

# My best self

I had all the advantages of material wealth when I was a kid, but there was no love in that house. I've been a compulsive overeater since I was very young. My overeating started as soon as I could drag a chair over to the counter so I could climb up and get the sugary things on the top shelf. I became obese off and on starting in my college days, though I have battled with my weight my whole life. I tried every diet, with varying degrees of success. I'd lose 50 pounds, then gain back 70. The next diet would appear, and I'd lose that 70 and gain even more. I have weighed 100# more than I do today. I hated going to social events when I was heavy. I came up with any excuse possible to avoid leaving the house when I could possibly be the fattest person at the gathering. I lived with a lot of shame, a lot of recrimination. Why couldn't I fix this? Why couldn't I stop overeating?

In 2018 I decided I would try again to lose weight. One of my friends told me her mom was very active in OA, and maybe I should talk to her. I said, "What's OA?" I had never heard of it. She said it was a 12 step program for overeaters. My limited knowledge of 12 step programs consisted of the phrase "Let go and let God."

I am an atheist. I do not believe in any spiritual entity that would guide me, look after me, take care of my eating disorder. I knew that I had to learn to help myself, but I had tried and failed so many times I was reluctant to try again. I was doubtful that a program based on belief in religious intervention could possibly help me, but I was desperate and I had tried everything else.

That first meeting in November of 2018 was an eye opener. People were sharing openly and honestly and without shame about behaviors I did and had kept hidden and secret for decades. Eating from the trash, hiding food behaviors from friends and family, going through the drive through and buying a couple of extra meals to eat on the way home before sitting down and eating with the family, making a food to bring to a gathering and another batch just for secret eating.

I attended traditional meetings for more than a year. I was starting to be seriously bothered by traditional OA's reliance on a deity for healing. I felt I couldn't be authentic in my shares, because while almost everyone was supportive about my atheism, if I mentioned my lack of faith in my share, several shares after mine would include how god helped them maintain their abstinence. I felt I had to edit my shares in order not to trigger that response in others, and that felt dishonest and stifling. I felt instantly at home in my first secular meeting and have been attending them for 4 years.

My sponsor helped me find my inner strength in the form of my best self. I started working on building a relationship with that best self. We all have a best self; the quiet voice of reason that speaks when we want to do something stupid, or wrong, or against our values. Over the years that part of me has become my best support. Always kind and quietly assuring me when I am taking good care of myself, and gently advising me when I'm headed in the wrong direction. I don't always listen to her; of course, my abstinence isn't perfect. But I no longer binge, or want to binge, and I rely on the support of my secular OA community to help me with the tough times. That support and a strong action plan have helped me maintain a healthy body weight for more than 4 years.

- Kathie S.