

"I Am a Sexaholic"

What is this public aspect of surrender? First, it is being able to acknowledge what we are. It takes some of us weeks or months of coming to meetings before we can realize it at depth and say from the inside, "I am a sexaholic" or "I am a sex addict." Others seem to freely acknowledge this immediately.

The next stage is that we start talking honestly about ourselves; first, what we've done and thought in the lust/sex area, then, gradually, as more is revealed, our other defects. Typically, this is revealed progressively over time. It's as though we can't see the full extent of the power this thing has over us without first making a start at sharing it in the group. Then we begin to see more, and more comes out as we become part of the progressive honesty and self-disclosure of others.

A trust then begins to develop as we see that nothing is being held against us and that others are just like we are—and even more so. Trust deepens as we become mutually vulnerable by leading with our weakness. Leading with our weaknesses becomes the point of identification and union with each other. And it seems someone's self-disclosure has to start it off. Someone takes the risk because they have to, the pain is so bad. Then this helps pull away the curtain concealing the truth of our own lives and encourages us to do the same. The honesty of one encourages the honesty of others, as though we'd all been waiting for just such a fellowship where we could be on the outside what we really were on the inside all along.

All this takes time, but before we know it, there is "a shared honesty of mutual vulnerability openly acknowledged"(Kurtz, Not-God). This is the essence of the program. And this is why there must be those in our meetings who are hurting or who have hurt badly enough to break through into surrender and true honesty. Otherwise, a preponderance of those who are incapable of being honest (Alcoholics Anonymous Chap. 5) has the opposite effect of weakening the power of meetings, and the group's spiritual unity and very existence are threatened.

This much seems certain: Without an in-depth realization of what we really are and a willingness to reveal the truth about ourselves to other members, we can't seem to be able to connect with recovery. When we begin telling it like it really is, and was, from the inside out, we become part of. The spiritual Connection, it would appear, begins here—by first disconnecting from what we did. And how can we disconnect from it without sending it away from us as we tell it? This is the point of breakthrough.

The essence of honest sharing is that we want to be done with our sexual and other wrongs and are sending them away. Mere catharsis or even honest self-disclosure misses the mark if that's all it is. The aim is to bring our misdeeds to the light so we can be done with them. In a very real sense, we send them away by bringing them into the light. When done from such an attitude, it becomes a decisive spiritual experience, an entrance into the new way of life.

This is why "telling all" is not taking the First Step; it can be anything from boastful replay to anguished dumping or psychoanalysis. And even then, it's not really "all" and often only surface material. Thus, we don't "take" the First Step; it takes us. It overtakes us. And if it hasn't yet, hopefully it will; the disease and punishment it produces inside us keep working until we're ready to give up and let go.

Some members have found value in doing what has been called a written First Step inventory on their sexual history as a separate exercise. Based on the principle of the Fourth Step, it focuses on what we did in the lust/sex/relationship area. The inventory is then read either to the sponsor or to a group of seasoned sober members. The value of doing such an inventory without successful sobriety is questionable. There is also the danger that such an inventory will get ahead of one's willingness to be done with his old way of life and send it away. Some have found value in writing and giving away such an inventory later on in sobriety after a long enough time to see it in perspective.

The Second Half of Step One

For those who will recover through this program, the realization of powerlessness is coupled with dissatisfaction of self. For it is the self that is sick. If we would be content with ourselves, simply minus the compulsion, there can be no recovery.

Deep inside we always knew there were other things wrong with us, and it turns out our addictions were really trying to keep us from facing them. This is why, once the initial surrender of Steps One, Two, and Three is made, Steps Four through Ten—the heart of the program—then deal with exposing, confessing, and righting our wrongs.

In sobriety we quickly learn that we are just as powerless over these other defects that begin to surface as we ever were over lust, sex, and dependency. The fact that they aren't as omnipresent as lust would seduce us into the notion we're really okay. We seem to go for stretches of time without acting out on them—resentment, for example—but when things go wrong, watch out! They burst forth with a vengeance and fury fearsome to behold. Bad feelings boil up as if out of nowhere—feelings that are against others, that isolate us and force us back into the prison-house of the self. We'd rather believe that such outbursts are simply results of what others are doing to us; we seem unwilling to see that we think and act badly because there's something wrong inside us. As though bitter waters can spring up from a pure well.

What great relief to finally come to the place where we can say, not only "I'm powerless over lust," but "I'm powerless over ME!"

It's okay to be absolutely powerless over self. This is where we join the human race. And best of all, just as the admission of powerlessness over lust is the key to our sexual sobriety, so the admission of powerlessness over our defects is the key to our emotional sobriety. Victory through powerlessness by the grace of God! What a glorious liberating discovery!

This is the point at which our self-honesty begins to grow, where recovery begins. But thank God, these defects are revealed to us progressively in the fellowship of identification, acceptance, and forgiveness so we are able to bear the realization without destroying ourselves or resorting to one of our "drugs" for escape. Our God is patient and loving and kind with us; as we must be with our fellow members.

The program calls those who are tired and weighed down with the burden of self, those who want to be rid of the load but can't. It calls those who are trapped in the prison-house of the self but know no way out. A broken and contrite spirit—the spirit of the First Step—is the key that opens the door and sets us free.