

theJournal

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Sober at the Holidays

Characteristics of Sex and Love Addiction

1. Having few healthy boundaries, we become sexually involved with and/or emotionally attached to people without knowing them.
2. Fearing abandonment and loneliness, we stay in and return to painful, destructive relationships, concealing our dependency needs from ourselves and others, growing more isolated and alienated from friends and loved ones, ourselves, and God.
3. Fearing emotional and/or sexual deprivation, we compulsively pursue and involve ourselves in one relationship after another, sometimes having more than one sexual or emotional liaison at a time.
4. We confuse love with neediness, physical and sexual attraction, pity and/or the need to rescue or be rescued.
5. We feel empty and incomplete when we are alone. Even though we fear intimacy and commitment, we continually search for relationships and sexual contacts.
6. We sexualize stress, guilt, loneliness, anger, shame, fear and envy. We use sex or emotional dependence as substitutes for nurturing care, and support.
7. We use sex and emotional involvement to manipulate and control others.
8. We become immobilized or seriously distracted by romantic or sexual obsessions or fantasies.
9. We avoid responsibility for ourselves by attaching ourselves to people who are emotionally unavailable.
10. We stay enslaved to emotional dependency, romantic intrigue, or compulsive sexual activities.
11. To avoid feeling vulnerable, we may retreat from all intimate involvement, mistaking sexual and emotional anorexia for recovery.
12. We assign magical qualities to others. We idealize and pursue them, then blame them for not fulfilling our fantasies and expectations.

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S.L.A.A. Signs of Recovery

1. We seek to develop a daily relationship with a Higher Power, knowing that we are not alone in our efforts to heal ourselves from our addiction.
2. We are willing to be vulnerable because the capacity to trust has been restored to us by our faith in a Higher Power.
3. We surrender, one day at a time, our whole life strategy of, and our obsession with the pursuit of romantic and sexual intrigue and emotional dependency.
4. We learn to avoid situations that may put us at risk physically, morally, psychologically or spiritually.
5. We learn to accept and love ourselves, to take responsibility for our own lives, and to take care of our own needs before involving ourselves with others.
6. We become willing to ask for help, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable and learning to trust and accept others.
7. We allow ourselves to work through the pain of our low self-esteem and our fears of abandonment and responsibility. We learn to feel comfortable in solitude.
8. We begin to accept our imperfections and mistakes as part of being human, healing our shame and perfectionism while working on our character defects.
9. We begin to substitute honesty for self-destructive ways of expressing emotions and feelings.
10. We become honest in expressing who we are, developing true intimacy in our relationships with ourselves and others.
11. We learn to value sex as a by-product of sharing, commitment, trust and cooperation in a partnership.
12. We are restored to sanity, on a daily basis, by participating in the process of recovery.

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Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous Preamble

Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous is a Twelve Step, Twelve Tradition-oriented fellowship based on the model pioneered by Alcoholics Anonymous.

The only qualification for S.L.A.A. membership is a desire to stop living out a pattern of sex and love addiction. S.L.A.A. is supported entirely through contributions of its membership, and is free to all who need it.

To counter the destructive consequences of sex and love addiction we draw on five major resources:

1. **Sobriety.** Our willingness to stop acting out in our own personal bottom-line addictive behavior on a daily basis.
2. **Sponsorship/Meetings.** Our capacity to reach out for the supportive fellowship within S.L.A.A.
3. **Steps.** Our practice of the Twelve Step program of recovery to achieve sexual and emotional sobriety.
4. **Service.** Our giving back to the S.L.A.A. community what we continue to freely receive.
5. **Spirituality.** Our developing a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves, which can guide and sustain us in recovery.

As a fellowship S.L.A.A. has no opinion on outside issues and seeks no controversy. S.L.A.A. is not affiliated with any other organizations, movements, or causes, either religious or secular.

We are, however, united in a common focus: dealing with our addictive sexual and emotional behavior. We find a common denominator in our obsessive/compulsive patterns, which transcends any personal differences of sexual orientation or gender identity.

We need protect with special care the anonymity of every S.L.A.A. member. Additionally we try to avoid drawing undue attention to S.L.A.A. as a whole from the public media.

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The Twelve Steps of S.L.A.A.*

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

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Letter From the Editor

The theme of this issue is “Sober at the Holidays.” When I first heard this theme, I thought about the “major” holidays that I always felt I needed to celebrate in a big way and my expectations around them— Halloween (couples costumes and haunted houses where I wanted to stick close to my significant other); Thanksgiving (where I wanted to impress my partner with cooking or cleaning skills and impress my family with my date); Christmas (where I had to find and to get the perfect gift and make the perfect goodies so that I could get compliments everywhere); New Year’s (where I always expected the perfect party and perfect partner to kiss me at midnight); and many sex and love addicts’ anti-holiday, Valentine’s Day (where I always expected lavish gifts and celebrations but usually ended up with a card and candy from my mother). The holidays were always a let down from the movie I had playing in my head!

I went to my home group meeting on Father’s Day and to my surprise everyone was sharing about the difficulties around that holiday. I realized that any time that society labels as special and family time can be difficult for sex and love addicts.

My parents got married on Father’s Day and my mom takes my dad away on anniversary trips and I feel resentful. But when I think back to all our holidays together, I realize how stressful it is when family gets together. It’s much more relaxing when the world doesn’t have to live up to my fantasies and I don’t have to be perfect and I can just try to be of service and enjoy the time I have with others, even if they’re not perfect either.

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

The Conference Journal Committee, a service body within Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, publishes *the Journal* for the good of the international S.L.A.A. membership. Oversight and policy is provided in accordance with the Ninth Tradition.

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Question of the Day

& Answers from Yesterday

“IS IT MORE DIFFICULT TO STAY SOBER AROUND THE HOLIDAYS?
WHAT SPECIAL PROBLEMS HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED AND WHAT TOOLS OF THE
PROGRAM DID YOU USE TO STAY SOBER?”

Staying sober during the holidays is usually no easier or harder for me than at any other time. My sobriety always depends on how “needy” or depressed I may be feeling, and that does not depend on the calendar.

Speaking for myself, the triggers are emotional circuit breakers, such as family problems, my personal health, my fear that I will die all alone, and as celibate as the Pope...

Sure, the holidays can aggravate loneliness, since the media always drag out their annual “Holiday Blues” story.

But the longer that I’ve been in S.L.A.A., the more I realize that my triggers are fairly predictable, even when I get sidetracked by self-pity.

Happy Holidays.

— **Marsha Z., Boston**

My first thoughts are that I didn’t have extra triggers around the holidays, just more sadness. I loved going to the marathon meetings.

— **Jill**

The holidays can be a tough time.

One issue is the amount of food.

Another issue is not being the center of attention.

Taking interest in others helps; so do meetings & outreach calls.

— **David G., Culver City**

For me, the holidays have gotten a lot more realistic. I used to expect so much from these special days and be disappointed every year.

My recovery teaches me that reality is okay and that adjusting my expectations to something more sane doesn’t mean I am settling, it just means I’m not setting myself up for anger and resentment.

Thanks,

— **Beth S.**

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “Is it more difficult to stay sober around the holidays? What special problems have you encountered and what tools of the program did you use to stay sober?” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two questions are: Issue #152 — Strengthening Healthy Boundaries— “How has the S.L.A.A. program of recovery helped you to strengthen your boundaries?” The deadline for submissions is 11/14/14; and Issue #153— Secrets Versus Privacy: How Do We Tell the Difference?— “Has S.L.A.A. helped you understand the difference between secrets and privacy? Please share your experience, strength and hope.” — deadline for submissions is 1/15/15. Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

I live in Santa Cruz, California, in a small town on the Central Coast. When I was just two months sober, I learned of a New Year’s retreat put on by the San Francisco/East Bay fellowship that was being held in my area.

I decided to attend, as I had no other New Year’s plans. It was culture shock as I had never been a part of such a large event, and I did not know anyone.

However the workshops, speaker meetings, and fellowship were fantastic. Slowly but surely I got to know some people, and allowed myself to be immersed in the retreat. This was the best gift I could give myself for my recovery.

I am often in the Bay Area during the winter holidays to visit family; during this time I see if I can make it to one of their meetings now that I know a few people there. The one hour drive from my folk’s place is totally worth it.

My own family, though I love them, can be trying and difficult at times. Connecting with my recovery family helps keep me in balance, and this is a gift.

— Dale B.

The holidays present difficulties for me because I still buy into the ‘meet prince charming and live happily ever after.’ Plus, commercialization encourages us to think we are not OK if we aren’t in some ‘special’ relationship.

I spend a lot of time alone and can find myself thinking about connecting through the internet again or even worse picking up some guy at an A.A. meeting. I want the fantasy holiday!

However, my memories of previous messes I’ve created help me to use the program tools. I talk to my sponsor, go to lots of ‘safe’ meetings — Al-Anon is a great filler for me because these meetings are mostly women.

I increase my prayer and meditation time and focus on staying in the present, moment by moment. If I feel the urge to call an old sex-buddy, I call one of my female program friends or journal. It helps that some of my sponsees are married.

Their real relationship struggles help me to realize there is no ‘happily ever after.’ Sometimes I have to pray the serenity prayer as an ongoing mantra to keep myself out of fantasy.

Finally, I get busy. I commit to finishing tasks BEFORE I pick up the phone to call X. This gives me the ‘PAUSE’ I need to think through the action to reality.

—Beth

Home for the Holidays



Photo by James E.

Thanksgiving and Christmas 2013 was my first time to go through the holidays without a partner and in early withdrawal.

Over all the decades prior to S.L.A.A., I had practiced serial monogamy in my disease and had clung to my partner and/or

her family because half of my family was deceased and the other half was estranged from me due to my resentments and family of origin dysfunction. Via

a Blue Christmas service at my local religious institution, I was able to grieve a lot of that loss, but I was able to be more honest about it during my S.L.A.A.

telephone meetings and with my recovery partners. I also began to seriously pursue service opportunities through my home group and to start working the Fourth Step with a Step study group. I had much to occupy my thoughts and began to find relief

from my withdrawal and a reprieve from my obsession during this time. Having a home group has always been important to me in other 12-Step programs and through this holiday time I was able to gratefully identify a phone

group as my home group, and I called the meetings all through the holidays. In that sense, I was home for the holidays.

-Orphan Annie, USA

Winding Down at the Holidays



Photo by James E.

Christmas is approaching and I know that when I head home to Detroit to visit my family, I'll have a massive re-adjustment to make for those cold two weeks. First, the stimuli that Los Angeles offers, appeals to me.

I like the bright sun, and I like the bright lights at night. I like the options and the variety. I'm used to sitting in traffic, and

I occasionally like to see helicopters swarming the sky over Hollywood during a police chase.

Life is interesting here. Not to mention, S.L.A.A. offers the widest array of meetings in a given day that I've ever personally heard of. In essence, there's a lot of life to be lived and enjoyed in L.A..

When I go to Detroit,

winding down is like being in withdrawal. It feels like it lasts forever, and it's painfully lonesome. So what do I do? Sometimes I cry. Other times I fret. If I'm up to it, I make calls to my brothers from the program who are scattered all over the country and I'm reminded that we're all going through the same thing. Then if I'm lucky enough, I see the

opportunities that lay in front of me to get out of myself and enjoy the company of people whom I don't get to see very often. Suddenly, it gets a bit better. I forget how sharing is a reciprocal process, affording

relief both to the sharer and the listener.

When I'm feeling lonely in Detroit this Christmas, I'll pick up the phone and connect with good friends from S.L.A.A. One day at a time, I'll make it

through with as little damage as I possibly can, and with as much openness and love as I can at any one moment. And... Life will go on!

— Anonymous

Temptations Come Up

At one time it was definitely harder for me to stay sober around the Holidays. It always seemed like others were happier than I was, that it was a time for "family." And my own family relationships were tense, dysfunctional, bound to be disappointing, and I had lots of feelings I did not even understand.

At those times — like any time I felt stressed, not sure what to do, or uncomfortable — the temptation to act out always seemed to pop up. I identified with Rich's story where he talked about how temptations always seemed to come up when he was most vulnerable, with fiendish regularity.

The fourth Christmas after I got sober, I was very tense and fearful about being lonely and about what I might do. I was not in any relationship at the time. The one I got into when I was just 6 months sober in S.L.A.A. had ended. My children were adults, and both had plans to spend Christmas day with others.

So I was going to be completely alone, for the first time in my entire life! I thought of all kinds of slippery things to do. One of those was imagining myself going to the A.A. marathon meetings and hanging around there for 24 hours.

Oops! Wait a minute! That was where I used to act out after I gave up alcohol! Maybe not such a good idea. I thought of taking a trip by myself somewhere where no one would know where I was, just to prove my independence. Hmm. Maybe that wasn't such a good idea, either. Planning to indulge my impulses to go here and there where no one knew me, sounded like an invitation to "compulsivity"! I thought of hiding at home with the phones off, and pretending I was somewhere, telling everyone I was with "friends." That sounded like a good wallow in a huge vat of self-pity.

Finally I ended up realizing I needed to do something for someone else. I was still way too



fearful and self-conscious to admit to anyone how I felt, or to ask someone to let me spend time with them. Looking back, I can see how incredibly

anorectic I was! So this is how that first holiday all by myself finally emerged.

I arranged times with my two children to meet to exchange gifts before the holiday, and then immediately went to a meeting. I went to a Christmas Eve performance of beautiful music sung by a community choir. I went to bed and got up early so I could make my special sausage stuffing, a huge quantity in one of those big flat catering pans that I rented. I took it to one of the places where they served meals to the homeless and poor.

I never even told them I was coming! Not that I was a commitment-phobe, or afraid my offering would be rejected or anything! They did let me donate the stuffing, and I helped serve the food, spooning helpings onto people's plates. I watched the families eat, and people talk to each other. I didn't really join in, but I felt part of it. When the stuffing was gone, I went home.

I did go to the marathon at the A.A. club, but I only stayed for a couple of meetings, and then went home. I had a bit of a cry, and went to sleep, and the holiday was over. With relief, I went back to work the next day.

Since then I have had many holidays with family, and many alone, but never had a struggle like I did that one year. When I didn't want to be alone, I would start inviting people for "Christmas Day Dinner" as soon as Thanksgiving was over, and would collect anywhere from 5 to 15 people who also did not have family to spend the day with.

Sometimes I just relaxed, enjoyed egg nog with nutmeg, which tasted just as good without the alcohol in it, and read a good book. The important thing I had learned

was not to dwell on what I was missing, or what I wanted, but to try to do something to make the holiday for someone else a little better.

And I go to a meeting every day, especially at those times when there will be only the "alone and lonely," because everyone else is with family and friends. I take time out to do that even at the times when my own holiday is filled with family and fun.

I had a 12 year partnership in which we both loved holidays, and those were very happy times. But I never let myself forget the lesson of that first "Oh,-my-Higher-Power!-I'm-going-to-be-all-alone-and-what-am-I-going-to-do?!"-experience. I make a plan, and have a back-up plan, to do something to nurture myself. I plan to dress up and feel good about myself, I plan something specific to help someone else.

If nothing else, I can always bake cookies and donate a package of gifts to a school to give to one of the needy families they know about. I go to meetings —S.L.A.A., open A.A. meetings, community choir performances, a good movie.

I don't let myself dwell on what I do not have. I do look for something to do for someone else. And I thank my H.P. for my sobriety. Today my holidays do not seem so special, and are often not any big celebration or big deal, and that is fine. I can celebrate any day!

I can be as happy as I make up my mind to be. I don't let "if only..." dwell in my thoughts. I know that helping others to be happy will make me happy too, and that will keep me sober. Just for today. Have a happy New Day, everyone!

— Anonymous

The important thing I had learned was not to dwell on what I was missing, or what I wanted, but to try to do something to make the holiday for someone else a little better.

Holiday Tools vs. Holiday Fools

When the only tool we have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail (Anonymous).

My A.A. sobriety began in April, 1994, and my S.L.A.A. sobriety began in January, 1998.

My emotional sobriety depends upon whatever time I got up this morning. That can change, hour by hour.

I identify as a sex, love, romance, relationship, rehearsal addict, with bouts of social, emotional and sexual anorexia in there too.

The seeds of these substance and process addictions and avoidances were planted in the hormonal surges of my adolescence in the early 60's in eastern Canada.

One of six siblings, the children of WW II, Mom was left alone a lot while Dad drove a bus for the Air Force near Halifax. Her loneliness and vulnerability transferred into my little soul as some unknown longing for intimacy with myself, the other, and the HP. Sex and love addiction is a family disease.

Holidays in the 40's and 50's were great training grounds for romantic and nostalgic vulnerabilities, given the post war trauma survivalist mode....given the holocaust and the war dead.

The best choice I could make after high school to escape from what I perceived to be a "less than ideal" situation was to become a nun and to "go on the missions." I really had a spiritual

experience of being called, but the seeds of my addictions were growing amongst thorny barbs, and I suffered from a certain naiveté about healthy intimacy.

From one ghetto to another, from the Irish Christian family-church-school womb/placenta to an even more intense womb with its protective placenta, I carried these holes in my soul of neediness, intimacy dysfunctions, etc. whether teaching in Michigan or training catechists in West Africa.

It took the sudden death of my father and a car accident to bring this stubborn "donkey in denial" to her knees, hitting bottom in 1993 after 15 years of active addiction.

Holidays in early sobriety were and are still problematic for me and possibly for all in recovery.

This is the time when my Irish heritage, the holiday gathering and social camaraderie, is at its greatest temptation: the temptation to be IN the world of illusion, fantasy, image-making, especially with all the media, and not detached from it with love.

Thanks to A.A. and S.L.A.A. and RCA, the "fool-ishness" or the insanity, inebriety, and chaos of my particular dis-ease is being transformed slowly, slowly into healthy use of healthy tools to make the world a better place, i.e. *trust HP, clean house, help others* (A.A.)



Photo by Beth L.

The 36 Principled Programs of S.L.A.A., A.A., and RCA (Recovering Couples Anonymous) have saved my life, and given me/us tools to handle the most difficult situations like holidays, with serenity, courage, and hopefully, a little wisdom.

Box 459 (GSO NY) yearly publishes that lovely 12 cartoon "Twelve Tips on Keeping Your Holiday Season Sober and Joyous."

In A.A.'s Big Book, Bill W. talks about the "kit of spiritual tools at our feet" (p.23)

So the "Tools of Holiday Sobriety" that I desire to use this holiday season to keep me from acting out or acting in are the slogans of:

* Live *Easy *But *Think *First: the first five words of the Basic Five slogans of A.A..

* We have heard it said Live and Let Live in A.A..

In S.L.A.A. the one by whom the Fellowship is named

(Augustine) has said, “*Love and do what you will*”, i.e. Love and let Love.

I hear this as having healthy boundaries, not comparing, not judging. During holidays I need to pay attention to H.A.L.T. (hungry, angry, lonely, tired); otherwise I will drive myself to insane thoughts and actions.

We have heard it said in A.A. *Easy Does It (but do it).

S.L.A.A.’s version of that would be:

Thy Will, Not Mine, be Done. or *the wisdom to know the difference*. Balance, balance, balance in the stressful holiday pressures.

In A.A. we hear: * But For the Grace of God.

In S.L.A.A. we are *blessed with “the ability to be intimate with HP, ourselves, and then others.* (Basic text, Step 11)

*Think, Think, Think in A.A. translates into S.L.A.A. as:

Use the 5 S’s: Review the Tools and Tips for Newcomers in the Welcome Pamphlet (2012).

*First Things First has a great equivalent in Al-Anon as, “How important is it?”

In recovery, I can still become obsessed with one person, idea or thing that “seems” to be the answer to all my problems. Each

morning when I do my 10th and 11th steps, I am reminded of what is first, and it is not me.

Augustine says, *We do not walk to God with the feet of our body, nor would wings, if we had them, carry us there. But we go to God with the affections of our soul.*

We are each and together blessed with the ability to choose the appropriate spiritual tools in the little toolbox that has been lovingly placed at our feet. We have the choice to pick them up and use them.

— **Beth L, Montreal**

Longing for Community



Holidays — I guess they bring up feelings of connection, intimacy and the challenge I face around these — the longing for community and intimacy and connection and all the ways that I block this in my life, either through total avoidance or

occasional compulsive ‘binges’ on unavailable qualifiers!

The most important tools to use are Steps One, Two and Three. Doing those Steps is the only way to stay sober and committed to recovery. Unless I fully accept Step One, I have no lasting motivation to amend my

behavior.

It is important to affirm my deep and lasting unconditional relationship with something greater than me — I call it Great Spirit, but it is something far beyond what I have known. This is because my solutions are not ones that are based on

unconditional and eternal peace!!! Lol!! They come from fear, self denial and avoidance, and a lack of ability to respond.

And I want something different — freedom! More than anything, the biggest gift and solace in the world is recovery! I think that is important to remember when my mind drifts into wanting to share the

holidays with someone.

Something that someone asked me the other day was really helpful when I was craving a qualifier, “What could you do instead?” This opened up my heart and I felt a sense of peace and relief. “Oh! I could take care of myself!” I realized. I didn’t have to white knuckle my craving! “Just realize that

something else would feel so much better,” I told myself. And I realized that I wanted that. Each day in recovery is a gift! It is so important to give thanks for that and affirm my new life in recovery, especially in times of festivity or stress such as the holidays! Good luck and peace to all of us.

— Elise

Isolation and the Holidays

My personal bottom hit on Thanksgiving, 2012. It was a little after discovery of my addiction by my wife and daughter. Earlier that week I discovered my qualifier had been lying to me (imagine that) about things big and small. My family went to my in-laws; I was not welcome.

I isolated with a turkey TV dinner, football and cyber-shopping. Before long I acted out for several hours in a bout of self pity and beating myself up. After that day, I committed to my recovery and started with a meeting a day, which I continued for 4 months. And I still go to over 8 meetings per week.

Christmas time, 2013 was also difficult. I was separated from my family. My qualifier was getting married on New Year’s Eve, and I had to make one more attempt to hook-up with her. She was agreeable. I couldn’t handle that. Why would she hook-up with me less than a week before the wedding? I did not see her,

but still acted out alone.

What worked: Thanksgiving, 2013, I volunteered at a homeless shelter. Working there kept me too busy to feel sorry for myself (and also made me grateful for what I had). Christmas, 2013, I went to the marathon meeting and a meeting afterwards.

New Year’s Eve, 2013 (The day my qualifier got married) I went to a nice religious ceremony which included writing a couple of character defects on a piece of paper and burning them and writing a letter to myself that the church sent out last month. I also was given a small stone that I assigned a value to. I decided on “Integrity.” I use it to meditate

when triggered. At midnight I participated in a group meditation to bring in the new year. Then I went to a brother in program’s place to hang out.

New Year’s Day I went to the marathon meeting and a meeting afterwards.

— Dave



Sobriety Is a Challenge When I'm Away from Home



I am now in the first weeks of soberly dating a man, so I take this service opportunity to share my experience in order to remind myself of and renew my commitment to sobriety because I want peace and freedom.

My experience is that I have relapsed after many years of sobriety while I was away travelling; I was alone, challenged and I didn't resist when a man showed interest in me. This led to a lot of

obsession, and nine months of painfully looking to use men for the solution to my inner pain.

Also, some years after that, while on vacation on a farm, I started a relationship way too fast with an old friend of mine.

This relationship lasted a year and a half. It had its good sides and less healthy sides. But it wasn't what I deeply wanted in a relationship. And it was very painful to leave it. It took many months to mourn it.



Living in sobriety is not about struggling against my will and desires, it is turning it over to a Higher Power, and receiving the grace of wanting peace.

So that's why I want to take time to know a person. I want to use my time wisely on what really is aligned with who I am and what my HP wants from me. I don't want to spend months and years on what isn't important.

So my answer is, "Yes, sobriety is a challenge when I am away from home."

If I look back to learn something from it, on both occasions I had no clear plan for staying connected with other members. On both occasions, when things got "hot," I had the thought that I should leave the area to get away from the person I was triggered by (find a convent or go back home). But I was already too thrilled and buzzed, too paralyzed to walk away. I guess my addict wanted a fix.

I also had experiences where I stayed within my bottom-line behaviours during holidays. Once I almost slipped with a man I was feeling heavy attraction to (maybe because he was almost the only man in this country camp I had gone to with the intention to work on a creative project).

Why I didn't slip: I was participating in many online S.L.A.A. meetings every day, sharing my experience and my hope. I shared why sobriety was important to me and what I had done to stay sober in the previous years. As they say in A.A., "If you want to keep it, you've got to share it."

Some elements that were part of other sober holidays include: Having nourished my connection to my HP and choosing a trip that felt guided; in triggering situations, recalling the awful pain I felt not so long after acting out, and during withdrawal; breathing and

reminding myself that I cannot trust the "feeling in love" part of me that feels that about people I just met; staying connected daily with members – even with no cell phone. I brought a calling card and a list of numbers; committing to call a whole bunch of newcomers while travelling in a city where my ex lives (my pride prevented me from calling the ex!); using all the other tools of program: literature, prayer, meditation, sponsor, self-care, service before, during and after vacations!

For me the whole point is the Third Step: surrendering my will and my life to a Higher Power. When I am buzzed and want to act out, there is no human power that can prevent me from doing so. The best I can do is use the tools to reconnect with a Higher Power.

Very important: living in sobriety is not about struggling against my will and desires, it is turning it over to a Higher Power, and receiving the grace of wanting peace. And it's about understanding that no sex nor human love will give it to me.

It is the miracle of letting go of the illusions that a man will fix me. All the Program tools are there to remind me – the 12 Steps, especially the first three. And thanks to the Steps, I can connect to a Higher Power that grants me, just for today, my daily reprieve from sex and love addiction.

Counting days of sobriety has been helpful to me after relapses. But it's not my way of living. Program reminds me to just live my day of today, asking HP to be of service. And then I receive the grace of a happy, free and meaningful life.

—Anonymous

Share space

Characteristics of Sex and Love Addiction

*F*eared abandonment and loneliness, we stay in and return to painful, destructive relationships, concealing our dependency needs from others, growing more isolated and alienated from friends and loved ones, ourselves and GOD.



Introvert: a person characterized by concern primarily with his or her own thoughts and feelings; :to turn inward; to introvert anger.

After being abandoned by my father at the age of 2, and my mother at the age of 6, I was set up to live a life with abandonment issues. I was placed in a Baptist Children's home at age 6 and left there until I was ten, with my twin brother, older brother and my sister. My oldest brother was sent back up north to live with his father.

Did I mention this was a Baptist Children's home? After 4 years there I came to be agnostic.

My mother rescued us at age 10 by marrying another man to adopt us and get us out. I never met my father (left at 2) and being the son of a

single parent (mom), who lived her life as an alcoholic and sex addict (my opinion) I never had a chance for a "normal" life. My mother passed away when I was 17. I loved my mom and have forgiven her for all her transgressions, knowing full well she did the best she could given her addictions.

During my time in the children's home, I did not have any friends; 4th grade through high school, I had no real friends, but a lot of crushes and fantasies on girls and teachers. My adult life was much the same.

I had sex for the first time when I was 20 and decided it was best to marry this girl. Bad choice, 5 years later she divorced me.

I drank heavily, (I'm not an alcoholic, I drank for courage) chased a lot of women, caught

Through recovery work and service work I have been able to create bonds with people I would have thought unimaginable 15 years ago.

very few, married another one and divorced her after 14 years. The crazy thing is, I stayed married for 14 years even though I hated every day of it.

The best thing I got from my 2nd marriage was S.L.A.A. In my haste to fix her, she found S.L.A.A. twice for me.

The only person prior to coming into S.L.A.A. that I was ever close to was my twin brother. He passed away in 2007 and thank God I had a few years of recovery behind me.

I am very fortunate to have found my wife in S.L.A.A. She is

truly my best friend and closest confidant and biggest supporter. She and S.L.A.A. have helped me to understand true intimacy. Through recovery work and service work I have been able to create bonds with people I would have thought unimaginable 15 years ago. My wife points out that it is not about me, it is about us as individuals living one day at a time. Progress not Perfection.

This is the part I love the most. Through service work I have been able to have, and still do, intimate relationships (with

no sexual connotations) with many, many members of this Fellowship, male female, straight or gay, doesn't matter.

Intimate relationships for me are those that include trust, safety, vulnerability, openness, willingness, acceptance and honesty. By allowing myself to be open and vulnerable I give myself to others.

While I live with abandonment issues on a daily basis, through this recovery program I have the tools to survive.

— Jack S. -

Another Challenge to Work Through

I have been attending meetings of S.L.A.A. regularly for about 4 1/2 years and have been fortunate to live in an area where it's possible to attend multiple meetings daily. I remember my first meeting clearly and that as the extremely depressed, lonely, and love-hungry individual I was, I was both shocked and delighted to see so many women (and attractive ones among them) in attendance.

It's possible to credit the presence of attractive women with why I chose to stick around through those scary first few meetings, as I found any female energy extremely welcome in my life.

It worked at first lure to get my ass in the chair and to show up to meetings. And eventually I started becoming more comfortable sharing honestly around them, and to start to look at the crushes I'd have on the women as yet another challenge to get over and work through.

Luckily, I'm naturally quite shy and awkward around women I'm attracted to, so even though I'd been tempted many times to seek out relationships with women in program, the shyness at first kept me sober from attempting to approach or act out with any of them. And then as the months and years of recovery stacked up, I didn't attempt anything out of respect for them, their recovery, and the healing and trustingly platonic co-ed nature of the program.



However I have to admit that the urges and skewed motives have definitely colored my participation in meetings and in program. I've preferred certain meetings to others due to the prevalence of attractive women (or a particular one I was drawn to). I've taken service commitments entirely to impress female members of the group.

I've exercised my flirtation skills at fellowship, though never with the (conscious) intention of securing a relationship or a date, though it's nearly happened a few times.

One female member of program in particular had me thrown into quite an inner drama for over a year. Even though she wasn't physically "my type" and a little older than me, I remember first seeing her at so many meetings all over town that I couldn't help but notice her.

When she started opening up at the meetings, I found myself seduced by her dangerous and aloof "femme fatale" energy, my desire to rescue her, and caught myself paying more attention to her shares than any of the others. Then one day I saw her profile on an internet dating site which ignited a lot of fantasy ("She's available! It can happen!"), especially after I'd noticed that she'd "looked at" my profile a few times.

The next time that we were seated next to each other at the same fellowship, I sensed some attention from her and brought it up to defuse the situation in a humorous way (which seemed to work, though I still retained the fantasy). Slowly she started to settle in to the same group of program friends I was in, and we started to become familiar to each other and interact in a more friendly way.

However there was a

palpable sexual tension between her and me which other, more blunt people in the group even pointed out. It started to feel like an episode of "Saved by the Bell" or like the old high school experience of "Who 'Likes' Who?"— the very breeding ground for my addictive fantasy-based view of relationships.

From there, all sorts of inner-drama ensued. I found myself having dreams about her and using fantasy over her to get me through unpleasant situations. I'd hurriedly speed to meetings and S.L.A.A. events, hoping to see her there. Strangely, one day she friend-requested me online and I accepted — only to have her delete me a few months later (which I heard through the very existent S.L.A.A. grapevine rumor mill was a sponsor-directed move).

This served to actually increase my obsession with her as to a degree I (as such a low-self-esteem individual) was delighted to be considered attractive or dangerous enough to trigger someone. Around that time we got in an argument when she asked for feedback on a lead share of hers (which she'd noticed had caused me to cry), to which I responded that it wasn't all about her.

I found the ensuing argument extremely triggering and my desire to fix the tense situation rhymed with my desire to yet fix her. My part is that even though I didn't actively pursue her in all this, I certainly did not set boundaries and did nothing to push her away. Many times I'd catch myself altering my shares if she was in the same room in an effort to manage my image.

I wasn't really strong enough in the lonely times to turn away the fantasy of being with her, which I kept as a fall back in my mind in case any of my out-of-



program romances didn't work out. Looking back, if she'd ever stepped forward and asked me out or informed me outright of any desire to be with me, I'm not sure I would have reacted with any dignity.

I'm lucky that never happened even though it may have been a great test of my commitment to my recovery. However, I made it a point not to directly or actively pursue her or do anything I considered inappropriate.

I'd seen other S.L.A.A. members hook up and it always bothered me, and I didn't want to be like them or make any of the women in program consider me unsafe and see me like the hungry wolf I feel like deep down.

While not strong enough to avoid her, the best internal bargain I could do was to "Step 3 it" by focusing on "going with the flow" no matter what that meant. And, in retrospect, God somehow kept me safe from

messing up my (or her) program.

I'm also lucky to be in such a big city that I could go to meetings across town where nobody knows her and be able to share the situation out of my system. And I took full advantage of those meetings (along with a lot of phone outreach).

Slowly over time, the obsession and fantasy around her largely cooled off, partly having to do with us not being at the same meetings much anymore and partly to do with just getting to know her, her story, and the gradual sane realization that a relationship with her would certainly not serve to increase my own sanity. Also, right at the height of it, I met a woman outside of program and got involved in a speedy and deep enmeshment, which distracted from (but didn't fully end) the S.L.A.A. crush.

The way things have been in

the past year, I believe we're semi sober friends and have a trusting (but fairly awkward at times) largely business-like relationship, though not without little hints of flirting here and there.

As an addict, I'm still drawn to her, and my desire to rescue (and be rescued by) her continues to pop up. The episode with her taught me that although I cannot control my mind, my thoughts, my emotions, and who I am attracted to, I have some control over my actions, and that, well... something (call it God, the circumstances, my sobriety, sanity, or the combination of unavailability) has kept us safe from acting out. I feel that it is just as important as the Five S's, to work imperfectly, honestly, and humbly through human experiences and temptations like these. This is a vital part of my recovery.

— M, Los Angeles, CA

Event

S.L.A.A. Retreat

- ◆ Presented by: Los Angeles Intergroup
- ◆ Where: Serra Retreat Center - Malibu, California
- ◆ Event Date: Fri, November 28, 2014 to Sun, November 30, 2014
- ◆ For Inquiries: www.slaafws.org
- ◆ More Info: Join members of the Fellowship for three days and two nights of peace, serenity and recovery in the hills of Malibu, California. Planned activities include meetings, a recovery panel, small group discussions and plenty of free time to spend any way you want (beach walk, fellowship, or meditation).
- ◆ Limited to 80 people, the retreat fee includes room, linen, meals from Friday night until lunch on Sunday and all activities.
- ◆ See the Los Angeles S.L.A.A. website for answers to frequently asked questions.

Are We Trying Too Hard for “Recovery”?



Thank god-dess for recovery! I truly owe my life to the sponsor who 12 Stepped me into S.L.A.A. when I was still so unhappy that I was suicidal and discouraged in spite of two other 12 Step recovery programs. It took a lot of raging at god-dess to get me to the First Step, but when I did it, I never looked back. More than 2 decades later I am still here. Just in case you are wondering, there are quite a few

of us long-timers around. We don't refer to our T.I.P.s (time in program), because we are there to get help and help others to live today IN recovery, not to reminisce about the past.

So why do I think I tried too hard for recovery? It has been obvious once I chanced upon the thought, which became an insight, which finally became an action plan. I never in my life had seemed to have love and safety right now, this day, so

how could I possibly “recover” it?!? No wonder it seemed like I was endlessly struggling with Seventh Step stuff, going back repeatedly to Step One, thinking a more thorough inventory would help, and finding myself all too often in the isolation and loneliness of social and emotional anorexia. I had been commitment phobic for nearly all of my life. AND, I had very good reasons for being that way. Therefore, a very young,

frightened part of me fought to stay with the old pattern of aloneness, because that was the only way that Young-A had survived to grow up.

New plan. First, I had to recover the capacity to choose not to act out. To do that, I needed to turn my will and my life over to the HP who was helping me stay sober, one day at a time, and I did that.

I tried for the “perfect” bottom lines, argued about how the Program was supposed to work, and enjoyed the feeling that came from doing the right things. But then those troublesome 6th Step things kept coming up. I kept my bottom lines, but it was really close at times, and now they showed up in more subtle ways. And more and more of my life seemed to be spent Tenth Stepping the ways I failed to live up to the standards I expected of myself.

I am grateful I did not slip. But it was years before I stopped feeling ashamed because of things like not giving up masturbation completely, even though now it was maybe once a month, and only when I was single, instead of one to several times daily, and always at night to go to sleep!

Many times I lived for weeks or even months in a state of much serenity, living out the adventure of returning to school to learn things I always wanted to know, finding jobs I could truly love and do well at, and having relationships that at least were healthier and lasted longer than relationships did before S.L.A.A.! But inevitably the dark times would come, blocking the sunlight of the spirit of recovery from my very soul. Then I would struggle to stay committed to my bottom

lines, and everything seemed difficult, and the results of my efforts at service seemed puny somehow, and often I failed to live up to the standards I set for myself.

Then, more than two decades into recovery, I tried a structured approach to the Steps with a sponsor. The bottom lines said “All that stuff you have been staying away from, plus ways to keep some of the not-so-sober-feeling behaviors out of the way while you do 30 days of structure and write new bottom lines.

And the miracle began. Patterns I had only glimpsed



before became clear roadmaps leading always to avoidance of commitment and comfort in all kinds of relationships. Now I could see how I had stayed with a path of “recovery”, down in the valley where I felt safe, but never experienced the sunshine and freedom of spirit that might be found if I scaled the mountains on all sides of me.

With my sponsor’s help, I dug more deeply into myself than ever before, seeking the very beginning of the pattern – the blueprint – I had used to live my life even after recovery began. I will not pretend this was easy! There was the inevitable pain of any Fourth

Step and humbling that seemed impossible to avoid in the Steps that followed. But I kept digging until memories – or visions that represented my reality of my early childhood – became clear.

I had denied that I even had needs for love and safety as an infant and early in my toddler years, because filling those needs was only available once in a while. I decided that I had to make those needs invisible, if possible, even to myself. I could not ask for love, or comfort, or support, or healthy attention, because if I did I might be abandoned altogether.

If someone offered love or protection to me, I had to accept it, however unreliable or flawed, and I had to turn my will and life over to those people, because that little bit, even when accompanied with soul-shriveling neglect or abuse, was all I deserved.

So I built a fortress to live in, so no one could see my real self, lonely and needy, and kept myself busy with things that required little or no intimacy, keeping my true needs for love and companionship secret even from myself.

Now, aware of the fortress – and how cold it was inside – and with a sponsor who would not let me get away with pages of rationalization and justification – I allowed myself to accept help in writing a new blueprint for my life. Now I would reach for a way to live in which I stayed conscious of my emotional and spiritual needs – and the physical ones as well. I would practice the idea and actions that declared my needs were normal and right sized, and that I had a responsibility to find the relationships with others in which we filled each other’s needs for friendship, casual or deep, for support, whether casual or profound,

and for the exchange of real love and intimacy of all kinds.

I had moved beyond recovery. Now I was living a life of DIS-covey, trying new things, some of which I liked and kept, and some of which I dropped without shame or regrets. I was open to romantic love, even when it was not available, and did not feel unworthy just because I was not partnered. I was a little lonely,

sometimes quite a bit, once in a while, but I knew it would not last, and even had friends who would comfort me at those times.

I was open to joy, and amazed at how often I felt it, even in ordinary things. Everything seemed easier, like I was now floating downstream, instead of fighting to swim against a current. I was discovering just how good (and

sometimes challenging) real life as the real, authentic me, can really be.

What gratitude! Thank goddess – and thank you old-me, for having the courage to try something old, but new – the 12 Steps to DIS-covey of my true self, and the true potential of living in sobriety.

— Anonymous

Event

Mark Your Calendar!

2014/2015 S.L.A.A. Midwest Regional Twelve Step Retreat Weekends

Our Primary Purpose-A Message of Hope

Fall Retreat Spring Retreat

Nov 7-9, 2014 May 1-3, 2015

Where: The Columban Fathers, St. Columban Retreat Center, 1902 Calhoun Street, Bellevue, Nebraska

Cost: \$150 (includes food lodging *)

(If received before Oct 12, 2014 for the Fall retreat or April 5, 2015 for the Spring retreat. Cost after these dates is \$175)

For information/registration forms visit

<http://midwestslaaretreat.org>

For photos and information about the retreat center please visit

<http://columban.org/bellevue-nebraska/>

* Room includes double occupancy. Single rooms are available for an additional \$25 per night on a first come, first served basis, Schedule: Friday 7:30pm SHARP! Introduction – includes hello's, house rules, ground rules, temporary sponsor availability, chore sign-up, potluck update, getting current/check-in's. Names will be drawn for chairpersons and speakers for weekend meetings. Saturday 9:15am - 11:00pm Meeting on Steps 1, 2, & 3; Meeting on Steps 4 & 5; Lunch; Meeting on Steps 6 & 7; Getting Current; Buffet Dinner; Meeting on Steps 8 & 9; Group Activity (Fun)! Sunday 9:30:00 am-12:00 pm Meeting on Steps 10, 11 & 12; Closing This retreat is open to anyone interested in learning to apply the Twelve Steps to sex and love addiction, as long as the anonymity of those attending the retreat is respected. If you have questions regarding anonymity or the retreat, please send them to: SLAAOmahaRetreat@gmail.com, S.L.A.A. Omaha Retreat, PO Box 19, Cedar Creek, NE 68016

The Steps Are the Program



Photo by Anonymous

My experience with the program is that working the Steps, in order, with a sponsor, is the most effective route to recovery from sex and love addiction. I was fortunate enough to have a sponsor when I came in the program who was into working the Steps and got me going on them right away. It has not always been smooth sailing, but I find that by using all the tools of the program—working the Steps, going to meetings, making phone calls, regularly praying and meditating, reading the literature and being of

service—that my acting out became longer between episodes and less intense.

I did not experience stopping all at once when I came into the program, even when using all the tools. My experience was that I kept acting out on my bottom line behaviors for some time until God as I understand God, lifted the compulsions to act out from me. God saw fit to do this over time and in steps, not all at once.

I came into the program through A.A. (another program) and therapy. I was working on my 4th Step and sharing it with

my therapist. It was all about sex. I finally asked her “Why do I do things that disgust me?” She reached in her drawer and pulled out the literature on S.L.A.A.. I have been coming ever since.

I went back and reworked the first three steps in S.L.A.A.. I wrote out my sexual history. My experience is that it was useful to write it out in five or ten handwritten pages. I know others who have written tomes and it is too much. The idea — what I did — was get my patterns of sexual behavior from my history. From those patterns,

I was able to look and see which were addictive and in that way, create my bottom line behaviors. My bottom lines are pretty much the same now as when I came in the program.

Having reworked the first three steps, I redid the 4th Step for both programs. This was the first time I had been completely objective and honest about my life up to that point. I used the 120-question Hazeldon format. Since then, I've done many 4th Steps using the standard Big Book of A.A. format of resentments, fears, and sex conduct. I throw in the 7 deadly sins and my "take to the graves" for good measure. I also use the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions 4th Step and do an emotional insecurity inventory as recommended there. I try to do two or three 4th Steps a year at a minimum. I find that resentments, fears and poor conduct—especially pride, lust, gluttony and sloth—are there for me to inventory even in sobriety.

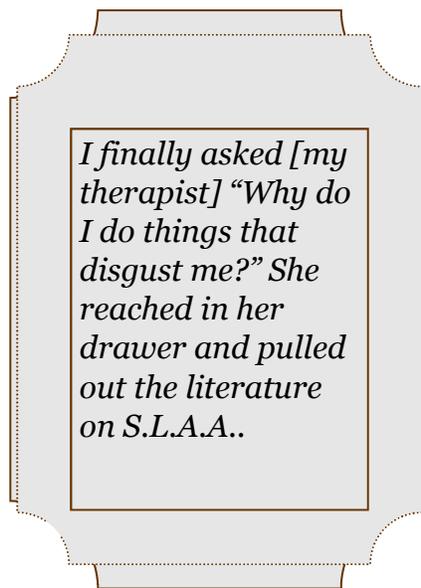
Of course, if I do a 4th Step inventory, that implies I do a 5th Step as well. My home group in that other program practices swapping 5th Steps not only with my sponsor but with other members as well. I'll do five or more 5th Steps for each 4th Step I take. And I make no distinction between programs, so the person, regardless of what program(s) they're in, hears my S.L.A.A. inventory as well. I try to swap with S.L.A.A. members as often as possible.

I find that the 5th Step is the key to humility for me. I feel humble — teachable or seeing my real place in the world vis-à-vis others — after doing a 5th Step. I feel more human having heard their 5th Step and sharing mine. I realize that the details may be different, but we're both just human, struggling with our

defects and trying to do right.

I am more ready to have God remove my defects of character than at any other time. We open the 5th Step with the 3rd Step prayer and close with the 7th Step prayer, asking God to remove those shortcomings that stand in the way of my usefulness to Him and my fellows.

I work the 8th and 9th Steps as they are laid out in the Big Book of A.A. and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. I make a list of people I have harmed, beginning with my 4th



Step list and write down how I have harmed them and what the amend is to be. I review this thoroughly with my sponsor and in that way, then become willing to make the amends.

Then, hat in hand, so to speak, I go to it. I don't like making amends, but have gotten great rewards from it. When I had about seven years, my sister told me she felt like she had gotten her brother back. That was really moving, powerful stuff and I want more of it, so I keep working the steps.

I do a regular evening inventory of my day for my 10th Step. I review the day, and my

character defects. I have a laminated card with the grosser handicaps listed (and their opposites). I use that. I then have other prayers, mainly for my loved ones and those with special needs at the time.

My daily morning routine includes both prayer and meditation. In my prayers, I admit what I am powerless over (redoing the 1st Step). I then review what I believe about my higher power (2nd Step) and say the 3rd Step prayer.

I have a 6th Step prayer that uses that same laminated card and then say the 7th Step prayer. The S.L.A.A. text has an 8th Step prayer I have incorporated as well. I have an 11th Step prayer I conclude with. After prayer, I read a daily meditation and then meditate for 20 minutes as suggested in the 11th Step. I thus feel like I am working all the steps on a regular basis.

For the 12th Step, I have a number of sponsees and try to be of service at meetings and in life in general. I try to practice all these steps (they are the principles of the program) in all aspects of my life. I have had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps and haven't acted out in some time.

I couldn't have done it on my own. God has seen fit to relieve me of these compulsions. I admit, though, that I went through a period of spiritual crisis as I was doing all this step work—and going to meetings, calling my sponsor, etc.—and still acting out.

The guidance I got was that God works in His time, not in mine and in His way, not in mine. Eventually I got the results I desired, but it was through perseverance on the step work and prayer that God was able to change me. And for that, I'm grateful.

— Bruce P.

Meditation Book Project

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PLEASE EMAIL SHARES TO THE *JOURNAL* WWW.SLAAFWS.ORG

Thy will, not mine, be done

SHARE: My bottom lines were drawn to empower me, not paralyze me with endless second guessing.

I turned my will and my life over to the God-of-my-understanding. My job now is to trust that my life is flowing in the stream of Good Orderly Direction.

My recovery progresses in accordance with God's calendar, which means, today, that I accept my situation—which includes my current sexual partner (or lack of one)—with gratitude and serenity.

After all, what is faith, but a belief that everything is—and will be—right with the world.

-I.B. Los Angeles

Help Create the S.L.A.A. Daily Meditations Book

We would like S.L.A.A. members to help us with writing meditations, prayers, affirmations and finding quotes from S.L.A.A. literature or topics for a daily meditation.

To volunteer or ask questions, please contact the Meditations Book Project Team by email at slaameditationbook@gmail.com, by phone at (210) 570-6784.

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