

Hello my fellow OA friends!

I find it very hard to believe that yet another year is drawing to a close and that we're fast approaching that time of year which often proves quite challenging to a lot of our members. Hopefully you'll get a lot out of this bumper edition of Step By Step whilst it feels like the rest of the planet is overindulging in our 'drug of choice'.

I also can't believe that at the time of writing this it's already been a month since the National Service Assembly (NSA) and Convention in Sheffield. The current SBS Committee all belong to the North of England Intergroup who were this year's hosts and as such played a substantial role in the organisation of what I hope you'll agree was a successful weekend. Personally speaking, I think I'm still recovering from that particular service which I allowed to pretty much take over my life for several months. Don't get me wrong, I thoroughly enjoyed giving that service, as I always do, however, I often still struggle to get the balance right.

Given that Step Six is one of this edition's topics, I have to hold up my hand and admit that for me workaholism is a big character defect (if not a full-blown disease in its own right?) that somewhat ironically I still have to work on, on a daily basis. Just recently I seem to have been totally snowed under in all areas of my life – work, home, service etc. When I shared that with somebody just yesterday it became crystal clear to me that it's therefore no wonder that I'm struggling to even give my fast approaching holiday any headspace, as from where I'm standing right now it just feels like 'yet another project'. Hopefully by the time this edition goes live, I'll be slightly more enthusiastic about what could potentially be a holiday of a lifetime. However, I have to be honest and admit that there is also an element of fear involved because where I'm headed food plays a huge role and as you may recall from the Autumn 2014 edition of SBS, my last holiday wasn't exactly without its challenges and there's an understatement if ever I saw one!

Whilst I was at NSA 2014 I invested in the leaflet "*Maintaining a Healthy Weight*" [Overeaters Anonymous, 1999]. The article on pages 3-4 especially resonated with me: "*It is a constant challenge for me to remember that setting boundaries is not deprivation; it is safety...I am taking care of myself...I write down my food every day to avoid...becoming overwhelmed with choices at mealtime. I have a sponsor, and I commit my food to her to take the secrecy out of eating...sometimes I cannot see the sneakiness of this disease. I take what I like and leave the rest, trusting that if I make an unwise decision, my Higher Power will let me know. I go to meetings to remind myself I'm not alone*"

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and I still have an eating disorder, no matter what the labels in my clothing say...My body size is a fringe benefit of this program. It serves as a reminder that miracles happen in these rooms.” And on that positive note I’ll love you and leave you and wish you a joyous, abstinent festive season, surrounded by those you love and who love you – whether they belong to your family of origin or of choice, i.e. your OA ‘family’ who love you unconditionally.

Love in Fellowship

*Lucy, SBS Editor
Newcastle-upon-Tyne*

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Email all submissions to
stepbystep@oagb.org.uk

OR, write to
**SBS c/o OAGB, 483 Green Lanes
London N13 4BS**

Ask-It Basket Request

If you have a question about OA, send your question to stepbystep@oagb.org.uk with the header “SBS Ask-It Basket”. Experienced OA members will answer your question, and it may also appear in the “Ask-It Basket” in Step By Step.

Submissions deadline for the Spring 2015 edition of SBS is Friday, 6th February 2015. Topics:

Step Seven "Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."

Tradition Four "Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole."

Tool of Recovery: Action Plan

Ask-It Basket

or any topic/Step/Tradition/Tool of your choice; review a favourite piece of OA-approved literature; or share your experience of an OA Event/Retreat/Workshop

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Step Six

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

When I first came to OA, I believed that I was entirely ready to do it someone else's way.

To use a driving/motorway analogy, I wanted to get out of the series of car crashes that typified my life, careering from one disaster to the next, unable to steer myself or apply the brakes, even when I saw that yet another pile-up was inevitable.

So I was entirely ready at that point for another driver to take control or at the very least receive some very clear instructions as to how to drive.

I have followed that advice and at times got totally out of the driver's seat.

The understanding I got from my Steps Four and Five was just simply awesome: nothing in it was a total unshared secret, yet I had never had a look at the entirety of my life, the whole picture. I saw me, a man who had created solutions to living life that were often well intentioned but were so misguided and often quite unsound. I also saw the inescapable truth that I was dishonest in virtually every area of my life; I saw that I was gripped by fear, and the only way I was going to get what I wanted or needed was by manipulation and self-centred, wilful behaviour.

I think I took Step Six a few days after doing my Step Five, when I took time to really reflect on what happened.

I think it's imperative for me to see my defects as defective and see how they are sub-optimal beliefs and modes of operation that I am better off without.

My greed tells me I need more of everything, that I have to have more than everyone else, but my selfishness knows no bounds and it seems to overpower my own sense of what is right and wrong very easily. For this reason alone, I am ready to live without it, even though in a way it's done quite a bit for me, as it has helped me acquire wealth. However, today I am ready to have enough and trust that God will provide me with far more than I need and I can live in abundance without the desperate greed. I can hand over my wallet along with the rest of my life today; this is something I never thought possible. With food, my greed is very obvious and I would love to be free of looking at my plate and comparing it to others'. I would love to believe that enough is really enough!

My ego tells me I am so very special and that I am better than you. It keeps me from connecting with other people and thereby has kept me safe. It has meant I don't have to reach out or rely on others in any way.

My arrogance has also fuelled my belief that I should have everything I wanted and has been a great justification for myself to do **whatever** I wanted **whenever** I wanted... because I deserved it.

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My pride has stopped me asking for help so many times, has stopped me from being teachable. I still catch myself saying, "I know, I know," when I don't want to appear stupid and have been able to actually be honest with someone and say, "Actually, I **don't** know, please tell me." Amazing to be able to admit my incompetence!

My laziness or sloth is something I have always had to deal with and is still something that I struggle against at times. It leads me into lying and being deceitful to cover my tracks and is one of my early warning signals that I need to take care of stuff before it takes care of me.

When my self-esteem is too low as a result of being too defective, I have very little self-determination, as I don't think I'm worthy of choosing what to do, or how to do it, and I initially become overly obsequious with others, which is just covering up how disgusted I am with myself. Then, when I am living life controlled by my defects, at some point I get fed up with the sycophantic fawning and people pleasing and I switch... I am simply miserable and become heartless, unfeeling and self-destructive and I just don't care about anything or anyone. And my most unpalatable behaviours come to the fore...

I am entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

B, London

Tradition Three

"The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively"

Recovery has been a slow process for me. I attended my first meeting in January 2010. I kept coming back, especially when I didn't want to. And yes, about three years ago, I started going to meetings because I WANTED to, not because I felt I should. That was the start of my real recovery. I have a great sponsor, who tells it like it is, but lovingly. She has been gently guiding me to abstinence, and always encouraging rigorous honesty.

This summer, when a health professional told me I would feel better if I lost some weight, I attempted to diet. Big mistake! Yes, I know I am working towards a healthy body weight, but it has to be in God's time, not mine, or that of a doctor who has no idea about my former compulsive overeating. My "fat head" took over, and I had convinced myself that I was breaking Tradition Three because I no longer believed I really had a desire to stop eating compulsively, and therefore was attending my three meetings a week under false pretences.

Insanity temporarily reigned in my head. I wanted to binge; I wanted to throw away my wonderful recovery. I reached out, and miraculously the first number I called was answered straight away. What a wonderful wise lady she was. She said, "I won't attempt to give you any advice, but one day, you will look back on this as something you will gain by, which will help you to recover even more."

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"B.I.N.G.E Because I'm Not Good Enough"

Her words were what I needed to hear. I did not binge, and know now, three months later, that I truly do comply with Tradition Three. I DO have a desire to stop eating compulsively, and having changed my eating plan with the guidance of my sponsor, have found a new level of abstinence, where my disease no longer forces me to behave as I have done in the past. Just for today, my food plan is totally clean, and the obsession to eat compulsively has been removed. Thank you to everyone who has been on my journey with me, and thank you Tradition Three.

Pauline, South Devon

Tradition Three

This Tradition is a fundamental reason that I continue coming back to meetings. I have been in OA for 16 months, and meetings are just about the only thing I do Programme-wise. I am definitely not the poster child for recovery—but I have faith that I will be eventually. The fact that Tradition Three is not 'the only requirement is abstinence' or 'the only requirement is a belief in a Higher Power' has made me feel so welcome, and has kept me coming back.

Until now, I simply have not been willing to get a sponsor, work the Steps, or do any serious readings or journaling. But now I am. And that is thanks to Tradition Three. If I had not felt that my desire alone was enough to be accepted at these meetings, I would have run away, because for these past 16 months the desire to stop eating compulsively is all I have had.

Because I have gone to a meeting almost every week for 16 months, I have come to feel ready to move on and fully embrace the Twelve Steps - to put my recovery in Programme over everything else. I am so grateful for this Programme and its flexibility. I have never felt rejected or 'less than' in these rooms, despite my lack of abstinence and my dedication to programmes outside meetings. I felt OK that I was doing what I was capable of doing at that time.

Now I have started to email someone daily, the beginning of sponsorship. I email what I have eaten; my food plan for the next day; how I felt physically, emotionally, spiritually; what I was grateful for; and how I have been of service. The acceptance of this Programme has allowed me to participate at my own pace. I have always felt that I needed to conform to those around me in order to be normal and successful - OA is not like that. OA has given me the freedom of feeling accepted, no matter what, and it's a patient Programme, with wonderful and patient members who have guided me through to the point where I am ready and so unbelievably willing to begin working the Steps and get a sponsor.

Without Tradition Three this would never have been possible.

Pauline, Edinburgh

Finding God

When I first came into OA, I heard the word God and I balked. That first time round, I decided to tweak the Steps, not get a sponsor and to cut out God from my Programme of recovery. I had a monumental relapse. Nearly a year later, I hit rock bottom. I was desperate enough to try OA again and this time round I decided not to do any messing about. If I could stop eating compulsively by myself, I would have done it already, and so it was pure desperation, not hope, that brought me back to the Fellowship; on my knees, pride in my hands, fearful, afraid of the unknown, desperate.

I remember my sponsor explaining the concept of a Higher Power to me and telling me that she'll be in a rush, and out of nowhere a parking space will appear, and she'll thank her HP. I thought she was nuts! I had a hard enough time believing in a creator of the universe without trying to comprehend that he'd make a parking space available for me. But I knew, way down deep in the pit of my stomach, that I had to find a connection, that I had to believe and comprehend a Power greater than me or else I would be lost. The Programme hadn't worked for me without a God and so I needed to find one.

I set out on a mission. I found myself in a church service (my family don't even belong to that denomination!). I visited churches, read about other religions and asked friends about their religions and all the while I felt a foreboding uncomfortable feeling that I couldn't shake. Slowly and painfully I came to realise that I wasn't seeking a Higher Power: I was seeking a religion; and this is where I was going wrong. My limited experience of religion was other people trying to persuade me to believe in what they believe. The fear of having someone knock on my door and feeling like I had to politely listen or reject them. The uncomfortable feelings of conflict and segregation, war and disagreement. I knew that for many, many people, religion is about love and community and peace and I wholeheartedly accepted this; however, religion was not for me.

So how then would I find my own elusive and undefined Higher Power? My sponsor spoke about willingness. She explained that I didn't need to have faith: I just needed the willingness to believe in something, anything, bigger than me. She suggested I try prayer. I thought she was nuts (again!) but I slowly came round to the idea of being willing to be open-minded and I started to pray. At first I read prayers aloud from the Big Book and it felt a little strange. As I become more comfortable praying out loud, I started making up my own prayers too.

I was careful only to ask for willingness to hand my will and my life over to God. As I didn't have a huge amount to ask for, I started to say thanks, and gratitude trickled into my heart. I'd often open my mouth with no idea of what I was going to say and would end up telling myself something I should be doing and so self-awareness trickled into my mind. I thought it would be difficult praying for all the people who have hurt me but it wasn't. With the slow process of self-awareness in Step Four came a fiery determination to be free from resentments. I'd never been able to change myself in the past, despite my resolve, the promises I made to myself and my absolute certainty that I could and would change. My self-will had given me false hopes and broken promises. And so I prayed to an unknown God and little by little I began to change.

"It's spelt GOD not DOG, so don't ask to go fetch!"

And either because my Higher Power knows I'm a stickler for proof, or that proof always existed and I just never noticed, small miracles began to happen; small but absolute certain occurrences of God. Here was my proof.

One memorable occurrence happened in a takeaway a few months ago before starting Step Four. I had been feeling guilty: dark, crippling, sordid guilt, the kind that swims in your solar plexus and makes you feel physically sick. And quite a lot of that guilt was misplaced. I'd pushed it down for so long, it was springing up all over the place: leaking out at inconvenient times when I'd not stopped at a pedestrian crossing, or had not said, "Thank you," loud enough to someone holding the door open for me. I was feeling guilty over imaginary scenarios that may or may not happen in the future. It was completely unnecessary but all-consuming and overwhelming.

Thoughts about misplaced guilt were running through my head as I ordered an abstinent meal and went to pick it up. When I arrived at the takeaway, the food wasn't ready, so I sat down to wait and I did something very unusual for me: I picked up a woman's magazine (I don't buy or read them usually). On the contents page, a photo caught my eye. It was of a woman in a bright red bikini with her back to the camera jumping into a sparkling blue sea, her arms and legs akimbo, and the page number 165. No other explanation: just a page number. Looking back, I don't think I assumed anything, although maybe I had a fleeting thought it was advertising: a 'get bikini-ready diet' or some such similar diet plan.

I absentmindedly flicked to page 165 and what I saw made my heart leap! In big bold font, right in the centre of the page, as clear as day, was a message from my HP. I will never, for as long as I live, forget what it said: 'If you only do one thing this month, give up guilt.' I felt like I'd been hit by a lightning bolt; the hair on my arms stood up; my heart beat wildly; I felt elated, safe, secure; warmth spread through me. I read the accompanying article with a little smile on my face and I felt at peace.

Maybe coincidences do exist but there have been far too many on my journey so far with OA for me to dismiss the signs. I don't know what God is, I may never know, and I don't think it matters that I fully understand or comprehend. All that matters is that I have faith and trust that the universe will guide me, if only I let it.

Sam D

The Alternative Serenity Prayer

*God, grant me the serenity
to accept the people I cannot change
courage to change the people I can
and the wisdom to know it's me!*

Dear Sponsee

I'm writing to let you know where I am at the moment Programme-wise. As I appreciate the honesty with which you share with me, I also think it's important that I share honestly with you.

During my recent holiday I pushed the boundaries where my plan of eating was concerned and ate more than I would usually...

I did come clean and was honest during the holiday with my sponsor and with her guidance got back on track fairly swiftly.

I'm sure you are aware of the problems I've suffered with my back and hip on returning home, resulting in my being unable to work. You know the problems I've had accepting my inability to be mobile which consequently resulted in my isolating myself.

Earlier this week I started to question my spirituality and unfortunately returned to my old coping mechanism: 'food'. I had a one-off binge, which I have to say didn't work. It never does! How I ever thought I was stronger than my compulsion and that I could control it is beyond belief.

I have also had my monthly health check and I've gained 2kg, which is hardly surprising due to my flippant ways with the food on holiday and my inability to be completely mobile.

Since yesterday I have been honest and am working with my sponsor to regain the connection with my HP. This relapse fills me with the fear of how easily I could lose it all. Fortunately (I can say this now after reflection) I am willing and know there is a solution. I can turn this around (with HP's help) and resume the positive actions I usually take daily. I do know and believe that a relapse isn't inevitable. If I look right back to before the relapse, I can list a number of factors that set me off balance. I don't want to be flippant about the fact that it was a binge. To return to the food so easily is mind-blowingly selfish, heart-crushingly debilitating, all-consuming and overwhelming, with self-disgust and shameful guilt thrown in. The thing is, I allowed my trust in a Power greater than myself to disintegrate and took back my own will, which is kaput. I suppose what I'm trying to say is whenever I have any problems, they will only increase if I try to add food to them.

There are many reasons I'm sharing this:

1. To be honest and humble
2. To show I'm just the same as anyone else in OA: I can't control this compulsion
3. I have to work the Programme too (nobody arrives)
4. Acceptance of self and where I'm at today
5. Give you the choice of working with someone else if you wish to
6. You deserve the same courtesy as I do from you
7. I want to get well

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I could go on; I hope you are getting the gist of what I'm trying to say. I can fall off my own pedestal, never mind any that I feel others have put me on. I trust that whatever you decide to do after reading this will be God-led; I'm at the end of the phone and am happy to speak about any of the items in this letter. I would also like to add RELAPSE IS NOT INEVITABLE!!!

We do have a choice; this Programme does work if we surrender, accept, trust and work it.

Love your sponsor xxx

Yours, imperfectly perfect and still willing to try T, Northwest England x

My Higher Power – My Loving Parent – My wise Inner Voice

Hi, my name is Anon and I'm a compulsive overeater. I would like to share recent developments in my relationship with my Higher Power (HP). I have been in Programme now for just under five years and have been graced with 'good' physical recovery. I worked the Steps with a sponsor, found a food plan and a definition of abstinence that worked for me – and, lo and behold, lost some weight, achieved a healthy body weight (according to medical parameters) and, more miraculously, have stayed within a specified and limited weight range since.

My abstinence has not been unbroken, and I have had some slips, and even stepped out of OA for a couple of months at one time, as I thought I could do this on my own. Thankfully I was disabused of that notion before I could entirely lose the plot and go back to old ways.

I am grateful for this 'time out' because these and other difficulties have led me to continue working and re-working the Twelve Steps. Thus I feel I have grown in learning and understanding about the Programme, my disease and myself.

On reflection, I believe that my recovery was initially focused on the physical aspects of my disease. I have been battling with my binge-eating and yo-yo dieting for so long that I see now that the physical recovery, the removal of the obsession to binge and the stability in my weight was enough for a while, but recent events have shown me that emotional and especially spiritual recovery have been less forthcoming... probably because they were not my focus.

The past 12 months have been difficult for me. I have been struggling at work and at home. I was trying to control everything: my feelings, other people and situations or events that I did not like.

Thankfully I know and believe that the Twelve Steps work, and so I reviewed my Steps.

A review of my Steps Two and Three revealed that I had distorted my connection to my Higher Power. I reverted to the God that I grew up with as a child: the God I turned my back on in my 20s after a very religious education. This God told me that:

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- I was not a good person
- My life choices were wrong
- I was wrong
- If bad things happened to me, it would be my own fault
- I can't cope with life

When this HP was too strong, I then related to a less pernicious but more absent HP. This distant, disinterested Higher Power didn't care about me and had no influence on my life or well-being. Therefore it was all 'down to me'. Whether I recovered from compulsive eating, remained abstinent, or held everything together. Whether at work, at home, or in my relationships, it was all down to me.

I was hanging on for dear life, controlling, or trying to control, every aspect of my life. Thankfully it all got a bit much, and I was beginning to lose it. No wonder. My HP was either absent, or cruel.

I am grateful that re-looking at the Steps, especially as described in "*The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous*" [2002], allowed me to remember that this is **my** HP and therefore I write the job description for Him. If the HP I've got isn't working for me, then what's to stop me sacking Him and employing a new HP? This is exactly what I did.

My new HP, also known as my Loving Parent, or my Wise Inner Voice:

- loves me unconditionally and wholly;
- points mistakes out to me, but reminds me that I am OK, I am a good person, worthy of love and respect; I am not a mistake;
- guides me to make choices that are good for me;
- helps me notice when my old HP is creeping in, with either a harsh, critical voice or an expectation that I must control everything, and then helps me to ignore that voice.

This process has taken a couple of months. But I feel that my relationship with my HP and with myself is changing. Lately I have been feeling a peace and joy that I have not felt for a long time. I am gradually realising the three-fold recovery I perhaps did not initially find when I was in the OA honeymoon period, when weight-loss and maintenance were all I seemed to need.

I know that I still experience bad days. But I do my best to connect with my new HP/loving parent/wise inner voice every day, and seek guidance on actions and how to live my life. I am finding that I can practise gentleness and compassion with myself, and that this practice comes with healing. Crucially with that healing comes increased gentleness and compassion with others.

ONE DAY AT A TIME!

To conclude, I wanted to share my hope with you that my recovery is a gradual and evolving process, and that I am continually learning, thanks to the Twelve Steps and this Programme and the fellowship I have found here. I pray that I may continue to do so and look forward to sharing this happy journey with you. Wishing all my fellows happy and healthy 'winter holidays'!

Anon

"Sometimes I have failed, but I am not a failure; I have made mistakes, but I am not a mistake."

Shame and Guilt. Failure and Failing

My name is Sam and I am a compulsive overeater. I feel sick writing this, that swirling, whirling, physical feeling of guilt. It sits on my chest like a vulture; cloying, heavy, dark. I can almost taste it in my mouth and I'm afraid it will suffocate me. Despite this awful feeling, my heart continues beating and my lungs continue breathing. In the past I've both thanked and cursed this miracle – that despite what my brain thinks or what my spirit feels my body keeps on keeping on. Blood pumping, eyes dilating in the sun, ears picking up sounds, I go on living. The millions and billions of atoms that make up 'me' are all humming in harmony with one clear purpose; to keep me alive. Perhaps I should feel flattered.

I feel guilty because my internal moral compass has detected that I've done something wrong and is flashing and waving like a mad man. I really dislike this feeling and in the past I've refused to feel guilt and I've eaten and eaten and eaten until I've squashed it deep down inside and felt satiated and numb. As a consequence of years of running away from feelings and pushing them down with food, the lines between guilt and shame became blurred. Instead of knowing that I was feeling guilty because of the act of doing something wrong, I started feeling like I was wrong, I was bad. That is the difference: guilt is, "I've done a bad thing," and shame is, "I am bad". Inside of me, clear as day, it rang out loudly. I am a bad person, I don't deserve this life, I'm not worthy of love or happiness.

I was petrified others could see it on me, like a streak of dirt, my muddy soul on show for the world to see and judge. And because of this I hid. I put on a carefully constructed mask and I became a people pleaser, the life of the party, fun, outgoing, funny. My self-worth suddenly became dependent on what I believed other people thought of me. It was exhausting. I lost sight of who I was, becoming more and more selfish, self-seeking, dishonest and excruciatingly fearful. My pendulum swung wildly between convincing myself I was better than others (did you hear how loud they laughed? I'm great, aren't I?) to feeling shameful and full of self-loathing. The more I did to try and get others to love me, the more I hated myself.

As my life spiralled out of control and my weight crept up and up, I found OA. Gradually I came to realise that I'm not alone. I came to trust my sponsor and others in OA. Little by little, I started building a relationship with my Higher Power. Finger by finger, slowly, painfully I came to see and understand these feelings about myself. And I came to understand the very profound difference between guilt and shame. The difference between failing to do something and believing myself a failure.

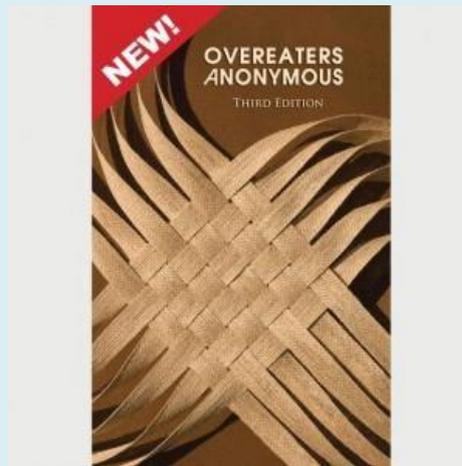
Today, right at this very moment, I feel both guilt and gratitude. I still don't like the feeling of guilt but today I recognise that it's a message from the universe, my Higher Power, guiding me. Today I have a choice about what I do with that feeling; 'feel, deal, heal' or eat over it. I never had a clear choice in the past, I never knew how to accept and feel my emotions, how to deal with

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them and take the right action or how to let them go and heal. The Twelve Steps of OA have taught me how to do that. I know how to work my Programme when I've done something wrong, I know that I can journal, pray, do a Step Ten, admit my wrong, speak to my sponsor, make my amends and move on. I accept that I may fail and I may make mistakes but this is part of being human; this doesn't make me a bad person or make me a failure. I've been given the incredible gift of accepting myself, of allowing myself to feel things, of realising that feelings are transient and will not kill me. And by accepting and feeling negative emotions, I also get to feel all of the positives ones with incredible clarity. I get to feel wonderment, grace, beauty, love, gratitude, compassion, empathy, amazement and awe.

Today I love who I am and because of OA I accept all of me; just another person, no better or worse than you, doing my very best.

Sam D



OA's third edition of the beloved 'Brown Book' includes forty never before published stories by members from around the world, the complete text of 'Our Invitation to You' the founder's story, and a new foreword by an eating disorder treatment professional with a new appendix to help readers understand the importance of using the Plan of Eating tool in finding abstinence.

Soft Cover 232 pages. Copyright 1980 2001 2014. Cost £15.50 available via: <http://www.oagb.org.uk/product/overeaters-anonymous-3rd-edition/> "God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called"

Tool of Recovery: Telephone

I have been in OA for 30 years and over that time the use of the Tool 'telephone' has changed immensely. When I joined OA in Canada, I used the telephone every day to reach my sponsor and to talk to other OA members. This was a real lifeline for me as I was able to express myself and often hear myself say things out loud that I didn't realise I thought. This was also a great help to my recovery, as I was getting support from others who understood the compulsion with food and the behaviours associated with that. In Canada, local calls were free no matter how long you talked.

When I moved to the UK 19 years ago and joined OA, I realised that over here you have to pay for any calls you make and this made people hesitant to use the phone as a Tool. I felt cut off from the support I had counted on so unknowingly. I tried to get my fellow OAs using the phone, but it was an uphill battle. Then, technology came along in the form of mobile phones with texts and cable providers offering 'free' calls on evenings and weekends. This helped a bit but it still cost something for these services.

Now I have learned to use texts to reach out into the void, hoping for a response. Just the act of texting my feelings or struggle has given me that moment of clarity not to turn to the food. I usually get a response within 24 hours but often within minutes, which helps me not to feel alone in the disease. Now many mobile phone providers have free minutes which help communication even more!

I am so thankful for OA's Twelve Step Programme and the Tools that help me to follow these Steps and not isolate in my room with my duvet. I have now been abstinent for almost a year and using the telephone as a Tool helps me.

Carol-Ann, Heart of England

Interview with Suzi, North West, aka SBS's most frequent contributor

The priceless gift of helping one another

My name is Suzi and I am a compulsive overeater. I belong to our fabulous Fellowship. As a result of abstinence and living the Twelve Steps, I am happy to give my time and words to support the service provided by the Step By Step committee.

I value the editions and feel a pride in contributing. When I was invited to answer a few questions, I had no hesitation.

Since Step By Step re-launched in the summer of 2011, I have been a regular contributor, having written a good few articles.

If you are considering writing an article, there will only be positives. You can be anonymous or use your name and location. You are not alone and will be helped with spelling and grammar etc.

The Tool of writing helps others and ourselves. Speaking for myself, seeing articles printed has helped me overcome fears: of showing vulnerability;

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worrying what others think; that it is rubbish and doesn't deserve to be printed.

Re-reading some of the articles I have written proved the words were God given and I was but the channel. I also take credit and accept I have a 'flair to share'!

The courage comes: I get out of myself, focus on the message I wish to share and give it a go. The outcome is nothing to do with me! The message is, "Just do it!" Every article is needed for the service to continue and everybody contributing **does** make a difference.

When my GP suggested OA in 1998, I was ready to do something different regarding how I lived with food. I was very miserable, fat and defeated. Desperation is a good place for change to start. I could lose weight but never maintained. Currently my weight has been the same for five years - miracles do happen!

After my 2001-2007 relapse, I returned to OA in September 2007, knowing I wanted to be well in my mind, body and spirit and that I could not go on another diet. I also knew passionately that wearing the seven stones of my disease was no longer acceptable.

I became abstinent by OA's definition and worked towards a healthy body weight with huge desire. My God wanted me to have body well-being. As the result of working the Twelve Steps, my emotional and spiritual well-being is ever-progressing and my weight maintains itself now and since 2009. Miracles do happen when we are ready to fully surrender to the severity of compulsive overeating.

An area of most interest for me is the cunningness of the disease regarding rationalising 'fat serenity' and 'skinny serenity'. Balance in all areas of recovery is my God's plan for me and by the grace of one day at a time, the Promises [*Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition, 2001, pp.83-84*] come true.

Any service I have done has helped me feel I belong and can contribute towards giving back the love and acceptance I get from all OA members. The rewards of not being judged but giving something a go are amazing. Communication skills along with ever growing IT skills are invaluable in all areas of my life.

Humility and working on Steps Six and Seven is a bonus to increase patience and tolerance regarding the unity of the service I am giving.

My opinions are mine and do not represent OA as a whole. My recovery has given me the courage to voice them anyway!!

Lots of love and gratitude for the Fellowship - knowing I am not alone saved my life.

*Blessings galore
Suzi, North West*

Ask-It Basket

Hello there fellows OAs

During my time in OA I have read through the Ask-It Basket archive on World Service Office website [<http://www.oa.org/membersgroups/service-bodysupport/ask-it-basket-and-archive/>] to get answers on some questions or issues facing my home group. There is a wealth of information on there, some things I had never even thought of and some really interesting topics and OA stance on some Traditions too. I've recently had to use the archive again as part of some other service I am involved in and I found the answer to something that had been concerning our group. I wondered if it would be useful to include some of the Q&As in Step By Step, perhaps to raise awareness of some themes of questions the Board get asked, or some focus on the themes of the newsletter such as certain Traditions?

The recent issue we had in my home group was a visiting fellow mentioning some actions her sponsor had forced her to take (or she would not work with her) which concerned us, this included stopping taking prescribed medication. Our group felt strongly that this was not OK and certainly breached Tradition Eight around being non-professional. The Ask-It Basket gave a similar question and a great answer which listed out all the Traditions and explained why this breached this. This helped us get clarity on why this was wrong and enabled us to have some sharers speak at the group around some of those Traditions, sponsorship and relevant OA-approved literature to help raise awareness with our members and visiting fellows. The excerpt is as follows:

"Medical advice/medication"

I am writing regarding an issue of paramount concern to several of us in our OA meeting group. Some sponsors have advised their sponsorees to refrain from taking prescribed medication. According to these sponsors, such individuals are in fact "using." This is a dangerous precedent. Medication prescribed for people by their doctors for specific diagnosed medical conditions is between the person and the health professional. A decision to terminate medication should never be initiated by "lay people" and surely not OA members.

I personally know of people who have been told not to take medication prescribed for depression/suicidal tendencies, manic- depressive disorders, high blood pressure, inflammation, menstrual pain, hormonal conditions and heart conditions. What is OA policy regarding this issue?

No, this is definitely not OA policy. There are several Traditions and policies that can answer this question.

Tradition Three: The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively. You don't have to stop eating certain foods, nor do you have to stop taking any kind of medication. (In fact, you can take what you want and leave the rest.) The criteria of Tradition Three is the only requirement to becoming a member of Overeaters Anonymous.

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Tradition Five: Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers. This is our only primary purpose.

Tradition Eight: Overeaters Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers. This includes any professionals in OA providing advice at OA meetings. This also falls under the category of "no cross talk," as described in the OA pamphlet Suggested Meeting Format.

Tradition Ten: Overeaters Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence, the OA name ought never be drawn into public controversy. Imposing an opinion on the issue of "taking medication" definitely brings OA into internal and possibly public controversy. Instructing a person to ignore a medical professional's medication prescription could result in serious injury or even death to that person. In some countries, the person or persons in the OA group instructing sponsorees to stop taking prescribed medication could be charged with various crimes and/or even be sued for monetary damages.

Tradition Six: An OA group ought never to endorse, finance or lend the OA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

From the Board of Trustees Meeting on September 21-23, 1983: "In adherence to Tradition Six, Overeaters Anonymous does not provide nursing services, hospitalization, drugs, or any medical, nutritional or psychiatric treatment; nor does OA provide referrals for the treatment of eating disorders."

OA strongly urges its autonomous groups to refrain from partaking in and/or encouraging this or any kind of similar instructional behavior. It is very dangerous to both our individual members and to OA as a whole. Unfortunately, we have received numerous letters on this issue in the last three months.

December 1994"

*Laura Mc Chryston Tuesday evening meeting,
Scotland x*

What the National Assembly means to me

Day three post-Assembly feels weird to me:

All weekend with fellows who love and accept me for me:

Food catered for, my needs are met, no compulsive eating for me - you bet!

Friday evening questions, answered with honesty, there is no other way to be.

Business Saturday executed with dignity, sharing views, mindful of unity;

Present, listening, joining in, the power in the room is a great place to begin.

Recovery is threefold and progressive too, I really cannot do it without you. A yearly date it is in the calendar already, in twelve months' time all preparations nice and steady.

Sunday was sharing, missing the chance to work together; workshops are fun and useful for ever.

Sitting still, listening and praying, seeking God's will for me and see where I will be playing.

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Committees, Board, bylaws and all, come join in the jargon and have a ball.
Overeaters Anonymous is 54 years old. Imagine if Rozanne's story was not told
The disease is progressive for you and I, ignore that fact and you could die
The solution is simple to me, abstain, Step and work with others, know what your
triggers are in order to refrain.
OAGB NSB work on behalf of you and me but there is no "I", only many "we"
Together we get a job done, along the way having plenty of fun
I am never alone, knowing I can pick up the phone
Face to face, phone, text or mail, help always available without fail
Family know I need to go and wouldn't choose to miss, my recovery is serious
and they never take the "p**s".
If I feel shy and scared no need to fret, I make an arrangement, and I'll be
met
Life stories told, everyone's journey begins to unfold
My body is changing inside and out, come join in and shake it all about Sing
OA from the roof tops loud and clear, there is nothing that can me be freer
The obsession with food and self may be lifted; attitudes and beliefs can be
shifted
To keep what I have I give it away, knowing I'm better day by day.
My love and gratitude is immense, the whole Programme makes me feel less
tense
Miracles happen to you and me, who said I'd ever be happy to just ... "be"
Book my place and join the human race, so long as it's forward I go at my own
pace!
Service with a smile, Step Twelve is cool, I jump in and bathe in the wisdom
pool
Long timers with knowledge beyond belief, knowing I don't need to stay the
same is a relief!
I'm home, welcome home, I really never need to feel alone.

Lots of love and in Fellowship forever Gratefully Anonymous



How does my group encourage members to do service at all levels?

I was recently asked how my group encourages people to do service on all levels of OA. The straight and honest answer is: It doesn't! At my home meeting, we are clear that the primary purpose of our meeting and all that we do is to be abstinent and stay abstinent. And the most important service – to fulfil our primary purpose and to carry the message that you can stop compulsive overeating today and stay stopped – is to be abstinent today. We do encourage people to do whatever it takes to be abstinent, which includes stepping up to appropriate service beyond being abstinent (maybe just setting up chairs or washing cups at first). But sometimes staying abstinent means not stepping up to additional service, or stepping down, either in the group or beyond the group.

In my group, service is upheld as one of the Tools we use to help us stay abstinent, not an obligation which can result in sending us back to the food! Initially, the willingness to step up to do service comes from desperation: I must agree to be the person who sets up the chairs so I get to the meeting on time, for example. Or I might agree to call newcomers during the week, to counter my tendency to isolate. Eventually the willingness to do service becomes a desire that arises from gratitude: I want to give back out of gratitude for the abstinence I have, and out of gratitude for all that my sponsors and other abstinent members of OA have given to me. I want to do service to ensure that I stay abstinent today so that I can help others recover from the hell of compulsive overeating.

Service is something to be worked out between me and my sponsor, not to do because I am worried what people will think of me if I don't. At my home group, we offer numerous opportunities for people to do service. We have 16 service positions in our meeting that require one to six months of abstinence, from buying the tea and coffee to keeping the finances, from replenishing the tissues to ordering literature. And those with less abstinence can help out week to week, just because they want to help, without the responsibility of holding a service position. Positions are held for six months and then rotate, giving everyone a chance. If someone newly abstinent for a month needs a job, we create one, perhaps dividing another responsibility into two parts. The group secretary must have six months current abstinence, but the weekly chairs, a different one each week, need only one month's current abstinence to read and lead with the format. So that encourages members to be abstinent for 30 days so that they can lead. We recruit members with six months' abstinence to speak and share their stories, so one could consider that as an encouragement to stay abstinent for six months. The other abstinent members are always available to assist someone trying a service job for the first time.

I started sponsoring at 30 days abstinent, so I encourage those I sponsor to start sponsoring when they have been abstinent 30 days and have taken at least Step One, for they have a lot of recovery to share with a newcomer! And I am always there to support them when they have sponsorship questions. If someone wants to serve at Intergroup, we support them, but sometimes we do

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not have an Intergroup rep. Whilst we don't encourage service for service's sake, we do encourage OA members to do whatever it takes to stay abstinent today—and often this means doing service. And we frequently remind one another that the most important service is to be abstinent today and share with the person who still suffers that they can put the food down today and never overeat again! This we strongly encourage!

Gratefully abstinent 33 years, London

Calendar of Events/Dates for Diary

Workshops, conventions and other OA happenings...

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	CONTACT
Thurs 22 nd to Sun 25 th Jan 2015	55 th OA Birthday Party Weekend Celebration	LAX Hilton 5711 West Century Blvd Los Angeles CA 90045	http://www.oalaig.org/oabirthday-party/the-oabirthday-party.html Sponsored by Los Angeles Intergroup
Fri 15 th to Sun 17 th May 2015	Ilkley Retreat – "The Twelve Principles of Overeaters Anonymous"	The Briery Retreat Centre Ilkley West Yorkshire LS29 9BW	Flyer to be distributed in the New Year Sponsored by North of England Intergroup
Fri 10 th to Sun 12 th July 2015	14 th Annual OA Recovery Convention	The Hilton Birmingham Metropole Hotel NEC Birmingham B40 1PP	Hosted by Heart of England Intergroup
Fri 16 th to Sun 18 th Oct 2015	30 th Annual OA National Assembly and Convention	Exact venue tbc Farnborough Hampshire	Sponsored by OAGB <i>Further details via</i> http://www.oagb.org.uk/n_sb-payment/

Publicise your OA event for free!

Let SBS know if your group or other service body is organising a workshop or other OA event that you'd like advertised on this page. (Just send an email to stepbystep@oagb.org.uk with details of the date, event, venue and a contact number and/or email address, stating which registered OA group or other service body is sponsoring this event.)

Any comments, suggestions or ideas for future editions?

Want to advertise a new group?

Send SBS an email at:

[**stepbystep@oagb.org.uk**](mailto:stepbystep@oagb.org.uk)

(please don't simply reply to the OAGB emails)

*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.*