

# the Journal

Issue # 192

Single Issue \$4

*People as Drugs*

# 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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## 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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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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In submitting such content to S.L.A.A., the member releases S.L.A.A., any other members of S.L.A.A. and S.L.A.A.'s officers, directors, employees and agents (collectively, the "Releasees") from any and all claims which the member may have against any of the Releasees in connection with the member's submission of content to *the Journal*.

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## Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

Euphoria is the experience (or affect) of pleasure or excitement and intense feelings of well-being and happiness. Certain natural rewards and social activities, such as aerobic exercise, laughter, listening to or making music and dancing, can induce a state of euphoria. Romantic love and components of the human sexual response cycle are also associated with the induction of euphoria. Certain drugs, many of which are addictive, can cause euphoria, which at least partially motivates their recreational use.\*

\*Wikipedia

The theme of this issue is “People as Drugs.” After reading the articles in this issue, I think of it as “People as Drug Dealers.” In Los Angeles S.L.A.A. meetings we refer to past addictive partners as “qualifiers.” I think I’ll start calling my qualifiers dealers instead. They gave me my drugs of choice: Euphoria and fantasy. The Wikipedia definition of euphoria lists healthy ways of getting the drug in healthy quantities. But as a sex and love addict, I always wanted more than I could handle and sought it from unhealthy sources. I always crashed and was forced into withdrawal because I had fantasy-based interactions instead of reality-based. Reality-based interactions never gave me enough of what I wanted—complete oblivion. The S.L.A.A. program and connection with a Higher Power showed me a way out of that vicious cycle of craving and delusion. I continue to be grateful every day.

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

## Question of the Day & Answers from Yesterday

The Question of the Day for this issue is, People as Drugs — “Through sex, charm, emotional appeal, or persuasive intellect, we had used other people as ‘drugs,’ to avoid our own personal inadequacy.” S.L.A.A. Basic Text page 74. Please share your story of using people as drugs and your experience, strength, and hope in overcoming the desire to use people as drugs. Here are some insights that were submitted in service from fellow S.L.A.A. members. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two themes are: #193 — Nov./Dec. — Pink Cloud - According to Dictionary.com, Pink clouding, or Pink Cloud Syndrome, is a phenomenon many recovering addicts experience when they first enter recovery. When pink clouding, they feel a sense of euphoria that’s then followed by a crash once reality sets in. Have you experienced a “pink cloud” in recovery? If so, please describe your experience and how it impacted your recovery. How did you maintain your connection to Program/spirituality? Deadline for submissions is Sept. 15, 2021. And #194 — Jan./Feb — Truth Being Revealed in Higher Power’s Time — “Have you found that Higher Power has shown you the truth about something important gradually rather than immediately upon your demands?” Please share your experience, strength, and hope with truth being revealed in Higher Power’s time. Deadline for submissions is Nov. 15, 2021. Please send answers to [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org).



## Question of the day

Please share your story of using people as drugs and your experience, strength, and hope in overcoming the desire to use people as drugs.

I walked into S.L.A.A. in 1990 with a gaping “Daddy hole.” My father had first emotionally abandoned me when I was five after his devastating chronic illness diagnosis. This unrecognized trauma worsened when he abruptly ended our incestuous interactions three years later. I was bewildered when our “special times” stopped without explanation. My mother had “won him back” in my young mind and despair descended. At age 11, I decided no one would ever marry me (how I believe women find value in a patriarchal society). At least I had confidence in my intelligence since academic achievements in a Catholic school gleaned some teacher and family recognition. After puberty, boys became emotional objects for me. I had to have one to function and at last I had something of value they wanted- sex. Their task was to sooth my torture from an unceasing inner dialogue of unworthiness. After years in recovery, it dawned on me that I had taken my parents behavior personally and had internalized generations of toxic shame and unhealthy relationship behaviors. It took a long time to realize I chose damaged men to feel superior. I could focus on their shortcomings and compulsively try to fix them to avoid my own problems. I treated them contemptuously which destroys relationships. Because of S.L.A.A., therapy, healing techniques, deepening my connection with my Higher Power and learning relationship skills, I now enjoy relationships more. I now have the spotlight on my anorexia and am working the Steps on this more fundamental manifestation of shame. I love myself first, focus on the good in myself and others, and speak my appreciation of the world. I work to remember who I am — a divine, radiant, beautiful, talented, and worthy creature. I deserve a man who knows the same about himself. Amen.

— ANONYMOUS, GEORGIA

## Question of the day

I have used people as drugs my whole life. I used intense crushes on teachers to make school more interesting and bearable, I developed obsessions with peers at university to make college a more exciting environment, and during my twenties I used affairs with married men to avoid having to deal with reality. I've been in recovery for 5 years and am now in a healthy (but long-distance) relationship – but I still catch myself using my boyfriend, or thoughts of him, as a drug. Recently he was taking a plane and I found myself tracking his flight in minute detail because I was feeling a bit anxious and bored that afternoon and focusing on him made me feel better. Or I wrap myself up in thoughts of snuggling up together with him. The reality of seeing him is often very different as he is a whole, rounded person with several habits that irritate me as well as the things I love! Trying to focus on what I can give to the relationship, rather than what it can do for me, helps me get out of treating people as drugs. On the phone, listening intently to what my partner is actually saying and asking him questions, rather than just circling again and again back to how much I want to see him, helps take us forward in the relationship even when we can't be together in person. In person, simply asking him how he is doing is a good way of refocusing myself on him as a real, thinking human being with his own Higher Power. I think I'm still astonished at how much love and acceptance he has for me, and scared that this will be taken away, so I try and get as much as possible of it before it's too late! Acknowledging this fear, to myself, my Higher Power, my fellows, and to him, usually helps me simply enjoy what is here in the moment, without fearing the future.

— ROS, NORWICH, UK



## Question of the day

I think the best way to describe this dynamic in my life is borrowing a phrase from an author I like — using oversharing as hotwiring for connection. I have lived so much of my life as though I have been gasping for air in that way. Too often, instead of looking to my Higher Power to fill the void left from neglect and trauma in my life, I have looked to people who neglect and abuse. It makes no sense logically, but there is a part of me that has been very sick, and I think that part has believed that I don't deserve much else. The 12-Step world helped me understand my codependency and taste a love that is like no other from my Higher Power. I had projected the "you have to earn your worth" dynamics in my life onto Him, so the first thing that was to heal for me was my relationship with God. He and I are still working on letting His love be sufficient, on me trusting that and seeking more connection with Him and receiving more of the love He shows through so many experiences, including empathy, caring, and insights from my fellows. I am so grateful to have found the world of recovery. For me recovery is a continued process and practice, but that is why I keep going to meetings and connecting with my fellows and why I gratefully accept opportunities to share experience, strength, and hope along the way.

— ANONYMOUS

## Question of the day

At some point in my recovery, I realised that I had to put my Master's Thesis supervisor on my Resentments list. I realised that I'd had a kind of addiction to him. As a straight male, this was for me a non-sexual attraction, but it was like a wide door of awareness had been thrust open, and I could see with painful clarity just how much I had 'fed' off of, needed attention from, tried to impress, and generally used others. And 'needing' others is sure and certain evidence of not being able to stand on my own two feet. Insecurity, fear, loneliness, and self-doubt. That's what drove it all. In sobriety I learn to accept myself with all of my past mess, future imperfections and persistent character defects. Only from that standpoint of acceptance of what I can't change, do I find the clarity to work on what I can.

— ANONYMOUS

### An Invitation For You

Enlarge your recovery by allowing others to get the same benefit that you get from reading *the Journal*. It is a great way to carry S.L.A.A.'s message of hope and practice the Twelfth Step. The fellowship needs volunteers of all skills and levels of availability. Here's what you can do: • Become a Journal Representative for your intergroup or home group, encouraging the use of *the Journal* as a source of topics, letting people know that there are Journals for sale, and ensuring that plenty of Journal subscription cards are always on the literature table. • Visit a local organization that deals with sex and love addicts in your area, bringing copies of *the Journal* along with a few pamphlets. The institution may be a treatment facility, a judicial entity, a large recovery club that welcomes varied literature, or a hospital.

**Contact info: <http://www.slaafws.org/contact/journaleditor>**

## My Drug of Choice Was Fantasy



I was a lonely sad elementary school kid. I was overweight from the time I was 4. I was called fatty and lardy. I would chase the boys in kindergarten, and they would run away. I was picked dead last for teams. No one sat with me at lunch except occasionally my only friend

Becky. I was not invited to birthday parties. My solace was at first fantasy. I read constantly, a book or 2 a day. I literally read books while walking to school and was nearly hit by a car a few times crossing streets while reading books. (This was back in the days when people would let

kids under 10 walk themselves to school.) But I was also quite a talker and I had no one to talk to except my little brothers and myself (well, that's a lie, I did have a friend who lived next door, thank God). I created fantasy worlds with my friend and our brothers, who we would order around.

My friend would also order me around. I took a lot of self-improvement classes during this time, at my mother's insistence initially and then eventually my obsession. I took piano, ballet, then jazz, then tap, and then I got into theater and took acting classes on stage fighting, how to do accents and dialects, musical theater dance classes.

The only part of any of that I was eventually good at was acting and accents. I started auditioning for plays at a regional children's theater — like everything else in my life I was rejected over and over again. My self-esteem was so low. I felt so ashamed and alone. But I kept trying. Eventually I noticed that the kids who got cast appeared to be very confident during their auditions. I was obviously NOT confident, but it occurred to me that I could pretend to be confident. From my fantasy life

I was good at pretending. So, I started pretending to be confident and by the time I was 12 (and it didn't hurt that I shot up to 5'7" and lost a lot of weight in the bargain and was basically, in hindsight, quite pretty) I was cast in my first play.

I started to make friends in the theater group. But I also started to realize that I could pretend to be confident in other areas of my life. So, I did that. I started to pretend to be confident at school and I started to put myself in a role of being in charge of whatever group I was in. So, if the popular kids didn't want anything to do with me (and they still didn't). I would build a group one kid at a time until I had a small group that absolutely was MY group.

I didn't control them in the sense of ordering them around. I controlled them in the sense of pleasing and charming and finding out what they wanted and giving it to them. I was still largely in a mode of fantasy when it came to boys but from the time I was 5, I was entirely boy crazy. I had crush after crush and talked about those crushes incessantly with my girlfriends. Point by point by point I would

relate what he said, and what I said, and what I was thinking and dreaming. Throughout junior high, none of these boys seemed to want anything to do with me, but I kept very focused on it and them.

In high school, although I didn't like the way I looked due to being overweight (and most of that story is for a different magazine in a different fellowship), I was actually (again in retrospect) very attractive, but I didn't think I was, and I cultivated more and more personal skills to try to find ways to get with boys.

As a famous celebrity used to say, "I did not want to belong to a club that would have me as a member." So, every boy that was attracted to me was "a loser" and every boy that wasn't — that's who I wanted. So that made me work harder and harder to get their attention. Charm, humor, creativity were my strategies. (I wore makeup and very high heels. Although, at 5'7" with 4-inch heels I was SO tall. I'm not sure why I thought that was a good option. Teenagers!).

It took me until sophomore year of college to be able to actually have a boyfriend. And due to my extreme insecurity,

and to a newfound interest in the drug of secrecy, I went from having only one boyfriend to having an official boyfriend AND another secret boyfriend and a secret girlfriend.

That became a pattern that lasted for decades. I had an official boyfriend, one major secret boyfriend or girlfriend or both and then usually multiple other flirts/intrigues/crushes on back burners so that I never had to worry that I was going to be alone or feeling lonely or rejected again. I couldn't take that chance. By the time I came to S.L.A.A., 16 years ago, it was a husband and we had children, but it was the same pattern, and it was threatening to blow up my whole world.

I was so impressed with myself, my charm, and my intrigue abilities that I was literally writing a book, the working title of which was "the Married Woman's Guide to Dating." Tomorrow is June 21st and God willing I will have 15 consecutive years of sobriety off my bottom lines of confining sexual and romantic intimacy to my marriage (I have about 10 years of abstinence off a newer bottom line of fantasy). S.L.A.A. has

saved my life and my marriage and provided me with real confidence and self-esteem. Today I'm still capable of being charming and manipulative, but I no longer have to use those skills to survive emotionally. I can also be vulnerable and real with

people. I have friends who know the sad lonely girl inside me too. I am so grateful for this fellowship and your support and your love. No matter who you are in this program, you are a contribution to me.

— ANONYMOUS

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## My Personal Drug Dealer

*Editor's note: this is an excerpt from an S.L.A.A. member's website. Reprinted with permission from the author.*

Then there was the time I ducked out of an important family event to go meet my drug dealer. The dealer wasn't bringing me any illegal substances. The drug was the dealer. He was bringing himself, and if I didn't get a fix of him soon, I was going to curl up in withdrawal like a junkie. Which is what I was. Just not with heroin. So, I ran out the back and he did a drive-by in his crappy compact – he was probably ducking out of a date with another woman himself,

because it's not like he was dealing quality drugs or anything – and he kissed me and told me I looked beautiful and drove away and I... exhaled. I got my fix. I was going to be okay... for a day, maybe, or two days. Then, if I didn't hear from him, I would slide back into withdrawal. Anyone who tells you love addiction isn't really an addiction, not like drug or alcohol addiction, has never had it. If you're a love addict, you know exactly what I'm talking about. You know how you get nauseous when you haven't heard from your obsession in a couple of days. Nausea, headache, lethargy –

it's like a low-grade flu, except the flu doesn't make you check your phone a dozen times an hour. When you do hear that voice, see that face, touch that skin, the energy returns like champagne bubbles coursing through your veins. You giggle. Your voice rises half an octave. You're high on your own body chemistry – dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin, whatever your dealer is holding – and it feels fantastic. Until it starts to slip away, and you need another hit. The worst of it is, I built up a tolerance to lust and infatuation and codependence. The feelings fade. The high isn't high enough. It's like "who cut this s\*\*t?" when the coke stops working... but with people: "You've changed," we say.

"You're not who I thought you were."

"You don't give me enough attention."

"We should see other people." What we're really saying is "I need a new dealer with a better connection." Because next time, it will be the good stuff. Pure, uncut, 100% romance. Ever run out of coke and scrape the insides of old straws or bindles, hoping for one more line? Or rifle through the medicine cabinet,

praying for an overlooked pain pill? The love addict equivalent: Calling up an old flame, that old reliable hit of sexual connection. Or maybe you'll take a chance on that new dealer your friend told you about – a.k.a., dating apps. Meanwhile, back at the family celebration. I don't know if my absence was noticed, or my rudeness remarked upon. I was too miserable when I left to think about anything except my own pain, and too high when I got back to pay much attention.

Because like any drug addict, when you're addicted to the love drug, you hurt the people you care most about, and you don't realize it until much later. Maybe it all rushes in at once and fills you with shame but it's too late to do anything to make up for it, and all you can do is write a s\*\*ty blog post and maybe help someone else from doing the same thing. So, here's the secret: the craving will pass, whether you pick up or not. It doesn't make a difference if you're craving This or That or Her or Him. It doesn't matter if you're picking up a drink or a drug or a cigarette or an iPhone. The craving will pass, whether you pick up or not.

— ETHLIE, LOS ANGELES



# People = Drugs



**I**t is my third-year anniversary this month and I am so grateful for the deeper awareness that S.L.A.A. has brought me. I had been in recovery in Al-Anon for over 13 years, but something wasn't right. I was working the Steps, had a sponsor, and many sponsees. I was going to meetings, doing service work on the state level and I still

wasn't happy, joyous and free. Three years ago, I was calling a friend who happened to be in S.L.A.A. in a panic because I was about to act out with a married man that I wasn't even attracted to. I couldn't understand. I was losing control, obsessed with this man but not interested. She suggested again that I try S.L.A.A. That weekend I was

able to stop acting out and get back home to a meeting. That incident scared me; I was shocked at how far I would go for a little bit of loving attention. As I got into S.L.A.A. recovery and started working this program, I could see my addictive pattern with romantic relationships.

I was always hopping into extremely long relationships with people I didn't like or wasn't interested in, thinking that they were safe. With relationships I was interested in, it felt like death if they did something that seemed negative or God forbid, they broke up with me.

Suicidal fantasies were rampant when I broke up with someone who I was interested in. The deeper I got into recovery, the more I could see how I used other people, not just romantic partners, for love and attention. In fact, there wasn't one that I hadn't used to make me feel better - friends, sponsees, employees. In my mind they were there for me, to keep me company, entertain

me and distract me from me. When single, as soon as I would get off of work, I would call a friend and be on the phone until I was either doing something else or at another friend's house.

Then once I had been occupied with these people for a few hours, I would return home, eat, and numb out with reading romantic books or watching romance shows/movies nightly. Never mind my responsibilities to my animals, my health. The fantasies and self judgement that would arrive through the romantic media was intense. I could not see any of this until S.L.A.A. recovery.

Today, I have my top lines and bottom lines ready and available every day. I observe how I interact with others. Am I desperate for attention? Then I need to spend time with my Higher Power and self, not manipulate another person to numb the pain. Thank you S.L.A.A. for this newfound freedom.

— SUSIE, GEORGIA

# Share space

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## Breakdown to Breakthrough

“Do you feel Higher Power demolished your life to build it back up with a stronger foundation? Please share your experience, strength, and hope.”

When I first came through the doors of S.L.A.A., I wasn't at my rock bottom. I'd actually hit my bottom two years before, and, thankfully, by the grace of my Higher Power, I had somehow survived and gotten into recovery in another 12-Step program. I didn't yet know about sex and love addiction, but it was clear that I definitely had some problems in that area, and I was determined to change my ways — to manage and control my behavior on my own. I often liken this time of my life to being a “dry drunk” with regard to my sex and love

addiction. I thought I was getting my life together. I was resolved to change my ways. I'd found a semi-stable job, what I thought was a healthy relationship, and I'd even made a few friends.

Because my old pattern had always been to get into relationships that were extremely toxic, enmeshed, and isolated, I had decided that the cure would be to get involved with someone who I *knew* would never enmesh with me — which turned out just to be someone who was completely avoidant and unavailable. Obviously, this did not cure my sex and love addiction. I had been so accustomed in the past to being my partner's entire world, and I was so desperately addicted to that attention and validation, that this

relationship (where I wasn't getting that) was making me insane. It was a different kind of insanity than my usual pattern, but it was still insanity, nonetheless.

Thankfully, I did eventually find my way into an S.L.A.A. meeting. I related immediately to everything I heard. I couldn't believe that not only was there a name for this — this condition that I'd been suffering from for my entire life — but there was a place to go, there was an actual treatment for this, and there was an entire room full of people who felt the same way I did. I felt like I'd finally found my home.

As relieved as I was to have found this program, though, to say that it hasn't been easy would be the understatement of a lifetime. I have often shared that things got a lot worse for me, before they started getting better. For one thing, I lost all my "friends." Of course, I put the word "friends" in quotes because, once I started S.L.A.A., I suddenly realized that all of my "friends" were people I had either slept with or people who wanted to sleep with me. It was a hard truth to face that I didn't actually have any true,

platonic friendships. Then, after about two months of going to meetings, my relationship with the avoidant guy also ended. I then found myself completely and utterly alone, for the first time in my life. I'd even given up my workplace intrigues. There was no one left to flirt with, to get attention from, or to get validation from.

It was the darkest time in my life — the time we know in this program as "withdrawal." I was finally alone with myself, which was something I'd been running away from my entire life. I had to confront my loneliness, my emptiness, my shame, my deep self-loathing. It felt like looking into the abyss. I remember lying on the floor in my apartment, curled in a ball, sobbing so uncontrollably that I literally made myself throw up.

Thankfully, I had also managed to find myself a sponsor during this time. She told me that this was the worst it was going to get, and that it was going to get better. Honestly, I didn't really believe her. I felt hopelessly broken. But I also heard other people share in meetings about the pain of their withdrawal, and about lying on the floor curled

in a ball and sobbing. And they said it got better, too. I wasn't sure if I believed them either, but I sure wanted to. I sure hoped that this would work, because I couldn't see any other chance for me.

I honestly don't know where I got the faith to keep going. I didn't really believe in the whole Higher Power thing yet, but something I couldn't explain somehow gave me the strength to just keep coming back, one day at a time. Some days, I literally sobbed throughout the entire meeting, so much so that I couldn't even get my name out when it was my turn to introduce myself. But I kept coming back.

I started doing the Step work with my sponsor, making outreach calls, and being of service at my meetings. But for a long time, it felt like I was watching everyone around me starting to get better, while I still continued to struggle. I wondered if it would ever work for me.

Maybe I was just too messed up. It took a long time for me to realize that it was *already* working for me. Slowly, gradually, and without me even realizing it, I was starting to change. While I was busy doing the work (and complaining about how it

wasn't working), my Higher Power was quietly doing for me what I couldn't do for myself. I continued to struggle with my sobriety for the first year of my recovery, but throughout that time, even during my many painful slips, without knowing it, I was growing, I was healing, and I was learning to know and appreciate myself.

My sponsor was teaching me what unconditional love felt like. My relationships with her and with my fellows were teaching me what healthy intimacy was. And my evolving connection with a power greater than myself was teaching me how to love and care for myself.

Eventually, I did start to realize that my life was changing, that I was changing. Sometimes, I couldn't see it until after the fact. I'd find myself on the way home from a party (or any other triggering situation that would have been absolute torture during the early days of my recovery) and it would suddenly hit me how differently I had handled myself, how much less fear and insecurity I had brought with me, and how it had been so easy to stay present that I didn't even think about it. I had somehow become someone who was actually

comfortable in her own skin.

My life looks so different today from what it was like when I first started my recovery that it's virtually unrecognizable. I am sane and sober, with a big, full life that I love. In fact, I've actually gotten so used to my new life that I can even sometimes forget what it used to be like

and the pain that it took to get me here. I'm always grateful for the opportunity to reflect on my story and remind myself what it was like and what I went through to get the life I have today. I don't ever want to take this life for granted. Yes, I went through hell to get here, but it was SO worth it, I wouldn't have it any other way.

— ANONYMOUS

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## Poem about Step Four in S.L.A.A. (the How Programme)

The beauty of Step Four,  
It gets right to the core

A boot camp method versus  
procrastination over the past  
six months,

Has packed quite the  
punch,

Testing my endurance to  
the extreme,

A level I'm pretty au fait  
with, the inner workings of my  
addict trying to boost her self-  
esteem,

But this time around, the  
process has been gradual, a far  
cry from the one before where  
the intensity was residual,  
almost leading to another  
breakdown for the primary  
source had me spellbound,

Captivated in a whirlwind of  
lust and deceit, mutual  
manipulation, treating the  
other like a piece of meat, till I  
could take no more of  
repeatedly evening the score, I  
admitted defeat then landed  
on my feet by coming into  
S.L.A.A., the best thing I've  
ever done by far,

A programme bespoke, this  
ain't no joke for the condition  
is critical, a miracle shortly  
ensued for my fantasy laid in  
lieu,

To embark on the journey  
of self-discovery,

Let me introduce you to  
Recovery!

— MISCHA D

## Message

If yesterday's message wasn't just right  
Maybe there's a new one today  
That hits you more squarely  
Lands with more impact  
Makes you feel a little less rotten  
Than the day before  
There's always another chance  
Always another opportunity  
Let the bad water roll past  
Breaking over the rocks  
Foaming, frothing, churning  
Crashing and roaring  
Breaking down onto itself  
Finally releasing  
Into gentler streams ahead

— ANONYMOUS, CT

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## Is There a Healthy Lust?

I experienced physical, sexual, and emotional abuse as a child. Years of trauma therapy helped me to become a functional adult.

However, all is not well: I wish to be in a loving, committed relationship. I desire to love and be loved. But whenever one of my relationships begin to flourish, I push the other person away. Intimacy scares me. Close

physical contact causes me to have panicky feelings and symptoms: I have a difficult time breathing, my arms begin to shake, my eyes become dilated, and I have a strong desire to run from the room.

Because I can't sustain a long term relationship, I rely on fantasies to fulfill my needs. In my fantasies, I am an important person that people treasure and appreciate; and I



am a loving, tender partner in a committed relationship. At S.L.A.A. Meetings, I am often told that it is ok, and normal, for a sex and love addict to have an aberrant sexual thought when they see an attractive person. However, if we “nurse” that aberrant sexual thought into an extended sexual fantasy, we could become so sexually stimulated that we lose our abstinence and begin to act out.

I don’t want this to happen. I don’t wish to masturbate. (I belong to a religion that forbids masturbation.) Instead, I attempt to picture the people that I am attracted to as being beloved children of God, who have mothers, who have fathers, and who have careers. When a sexual fantasy begins to develop, I picture my sponsor screaming at me, saying, “STOP, STOP, before you ACT OUT!! And I do stop.

Sometimes I can go a year without masturbating. I do my Step work, say my prayers, and ask God, throughout my day, to keep me sexually sober and emotionally sober.

However, I wonder at times: am I doomed to live a lonely, non-sexual life? Is that what S.L.A.A. would have me do? Should I live a life of service to others and not be concerned with my own sexual needs? Don’t normal people start out being sexually attracted to the person they eventually fall in love with? Is all lust evil? Can I like someone as a fellow human being and still sexually desire them? On some lonely nights, I read my Program Literature; then I hug a pillow and wish that there were answers to these questions. I pray that the Promises come true for me. I want to be happy, joyous, and free!

— JOHN G.

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## How Higher Power Sees

I am worthy and good;  
I have value and dignity;  
I belong,  
We all belong!

— JOHN G.

# Who Am I? Lost Then Found



I was out with friends, and I looked the part. Hair, make-up, and outfit all perfectly placed. But what was out of place was my heart. I felt mentally unstable and emotionally unbalanced. I felt badly about myself. I was in the throes of my sex and love addiction. I was looking for a man to act out with, like a Lion on the prowl. I knew I would get what I wanted because my game was good. Because I always did.

I also knew I would spiral into a deep hole of sadness and despair afterwards. The low that always followed the high. I

went to the bathroom and looked in the mirror and asked myself, “Who am I?” I was lost. S.L.A.A. helped me to obtain the answer to that question — to be “found.” I have been able to find grace and mercy. I have been able to treat men and women with respect. I have been able to treat myself with respect. I no longer act out sexually. I no longer have highs or lows like I had back then. I am hope-filled and hopeful. Thanks to higher power / God and to program. What a divine blessing.

— LINDSEY R

# Letter to my Higher Power

Dear Life,

I would like for us to be better acquainted. You have been there forever, so close, and yet so far away.

I have experienced some moments in my life when you and I were connected. Thank you for gifting me with the honor of being responsible for bringing new life into the world, and for the profound adventure of trying my best to nurture you within them. I have never felt so connected to you as I did when I was parenting my baby girls.

When those two gifts were no longer present in my day-to-day life (that is, when my wife and I became empty nesters), it was one of the most profound losses I have ever experienced.

Looking back, I now know that I was experiencing the joy of you through my children. It was an indirect connection.

Today, I can still feel you there, a tantalizing and terrifying possibility. I believe in my heart that I can experience the kind of connection I felt to you all

those years ago. Today, there is no conduit through which I can experience you and touch you. There is me, and there is you. I can turn towards you, or I can turn away.

How can it be that there are parts of me that want to turn away from you? How can it be that there are parts of me that would rather experience the cold comfort of compulsive sexual behavior and fantasies?

As a child, you and I were one, at least at first. As I became more self-aware, I was distracted by the dysfunction and negation of my childhood experience. For every moment that I experienced the exhilaration of connectedness to you, I experienced a contrary force that showed me that life was only about suffering and sadness.

At the time, that contrary force was far louder than you. I had no choice but to listen to and be influenced by it.

It taught me that you were only struggle and risk and danger and fear and pain and sadness and loneliness and

tears — something to be avoided at all costs. Even then you were still there, calling out to me in moments of fun and laughter and play, and in all the things I just listed above.

Maybe that was my problem. Maybe I saw all the things you were and got scared. I mean, why would a child want to embrace pain and suffering?

So, to protect myself from the imbalance of the hard things that came with embracing you fully, I turned away. And, since you are everywhere and everything, the only place left for me to go was inside myself.

So, I found a place to hide from you, within my own mind. But it was lonely and boring in there, so I had to find things to do to occupy my mind and entertain myself.

There was masturbation (eventually) and drugs, and then masturbation and drugs.

You were so painful (or you seemed so painful) that I would do anything to avoid your embrace. I came to enjoy the embrace of others (friends, a lover, a wife, my children) but, in the end, it always came back to me and you.

I was afraid to embrace you. You are so powerful and overwhelming. I kept telling myself that it was safer to stick with what I had, to embrace the substitutes for life and to focus on my pleasure, my world, and my satisfaction.

I paid the price for my fear. I developed what is referred to in younger people as an “inappropriate sense of entitlement.” I thought that, because my childhood was characterized by powerlessness, loneliness, and pain, I was entitled to indulge my small-hearted wants and desires.

Other people became instruments and opportunities to indulge my will and my wants. My actions were calculated. Indulging my will was, to me, the obvious choice to make.

I was tailor-made for addiction. I was able to justify levels of self-indulgence and narcissism that were astonishing.

Each step towards self-indulgence and compulsion was a step away from you. I eventually, inevitably, lost sight of you and lost track of you. Embracing you became a concept. Instead, I counted

wins and losses, “scores” and put-downs. I nurtured my ego at the expense of my soul and my connection to you.

So, here I am today. Your voice is calling out to me, undeniably so. I know you want me back. You want to pick up where you left off with that seven-year-old boy.

He is still here. I know it with certainty. And you are still there, right where you’ve always been. As constant as the stars you have been. As reliable as the coming and going of the seasons.

If you can forgive me of my damages (and I know you already have), I believe we can be together. I want you, though I don’t really know you. And that’s exciting and scary.

You are exciting and scary. I am so sick and tired of being afraid. The opposite of you is death. One day death will come, and I hope that is not today, and I hope that I will be ready on that day. But that all depends on my ability to set aside my fears and embrace you as you are, on your terms, not mine.

I am ready to embrace you. I am ready to move through my fear and to trust that I will be safe in your embrace.

I have missed you deeply, and I have longed for your embrace for many years.

I trust you. I want you. I need you. I love you.

Please take me back. Please help me take you back.

— DAVID R., TAMPA BAY, FL.

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## **THE INSPIRATION LINE**

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Greater Delaware Valley Intergroup, originators of the Inspiration Line want to thank Fellowship Wide Services and the Journal for supporting the Inspiration Line. GDVI wants to acknowledge the 15 volunteers from all over the US & Canada that leave inspirational messages on the Line and credit them for making this huge milestone possible: Alicia, California, Alyce, Montreal Canada, Alyson, Pennsylvania, Bob, Pennsylvania, Brenda, Maryland/Florida, John, Florida, Kip, Connecticut, Leah, New York, Mark, New Mexico, Matt, Pennsylvania, Michael S., Pennsylvania, Mike M., Pennsylvania, Natalie, Pennsylvania, Rich, Massachusetts, Sean, New Mexico, Shelly, New York, Steve D, Pennsylvania and Zoe, Pennsylvania

# *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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