

OA/HOW FRIDAY MEETING READINGS

March 2014

WHAT IS H.O.W.?

H.O.W. is a movement within Overeaters Anonymous whose basic principle is that abstinence is the only means to freedom from compulsive overeating and the beginning of a spiritual life.

Where And Why Did H.O.W. Begin?

H.O.W. began in Phoenix in 1981, as a means of reviving a group called OA VICTORIOUS. Its meeting format is taken from Rozanne's book, *I Put My Hand In Yours*, and centers around the concept of service. Many of the questions used in H.O.W. sponsoring stem from O.A. Plus and Westminster groups. The outline of service came from the O.A. Suffolk County, New York sponsor's guide.

THE ONLY REQUIREMENT

Overeater's Anonymous respects the autonomy of each OA group. We do suggest, however, that any group that has requirements in addition to the suggested twelve steps and twelve traditions inform its members that these requirements are what that particular group has found effective in working the program and do not represent OA as a whole.

The members of this group have found the H.O.W. concept to be effective in working the O.A. program. The opinions expressed here tonight by those who share, are their own and not necessarily those of O.A. The Board of Trustees states: "We understand the third tradition to mean that individual ways of working one's program should not exclude any compulsive overeater from attendance and participation at OA meetings anywhere, anytime."

"The only requirement for membership is the desire to stop eating compulsively. Anyone who says he/she is a member; is a member. We of Overeaters Anonymous welcome all members with open arms."

THE H.O.W. CONCEPT

The Overeaters Anonymous H.O.W. meetings have been formed to offer the compulsive overeater, who accepts the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions as a program of recovery, a disciplined and structured approach. H.O.W. groups are formed in the belief that our disease is absolute, and that only absolute acceptance of the OA program will offer any sustained abstinence to those of us whose compulsion has reached a critical level. Therefore, we accept the nine tools of program and the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions as necessary for our recovery. In OA-HOW, our daily action plan is outlined in the structured use of each of the other tools.

Our meetings are dedicated to the concept of remaining honest, open-minded and willing to listen. This is the H.O.W. of the program. We pray that the collective group conscience and love that these ideals offer us will promote a strong sense of security that will enable us to experience a new unity and wholeness with all those around us; and, that the H.O.W. ideals will help us to progress in our program of recovery on a daily basis.

To be certain, much of our strength is found in the structure of meetings and in the daily adherence to the program as it is written in our literature.

The evening phone meeting also firmly understands that, after our recovery has begun through abstinence and the taking of the first three steps, our further surrender to the additional steps of recovery offers us a promise of happiness, contentment and achievement in all areas of our lives.

We ensure our continued and sustained abstinence from compulsive overeating by being forever aware that God is doing for us what we have never been able to do for ourselves.

May God, as each of us understands Him, open our minds and our hearts to the love which is manifested on this telephone meeting. Amen.

REFLECTIONS FOR THE NEWCOMER

Welcome to O.A./H.O.W. We are all so glad that you have decided to become a part of our fellowship. You know that the H.O.W. concept is a disciplined program. We believe that the discipline of weighing and measuring, of telephoning your sponsor at a particular time, of attending meetings and making phone calls, all lead to a life based on the Universal Discipline, which is accord rather than discord, even with many things going on around us. Therefore, if there is a breakdown in any of these areas, the concept is threatened, as is the individual's abstinence.

We have found that the discipline must remain as constant for the beginner as for the sponsor. If the newcomer shies away from this life's responsibility, the sponsor may give the newcomer's time slot to someone more committed to recovery. This is not a personal affront, but a matter of necessity. So many who think they should recover, in fact, are not ready. If the newcomer should show lack of commitment, the sponsor may then offer the newcomer assistance in finding a new sponsor. The rationale here is, if the newcomer insists on picking up the food before the phone, then there is a breakdown in the level of communication between the sponsor and the newcomer. "Frothy emotional appeal seldom suffices." ("Doctor's Opinion", BB p. XXVIII, para. 2) If a sponsor slips, get a new one. The pitfalls of self-deception cannot be overstressed if you are to recover; therefore, a sponsor, in all self-honesty, must release all sponsees to continue his own recovery. A sponsor cannot give what he does not experience.

Finally, you must believe that we need each other. All problems that arise can be worked on via the phone, or person-to-person contact. Only positive, upbeat recovery belongs at our meetings.

“A body badly burned by alcohol does not often recover overnight, nor do twisted thinking and depression vanish in a twinkling. We are convinced that a spiritual mode of living is a most powerful health restorative.” (“The Family Afterward”, BB p. 133, paragraph 2)

Good luck. Everyone in the fellowship is praying that you find the release from the obsession so many of us have.

God bless. And no matter what, **KEEP COMING BACK!! WE’LL ALWAYS BE HERE FOR YOU!**

CHAPTER 3 (FROM THE BOOK, "ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS")

Most of us have been unwilling to admit we were real alcoholics. No person likes to think he is bodily and mentally different from his fellows. Therefore, it is not surprising that our drinking careers have been characterized by countless vain attempts to prove that we could drink like other people. The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity or death.

We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics. This is the first step in recovery. The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed.

We alcoholics are men and women who have lost the ability to control our drinking. We know that no real alcoholic *ever* recovers control. All of us felt at times that we were regaining control, but such intervals—usually brief—were inevitably followed by still less control, which led in time to pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization. We are convinced to a man that alcoholics of our type are in the grip of a progressive illness. Over any considerable period we get worse, never better.

We are like men who have lost their legs; they never grow new ones. Neither does there appear to be any kind of treatment which will make alcoholics of our kind like other men. We have tried every imaginable remedy. In some instances there has been brief recovery, followed always by a still worse relapse. Physicians who are familiar with alcoholism agree there is no

such thing as making a normal drinker out of an alcoholic. Science may one day accomplish this, but it hasn't done so yet.

Despite all we can say, many who are real alcoholics are not going to believe they are in that class. By every form of self-deception and experimentation, they will try to prove themselves exceptions to the rule, therefore nonalcoholic. If anyone who is showing inability to control his drinking can do the right-about-face and drink like a gentleman, our hats are off to him. Heaven knows, we have tried hard enough and long enough to drink like other people!

CHAPTER 5 “HOW IT WORKS”

Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program; usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born that way, they are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty. Their chances are less than average. There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest.

Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now, If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it - then you are ready to take certain steps.

At some of these we balked. We thought we could find an easier, softer way. But we could not. With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start. Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely.

Remember that we deal with alcohol — cunning, baffling, powerful. Without help it is too much for us. But there is One who has all power—that One is God. May you find Him now.

Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked His protection and care with complete abandon. Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery.

THE TWELVE STEPS

1. We admitted we were powerless over food - 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 him.
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 Him 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 God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His 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 compulsive overeaters and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Many of us exclaimed, "What an order! I can't go through with it." Do not be discouraged. No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles. We are not saints. The point is that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS

The Twelve Traditions are:

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon OA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers.
6. An OA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the OA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every OA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Overeaters Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. OA as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Overeaters Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the OA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, television and other public media of communication.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all these Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

JUST FOR TODAY

- Just for Today I will try to live through this day only, and not tackle my whole life problem at once. I can do something for one day that would appall me if I felt I had to keep it up for a lifetime.
- Just for Today I will be happy. This assumes to be true what Abraham Lincoln said, that, "Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be."
- Just for Today I will adjust myself to what is and not try to adjust everything to my own desires. I will take my "luck" as it comes and fit myself to it.
- Just for Today I will try to strengthen my mind. I will study. I will learn something useful. I will not be a mental loafer. I will read something that requires effort, thought, and concentration.
- Just for Today I will exercise my soul in three ways. I will do somebody a good turn and not get found out; if anyone knows of it, it will not count. I will do at least two things I don't want to do, just for exercise. I will not show anyone that my feelings are hurt; they may be hurt, but today, I will not show it.
- Just for Today I will be agreeable. I will look as well as I can, dress becomingly, talk low, act courteously, criticize not one bit, not find fault with anything, and not try to improve or regulate anybody except myself
- Just for Today I will have a program. I may not follow it exactly, but I will have it. I will save myself from two pests: hurry and indecision.
- Just for Today I will have a quiet half-hour all by myself and relax. During this half-hour, sometime, I will try to get a better perspective of my life.
- Just for Today I will be unafraid. Especially, I will not be afraid to enjoy what is beautiful, and to believe that as I give to the world, so the world will give to me

SPONSOR READINGS

PLAN OF EATING

To Be Read By a HOW Sponsor

A food plan is a commitment to recovery. The HOW disciplines were designed for food addicted people. We believe in a disciplined and structured approach. HOW abstainers do not modify their food plan to suit themselves and commit themselves to black and white abstinence. Deviations invite the return of many other problems.

A food plan is not a personal thing in HOW. This means that we depend upon each other for the strength and growth that we need to remain abstinent. We join together in an effort to free the compulsive overeater from the bondage of food through the use of a food plan, positive thinking, and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous. We eat weighed and measured meals with nothing in between, except sugar-free beverages and sugar-free gum. Food is written down, called in to our sponsor and committed, so that we can get on with our recovery and out of the food. We also believe that negative thinking is a large part of our disease, so we abstain from negative thinking.

*Those of us who work the HOW program concepts
use the following guidelines for food plans.*

1. We do not write our own food plan. We use a food plan given to us by a doctor, nutritionist or dietitian. We discuss it with our sponsor. We do not pick one that allows any of our binge foods. If some food on our plan becomes a problem, we avoid it.
2. We do not skip meals, switch meals or combine meals. We do not deviate or manipulate our food plan in any way. If we need to change our committed food during the day, we call a sponsor.
3. We weigh and measure all our portions so that there is no guess work. We do not measure by eye. We use a measuring cup, spoon, and a scale. **(Verbally describe what you do with your abstinence kit: scale, cups/spoons, telephone, etc.)**
4. We weigh ourselves once a month until we reach goal weight and once a week on maintenance.

5. Unless advised otherwise by your doctor, we take a multi-vitamin and drink 64 ounces of water a day.
6. We do not drink alcohol.
7. We do not use foods containing sugar, except if sugar is listed 5th or beyond on the ingredients label.
8. Above all, we do not vacillate or water down the disciplined nature of the HOW program. It is not the extra string bean that counts; it is the decision to take it.

SPONSORSHIP

Sponsors are OA members who are committed to abstinence and to living the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions to the best of their ability.

We ask a sponsor to guide us through our program of recovery on all three levels: physical, emotional and spiritual. In working with other members of OA and sharing their experience, strength and hope, sponsors continually renew and reaffirm their own sobriety. Sponsors share their program up to the level of their own experience. Ours is a program of attraction; find a sponsor who has what you want and ask how it was achieved. A member may work with more than one sponsor and may change sponsors at will.

A H.O.W. sponsor is a compulsive overeater who has completed at least 70 days of back-to-back abstinence and who has taken the first three steps of the program. Sponsors have also completed at least 70 days of assignments.

REFLECTIONS TO THE SPONSOR - SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

No list of reflections and meditations are end-alls and be-alls for the newcomer. A sponsor must be attentive not only to what the new person is saying, but also to what the newcomer is not saying. There are many newcomers who are reticent to purchase books, and who are hesitant to throw themselves headlong into the program. Therefore, we have a list of pre-commitment assignments.

Above all, **DO NOT VACILLATE OR WATER DOWN THE DISCIPLINED NATURE OF THE H.O.W. PROGRAM.** It is not the extra string bean that is the problem. It is the **DECISION** to have it that results in some trouble.

The H.O.W. Concept is an alternative for people who have tried everything else—therefore, the program is an immutable triumvirate of tools, steps, and traditions. Using the tools of weighing and measuring our food, sponsors, meetings, phone calls, reading and writing, service, and anonymity, we follow the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions of O.A. in order to free ourselves from the bondage of food addiction. **SPONSORS DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO PLAY GOD WE HELP EACH OTHER.**

ANONYMITY

Anonymity is a tool as well as a tradition because it guarantees that we will place principles before personalities. It offers each of us freedom of expression and protection against gossip. Anonymity assures us that only we as individual OA members have the right to make our membership known within our community.

Anonymity at the level of press, radio, films and television means that we never allow our last names or faces to be used once we identify ourselves as OA members.

Within the fellowship, anonymity means that whatever we share with another OA member will be held in respect and confidence. What we hear at meetings should remain there. It should be understood, however, that anonymity must not be used to limit our effectiveness within the fellowship. It is not a break of anonymity to give our names and addresses to the secretary of our group or to other service offices of OA for the purpose of conducting OA business, which is primarily twelfth-step work. It is likewise not a break of anonymity to enlist twelfth-step help for group members in trouble, provided we are careful to omit specific personal information. If their disease has reactivated and we persist in protecting their anonymity, we may, in effect, help kill them and their anonymity.

Anonymity is the part of the program that allows each of us to stand in front of our fellows and share for the first time, honestly, who we are, where we have been, and where we hope to go, without fear that our story will be told outside these rooms.

For many of us, the O.A. rooms are the first place where we have no fear being judged or criticized. We are accepted as we are at that moment. This is the first time for most of us that we experience sharing where we are not told what we did wrong.

We come into O.A. at rock bottom, mangled emotionally, physically and spiritually. We are supported back to health with honesty, open-mindedness and willingness. We are encouraged to speak of our pain and we are lovingly told “your secrets are safe.” Come share our recovery, recovery on a three-fold level: physical, emotional and spiritual.

Lastly, a word to newcomers: please join us. However, if you decide that our program is not for you, please remember that our anonymity allows us to grow and recover from a very serious disease. ***WHOM YOU SEE HERE, WHAT YOU HEAR HERE, WHEN YOU LEAVE HERE, LET IT STAY HERE.***

TELEPHONE

Compulsive overeating is a disease of isolation. The telephone is a means of communicating with another compulsive overeater between meetings. It provides an immediate outlet for those hard-to-handle highs and lows we all experience. The telephone is also a daily link to our sponsors and, as part of the surrender process, is a tool by which we learn to ask for help, reach out and extend that same help to others.

In HOW we are asked to make at least four telephone calls a day; one to our sponsor and three more to other OA members. These calls give us an opportunity to “talk program” on a daily basis. The telephone is our lifeline.

MEETINGS

Meetings are gatherings of two or more compulsive eaters who come together to share their experience before and after recovery and to share their strength and hope OA has given them. Meetings are an opportunity for us to identify and confirm our common problem by relating to one another and by sharing the gifts we receive through this program. We find that being on time for meetings enhances our recovery and provides service to the meeting. Though there are many kinds of meetings, fellowship is the basis of them all. As H.O.W. members we attend at least one H.O.W. meeting a week.

LITERATURE

We study the text book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, referred to as the Big Book, and the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, another AA book to reinforce our program. By substituting the words, “food” and “compulsive eating” for the words, “alcohol” and “alcoholism,” we can identify closely. We also read OA literature: the OA book, *Overeaters Anonymous*, referred to as the Brown Book, the *OA Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, For Today*, for daily meditation, and *Lifeline*, our journal of recovery. Read on a daily basis, our literature impresses on us certain basic truths that we have found vital to our growth. Our literature and the AA books are an ever available tool that gives insight into our problem, as well as the strength to deal with it and the very real hope that there is a solution for us.

WRITING

In addition to our writing our inventories and the list of people we have harmed, most of us have found that writing has been an indispensable tool for working the steps. Further, putting our thoughts and feelings down on paper or describing a troubling incident, helps us to better understand our actions and reactions in a way that is often not revealed to us by simply thinking or talking about them. In the past, compulsive eating was our most common reaction to life. When we put our difficulties down on paper, it becomes easier to see situations more clearly and perhaps better discern any necessary action.

SERVICE

Carrying the message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers is the basic purpose of our Fellowship and therefore the most fundamental form of service. Any service, no matter how small, that will help reach a fellow sufferer adds to the quality of our own recovery. Putting away chairs, making coffee, talking to newcomers, doing whatever needs to be done in a group or for OA as a whole are ways in which we give back what we have so generously been given. Do what you can when you can. “A life of sane and happy usefulness” is what we are promised as the result of working the Twelve Steps. Service fulfills that promise.

Always to extend the hand and heart of O.A. to all who share my compulsion; for this I am responsible.

Anniversary Reading

 , (insert first name), Now comes the biggest question yet. What about the practice of these principles in *all* our affairs? Can we love the whole pattern of living as eagerly as we do the small segment of it that we discover when we try to help other alcoholics achieve sobriety? Can we bring the same spirit of love and tolerance into our sometimes-deranged family lives that we bring to our A.A. group? Can we have the same kind of confidence and faith in these people who have been infected and sometimes crippled by our own illness that we have in our sponsors? Can we actually carry the A.A. spirit into our daily work? Can we meet our newly recognized responsibilities to the world at large? And can we bring new purpose and devotion to the religion of our choice? Can we find a new joy of living in trying to do something about all these things?

Furthermore, how shall we come to terms with seeming failure or success? Can we now accept and adjust to either without despair or pride? Can we accept poverty, sickness, loneliness, and bereavement with courage and serenity? Can we steadfastly content ourselves with the humbler, yet sometimes more durable, satisfactions when the brighter, more glittering achievements are denied us?

The A.A. answer to these questions about living is “Yes, all of these things are possible.” We know this because we see monotony, pain and even calamity turned to good use by those who keep on trying to practice A.A.'s Twelve Steps. And if these are facts of life for the many alcoholics who have recovered in A.A., they can become the facts of life for many more. (A.A. 12 and 12, p. 111)

H.O.W. STEPPING UP CEREMONY

Before you, you have five candles:

Truth

Reality

Surrender

Acceptance and Knowledge.

OA offers each of us a wonderful opportunity to develop and hasten an attitude change known as ego reduction. The use of these disciplines of weighing and measuring, phone calls, reporting to sponsors and attending meetings, all combine to reinforce our growth in OA. Action is the magic word. Until we so humble ourselves through these acts, there is no evidence of our ego reduction or our surrender to anyone or anything outside of ourselves. Each candle signifies a step toward arresting the progression of our disease. The first two represent Truth and Reality. Without these two qualities, we would not be recovering compulsive overeaters.

(Note to leader: After the reading of candle no. 5, Read paragraphs 8 and 9 of Step 12 in the 12&12.)

(Read After Candle 5)

Even the newest of newcomers finds undreamed rewards as he tries to help his brother alcoholic, the one who is even blinder than he. This is indeed the kind of giving that actually demands nothing. He does not expect his brother sufferer to pay him, or even to love him. And then he discovers that by the divine paradox of this kind of giving he has found his own reward, whether his brother has yet received anything or not. His own character may still be gravely defective, but he somehow knows that God has enabled him to make a mighty beginning, and he senses that he stands at the edge of new mysteries, joys, and experiences of which he had never

even dreamed.

Practically every A.A. member declares that no satisfaction has been deeper and no joy greater than in a Twelfth Step job well done. To watch the eyes of men and women with wonder as they move from darkness into light, to see their lives quickly fill with new purpose and meaning, to see whole families reassembled, to see the alcoholic outcast received back into his community in full citizenship, and above all to watch these people awaken to the presence of a loving God in their lives—these things are the substance of what we receive as we carry the message to the next alcoholic.

CANDLE (1)

The candle of truth is the keynote of those who strive to stop the advancement of compulsive overeating. It is the unrelenting force that permits no double standard. Its attainment brings the satisfaction of inward peace. We must fearlessly face the truth to avoid the ever present pitfall of self-deception.

CANDLE (2)

This is the candle of reality and it is a new light. It opens the door to a new life. It holds a promise of new understanding. It offers a chance for personal renewal. It makes a statement that goes beyond fantasy and it holds the dream of a better tomorrow. Without the light of reality, we are destined to remain in that sick, shadowy world of past mistakes and unrealistic dreams of false tomorrows

CANDLE (3)

This is the candle of surrender. In OA surrender is the first and most important act necessary to launching you into the other steps. Without the surrender of your food, your ego, and your will, all else is hopeless. When you surrender, you suspend such negative emotions as disbelief, grandiosity and you open yourself up to the process of learning who you are and where you fit into the scheme of things.

CANDLE (4)

This is the candle of acceptance, without acceptance you could not have come this far. Acceptance is seeing things as they really are. Acceptance is understanding that we have spent our lives denouncing everything and now we must open up our hearts, as well as our minds and accept. We must accept the will of God. Accept that only He can restore us to sanity.

CANDLE (5)

This is the candle of knowledge and it opens the door wide. We now know that God is on our side. We can see and hear his pronouncements in our lives. We recognize what it is that we may do and what only he can do. We acknowledge that the greatest gift He has given us; is knowing ourselves.