

WORKSHOP

ABSTINENCE READINGS

At the 2012 Region 9 Assembly, at the start of every session, we had an Abstinence reading. Someone would read it, and then OA members tried to answer on which piece of OA Literature this reading came from. The winner won a prize. Readings and the answers (where the readings come from) are included here.

This could also be at any type of OA event.

It was great fun.

1st Reading on Abstinence

Abstinence, to me, is very simple. It is refraining from compulsive overeating and continuing to work my program. Compulsive overeating is when I wander around my kitchen shoveling food into my mouth unthinkingly. Compulsiveness is when I am not reading, writing, calling, and using the other tools. Compulsiveness is when I do not use the Steps or talk to my HP.

Abstinence is eating balanced meals, using the OA tools, practicing the OA Steps and Traditions, sponsoring and doing other service. I can binge on veggies, so I do not have a food list that determines my abstinence. Instead, it is an action that undermines my abstinence: eating compulsively - feeding feelings, bingeing, stuffing my face. Recovery is three-fold - physical, spiritual, and emotional. If I only count the physical (adhering to a food plan), I miss out on two important parts of recovery.

2nd Reading on Abstinence

Abstinence from compulsive overeating is the objective of working our program. At the physical level, its simplest definition is to refrain from eating compulsively, and a plan of eating helps us to achieve this. At the emotional and spiritual levels, abstinence is a state of mind characterized by freedom from the food obsession; this comes as a result of working the Steps and surrendering to a Higher Power.

3rd Reading on Abstinence

There is no telling what price I may have to pay for breaking my abstinence "just this once." it could be nothing at all, or a trip back to the pits of compulsive overeating.

But the truth is, I do not have to take that chance. It is irrational to feel guilty about refusing food and drink I don't want. If absolutely pushed to the wall, I can say, "I'm sorry, it doesn't agree with me." Which is all too true.

I have already paid dearly for the "pleasures" of compulsive overeating. Then, when I could no longer pay the price, I surrendered, admitted my powerlessness and turned myself over to the Power that still directs my life.

No holiday dinner, no party, no celebration can persuade me to give up the freedom I enjoy as long as I am abstinent.

4th Reading on Abstinence

Catalog and recatalog the positive enjoyment of abstinence from compulsive overeating such as:

- The simple ability to eat and sleep normally and wake up glad you are alive, glad you abstained yesterday, and glad you have the privilege of abstaining today.
- The ability to face whatever life may dish out with peace of mind, self-respect and the full possession of all your faculties.

5th Reading on Abstinence

There are people who come to our meeting every week and complain that they can't get abstinent. But when we offer the solution of the Twelve Steps, they pooh-pooh the idea. They think that holding hands, talking on the phone, and going to meetings should be enough.

It's not enough. I would not have over five years of abstinence today if I hadn't been willing to work the Steps, make commitments, and have a sponsor. My Fourth and Fifth Steps were tedious and time-consuming, and they made me cry. My Ninth Step cost me money, not to mention the humiliation of the social amends. My life was precarious for about a year and a half as I assimilated new behaviors and stifled old ones. And you know what I got for all this discomfort? A comfortable abstinence.

I want to keep this comfortable abstinence, so I'm always providing service to my meeting and sponsoring as many babies as want to work the Steps. I am afraid that if I refused to be of service to this program, I wouldn't need abstinence anymore; I'd have plenty of extra time to fill with binges.

I've lived through plenty in the past five years. I moved, changed jobs, got married, lost two babies, gave birth to a wonderful baby girl, and battled some serious health problems. This is life. I'm a compulsive eater, no different from the other compulsive eaters who come to our meeting and complain and hold hands and talk on the phone and binge. I wish they would listen, work the Steps, provide service, and sponsor. I'm quite sure this program would work for them, just as it works for me and for so many others who have found the willingness.

7th Reading on Abstinence

I finally made it - thirty days of abstinence!

I have had several weeks of abstinence a number of times, but I usually broke it about the twenty-fifth or twenty-sixth day. I always sabotaged myself in some way as I neared the "magical" thirty-day mark. Now that that day has come and gone, I realize there is nothing magical about thirty days per se; but there is something miraculous about every day of abstinence.

As I neared the thirty-day mark this most recent time, I saw how poorly I had been treating my very fragile abstinence. I was handling it carelessly, playing with it, almost daring myself to break it. This was most apparent to me during the celebration of a recent holiday.

As part of my personal plan, I chose to refrain from the traditional binge foods that had always represented joy and celebration, and replace them with good, wholesome foods that my entire family could enjoy. To establish a festive feeling, I prepared the table with the best of everything - fancy place mats, our best china, crystal goblets (not used since our wedding), and a crystal candle holder at each setting.

The only thing "out of place," so to speak, was a cheaper, smaller glass goblet that I set before my six-year-old daughter. I felt I couldn't quite trust her to handle a large crystal goblet. She cried when she saw that she had a different glass, until she noticed that it, too, was fancy and delicate.

As she handled the smaller goblet, I felt my heart leap into my throat several times. She treated it so roughly, pretending to be toasting with everyone, hitting the glass against every available surface, and setting it down a bit too hard after every gulp.

Suddenly, I saw myself in her. I had been handling my abstinence roughly also. As I'd seen the thirty-day mark approach, I was so sure that I would break my abstinence again that I toyed with it. I let myself taste things that I had no business tasting. I wasn't caring for my abstinence lovingly or carefully. Instead, I broke my abstinence - just as my daughter never really broke the goblet but I had many close calls.

And you know, I could tell that my Higher Power was standing near me, guarding the abstinence so graciously given to me. God reached out to catch me when I risked falling, just as I had kept a careful eye on my daughter.

My abstinence is so very delicate. I know now that even though I have passed the once-elusive thirty-day mark, I must treat my abstinence with tender loving care and gentleness lest it be broken.

8th Reading on Abstinence

I came into the OA program in January 27, 1994, because I had hit bottom. It was such a terrible time. I binged and purged every day. First I went to AA meetings because there were no OA meetings in my area. I wanted to learn how to work this program. When I started attending AA meetings, I heard that it was good to go to 90 meetings in 90 days. I took action, and my HP gave me abstinence. A miracle happened! The Steps worked for my food problem, so another member and I started new OA meetings.

Before I found OA, I never stopped bingeing and purging. I started dieting by the age of 14. I was obsessed with losing weight; I counted calories. By age 17, I was bingeing and purging. Every day my life got worse. During the day, I lived normally, but at night I ate compulsively and then purged in the bathroom. I weighed myself twice a day - before breakfast and after bingeing and purging at night. I felt miserable and asked myself over and over why I didn't stop, but I didn't find any solutions.

The OA program gives me great hope of recovery one day at a time. I've been abstinent for nine and a half years. I'm bulimic; when I started recovery, I gained some weight, and I now maintain a healthy weight. My food plan is simple: three meals a day and a snack. I don't have an OA meeting in my area now, but I still work the Steps and Traditions with my sponsor and OA friends through letters and emails. I read literature and Lifeline. I'm free from my obsession with food, weight and calories. I enjoy my life and the OA program.

9th Reading on Abstinence

We are not a "diet and calories" club. We practice abstinence by staying away from eating between planned meals and from all individual binge foods. Once we become abstinent, the preoccupation with food diminishes and in many cases leaves us entirely. We then find that, to deal with our inner turmoil, we have to have a new way of thinking, of acting on life rather than reacting to it - in essence, a new way of living.

From this vantage point, we begin the Twelve-Step program of recovery, moving beyond the food and the emotional havoc to a fuller living experience.

10th Reading on Abstinence

When I came into OA, I had over 100 pounds (45 kg) to lose. I had experience with another Twelve-Step program, so I knew it would work. I found a plan of eating and followed suggestions; I was one of those my group referred to as being "struck abstinent," and the weight came off fairly quickly. For the first time in my life, I had an average-size body. More importantly, I was closer to my HP than I thought possible. Many issues came up as the food obsession came down, things I thought I'd dealt with but hadn't fully. With my mind clear, my options were clear. My serenity reached an entirely new level, and I was beginning to gain some of the self respect that had always eluded me.

One day, a well-meaning member asked me if I'd reached "goal" weight yet. I had no idea what that meant; my idea of a healthy body type meant there were no XX's on the labels in my clothing. I consulted with my doctor and a nutritionist, came up with a number I "ought" to strive for, and promptly lost my focus.

The word "goal" implies an end. It implies that once we have reached a particular weight, we are finished. We have arrived. My disease seized upon this idea and began to tell me that I could eat just like others; that because I was no longer obese, my eating disorder had vanished with my excess weight. It was like Bingo - I hit the number, and my struggle was over.

For me, the struggle has just begun, perhaps because what I want is less tangible than a number on the scale or a certain dress size. I want food to have an appropriate role in my life. Though I stay within 10 pounds (5 kg) of what is healthy for me, my mind reels when I use food for other than nutritional purposes. I want to form a healthy partnership with my meals. It is a constant challenge for me to remember that setting boundaries is not deprivation; it is safety.

It has been helpful for me to examine why I do what I do, to remind myself I am taking care of myself, and what others do, in and out of our halls, is not my concern.

I write down my food every day to avoid becoming caught up in planning the "perfect meal" or becoming overwhelmed with choices at mealtime. I have a sponsor, and I commit my food to her to take the secrecy out of eating. I listen to her suggestions, because sometimes I cannot see the sneakiness of this disease. I take what I like and leave the rest, trusting that if I make an unwise decision, my HP will let me know. I go to meetings to remind myself I'm not alone and I still have an eating disorder, no matter what the labels in my clothing say. I stay connected. We are all the same. Whether we binged or purged, no matter what our trouble foods, I can always identify at a meeting.

Most importantly, I follow the Steps and practice these principles in all my affairs, every day to the best of my ability. I turn my food, my life and my will over to my HP. I pray. I read literature. I write. I make my best effort to be kind; when I am not, I apologize and let things go. I assert myself appropriately. On many levels, the inability to do these things kept me eating.

I have learned to trust my HP completely, and the peace this brings me is indescribable and more delicious than anything I ever put in my mouth. My body size is a fringe benefit of this program. It serves as a reminder that miracles happen in these rooms. I am not at "goal." I am at "life."

11th Reading on Abstinence

In the earliest OA meetings, we shared techniques for "sticking with our diets." I can't recollect the word "abstinence" being used in those days, although it does appear in a list of "our working tools," compiled in August, 1961, for the original West Los Angeles OA group:

1. Attend the meetings each week religiously
2. Phoning
3. Stripping the home of foods that help nourish a binge
4. Have a calorie chart... count calories and measure
5. Plan - think and prepare your course - 3 meals a day
6. Abstinence - do not eat in between meals
7. Make small goals
8. One day at a time, postpone, one hour at a time
9. Read program at home - educate yourself with literature about nutrition

I don't remember the discussion surrounding this list, but I do recall clearly the day I came to believe that abstinence was the missing key to our physical recovery.

12th Reading on Abstinence

I'm Jamielee, a compulsive overeater. I have been in OA a little over 3 years, and I recently celebrated 2 years of abstinence from bingeing, white flour and sugar.

I came into OA when I turned 16 because I was sick and tired of hating my body and letting food control my life. I had tried a few diets that inflamed my eating disorder and led me to gain weight. I motivated myself to go on diets by reinforcing my poor self-image. I told myself I was worthless because I was overweight, but I would have a perfect life when I got skinny. I bought clothes that were my "perfect size" to motivate myself to exercise, and I restricted my food to make up for bingeing, so I lost weight despite my overwhelming urge to eat.

When I obsessed about my body and weight, I was very selfish. For instance, all I thought about when going to a relative's house was how to look good enough so people would tell me I had lost weight. I always felt like an outsider, like I was worth less than other people around me, but I thought if I could become skinny I would far exceed those around me.

Food consumed all my thoughts and actions. I see now that compulsive eating gave me temporary comfort, followed by more heartache as my eating worsened. As each binge passed, I required more food to produce a similar effect. I would binge on a partially frozen sugar product while microwaving a flour product to hide in my room for later. I wrote oaths to swear off food; I listened to tape recordings of myself saying not to binge and then binged anyway; I watched television episodes about weight loss and binged right afterward. I asked my family to stop me if they saw me start eating after a certain hour, but I just waited until they fell asleep and then binged. I obviously did not have a sane relationship with food.

Today my life is tremendously different in the best way. I see the uniqueness in others and myself, and I accept rather than condemn flaws. I was able to remain abstinent while I moved across the country to attend a college that fosters my love of singing. I've been able to enjoy rich, honest friendships in OA. I have had loving, supportive sponsors who have helped me with my spirituality, honesty and daily commitment. I have met loving, interesting people from all different countries and backgrounds who share my compulsion and now share my pursuit of a better way of living.

Every aspect of my life has been renewed as a result of OA. I have a new relationship with a Higher Power and with my parents, friends and myself. I've learned how to walk through fear rather than run, and I now live a life that's wide open rather than shut inside a box or bag.

I am grateful to be an OA member and to experience the support and love that is all around us.

13th Reading on Abstinence

We are not like normal people when it comes to eating. What all of us have in common is that our bodies and minds seem to send us signals about food which are quite different from those the normal eater receives. We can't stop once we start eating, and even if we have stopped through a diet, we can't keep from starting again. So the cycle continues.

In OA, we learned that we have an illness, an unhealthy condition of body and mind that can be relieved on a daily basis. Our relationship with food is one in which we cannot behave like normal eaters. We experience the need to keep eating even after we have had a full meal. Certain foods, such as sugar, flour, fats or salty snacks, may trigger our compulsion and cause uncontrollable cravings. Sometimes even just the action of eating will stimulate us to eat more. These symptoms of our disease are the common ground on which we base our recovery.

OA offers a solution. We find that we no longer want to return to the foods and eating behaviors that created uncontrollable cravings in us. We have been released from our mental obsession. We are able to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight. For us, that is nothing less than a miracle. Many of us in OA have lost over 100 pounds (45 kg) and maintained a healthy body size for years. We have found a way to abstain from our compulsive behaviors with food, diets and body image.

We discovered that we can recover by following OA's Twelve Steps and by reaching out to help others with the same problem. In OA, the only requirement for membership is the desire to stop eating compulsively- no dues or fees are required because we support our Fellowship by giving voluntary contributions. We promise that if you work the Twelve Steps to the best of your ability, regularly attend meetings and use OA's tools, your life will change. You will experience what we have: the miracle of recovery from compulsive eating.

14th Reading on Abstinence

One symptom of this disease is that we seek an external solution, when the real solution comes from within. The outward methods I used to tackle the disease of compulsive overeating never had any permanence. At best, the methods were a temporary fix. The diets, therapies, and medications just stopped working for me. Confusion and frustration set in. No, there was no human solution.

Ultimately, I came to know that the answer I seek is truly the inner spirit - the spirit of God within me. The Twelve Steps tackle the job of clearing away the debris, a cleansing process that brings me closer to a fulfilling union with the spirit within. There is no external answer, just the internal one.

Each day, I remain open to the nurturing of that answer. Part of my daily prayer is that I may overcome any human frailty that blocks the internal answer. I stumble and fumble, impeding my own progress, but I can learn from this. Faith grows. Hope increases. New meaning comes to life.

If the disease of compulsive overeating brings us together, our recovery keeps us together, our recovery keeps us together. Together, as we move closer to the cell door to gain freedom, we notice that the key to the door is on the inside. God's light illumines the way out for us. The inside track is our salvation; we are never alone.

Answers to Readings on Abstinence

1st Reading - Voices of Recovery book (A Daily Reader)...Recovery is the result of living the OA Twelve-Step program...March 9, pg 69

2nd Reading - A Plan of Eating pamphlet (A tool for living - One day at a time)...What's the difference between a plan of eating and abstinence?...pg 6

3rd Reading - For Today book..."The means by which certain pleasures are gained bring pains many times greater than the pleasures"... December 31, pg 366

4th Reading - Before You Take That First Compulsive Bite, Remember... pamphlet (Working the Program, You have a friend in OA)...# 11

5th Reading - A New Beginning book (Stories of Recovery from Relapse)... The Price of Abstinence (Anonymous)...pg. 46 - 47

6th Reading - A Commitment to Abstinence pamphlet (A decision, One day at a time)... What is commitment / Some actions that help promote personal abstinence... pg 1, 3, 4

7th Reading - Abstinence book (Members of OA Share Their ESH)... Handle With Care (Illinois), pg 82-83

8th Reading - OA Members Come in All Sizes pamphlet (Welcome, Whatever Your Problem with Food)... Lifted Up from the Bottom (Malaysia)... pg 19 - 20

9th Reading - Overeaters Anonymous, Second Edition book... OA - Our Invitation to You...pg 2 - 3

10th Reading - Maintaining A Healthy Weight pamphlet (A lifetime commitment, one day at a time)...I have learned to trust my HP completely, and the peace this brings me is indescribable and more delicious than anything ever put in my mouth...pg 3 - 4

11th Reading - Beyond Our Wildest Dreams book (A History of OA as Seen by a Cofounder - Rozanne)... Abstinence and the Carbohydrate Controversy... pg 136

12th Reading - To The Teen pamphlet (Do you have a problem with food? There is a solution...)...Jamielee...pg 7 - 8

13th Reading - To The Newcomer pamphlet (You're not alone anymore...)... You Are Not Alone...pg 2 - 3

14th Reading - Seeking the Spiritual Path book (A Collection from Lifeline)...The Inside Track (Ohio)... pg 64