

The Power that Keeps Me Abstinent

My first step was brought about by powers greater than myself. I was yelling at myself to stop eating, because I was afraid of what it was doing to my body. I told myself to buckle down and get this under control. Yes, I'd been telling myself that for months, but obviously I needed to try harder. Then I realized that the harder I tried, the worse my eating got. Uh oh. I remembered an alcoholic who usually started drinking at 5pm unless he had sworn off booze earlier in the day. Then he'd start at noon and be plastered by 5pm.

Having heard plenty of recovery in other kinds of twelve-step meetings, I thought of OA. Trying harder was not the answer; I would try OA. That was step one.

In my second OA meeting, I heard the voice of recovery and asked that person to be my sponsor. She said yes. That was step two.

So what were these greater powers? My love for my body that demanded I take better care of it, the recovery I had heard over the years, the honesty of people who had shared it, my own honesty in admitting I needed help, the generosity of my new sponsor. Love, recovery, honesty, generosity. Powers greater than myself.

The next big task was to get access to the power to turn my back on baked goods, eat enough but no more, and stop wandering into the kitchen looking for something that wasn't there. My previous source of power worked well for social and ethical concerns. It gave me access to joy and security. But it didn't help with food. What to eat was neither a social nor an ethical choice (I thought), and I was lost. Then I thought of a mother with a child who wanted to eat the wrong things and at the wrong times. Imagining her talking to my desires the way she taught her child gave me access to the power I needed: Love, again. And after I applied love to my inner turmoil for a while, I came to see that what I eat is an ethical issue after all. It's as wrong to eat in ways that destroy my health as to feed a child in such ways.

By the end of my first week in OA I had peace from the inner struggle over food, a sponsor and a fellowship, hope for my health, and a definition of abstinence. I have now been abstinent from using will power to control my eating for 5 years.

I can learn from the monotheists in recovery by listening for what they do, not what they think. Our concepts are different but the same actions usually give us the same result. When we need guidance, we both seek it in various places until something inside says, "That's a good idea." They might think in terms of guidance coming from above while I think of it as coming from within or over the phone, but our actions are similar and the results are similar.

Of course, sometimes they don't say what they do. I went to hear a speaker because it seemed to me he had good recovery. I was disappointed, so in the questions-and-answers I asked him how he established his abstinence. His reply? "I don't know." That typifies my frustration with meetings where results are assumed to be gifts from a celestial, and often capricious, being. Where are the nuts and bolts?

But I was making progress in those first few years among people who spoke their foreign language. I didn't even notice how much effort it was to translate everything until zoom came

along and changed my life. In my town there are no secular OA meetings, but on zoom there were many. The freedom! I didn't have to worry about what words I used or what they would ask me to read. I didn't have to guess what they meant when they said "God." I started to share more honestly and—halleluia!—I started to hear new thinking. New to me when I hadn't even noticed my own had gotten stale. Fresh from people sorting through the nuts and bolts. My people!

New questions opened up, new understanding, and recovery became fascinating again. Now the only meetings I go to are secular, and thank OA for the specific-focus listing for secular meetings!

To a believer, the word "God" offers comfort and strength, but to an atheist, it's just an obstacle. Our OA literature is saturated with these obstacles and looks like a boulder field to the newcomer who doesn't subscribe to the supernatural and does not want to be converted. To the newcomer with a history of abuse by religious authorities, negotiating the boulder field can be impossible. That's why I sponsor atheists as much as I can - to extend the hand and heart of OA to those who need it in their own language.

- Anonymous Atheist