

April 2016

OA TODAY



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FREEDOM: THE OA PERSPECTIVE

Whenever I think of the word “freedom,” there are two dimensions to consider: freedom from and freedom to. The first is a release from a burden – restraint, slavery, interference, or coercion. The second is an empowerment to act – power of self-determination; the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance; the power to determine one’s own behavior or activity.

The first aspect of freedom implies the liberation from or absence of a negative factor that limits or controls one’s thoughts and feelings and behaviors. The second aspect implies the energy or motivation to take on a positive and constructive activity.

When I speak – in the context of Overeaters Anonymous – about the freedom from disease and the freedom to achieve recovery which a person gains by working each of the Twelve Steps of Overeaters Anonymous, I find the following concepts or characteristics surfacing:

Step One: I experience the freedom from the obsession with food, and I have the freedom to admit that I am powerless over food, perhaps for the very first time in my life.

Step Two: I feel the freedom from insanity and hopelessness, and I embrace the freedom to have the assurance of hope and the conviction of faith in a power outside of myself which holds the key to sanity.

Step Three: I face the freedom from the bondage of self, and I acknowledge and accept the freedom to surrender my will and my behavior to a higher entity I call God.

Step Four: I come to know the freedom from dishonesty, and I encounter the freedom to recognize those liabilities and assets which become either stumbling

blocks or passageways to recovery.

Step Five: I come into contact with the freedom from isolation, and I welcome the freedom to admit the precise character of my disorders and to affirm the accurate description of my positive values, so that I can move toward better and lasting connections with others.

Step Six: I identify with the freedom from running the show, and I hold on to the freedom to choose dialogue, collaboration, and cooperation as the means to successful personal growth.

Step Seven: I realize the freedom from self-reliance, and I cherish the freedom to be honest and humble in facing the state of my well-being and my path toward wholeness.

Step Eight: I come to terms with the freedom from blame, and I relish the freedom to be able to say “I’m sorry!” and “I forgive you.”

Step Nine: I know all too well the freedom from fear of people and their criticisms, and I move toward the freedom to make whatever amends are necessary, to heal any breaches that have been made, and to build any bridges that might have been destroyed.

Step Ten: I accept the freedom from complacency, and I enjoy the freedom to take stock of my advances and drawbacks, repair any negativity, and hold onto whatever is positive.

Step Eleven: I am grateful for the freedom from loneliness, and I thrive on the freedom to keep in contact with God, to know and do his will, and to enjoy his power of guidance

Step Twelve: I stand tall before the freedom from a lack of purpose, and I proclaim the freedom to become a messenger of truth and serenity by my testimony, witness, and service.



STEP FOUR

“Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”

What Does This Step Mean?

The meaning of Step Four, as it applies to my life, is that I needed to make a fearless and moral inventory if I was going to discard those things in me that had been blocking me from my Higher Power. In order to get rid of those things, I needed to uncover what they were. I worked tirelessly on a very thorough 4th step inventory.

My sponsor and I used the tools provided to uncover and find out what has had me tangled emotionally and spiritually. I was fearless and thorough from the very beginning. I told him everything. Absolutely everything. I have done mediocre 4th steps in the past and the results were mediocre as a result. If nothing changes, nothing changes. I abandoned myself to my higher power and I had faith that I would land in a safer place; and I did.

So the process for me today is to continue to uncover, discover, and discard my character defects, my fears, and all of the little things that caused me to binge in the first place. I have come to understand that I need to live the program and apply these principles in all of my affairs. If I do not, I will be, without a doubt, irritable, restless, and discontented. If I stay close to OA, I have a chance to be happy, joyous and free based on my spiritual condition each day.



Step Four is needed in my life because it lets me know where I was. What my fears are. What core beliefs I safeguard because in some sick way they are comfortable to me and I enjoyed them. Step Four identifies the things that I am asking my higher power to remove from me daily. Things that no longer work for me. I am living in much, much, less fear. I am starting to love myself. I am grateful for OA, my Higher Power and sponsorship. They have allowed me to have a life that I did not think would ever be possible.

Tim T.

How Does This Step Work?

“How long does it take to do a Step 4 inventory?” I asked.

I was told there is only one strong and basic advice about taking an inventory. If you’re done in less than 25 minutes, you get to start over. If you want to hide your inventory for fear someone will read it, you are probably doing a GREAT job. You need to be HONEST, Susie, and don’t let FEAR stop you! This was a hard challenge.

My first introduction to Step Four came when I had a physical breakdown, admitted to a hospital and married six months. I was introduced and put under the care of a psychiatrist. He asked me to write about my life from the beginning. Unbeknownst to me, this was my first Step Four. I left the hospital with pen and paper. I filled the paper with facts about my name, birth, parents name, siblings’ name and age, dogs, etc. I wrote nothing about my fears, loneliness, selfishness, etc.

On my first visit, his response to my inventory was kind, however, he added “Susie, I want you to write your history again; only this time, dig deeper.” And so my digging began. One day, out of nowhere, a forgotten incident came alive. This was a situation I had never told anyone about. I was filled with anxiety and fear. I told myself, “I will put this on paper; but that doesn’t mean I am going to read it to my doctor! Even though he has stressed the importance of HONESTY and thoroughness.”

When my next appointment arrived, I was overflowing with nerves and panic attacks. Praying like crazy, I read EVERYTHING TO HIM. My secret was out there on the table! What would he say? What would he think of me? What’s going to happen to me? The idea that somebody else knows about me was threatening and scary. When I finally looked up, the SMELLING SALTS waiting for me, my doctor said, “Susie, the situation you’ve written about is false. It’s not true. It’s a mistake. Tear it out. Throw it away. It’s OVER.”

“It’s OVER,” I repeated. Words will never be able to describe the shock and surprise I felt. A HUGE, GI-GANTIC weight was instantly lifted. The sun was shining and I was no longer chained to my addict, Ugly (this is the name for my addict). All those years I spent believing in a lie. An unbelievable FREAKIN LIE!

You see UGLY wears my mask. He looks like me. He talks like me. I believe what he says: Examples:

“You’re not as sick as the other OA people. You can have some. It’s a party! Go ahead; don’t ever tell that secret.”

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TRADITION FOUR

“Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.”

What Does This Tradition Mean?

When I was asked to write on the Fourth Tradition, I knew that it was my Higher Power’s way of helping me work out some of my own personal turmoil. I believe that the Fourth Tradition is a metaphor for life. *“Tradition four – the tradition of autonomy – gives OA groups the right and responsibility to operate as they see fit, free from any outside influence. Every OA group makes its own decisions-and mistakes-without interference from any governing body other than its own group conscience.”* These are quotes from p. 137 of the OA Fourth Tradition. If this isn’t direction for living my life, then what is?

When I was growing up I believed that the way to get love was to please my family. I thought that being a people pleaser was my identity. As I got older, and certain things did not work out, I turned to the food in my hurt and disillusionment. I remember talking to my first sponsor about five years ago. I asked her about something regarding my family. She told me that I would have to think about that and make a decision. What! I needed someone to tell me what to do, and she was asking me to find my own way.

As I have grown in OA, I have realized how co-dependent I was within my own family. My people pleasing had kept me from actually getting to know who I really wanted to be. What dreams I wanted to fulfill as an adult.

With the love and guidance of other OAs, I have learned what my autonomy means to me. I have changed and now my family dynamic has also changed. I have a new decision to make in how I deal with my family. My responsibility is to “stay on my side of the street” and live an abstinent life. I pray to my HP that working the steps will help this to come about, one hour at a time, one day at a time.

Anonymous

Working Step Four, continued

I need people in my life. I can’t always discern what my thoughts are versus the addict. He’s so sneaky. When I write my thoughts on paper, sooner or later I come to an end, to the last word. When I keep my thoughts in my mind, I

keep going around in circles over and over again. Steps Four and Five are one of the most beautiful gifts in my life. I’m as sick as my secrets. The secret I want to keep most, is the secret that keeps me the most sick!

Susie D.

How Does This Tradition Work?

After being in OA for a while, I have seen how the Traditions really are what keep our program running and solid. Tradition Four states that “each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting OA as a whole.” This is such an important part of our program because it allows groups to run their own meetings without having to follow a specific rhetoric or method.

We can basically do whatever we want as long as it doesn’t threaten OA as a whole. We hold business meetings to determine what works best for our group, and then we apply it to the meeting format. We can decide to move to a better place, incorporate greeters for the meeting, and even change the format of the actual meeting. What a freedom!

When I first got into program, I didn’t understand this Tradition at all. I was very controlling and toxic. I wanted someone to be in charge and get these unorganized people in shape!

Later, I found out that I just wanted to have someone or something to blame, and then complain about. But, alas, no one stepped up to the plate.

It would completely throw me off when different people would lead each week at one meeting, but at another meeting, it would be the same leader for a month.

Looking back, I was desperately trying to figure everything out and control my uncontrollable life. The best thing that OA did for me was to continue practicing the traditions so I still have meetings to attend, no matter what the format!

Anonymous



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IMPORTANT NOTICE:

The Sunday 4:00pm OA Meeting has moved to the PNC Bank Building! The “Abstinence First Newcomer” Meeting is now at 333 North Kirkwood Road, Suite 305. Please join us there!

Positive Characteristic of Recovery: “FREEDOM”

As I celebrate my 20th birthday of abstinent recovery in OA, I am filled with gratitude, joy, and hope. Prior to February 14, 1996, these incredible gifts were in short supply. As I navigated through life, depressed and bingeing, bingeing and depressed, my disease raged within. I expended endless amounts of energy keeping up appearances for literally decades. I surreptitiously maintained my dirty little façade. I was a compulsive user and abuser of food.

My life changed dramatically in early February 1996. That is when I attended my very first meeting of Overeaters Anonymous. The Monday night newcomers meeting welcomed me “home” that night. I learned my relentless, abnormal, confounding thoughts and behavior around food had a name. More significantly, I was introduced to a simple (not easy) solution – 12 steps, tools, and a group to guide and support me in that solution. The speaker that night shared on the tool of sponsorship, a topic that would soon impact me in a most significant way.

A week after that first meeting, after falling off the wagon once again, the importance of getting a sponsor resonated. I called up a person listed on my newcomers’ packet. It seemed we had little in common. I was 46, married, a mother of two. She was 29, single, an attorney. She had made an impression on me, however, at that first meeting. She had that proverbial “what I wanted” suggested when choosing a sponsor. She helped me cultivate and maintain a strong program of abstinent recovery.

As I reflect on these last 20 years, I find it most important to share my birthday with all of you. After all this OA program is all about relationships. “...each time one of us takes a step forward, we pull the entire group forward.” The “We” principle of OA strikes a resounding chord. Whether it be the “we” of me plus my Higher Power, of me plus a sponsor or sponsoree, or of me plus the fellowship, we continue to be bound not only by our “weakness” but by our shared connections. “Without help it is too much for us.” And therein we find our strength. That, God, and all the principles of this spiritual program have catapulted me to the place I find myself today. I thank each and every one of you from the bottom of my heart.

Gratefully,
Peggy E.

The Principle Behind Step Four: “COURAGE”

Somewhere in life, I learned that I had to behave perfectly in order to be acceptable. It was okay if something unfortunate came my way; as long as I appeared to handle it with dignity and, of course, appear to have no responsibility in it.

It was better to be the strong and brave victim, than to be honest and acknowledge that I could have done things differently. It made me proud, and also ashamed if someone told me that they admired the way I handled my divorce, family members’ deaths, or strife at work.

What they didn’t know was that, in isolation, I ate and ate and ate to deal with the heartache, the grief, the shame, and the embarrassment.

As I am beginning Step Four, I am unveiling this newfound courage to actually take a peek inside and acknowledge that I am not perfect. No one expects me to be perfect; I will not achieve perfection.

With the help of my sponsor, I am learning that it is human to have negative thoughts or to have reacted badly to a situation without thinking that I am unacceptable or worthless.

OA has given me a new found courage to live life on life’s terms and I am eternally grateful.

Coly W.

COURAGE
is not the absence of fear
but the acquired ability
to move beyond fear.

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