

Long-Time Agnostic Recovery

My first OA contact in 1974 was WSO literature. The word "God" sounded religious so I stayed away for two years. I kept coming back after my first meeting in spite of the religious closing because I never heard honest sharing about compulsive eating anywhere else. I was hugely relieved that I could take what I liked and leave the rest. The only requirement for OA membership was (and is) the desire, not necessarily the ability, to stop eating compulsively.

Naturally, at first I focused on food planning and fellowship. A year attending a strong step meeting taught me that Steps 4-9 were for healing, not punishment. I did inventory but stopped at making amends. Partial step work gave me six and a half years of intermittent abstinence. I never stopped coming because nothing else worked better. Seeking serenity finally motivated me to complete the steps. I expected little effect on weight but I decided that abstinence some of the time was better than none of the time. I did not have clean abstinence while making amends but I knew if I quit I would never stop bingeing.

After one month I noticed that continuous weight gain stopped. That got my attention so I continued step work. A gender neutral divinity concept helped me begin detaching from my religious background. For Step Eleven I recited meaningful quotations. Later I learned meditation techniques which I practice today. Writing my reactions to readings helped me start processing feelings. A few weeks after completing the Steps I felt 'full' halfway through my usual abstinent breakfast. I called my sponsor to ask her what was wrong. She replied that this was removal of the compulsion as the result of working the steps.

Some other members were not accepting of my secular approach including this sponsor. To her credit she apologized for her anger over my getting abstinent without belief. In the absence of a sponsor I have consulted various members with strength in a particular area such as anger. Another barrier was doing the food differently than most. Because very low carb was neither practical nor healthy I had to find a moderate place between all out bingeing and anorexia. I've settled on moderate meals with periodic adjustments as I aged. I have always found members who were accepting of my alternative approach to recovery even if it meant I had to find another meeting. To deal with minimally helpful theistic orientations in literature I have had to "take what I liked and leave the rest" or reinterpret the language so it makes sense to me.

I got abstinent in 1983. Today I have relief from the compulsion most of the time. Being not cured, I must be constantly vigilant for food challenges. I've dealt with serious long-term life issues such as eldercare and the death of my parents with no desire to binge. Had I wanted to eat I would never have had the ability to resist. The steps have worked just as well for me regardless of my nontraditional interpretation because I have been and continue to be willing to do the inner work and service.

- Barb G