

BTW¹, Turkey is NOT vegetarian

I've been in OA for almost eight years, and I'm also an atheist. I've successfully stopped eating refined sugar and have kept off 60 pounds (27 kilos), and my overall health has really improved. The OA Tools (especially writing and meetings) and peer support (like my sponsor, accountability buddies, and OA friends) have been immensely helpful and keys to my success.

What hasn't been helpful is the push I felt to have a Higher Power (HP). In the beginning, I made an effort to "fake it until I made it." I had a traditional (i.e., not secular) sponsor, and she tried to help. "Write a job description of an HP that would work for you," and "Just use the group as your HP" were two ideas. Other experienced OA members suggested that God was, "Good Orderly Direction." I did my best, but hearing the word "God" over and over at meetings conjured up the bearded white guy often depicted in classical paintings. The name was also inextricably linked to religion for me, and much of the advice in OA literature and at meetings is to pray. While praying doesn't have to be religious, those were my hardwired associations. And I tried, I really tried, but I just couldn't create or believe in a Higher Power that would help relieve my compulsive food behaviors.

I have an analogy that food addicts may be able to relate to. If you eat meat and you invite a vegetarian² to Thanksgiving (or some other holiday feast with a traditional meat dish), you shouldn't expect them to eat the turkey. You would either provide comparable options (e.g., a second meatless main course) or encourage the guest to bring their own food. As a gracious host, you wouldn't say, "Just pretend the turkey isn't an animal," and then expect them to eat the turkey! Maybe you would provide healthy vegetarian side dishes, and the guest would be able to cobble together a good meal. And, that's what I do: I see what I can pull in from OA that is helpful and true for me. And I've been able to put together a strong recovery program.

There's the classic slogan, "Take what you want, and leave the rest." There's no doubt that I can find something helpful almost anywhere in OA. Maybe I'll attend a traditional OA meeting, and I'll hear a good idea or a bit of a story that resonates with me. Often though, the helpful bits are buried under layers of advice or experience that just don't apply and actually cause me to shut down. This is why secular OA meetings are SO important. It's like being a vegetarian who is at an actual vegetarian Thanksgiving—there are so many more options that you can eat!

Our global community (at least in 2024) doesn't have enough geographical critical mass for in-person groups. But we do have online Zoom and phone meetings available. You can Google Secular Overeaters Anonymous or go to the [Secular Service Board website](#) to find a list of currently available secular meetings. Visit different meetings until you find one or more that work for you, and you may eventually find your people and hopefully, a way to create your own successful secular OA program!

- Jenny, SF Bay Area

[Footnotes]

¹BTW is text talk for By The Way

²In general, a vegetarian does not eat animal meat.

Suggested discussion/writing topics

1. What top three OA tools or concepts help you the most with your recovery and why?
2. What advice was most useful to you when you first came into OA?
3. What advice would you give to new secular OA members?