, we may be tempted to think that our group can now improve all sorts of other things. After all, we see so many ills in the world around us that could be positively impacted by the grace and love we have experienced in SLAA. It is tempting to think that our model of fellowship and interaction could benefit so many more people. We may wonder whether it is time for our Fellowship to get involved on a wider level.

It is so easy to forget that we didn't get sober by ourselves. Our Higher Power had a lot to do with it, perhaps everything to do with it. It's easy to think we have some power when, in reality, we are powerless over our addiction, as well as over people, places, and things. We are sober at this very minute largely because we humbly acknowledge and accept that we do not have the power to enforce our will. It would be arrogant to think we can use our sober status to control outside issues, events, and situations.

Tradition Six builds on Tradition Five. We have a singular purpose — to carry the message to the sex and love addict or anorexic who still suffers. We do this through our meetings, our service structure, our retreats and events, our websites and our publications. As a Fellowship, any endorsement, any alignment with an outside enterprise, any financial investment, can divert us from our primary purpose. In Tradition Six we maintain our humility by avoiding attempts at control with money, property, and that elusive, seductive quality of prestige. We stay humble, which helps us stay sober. Let's not confuse

the situation by endorsing or partnering or involving our groups with other enterprises. Our focus needs to be firmly on recovery. Any other activity is an outside issue.

Even enterprises that seem to be aimed at adding to our recovery can be problematic. Why not have “S” clubhouses, rehab centers, and drop-in sites where healthy relationships can be cultivated? Why not endorse outside activities, programs or campaigns that we see as beneficial to our membership? It is attractive to think about having a SLAA building with meeting space, a TV room, even a kitchen; a place where we can receive phone calls and mail, where addicts can drop in at any time. It seems efficient to join with another organization — a church, or even another Twelve Step group — in order to maximize resources. Justifiable, we tell ourselves, because we can reach more addicts.

And yet, our focus on recovery becomes diluted as we worry about rent, publicity, inter-organizational politics, and all the little chores required to keep a business running. We, as SLAA, need to avoid these entanglements. Certainly a clubhouse for SLAA sounds wonderful, but it should be handled by a separate enterprise. Our Fellowship, for its survival, needs to stay out of these arrangements. If we establish a SLAA club or Twelve Step house, we have aligned ourselves with a business. Alcoholics Anonymous has dealt with this issue and has clearly separated itself from Twelve Step clubhouses, which are always incorporated separately.

Independent, autonomous meetings pay rent at those facilities. The group, the meeting, is separate from the enterprise. We in the SLAA program often meet in churches and are careful to define ourselves as separate and independent from our landlords.

The issue of endorsements can be subtle. If we invite a therapist to speak about their work at a SLAA event, if we invite an author, if we invite clergy, it would be interpreted as an endorsement of their practice, their publication, or their church. In addition, if we read non-conference-approved literature at our meetings, we risk endorsing outside methodologies or philosophies, and may dilute our Twelve Step message. Tradition Four states, “Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or SLAA as a whole.” Therefore, each autonomous group is free to use any literature it chooses, but each group will want to consider carefully whether outside literature may dilute the SLAA message — especially for newcomers — or affect the Fellowship as a whole.

Another subtle challenge is avoiding endorsement of specific methods of working the steps, of particular ways of working the program. We need to be open to all approaches, not endorsing one method of Step Four inventory over another, for example. To be rigid about one or another method of working our program is a failure of humility. We must again remind ourselves that we have one primary purpose; we must not let ourselves be distracted by issues of method or approach or style.

Our Fellowship is diverse. We are made up of addicts and anorexics from all parts of the world, from all classes, all cultures, from all religious and social backgrounds. We characterize ourselves by our openness to all human traditions. We make room for all beliefs and customs, using our Twelve Traditions as our guide on how to live and work together. And so we do not endorse any particular ideology, any religion, any social custom, any society. We try to remove all barriers to membership in our Fellowship.

Of course, as individuals we have personal freedom. We get involved with other activities — religious, political, therapeutic, commercial. We as individuals can endorse and partner with other enterprises. However, as part of our SLAA Fellowship, we focus on one thing only: recovery — ours and that of those who suffer from the same disease we have. It is our number one objective in all that we do as members of this Society.

Therefore, we avoid any controversy that could threaten our unity as a Fellowship. We strive to ensure individual freedom within the unity of the Fellowship. We are careful not to align ourselves with any outside enterprise in any direct or indirect way. We maintain contact with a Higher Power, relinquishing to that Higher Power any control we think we might have. We follow this guidance from the Traditions, surrendering our desire to be helpful in other ventures. In this way, our concentration on recovery, for ourselves and others, can remain unbroken and untroubled.

The guidance we receive from Tradition Six is another shield preventing our egos from harming our recovery and the recovery of all sex and love addicts into the future. It protects our identity and preserves our unity.

### **Tradition Seven:**

***Every SLAA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.***

We may wonder why we need to discuss money, since ours is a spiritual program. We may wish to put money out of our minds completely, fearing it may complicate our lives and our relationship with our Fellowship. But we need to talk about money because it is a fundamental part of the practical world in which we live. We need to talk about it so that it doesn't become a negative power in our collective life.

Money can be a source of argument and controversy. It is often a source of pride, privilege, or inequality. Money can become a higher power which can distract us from our spiritual path and our true Higher Power. Because money can get in the way of our spiritual recovery, we must have a strategy to deal with it. Tradition Seven continues the discussion of money begun in Tradition Six, providing further direction about how to manage the financial lives of our groups.

There are no fees, no membership dues, and no financial requirements to belong to SLAA. Membership is free to all who desire it. So how do we pay our bills and maintain our financial health? **We are self-supporting through our own contributions.** At our meetings, we provide the opportunity for each individual to anonymously contribute whatever financial support they are able. We use these funds to support meeting expenses, and, if there is excess, to support SLAA as a whole, usually by contributing to our local Intergroup and/or to our international service body, Fellowship-Wide Services (FWS).

In addition, members are able to make independent gifts to the program. Gifts can be made up of money or property. Any asset that carries a material value can be gifted to our Fellowship. However, the guidance from this Tradition is to make sure the giver is part of our Fellowship, and further, is receiving neither prestige nor special treatment nor renown because of the gift. We do not accept loans or gifts from outside the Fellowship, and we limit internal gifts to a maximum amount. We decline gifts that are in excess of our agreed-upon limit.

Of course, this is unusual behavior. It seems strange to many that SLAA will turn away a gift if it is valued over a certain amount. In most organizations — whether a small club or a global corporation — revenue is crucial. It becomes the focus of much activity. But we strictly limit donation amounts because money can become linked with prestige, which, in turn, leads to inequality and a loss of the sobriety we so desire and strive for.

Neither do we accept grants nor donations from outside our rooms. We pay for our meeting space because we do not want our Fellowship to be confused with our landlords, who may have a specific religious or medical perspective. We want to protect and maintain our independence at all times. We are no longer dependent on anyone but our Higher Power, our Fellowship and ourselves. We take

direction from our Higher Power, not from our source of income. We have learned responsibility; we have learned to be self-supporting through our own contributions. This has contributed greatly to our self-respect, as groups and as individuals.

As a Fellowship we are committed to what is called “corporate poverty.” We do not spend beyond our means. We do not expect others to pay for us. And we avoid the accumulation of too much money. What if we became rich? What should we do with all that money? The arguments over conflicting ideas could be many and endless, and could distract us from our spiritual goals. We in SLAA, as individuals and as groups, are part of a spiritual program concerned with material things only to the extent they ensure our financial survival. Our financial efforts must always support our service to the still-suffering sex and/or love addict or anorexic. Our interest is in the unity of our fellowship and our ability to carry the message. We are not interested in how big our bank balance has become, how big our office is, nor in the prestige our financial strength might carry. This establishes our integrity to our members and to the general public.

But we do have necessary expenses. We pay rent; we purchase literature; we hire staff. We may need to furnish our meeting room in order to have enough chairs, a table, sufficient lighting—the things that allow a meeting to operate comfortably. We need to keep our meeting rooms and office spaces clean. We need to reach out to members and prospective members of the Fellowship via all available media, whether a web hosting site or paid postage. We pay someone to answer the phones at the Fellowship-Wide Services office, to ship books, and to handle the business of renting and administering the office. If, as a meeting, we do not approve of the activities of the Intergroup or the FWS office, we have the power of the purse. The power of the Fellowship resides with the meetings.

Meeting space, meeting safety, and communication tools support and promote recovery. We pay for the things we need, the things that allow us to continue to function as a vibrant, unified and growing Fellowship. However, the perception that we need more money in order to accomplish material goals, even if the result of that goal is to reach more addicts, is a dangerous line of thinking that can subvert our primary purpose. As individuals and as groups, our objective is to serve each other and to grow spiritually, with money playing only a minimal part in our ability to do so. We are not restrained by having, or not having, money.

After our basic financial needs are met, we then concentrate on the spiritual practices that will yield a contented, sober, and useful life for ourselves and others. While we have turned our will and our lives over to the care of our Higher Power, we realize that no one but ourselves can do the footwork. Ours is a program of action, requiring our participation at every level. We pay our own way, we do our own work, and we help each other.

And so we are self-supporting in other ways as well — doing the things that need to be done to keep the Fellowship in operation. In addition to paying our own way, we are self-sufficient when we show up, when we help out, when we donate time and effort to the Fellowship as a whole. This includes showing up at meetings, telling our story, listening to others when they share, serving on committees, and being a sponsor.

Our group would not exist if it did not have regular attendance, if we didn’t listen to one another, if we didn’t maintain our anonymity. Someone needs to step up to chair the meeting, to publish the meeting list, to represent the meeting at our local Intergroup or the Annual Business Conference. Without this service, we might fail to reach sex and/or love addicts or anorexics that need our help. We might miss the opportunity to grow along spiritual lines that service affords us. We are self-sufficient when we are responsible, when we take necessary actions as guided by these Steps and Traditions.

Similarly, our service groups require responsible commitments of funds and service. Pamphlets, books and journals need writers, editors, and page designers. If no one volunteered to write literature, we would have none. At local Intergroups, our members volunteer to design and run websites, chair meetings, oversee the treasury, print local meeting directories, and attend our ABC/M (Annual Business Conference/Meeting). Some of this work requires paid professionals and services. Our local groups support these service arms — their local Intergroup and Fellowship-Wide Services. This mutual interdependence is a wholesome and sustaining condition, preserving our fellowship in unity and equality.

Therefore, each one of us has a responsibility to share in the financial support of our Fellowship. While our expenses should be minimal, we all need to share those expenses. We need to keep in mind that, even though we don't pay dues, the primary source of revenue for SLAA comes from the contributions members make to their groups. If we are used to giving a small amount at our meetings, we could consider giving more. After all, most of us spent much more money on our acting out behavior when we were in the disease. We contribute financially as generously as we can to the Fellowship that saved our lives.

We are a Society, a collection of individuals, helping each other, day after day, to stay sober. We cannot buy recovery. Our financial efforts must always be subservient to our spiritual efforts. Each group, and its members, is responsible for being self-sustaining. Being self-supporting brings self-esteem. We are dependent on no one but our Higher Power.

### **Tradition Eight:**

***SLAA should remain forever non-professional,  
but our service centers may employ special workers.***

SLAA is a society of individuals helping each other heal from sex and love addiction. We help each other establish a new way of living without the misery and despair we suffered in our disease. We do this work as non-professionals — what we do for each other is not done for money or any other material gain, but to further our own spiritual growth and that of others.

We work with each other in many ways: attending meetings and sharing, listening to each other, starting new meetings, making or receiving outreach calls, volunteering for service positions, sponsoring, reaching out to newcomers, publishing meeting lists, serving on committees to support our fellowship, and many other tasks that maintain and enhance our unity and communication with each other. We call this Twelfth Step work, and we do it because it helps keep us sober. We do not ask for money or any other remuneration for working the steps, sponsoring, hearing a Fifth Step, or leading a meeting or a panel discussion. We contribute our time and attention as a gift to each other.

Our program is a spiritual program. We are a community—a society—of people afflicted by a common disease. One of the miracles of SLAA is the effective neutralization of the disease of sex and love addiction and/or anorexia, using the kit of spiritual tools outlined by the founders of the first Twelve Step program. We do not have professionals or gurus at a podium telling us how to recover. We are not restored to health by miracle drugs nor by rational explanations of data collected by health workers or sociologists. We share a spiritual attitude toward life and take action based on that attitude — action that arrests our disease and allows us to live happy and productive lives.

Many of us are professionals of various sorts in our lives outside of our Fellowship. There is no special status in SLAA for those whose living comes from a professional career. We are all equal members in a Society with a common solution to our addiction. Our addiction is the great equalizer, and it is the

recognition of this equality — the realization that recovery is available to all who seek it — that binds us in love and service. Our humility in all areas of our lives is the result of the spiritual work that we do together and the anonymity we practice.

Sometimes professionals from the fields of psychology, psychiatry, medicine, or religion find themselves qualified for membership in our Fellowship. Just like any other sex and love addict, they are welcome. Their participation in meetings and in the Fellowship as a whole is on a member-to-member basis, not as a professional, with their own recovery as their primary concern. We have heard of a priest who chose to remove his clerical collar before attending meetings in order to maintain his anonymity and equality with others in the fellowship. Many of us maintain professional anonymity for the same reason.

We are not opposed to professional help. There are many fine doctors, psychologists, therapists, attorneys and professional experts in many areas. The work done by professionals is often indispensable to our well-being. We encourage each other to take advantage of professional support whenever and wherever appropriate. But we keep in mind that all such help is outside of our program of recovery. We have no opinion on how each individual addresses his or her health or legal issues.

Professional help is important from a personal standpoint, but it is an outside issue as far as our Fellowship is concerned.

Our experience in SLAA has provided many of us with the desire and the perspective to work in a professional field. If our knowledge and experience from SLAA can make us better teachers, therapists, clergy, counselors, attorneys, or workers of any kind, that is great news. As long as we maintain anonymity, and we separate our SLAA Twelfth Step work from our professional activity, we harm no one and likely benefit many.

However, Twelfth Step work alone is not enough to keep our Fellowship functioning smoothly. Office phones need to be answered; rent needs to be paid; letters written. Books and journals need to be published, stored, inventoried, packed and shipped. Legal issues arise from time to time which require us to hire legal counsel. There are tasks that need to be done that are part of keeping the Fellowship alive, but are not directly related to our Step work. We pay employees to perform these activities that keep the fellowship functioning — activities that allow the rest of us to work Step Twelve, and all of the Steps, as best we can. Those who perform paid tasks for SLAA are fairly compensated; we are dedicated to paying our own way in the spirit of the Seventh Tradition.

Tradition Eight highlights the boundary between the spiritual and the material. Our program is not a self-help program or group therapy. We have a design for living, simple but not easy, that very specifically delineates the difference between helping each other out of love and helping each other for pay. We offer the unconditional love originating with our Higher Power to all members of SLAA, with no expectation or acceptance of material reward.

### **Tradition Nine:**

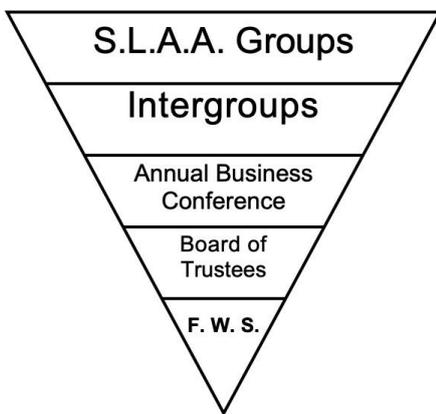
***SLAA as such ought never to be organized;  
but we may create service boards or committees  
directly responsible to those they serve.***

This Tradition is as critical to the ongoing health and vibrancy of SLAA as any other. It may be confusing to hear that SLAA is “never to be organized”; our meetings seem to run in an organized fashion, with consistency and clarity of purpose. We meet at the same time, we read literature each week, we follow

the same format time and again. We have service positions — Secretary, Treasurer, Literature, Intergroup Representative, and others — that are filled through rotation of service.

This ‘organization’ and consistency is a welcome support for our recovery. But we are a Society, not an organization. All of these structures are subject to group conscience decision making — we are to be mindful of what a loving God would want us to do, and that helping the sex and love addict recover is the goal.

Unlike most human endeavors which are organized, SLAA does not impose rules, and does not create extensive membership requirements for individuals or for groups (see Tradition Three). We do not have regulations. No one among us issues directives. Even a mention of “*violating a Tradition*” would be outside the intent of Tradition Nine — although we often catch ourselves speaking in these terms. There is no authority who can enforce the Traditions. The only law is the disease itself which will, if we do not practice the principles of our program, rob us of our dignity, honor, and self respect.



At the same time, along service lines, we are highly organized. In addition to meeting service positions, we have an Annual Business Conference/Meeting (ABC/M), Conference Committees, the Fellowship Wide Services (FWS) office, and a Board of Trustees (BOT). The service structure of Twelve Step Recovery is illustrated as an inverted triangle.

Unlike most organizations, where the highest and narrowest point is the ultimate authority, in our Society the highest level of authority is the SLAA groups representing the membership at large. FWS does not pass final judgement on any SLAA issue; the Board of Trustees receives their guidance from the Groups through the ABC/M

Representatives. We find our structure through our Higher Power as expressed through group conscience, and it is a structure exclusively dedicated to serve the individuals and groups that make up our fellowship.

In SLAA, officers are elected at each level of our fellowship to serve in various capacities. However, not one of them can make or enforce any rules. Our officers’ duty is to serve the groups as trusted servants, to do the will of the groups. SLAA members and groups inform the Intergroups about their concerns and needs. These concerns can be brought to the Annual Business Conference/Meeting. The ABC/M and the Board of Trustees are responsible for providing services and addressing requests as best as possible.

Conference Committees likewise are established to achieve various goals such as publishing literature, providing focused outreach, and organizing retreats and conferences. All service workers are responsible to the individuals and groups who are working to recover from the many forms of sex and love addiction.

Since we are a group without leaders, rotation of service positions is a critical necessity. Any member of SLAA may — and is encouraged — to join these committees. We are a fellowship of equals who share decision-making. This reality brings a responsibility — it is important for us to see ourselves as capable, competent, and committed to participate as best we can. This furthers our growth and recovery personally and adds diversity and richness to SLAA as a whole. We are — each and every member of SLAA — a necessary voice in the ongoing conversation of recovery and a positive example to the greater society around us.

So how do we deal with difficulties without governing? For example, it has happened that a member has come to a meeting drunk and disruptive; there have been times when members have attempted fund raising for efforts not supported by SLAA; sometimes a member's share at a meeting is out of bounds; some meetings read literature that is not conference approved. A recent group's business meeting was trying to address perpetual lateness by a few members of that group. Over several years a number of actions were taken: the meeting start time was moved back five minutes; language promoting punctuality was added to the meeting script; a private conversation was had with one of those perpetually late, which only resulted in bruised feelings. The tardiness issue continued, but the group attendance increased and the hope persisted that the Twelve Steps would do their work for all members. These Steps, if worked rigorously, may allow the realization among those with punctuality problems that being late is on some level a harm done to those who arrive on time.

We cannot legislate proper behavior. But what about addressing behavior that is clearly anti-social? What about an instance where a sex and love addict's disease takes control and their behavior at meetings becomes that of a sexual predator? Or addressing a meeting's format that is viewed by other meetings as a threat to the fellowship? Let's imagine there is a meeting that charges a membership fee and requires members to meet specific criteria. Could we refuse to list the meeting in our directories? Could we file a legal effort to prevent the group from using the SLAA name?

The answer is this: *we do not have to fear anyone or anything*. The Traditions require us to trust our Higher Power and we do. We sort out the difficulties that come through human relationships with reliance on the Spirit that guides us, through our group conscience. Often, this is not easy. We as a group may decide to speak one-on-one with the person inflicting the harm; we may decide to exclude them from the meeting for a period of time; it may even be necessary to call the authorities.

Tradition Nine instructs us not to play God. It instructs us to provide service, not government. At all levels of service we must serve in humility, open-minded to those who offer different ways to do things. At all levels we must ask for God's guidance, and test our decisions against high standards of spirituality.

Tradition Nine speaks to the fact that we have no hierarchy. The various Conference Committee members, Conference Delegates, Trustees, Intergroup Officers, and Group officers are all trusted servants who make suggestions regarding the many matters which are important to the healthy continuing existence of the Fellowship. Our Higher Power is our authority. Our recovery depends on our service to ourselves and others. We pursue service — work in service — in an efficient and organized way and work hard to avoid power and prestige of title and position.

In Tradition Nine, the practical meets the spiritual. There is a clear, concise, and urgent point to this Tradition, and it is that the organized structures in our Fellowship cannot give orders, cannot make directives, and, simply, do not govern. We create internal organizations to address the practical needs of our Fellowship, but we guard with special vigilance what is fundamental: the spiritual nature of our program.

### **Tradition Ten:**

***SLAA has no opinion on outside issues;***

***hence the SLAA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.***

We are reminded of this Tradition at every SLAA meeting when the Preamble is read: "As a fellowship, SLAA has no opinion on outside issues and seeks no controversy." We have one purpose, as defined in Tradition Five. As a Fellowship, as a Society of recovering addicts, we focus only on carrying the message. We carry the message of our principles, our road to recovery, and our sober lives to the next addict. An

outside issue is anything — everything — that is not precisely carrying the message of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions to sex, love or avoidance addicts.

We are recovering from a fatal condition. We have found a program that works.

And yet our future is not guaranteed unless we continue to follow these few simple principles. We have established our primary purpose, but sometimes as addicts we are easily distracted. We may feel that, having achieved liberation from acting out or acting in, our Fellowship can now be of service in other ways, on other issues, in other arenas. We may falsely think that we can help all of humankind, addicts and non-addicts alike. We think we can solve environmental challenges or end human trafficking. Wouldn't it be wonderful, we think — not noticing the self-importance in our attitude — if pornography were outlawed, thereby reducing our temptations and sparing others from falling into the addiction that once controlled our lives? There are certainly many causes that we can feel passionate about, some quite worthy, but they are all, each and every one, outside issues. Maybe we will get involved as individuals, but as a Fellowship we maintain neutrality.

Of course, as Individuals we may take up causes we believe in. As recovering individuals we have a responsibility to participate, to be responsible citizens, to bring our newly won peace and sobriety to the greater world. But as a Fellowship, we have one primary purpose. We are careful to maintain the separation between ourselves as individuals and the Fellowship when interacting with society at large. We do not use the SLAA name to weigh in on any public issue. When we speak in public or to the media, we ensure it is clear that we are speaking as individuals. This Tradition protects the group from the individual, who may have strong feelings about an issue but is not authorized to represent SLAA as a whole.

As a Fellowship, we avoid being drawn into any controversies swirling around us in the world at large, which are many, fractious and often acrimonious. There may be issues that are enticing to weigh in on, things that seem suited to our focus and experience. Perhaps we could reach agreement on a level of punishment for prostitution that includes compassion for the practitioner; what if sex offenders were sentenced to recovery rather than prison? These issues would certainly have proponents and opponents, both inside and outside of our Fellowship. The ensuing controversy could wound many and threaten the very existence of the Fellowship we have come to depend on.

We also avoid controversy and judgement inside our Fellowship. We have seen judgement and controversy in the world at large and the results are often division, alienation, retribution, or even violence. We have seen self-righteous attitudes result in a few individuals attempting to force the world into their version of perfection in spite of resistance by others. We see the results of this approach to life. We do not want to go down that road.

But how do we avoid controversy and division within SLAA as a whole?

Surely we have various and conflicting opinions about how to carry the message, how to be more effective, how to reach more addicts. There are many ways to organize our service boards, distribute our funds, write our literature. How do we avoid conflict, argument, and outright fights?

There is a story about a dedicated fellowship who had split into two factions which were continually fighting over process and protocol. Eventually, the leaders of each faction, thinking this was no way to live, got together. They hoped to resolve the differences that separated the groups. They went to an older leader who had avoided the split and who had a reputation for great wisdom. They explained that they had been arguing for years and could find no compromise. "Please explain our traditions so we can

settle this battle and find peace.” The wise member answered: “This is our tradition: we argue, we fight, we acknowledge and defend our differences. This is the way of most human societies.”

Fortunately for us, although we may argue, disagree, and fight at times, we have learned to compromise. We tolerate our differences. We remind ourselves of our common purpose — and that more connects us than divides us. We patiently work for unanimous agreement, having learned that we need not be in a hurry and we can find peace if we look for it. Divisiveness can be avoided. We in SLAA have the same disease, but we are all different, and we are all accepted. We have one purpose, one objective: to stay sober and to help others find sobriety. We are unified around this purpose.

When we step into a SLAA meeting there are no divisions between us. We are all imperfect human beings; all on equal footing; all working, with God’s help, toward sanity. The Fellowship of Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous opposes no one. We carry a single, unified message that is filled with hope, peace of mind, and unity. Therefore, in meetings, we focus on recovery only. We strive to avoid discussion of outside issues as well as non-Twelve Step recovery methods. We refrain from espousing particular beliefs. In this way we avoid controversy.

Thus, a newcomer to any meeting can feel safe. They do not need to believe anything in particular, do not need to support or oppose any cause or hold any particular view. We are free to personally have any beliefs, any ideas, any causes we want, but as a meeting, as a Fellowship, we have no set beliefs, no rigid ideas, no political or religious causes. We have only the desire to stay sober and help other addicts achieve sobriety.

We’ve overcome our addiction — for this moment — as long as we continue practicing our principles and our five resources: desire for sobriety, sponsorship/meetings, steps, service, and spirituality. Our collective experience shows that the task of helping one another break the bondage of destructive addictive patterns is enough to keep us busy. The answers to all the other troublesome social issues are not our concern as a Fellowship. As with all of the Traditions, we put aside our personal desires and step forward with a helping hand, reaching out to our fellow addicts.

## **Tradition Eleven:**

***Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV, film, and other public media.***

***We need guard with special care the anonymity of all fellow SLAA members.***

We have found a way out of our addiction, out of the misery of our acting out or acting in behavior, that we were unable to stop on our own no matter how much it disturbed us. As long as we practice these Steps on a daily basis, and carry this message to others, we have a daily reprieve from our affliction. Help, recovery, and relief are available. As we discover the joy of living through the practice of our Twelve Step program, we wish to share this way of life with others.

But how do we reach the addict who still suffers without promoting our program? How do we reach professionals who can guide suffering addicts and anorexics to our rooms for relief from their misery? How do we reach out to rehabilitation centers, clergy? How do we let the larger society around us know that SLAA exists? How do we respond to the media when asked about our program?<sup>9</sup> In Tradition Eleven, we are given guidelines on how we carry this message.

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<sup>9</sup> See the pamphlet: *12 Recommended Guidelines for Dealing with Media/Public Relations Opportunities for Use at All Levels of the SLAA Fellowship*. Available from [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org) for further specifics about interaction with the media.

A typical enterprise would start advertising. It might try to sell its solutions by making promises it might not be able to keep. A commercial organization would find a high profile sponsor who could attract folks who want to associate with that fame. A standard outreach campaign might appeal to those who could use these services by stressing the convenience, the feel-good nature of the cure, and the dramatic payoff.

We don't do that; we can't do that. At the root of our problem is our inflated ego and our low self esteem. We have seen that pride is dangerous to us. We have learned that keeping our egos in check is a large part of staying sober. Media attention can be very attractive, but can do damage by feeding our egos. For example, an appearance on a talk show, or coverage in print, can lead to a feeling of self-importance, which can lead to a slip.

More importantly, we want to promote our principles, not our members. We want to model humility, not personality. We want to make clear that one person is no more important than another in our Fellowship. It is specifically this avoidance of personal celebrity that gives our Twelve Step program its vigor and its attraction.

Tradition Eleven provides us guidance on how to avoid the allure of personal popularity — the recommendation is anonymity. Therefore, when we interact with the media in any form on behalf of SLAA, we do not use our full names; we do not provide identifiable photos of ourselves or each other; we do not suggest that we are an important representative of our Fellowship. We simply share our personal experience, strength and hope, sharing what it was like and how we have been relieved of the burden of our addictive patterns — with the hope that some addict or anorexic out there will hear our story and see themselves, and also find help. This is our means of attraction.

We also need to reach out to society at large with our message. We do it with public service announcements that avoid any reference to individuals. We do it with direct communication of our program material to the professional community. We may leave brochures with our therapist, or help our local meeting or intergroup do a mass mailing to the professional community. We let clergy know about SLAA by direct personal contact or by mailing information to local churches. We can approach rehabilitation centers about hosting meetings. We can donate our books and pamphlets to prisons. We can place public service announcements in the local newspaper or on the local radio. We can even place anonymous SLAA introduction videos on internet media. Personal anonymity is the key feature of this kind of outreach in which we let the public know that SLAA exists and can help.

In addition, we reach out to the greater society around us by practicing the Twelve Steps in our daily lives. As we find greater serenity and satisfaction than we have ever known, we become walking advertisements for our way of life. In fact, each of us, as members of SLAA, bears a responsibility for the reputation of our Fellowship. We are guardians, we are examples, of our recovery and our Society.

When a newcomer joins our meetings, what may strike them the most is the ease with which those with some sobriety talk about their past. The calm and serenity we exhibit at meetings is what keeps the newcomer coming back. Our welcoming support of the newcomer is the attraction by which we illustrate our way of life. Imagine how off-putting it might be to a newcomer to have someone in a meeting promote the program with drama and urgency, as if it were mandatory to participate! This type of promotion is doomed to failure.

Anonymity is more than protection against the temptations of promotion — it is also protection from society's negative perceptions. There is a great stigma attached to our affliction. Society at large has little understanding of the nature of this disease. Public knowledge of one's membership in our Fellowship could negatively impact career, economic well-being, standing in the community — both of

the member and also of their family. It is critical we protect our members from the prejudices and misunderstandings of society. We are collectively a shield against this stigma. Without anonymity, newcomers might be afraid to come to a meeting or to come back. We are, therefore, guardians of each other's anonymity.

We are human beings continually working to overcome our character defects. As we practice humility and open-mindedness we learn to respect others' privacy and to avoid gossip. Gossip can be destructive to groups and individuals. Thus, anonymity applies in our own recovery circles as well as outside the program. We do not share others' stories or talk about what happened in meetings. We do our best to live the principles of the Twelve Steps in all areas of our lives and thus make our SLAA. Society attractive and safe for everyone.

It is in this way that we practice attraction rather than promotion. As we achieve a sober, contented and useful life, we naturally attract others who hope to recover from the pain of this addiction. We help others, day by day, as we strive to replace despair with hope, as we carry the peace of the program with us into the adventures of our daily living.

### **Tradition Twelve:**

***Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.***

As we have progressed through these Twelve Traditions, one by one, examining their meanings, intents and suggestions, we have seen that the success of our way of life as a group is based on our willingness to sacrifice our personal, ego-driven desires in exchange for the greater good. We understand that this willingness and ability to put the needs of the group first is a spiritual strength we have learned through working the SLAA program of recovery. As we have repeatedly experienced and practiced the unity in our recovery program and the sense of equality that permeates our meetings and now our hearts — we are amazed at our increased sense of spiritual ease.

The practice of anonymity underpins this spiritual healing we have experienced. The fundamental principle within this practice is humility, the deep understanding that we are not special. We are not the most important member, the best spiritual student or teacher, or the public face of our program of recovery. We are not the ultimate authority within our Fellowship, our relationships, or the broader world. Recognizing this truth is humbling, and also freeing. We humbly acknowledge that our recovery is the result of a profound intervention in our lives by a Power greater than ourselves.

This is the design for living that is given to us when we work the program of Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous.

Real humility in action is about being helpful without acknowledgement: being a sponsor and leading others through the Steps with no personal acclaim; serving on SLAA, Intergroup or Conference committees without pay or distinction; starting a meeting, setting up chairs, or reaching out to a newcomer without expectation of praise or reward. As we do these things, humility is nurtured within us. We become willing to be teachable and open-minded. We settle into thinking of ourselves as equal to others, neither better nor worse. We are capable of being still, appreciating the great blessings we have received; we speak truthfully and strive to offer compassion; and we practice living and acting simply, avoiding our tendency to complicate. Our lives become filled with grace, with help from our Higher Power, and our connection to this power is deepened.

Anonymity helps ensure our privacy and that of others, keeps us from dominating our groups, and discourages us from grabbing personal attention from the public at large. But sometimes we take our practice of personal anonymity to an extreme. Thinking we are practicing anonymity, we practice secrecy instead. We hide the truth from ourselves and others, denying the reality of our addiction. Sex and love addiction has a tremendous stigma — we are afraid to be ostracized, publicly humiliated, lose our income, or suffer even worse consequences. We keep our membership in this Fellowship secret, unknown to our friends, employers, neighbors or the society we live in.

While this is understandable, this Tradition is about humility, not secrecy. The fear of being revealed as a sex and/or love addict or anorexic can undermine our serenity and our usefulness. It can block us from connection to God and others. We may be so accustomed to the shame and secret-keeping of our past that we don't recognize when we are doing it still. Remaining private is certainly wise in many instances. But there may be times, such as when we have the opportunity to be of service, when setting aside our anonymity is appropriate. It is up to each member to practice discernment in each unique situation.

A fellow member shared this story: "I work in a large office at a prestigious corporation. Our private lives stay private. However, at one time gossip started about an affair between two colleagues, both of whom were married. I took the risk of approaching one of the participants and told him my story, and that there was help in SLAA. He didn't take me up on it, but he appreciated the talk we had. It was the right thing to do and I have had no negative consequences." Of course, each case must be thought through carefully. As a practice, we review these types of actions with our sponsors before we take them — making sure we are not endangering our safety or that of others.

With other members of our Fellowship one-on-one, maintaining our own personal anonymity is at our own discretion. We have also found it appropriate at times to request the full name of an individual SLAA member. We want to visit Lisa in the hospital; we want to send Brian a card in prison; we need to ask their full names. Their disclosure of this information is purely voluntary, of course — it is never required of them. We continue to guard the anonymity of each SLAA member. We commit to resisting the urge to gossip, to refrain from repeating stories, to avoid disclosing who attended a particular meeting. As sponsors we are especially careful not to reveal any stories about our sponsees. We maintain confidence by maintaining this privacy.

As we carry the message, practice anonymity, and become humble trusted servants of the Fellowship, we naturally begin to focus on the principles learned from the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts — principles such as honesty, faith, integrity, willingness, and more. Putting these principles before personalities means we develop the ability to hear the message of someone else's share, rather than being in judgement of their demeanor or delivery. We focus on the principle behind what they are saying. We are able to learn something from everyone, even from people whom we might have previously dismissed due to their gruff manner, political persuasion, or a myriad of other personal qualities. We are now able to be open and compassionate.

We see their humanity and hear their story — and our lives are richer because of it.

We try to practice these principles in all areas of our lives, as directed in the Twelfth Step — and we try not to focus on personalities even in difficult circumstances. We avoid idolizing another as superior or more valuable, simply because of their accomplishments, possessions or attributes to which we aspire. Conversely, when we find someone irritating, when we are hurt, angry, bored or annoyed with another person, we take a deep breath and remember that our principles of loving kindness and respect are much more important than being right or being comfortable. We take a moment in a difficult interaction to reflect on what our Higher Power may want us to learn from the situation, and say a quiet prayer for our own and the other person's welfare and happiness. We recognize that God is present in

every person we come into contact with, and we seek to respect this divine presence, however imperfect the human expression.

As we carry this message within the Fellowship as well as to those in the broader world, we choose to sacrifice our desire for personal prestige or fame in exchange for the rewards we receive when we practice these principles. We are human beings and thus imperfect, but we cultivate humility as we live one day at a time.

Personal distinction slowly loses its power for us. Our need for praise and our fears of condemnation and rejection ease. We are able more often to rise above blame, hurt and judgement. We find harmony and balance. We realize we are all equally worthy.

When we came to our first SLAA meeting, filled with despair, fear and isolation, we heard the first word of the first Step — *We* — and we heard the stories of others. Those stories, surprisingly so similar to our own, made us realize that we were not alone. Our isolation began to end at that first meeting. Today, every meeting we attend helps to enhance our spiritual connection with our Higher Power, ourselves, and others. We continue to grow in acceptance, humility, and spirituality one day at a time. Tradition Twelve describes a spiritual practice — a blessing and a way of life that fills our hearts with hope, compassion, and love. As we continue to embrace these spiritual principles, we realize how much we have changed, and what a miracle the SLAA program has been for us. We have become new people, guided by our recovery program and our Higher Power.