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S.L.A.A. 12 & 12 — Steps 1 thru 4, Traditions 1 and 2 — 2019 IFD

Hi Members of S.L.A.A., from 12X12 Book Project Team,

We are presenting the following six draft chapters from the S.L.A.A. 12&12 manuscript. We have been working on this project for a number of years and feel that these six chapters are ready for publication. However we do suggest we wait for all Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions to be complete before the book is approved and published.

If we can continue at the current pace we expect to present six more chapters in 2020 as an IFD. Then the final twelve chapters in 2021. We realize this seems like a long time, but it's what we can do.

***These partial drafts are drafts. They are intended for all members of the fellowship, but should not be posted on websites open to the public. It is fine to copy these and pass them out at Intergroups and meetings. You are all welcome to respond individually as well.***

We suggest reading and discussing these in group meetings. Perhaps ask a member of the group to make brief summary notes of the ideas of various members of the group and forward these to us. A group conscience is not necessary at this stage in the manuscript development. We do trust, however, that there will not be major changes suggested.

Please send comments, suggestions, praise, or complaints to the 12x12 Book Project Team through the Fellowship Wide Service (FWS) website ([www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org)), [slaa-12x12-book@googlegroups.com](mailto:slaa-12x12-book@googlegroups.com) or mail them to the FWS office at: Fellowship-Wide Services, 1550 NE Loop 410, Ste 118, San Antonio, TX 78209.

Respectfully in service,  
12x12 Book Project Team

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## **Step One: We admitted we were powerless over sex and love addiction — that our lives had become unmanageable.**

We attended our first meeting of S.L.A.A. because we were in pain. Perhaps we were directed here by a therapist or a relationship partner, but this was never a place we had intended to be. The trajectory we had envisioned for our life did not include membership in any 12 Step program, especially one focused on sex and/or love. This was not a Fellowship we were looking forward to being a part of. But the pain had become too much. We realized we needed help. What we found here was remarkable.

When we finally walked into an S.L.A.A. meeting, we heard members sharing intimate details about their lives. For some of us it happened slowly and for others quickly, but all of us have become part of the *WE* that makes up this Fellowship. We were no longer alone. We recognized people who were like us. We had had the misconception that we were the only ones who thought and acted like we did, but now we found a whole Fellowship of similar people. And we found a program which, when practiced diligently, would not only relieve our addiction but also provide us with a contented and satisfied life.

The pain was slow to go away. Coming to our first meeting was certainly a big part of working Step One, but we also needed to admit and accept the reality of our situation. We needed to face and accept our powerlessness. We needed to understand how life is unmanageable for us. We needed to break through our denial. We needed to become part of the Fellowship.

Many of us landed at the doors of S.L.A.A. following a long, winding quest for control. We felt we needed to handle our disease by ourselves. We felt we could fix ourselves. We sought control over the circumstances of our lives, and we sought control over other people. More than anything, we sought control over our own

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emotions including fear, anxiety, boredom, loneliness, resentment, worry. But we failed. Our lives were out of control. We needed help.

We call the compulsive and obsessive behavior that characterizes our addiction either *acting out*, or *acting in*. *Acting out* is avoidance of life by escaping our emotions; we *act out* our feelings rather than feel them, rather than address them in a grownup way. When we *act in*, we also avoid life by restricting ourselves from living; we use negative emotions such as guilt, shame and unpleasant memories to prevent ourselves from pursuing relationships and sexual pleasure. We feel we don't deserve happiness. On the one hand, we do things that cause harm, on the other hand, we do nothing, also causing harm. The motivation is the same: to avoid our feelings.

The manner in which our sex and love addiction expressed itself was as varied as our individual personalities. Our obsessive/compulsive behaviors shared a common feature: our acting out, or acting in, altered our emotions and thoughts. We were able to escape from life. Our behaviors could take many forms, including but not limited to: compulsive masturbation; romantic obsessions/emotional attachments; fantasy; habitual use of pornography; avoidance of both sexual and emotional intimacy; exchanging money, resources or favors for sex; infidelity; having anonymous sex; and repeatedly engaging in sex that involves deceit of others. Some of us compulsively avoided sex and relationships while others compulsively moved from one relationship to the next or maintained multiple relationships concurrently, with, or without, the knowledge of our partners. This list is not exhaustive. Many of us have engaged in some, or several, of the behaviors listed and others not listed. Many of us exchanged one behavior for another, cycling through one after another, switching when the pain became too much.

Whatever forms our acting out or acting in behavior took, we were isolated. We lived a secret life. We were alone. We were afraid of being alone, but we were also

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afraid of being with people, at least in any emotionally intimate way. We confused sex with intimacy, blocking any chance for a healthy human relationship. We confused abstinence and isolation with health. We confused fantasy with reality. We had no idea what a healthy relationship looked like, no idea what a normal relationship could be.

The central feature characterizing S.L.A.A. members is that we eventually reached a point of powerlessness: a point at which we lacked the ability to choose whether or not to engage in these behaviors. Most of us felt at moments, sometimes for years and decades, that we were in control and doing what we wanted. In fact, one of the major highs that our acting out, or acting in, behavior gave us was the sensation of control. We had the brief illusion of being free, powerful, and safe.

Eventually, we began to experience episodes where we promised ourselves we would not engage in a behavior, yet we did it anyway. We could not stop. Many of us realized that our behaviors were harmful, yet we were not prepared to give them up entirely. We tried to control and enjoy our sex and love behaviors. Our idea was that we would do just enough to feel a thrill, but not enough to spiral out of control.

But once we entertained the possibility of acting out, or in, for any period of time, it set in motion a train of compulsive thoughts, rituals and behaviors over which we had no power to stop. We were defenseless against the ideas and thoughts that came from our memories, from our fantasies, and from the culture around us. We each paid a terrible personal cost in terms of emotional well-being, sense of self-worth and mental health. The harder we tried to control our behavior, the more we came to realize just how out of control, how powerless, we were.

We were unable to manage our time. We were unable to manage our money. We experienced legal troubles. We failed to meet work commitments and often shirked such responsibilities that would get in the way of our acting out or in. We spent

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considerable sums of money in pursuit of our addiction, wiping out savings and even going into serious debt. Some of us even acted out at work viewing pornography at our place of employment or making advances to coworkers. Some us of lost our jobs.

In our relationships with partners, we were alternately impatient, temperamental or doting. We manipulated situations, frequently convincing others something was wrong with them. We falsified reality to protect our pride, our self-esteem, our honor and to conceal our shame. If we were questioned about our lying or behavior we might say, “You’re paranoid because of your own insecurity” in an attempt to redirect attention away from us. All of this was done in an effort to protect ourselves from consequences. We were fashioning an alternative to the havoc in our lives by lying, by creating a falsified, imaginary, reality.

Many of us spent years in self-deception. We simply told ourselves we could quit if we really wanted to. If we really wanted to, we could find and establish a healthy relationship. We adopted philosophical or religious outlooks that gave greater meaning or legitimacy to our self-destructive behaviors. We denied that we had a problem, rationalizing our behavior with any number of self-justifying defenses. We insisted to ourselves that our behavior was normal, that we would stop if events got out of control. We were in denial. We would often decide that we would not engage in a specific behavior yet engaged in the behavior shortly after our resolution. We would reason that perhaps engaging in the behavior was OK after all. Our boundaries were forever changing because, in truth, we were largely incapable of establishing boundaries for ourselves or respecting those of others.

By the time most of us arrived in a meeting of S.L.A.A., dishonesty had become a way of life. We lied to partners about where we were, or who we were with. We lied to ourselves to bury our pain. Often, we lied for no apparent reason. Deception had become the manner in which we lived. Underneath all of it was a profound and

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enduring sense of shame: a belief that we lacked basic worth or were somehow “less than.” This dishonesty, this inability or unwillingness to acknowledge and accept reality, was a core driver of our disease.

The emotional and mental pain produced by our powerlessness over our addiction was suffering enough. However, in order to recover, we needed to dig deeper. It is clear that our acting out, or in, behaviors adversely impacted every area of our life and the lives of those around us. We wanted to stop but did not have the power. We realized that not only were we unable to control our addiction, our lives were filled with chaos. We needed to change not just our behavior but our whole approach to living. The fact was that our lives were, and are, unmanageable. Acknowledging this truth — that we cannot manage our own lives — is critical to our recovery.

Some of us wrote out a history of our sexual and relationship experiences. Once we could see what we had done and what had been done to us, there was no room for denial. Once we inventoried what we had avoided, what we had run away from, we could not deny our situation. We shared our Step One inventory with our sponsor, or at a meeting, reducing the chances of our denial resurfacing.

Once we acquired the willingness to look at ourselves and our lives honestly, healing became possible. We accepted life as it is, allowing ourselves to have hope and engagement. We admitted defeat. We found we were not alone. We admitted we were powerless over people, places and things. Sobriety became possible. The ability to live, and accept life as it unfolds, on a moment by moment basis, became possible. We surrendered our need to control and began a life filled with acceptance of the reality that surrounds us. We recognized that we were addicts. We were powerless and our life was indeed unmanageable. We had worked Step One. We started on the process of recovery.

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If by recognizing our problem, and stopping our addictive behaviors, we could regain the ability to manage our lives, we would not need to work the next eleven steps. Unfortunately, much of life is outside of our control. We can determine our behavior to some extent, but we are powerless over what results. We can make good choices; with help we can stop lying to everyone around us, we can stop acting out, or in, one day at a time, but until we admit that our lives are ultimately beyond our control — until we admit that we are sex and/or love addicts and cannot manage our own lives — we remain in the grip of this destructive disease.

We realized we must practice this Step every day. No matter how many twenty-four hours we have in the program, when we wake up each morning we are still sex and/or love addicts. For our own well-being we admit each day that we cannot manage our lives, we need help from a Higher Power, and we are powerless over this disease. Although we are powerless, luckily, we are not helpless. Step Two, the very next Step, provides the hope, the power, the solution to our difficulties.

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## **Step Two: Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.**

There was a definitive moment when we admitted to ourselves – or were forced to admit by others – that our desires for sex, love, or sex and love were far from right-sized. Or that our desire to isolate from others was not a reasonable approach to living. We had passed from believing in our dominion over life to seeing that we were completely powerless. Our lives had become unmanageable. We may not know the exact instant we went from master of our addiction to its slave. What we did know is that we were in tremendous pain. And we wanted it to stop. We really had no choice. Our alternatives were more than limited, each sadder and more desperate than the last.

In the past, we had tried on our own to stop the behaviors we found most troubling. In some cases we were successful. For a moment. Or a day. Or perhaps even a month or more. But inevitably, the harder we pushed away at the very parts of our being that we found most troubling, the greater their strength in pushing back. It was as though we were wrestling a gigantic, unrelenting, tireless beast — one with no conscience and no thought other than to completely destroy its opponent.... Our addictive beast was an equal-opportunity destructive energy. And one that no human force could slay. In this spiritual mismatch, it was inevitable that we would be forced to surrender. And eventually, grudgingly, we did.

Having admitted our powerlessness and that we could not manage our own lives, we realized we had to find a new approach. We needed to find a routine and learn to trust guidance from others. We needed to find a power we could trust to guide us through this life.

Yet the idea of a power even greater than our strongest inner demons seemed implausible. Many of us had already had much experience with traditional religious

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practices. If the iconic figure of the faith we'd practiced (sometimes for many years) had not protected us from ourselves, we wondered why we should trust it now? If insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results, isn't placing faith in the same deity that watched passively while we destroyed ourselves misguided at best?

Some of us had no traditional faith. Others were virulently opposed to even the concept of a Higher Power. "The universe is random," we would say. "Why would I put my faith in something that does not exist?" And yet we had put our faith in acting out, or acting in, as behaviors that would make us feel better, that would solve our misery. We made that person, or that other one, a higher power. Some of us had a conception of a God that we believed in, but when we really thought about it, we did not trust God would save us. At other times, we made a song, or a book, an aphorism, or a place a higher power — something that had more power than we did. We tried self-help programs, systems of philosophies, exercise regimens, all without success. Why, then, when we were offered a way out by finding a spiritual Higher Power, did we balk?

For most of us, the idea of relying on an invisible being, concept or spirit was an action that we took not in faith. Or even in hope. It was literally an act of desperation. We had long ago checked the final item on our "try this" list. We had run out of options.

And so we went to meetings. We went to our first meeting. It was something we would never, ever in a million years had imagined as our path. Then again, neither was our addiction. As we went to more meetings, we recognized that we had not traveled our path alone, that countless others had been to their first meeting long before we came to ours. We realized that the path both into recovery and along its Twelve Steps was well trod by the feet of those whose actions prior to entering the program might have been very different from ours but whose pain and desperate need of relief from it were very much the same.

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In time, we saw people getting chips. Some for a day of sobriety, others for a year or more. And we experienced that the very real joy shared by those witnessing these important milestones was as exuberant for those claiming 24 hours of sobriety as it was for those who had earned 24 months. Sometimes even greater. As we thought about our own inability to stop acting out, or acting in – sometimes after years of trying – it became clear why a single day was as important as a dozen years. Sobriety can only truly be measured one day at a time.

The very real successes of others awakened us to the reality that a better, more fulfilling life awaited us, if only we were willing to work for it. We'd seen the Twelve Steps work for others. Maybe they would work for us. It was at this point that our relentless “Why me?” / “Why am I an addict?” underwent a metamorphosis, blossoming into an insistent “Why not me?” / “Don't I deserve a life that is as content as the recovering addicts I have met?”

With an honest, if hesitant, yes, we sought greater understanding of how other addicts had realized their relief from their acting out, or acting in, behaviors. We saw that while in each case many of the same tools (sponsorship, meetings, step work, service) were used to secure even a day's sobriety, in every case, the bedrock of their recovery was spiritual. We found something beyond our ego that allowed us into the world, that joined us in community with people, with the whole diverse universe. Our ego wanted to keep us separate, but we broke through the partition our ego created and joined the human race. We developed a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves which can now guide and sustain us in recovery.

And to our surprise we did not need to understand this Higher Power. We did not really even need to define it unless we wanted to. We did not need to worry about anyone

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else's idea. This was a Higher Power of our own. The important idea was that we began to understand that we were not in control, that we did not have the power.

It was at this moment that we came to believe that our addiction was less a behavioral aberration than a spiritual one. Our thinking had been flawed, but we could, aided by a Power greater than ourselves, add an all-important positive positioning to our thinking. And if thoughts become actions, then it was only by constructive thoughts that we could – and would – act our way into a new way of being. It was in this moment that a belief in a Higher Power became essential. We knew that since it was our best thinking that created the insane behavior that brought us into the program, it would certainly take a much loftier power to restore us to sanity.

Realizing our need for a Higher Power to restore us to sanity, the question became what exactly is a Higher Power? We know it is not ourselves, nor the object of our obsessions, nor any other individual. Fortunately, we needn't struggle searching for an agreed upon definition of our Higher Power. Just as we honestly define our own bottom lines in S.L.A.A., so too, do we create our own definition of a "Power greater than ourselves." Some define that Power as God, Jesus, Krishna, Allah, Muhammad or another traditional religious deity. Others work within Buddhist concepts, Native American concepts, the Tao or other "non-Western" traditions. Some consider their S.L.A.A. home group, or the whole Fellowship, as their Higher Power. Still others don't confine a Higher Power to any single thing, insisting that a Higher Power is too big to be defined. It's a Great Mystery. These folks consider all of nature, science, the Great Reality or the astonishing kaleidoscopic universe as a Power greater than themselves.

Regardless of exactly how each of us defines our Higher Power, two suggested attributes of any Higher Power are that it is loving and caring. And this only makes sense. After all, why would we want to be guided by a power that didn't have our greatest welfare at heart? It was our misplaced faith in the belief that we were

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unworthy, that we were less than everyone else, that brought us into the program in the first place. Now, we have come to believe in a Power that loves and cares for us. We are worthy. We are imperfect. We are frightened much of the time. Nevertheless, we are accepted. We are loved and forgiven. We have come to believe.

We have found a Power we trust, a power that will restore us to sanity. Now the question is – just what is sanity? We have several sources to which we might look for guidance. The most obvious one is our sponsor. We chose our sponsor because he or she has what we want. And while we may think that what most attracted us to our sponsor was their status in the group, their years of sobriety, or their personal or business success, the greatest force pulling us toward our sponsor was his or her undeniable sense of calm.

While we may not yet exactly know what sanity looks and feels like, we certainly remember our experience with insanity. And with growing confidence, we embrace a brighter, more hopeful path, one that fills us with as much optimism as our old ways had burdened us with shame.

In our days of acting out, we went from one addictive hit to the next, often stopping only to fuel our bodies with just enough food and rest to allow us to act out again. In recovery, we are learning to take it easy. We are learning to do the next thing in front of us without the stress of contemplating all the things we have to do. We learn we can go slowly without feeling the stress of the world around us demanding results. We learn to look for balance and harmony. We learn to find serenity in small things. We feel free to start over whenever we need to.

What is most heartening is that we are realizing that our Higher Power – however we define it – has been with us all along, just waiting for us to be willing to allow Him, Her, It or Them to support us on our miraculous journey. Remember the countless times

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that the planets aligned just right to help us avoid a slip, make a meeting, support other addicts in their recovery or simply do the right thing? We've heard it said that, "A coincidence is just God's way of staying anonymous." Not coincidentally, the longer we are in recovery, the more coincidences we encounter. And the more we reflect upon it, the clearer the reason for our ever more frequent good fortunes becomes. We suddenly realize that our Higher Power is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

We now allow our Higher Power the opportunity to help us in ways that we could not, or would not, help ourselves. We remember that before we were in recovery we thought we had all the answers and knew what to do and the result was our addiction and the intense pain we caused to others and ourselves. Now, we allow our sponsor, program readings, the support of other addicts, and thoughtful prayer and meditation to offer new ways of thinking, of acting, and of being. We allow our Higher Power to direct us. We welcome the Great Mystery into our life.

It is with this realization, it is with the desire to fill our lives with the positive guidance provided by our Higher Power, that leads us to Step Three.

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## **Step 3: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.**

We admitted we were powerless and we could not manage our own lives. We came to believe that there is a Power — a power that is not me — that can give us back a life without addiction. We realized doing things our way had not ended up well. We found a Fellowship. We asked for help. What do we do next?

We could go back to our addiction — its pull remained strong — but despite any belief to the contrary, the consequences would be worse than those we had had before. We were no longer in control of the outcome of our actions — the illusion that we ever were had been abandoned. And even if we were not concerned with the consequences, the peace we had found in this Fellowship was something we really wanted to keep. We were no longer alone. We had been led to these rooms by a power greater than ourselves. There was a power that cared for us and somehow brought us here. There was a power that already intervened in our lives to get us to the Fellowship. Our understanding of this Higher Power was our own concern. It mattered not what religious affiliation we might have, or if we had no affiliation at all; it mattered not if our Higher Power was female or male, or one or many, or a concept such as the Fellowship. Many of us had strongly held allegiances to a formal religious organization, but many of us did not. It made no difference; we were bound together by our common disease and our common solution.

We realized that we can decide we want what those in the Fellowship have. We wanted what those folks — those folks we see at meetings — have: peace and serenity and spiritual presence. They seemed so calm, so centered, so aware. We found hope and peace in the rooms. We began to trust that a solution was available to us. We began to believe that there was a way out for us. We decided to turn our lives over to

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that solution. We made a commitment to work the rest of the Steps, to do the work, to practice the principles. We made a decision.

We were learning how to be honest with ourselves and others. We were learning to see. We were slowly developing healthy relationships with others inside and outside of the program and beginning to feel comfortable with who we were and with those around us who also had this disease. We were told to “keep coming back,” which was not something anyone, anywhere, had been eager to say to us before. With each meeting we attended, we felt more hope. We came to believe that there was a Higher Power that could help us, and now, in the rooms, we saw the evidence of that Power moving with and through people whose problems were like our own. We found a place where we could openly share our guilt, our shame and the feelings that had possessed us for so long. We found a place where we could talk openly about our acting in or acting out.

But meetings were not enough. The solution was a continual practice of the Steps. We hesitated. Did we have to turn over our entire life to this Higher Power? Could we just turn over the sex and love part and keep managing the rest? After all, the rest of our life was not in such awful condition. Well, at least not yet. We reflected on this monumental surrender. If we turned everything over to God, would we end up with no possessions, helping people in the desert or in the jungle? Would we still be able to go bowling? Finally, we realized the decision had been made for us. If we wanted a better life, we had no choice but to surrender entirely. We could not live as we had been any longer. We could not go back to our addiction. Our only choice was to move forward into recovery. As painful as it was, we realized that the solution had to come from outside our limited selves. We had to be humble, open-minded and willing. We were totally defeated. We were totally hollowed out.

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We made a commitment to do the next right thing and let go of the results. Letting go was hard; simple maybe, but not easy. It made no difference how much we read, how much we studied, how much we learned or even how much we talked about letting go. Recovery had nothing to do with figuring out our predicament or what got us here. We needed to let go of all these things. We needed to hold our hands out palm down, open up our fists, and drop the garbage. We needed to trust that the world was as it should be and that our Higher Power would guide the future. We needed to let the world be. We needed to put Step One into practice by accepting the reality around us and trusting the Higher Power we found in Step Two to show us the way. If we were to find the serenity and peace we saw around us, we had to turn over our control to a Higher Power.

We had come to believe that repeating the same behaviors and expecting different results was never going to work out for us. We had come to believe. Now the question was: Had we learned to trust our Higher Power? Trust was the fundamental question. Without trust, we could not let go, we could not commit, we could not turn over our thoughts and actions to a Higher Power. How could we trust our lives to a power that we could not fully comprehend? We found some way to make the leap. We renewed our trust, making that leap anew, over and over, every morning and throughout every day.

It was disturbing to realize that sex and the blind pursuit of love and approval were enmeshed in so many areas of our lives. And, on the flip side, for the anorexic, the denial of contact with others, the deprivation of the joy of companionship and the withdrawal from human involvement was entangled in every stratum of our existence. No bit of our life had escaped the contamination of our addiction. We feared intimacy, and it showed. We literally were possessed by our addiction on every level of our being. We had no choice but to surrender all of our life and our will to the care of our Higher Power.

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But we did have that choice to make: on the one hand, absolute surrender of every facet of our will and our life over to the care of our Higher Power, or, on the other hand, continue to deny, rationalize, control and eventually get pulled back into the insanity. We were taught growing up that surrender was for cowards and that we should fight back. Now we learned that surrender was the only successful strategy. We needed to change our attitudes as well as our actions. As painful as it was to face, we were powerless over our entire life. We realized that as addicts we could not manage our own life. We realized we had not grown up yet. Only our Higher Power could help, if we let that Higher Power in.

We were not passive. We took the action of letting go. We took refuge in our Higher Power, in our Fellowship and in recovery literature. We made the decision to work the rest of the Steps, certain that we would be aided in our recovery. We faced the reality that we did not have to recover alone; in fact, we could not recover by ourselves. We grasped that our life was beyond our self-centered control, but we still had choices to make. We used our will to let go, to surrender. We chose to put the care and control of our lives in the hands of our Higher Power. We chose to put all the little triggers and payoffs in the hands of someone or something else. We chose to put all the negative energy aside. We made room, little by little, for the positive power as it showed up in our lives.

Often, during the day, we took back control of our thoughts and actions. At first, these were subtle resumptptions of control over small things. We thought we had made some progress and could handle life. We tried again to manage our life on our own. We seemed to be cured. We began to rely more on self-propulsion. Before we knew it, we were in full relapse, acting out or acting in more severely than before.

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Despite renewed shame, we returned to the Fellowship, we went back to a meeting. We made the leap again. We turned over everything to some Higher Power who was loving and caring. We made progress. We stumbled into the future with our ego taking back control from time to time and then relinquishing it again. We avoided relapse. We repeated our attempts to manage and control. We let it go again. We repeated the back and forth with our Higher Power, as often as we needed. The exchange became a form of communication with God.

And we took action. We moved our feet. We moved forward. Unlike the Major League baseball player who, after coming back from drug rehabilitation, went up to bat for the first time and watched three perfect strikes whiz past him. In the dugout the manager asked, “What happened?” and the player responded, “I was waiting for God to tell me to swing....” No, we would not be passive. It was up to us to take the swing to the best of our ability; we left the results in God’s hands. We did not wait for God to tell us what to do. We had our recovery literature, and we had meetings. We had our Fellowship. Our instructions were simple: Don’t act out (or in), go to meetings, work with others, and practice the steps... Practice them again.

While the action of letting go seemed small, the effect was immense. We began to focus more on what we could add to a situation, how we could help. And we stopped thinking in terms of what we could get out of each situation. We eventually even thought about what we could bring to a meeting rather than what we could take from it. We began to think in terms of how we could help another addict instead of only how the Fellowship could help us. We took the action of deciding to work the program, completing the work of Step Three. Now we were faced with more action.

In our recovery each new day brought new challenges. Everything changed. Our completion of Step Three one day only meant we needed to work it again the next. We woke up each morning faced with a decision. We once again committed to recovery.

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We asked for help. We meditated and prayed as best we could. We asked for help to focus our thoughts on having a simple attitude. We admitted that we were powerless, that we could not manage our own lives, that there was a Power that would care for us, and we committed to following the suggestions laid out in our program of recovery.

We made a decision. Our intentions were clear. We would practice Step Three on a daily basis and begin our work on the remaining Steps starting with Step Four.

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## **Step Four: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**

In the first three Steps, we faced our reality. We began to develop an attitude of humility, admitting that we could not manage our own lives, but that a power greater than ourselves could. We made a commitment to recovery. Now, in Step Four, we dug deeper. We sought to discover the causes and conditions that led us to our addiction, that prevented us from recovery, and the tools we could carry with us to lead us out.

We were addicted. Hopeless, but not helpless. We were told there was a solution. Old Timers told us this Step provides relief. We had to be thorough. We became willing. Willingness was the key to a fearless look into our past. Until now we had hidden our heads in the sand when forced to look at our own behavior. Unless we wanted to go on living exactly as we had been — living a life filled with misery and despair — we had to make a beginning. With the help of our friends in recovery and our Higher Power, we started. However tenuously, we began to write.

We made a decision, a commitment, in Step Three to be willing to work the following Steps. It was an opening up to a Higher Power. Getting started, we may have felt dread, confusion, fear and anxiety. Step Four appeared overwhelming, confusing. There were so many different ways to work this Step, and a number of good templates to choose from. Step 4 needed to be written. We worked with our sponsor. We chose a method, a framework to use for the inventory. It didn't matter which method as long as we got started. We jumped in. If we were afraid, we asked for help. We started writing with whatever courage we could rally. We had doubts, but we continued to write.

We checked in with our sponsor and other program friends regularly. Working with a sponsor was critical for this Step and, frankly, for all of the Steps. As we went through our day, we thought of things that we needed to inventory. We spent more time writing. When we came to something we had hoped would never see the light of day, we asked ourselves how free we wanted to be. We wrote it down.

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To start, perhaps we focused on one relationship. We wrote down the name of that girl or boy from school. Or we started with our family. We wrote down our father, mother, or siblings. We listed some names and what they had done to us. Or we organized our Fourth Step around categories of behavior — for example, lies we had told; secrets we had kept. We talked to our sponsor and other program friends.

Many of us suffered from perfectionism. So, we decided not to worry about how flawed our first attempt might be. To inventory is simply to make a list. We looked to inventory some of our glaring handicaps, our failings. We made a list of, for example, our resentments, our fears, and our harmful behaviors. Or, we made a list of how we had failed to live up to the spiritual tenets of our faith. Or, we made a list of our troubling emotions — for example, fear, loneliness, self-pity, shame, anxiety, jealousy. We made a list of the sex behaviors that had caused us trouble. We realized our inventory would not be perfect, and we pressed on. While sex and love were our main problems, we did not neglect to inventory our financial failings, our aggressive behaviors, our avoidance techniques.

Avoiding perfectionism, we balanced our inventory with our assets as well as our defects. No inventory is complete without noting the positives as well as the negatives. We listed our positive attributes, perhaps noting specific instances when we were living up to our highest ideals. These positive attributes and actions were important to help provide a complete and balanced inventory of who we were.

Our inventory includes what we had done and what had been done to us. In some situations we had no part at all, but we were harmed. We listed those things, perhaps unforgivable, that were done to us and that we had been carrying around in our head. We realized that we were continuing to hurt ourselves by hanging on to this anger and resentment. We had to be rid of this poison or it would kill us. The original act that hurt us might have been hard to forgive. Nevertheless, for our own peace of mind, we needed to stop turning the event over in our memory again and again, which

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only repeated the injury. We needed to let go of what was done to us. So we wrote it down. This was a beginning toward forgiveness. Forgiveness did not mean approval. Rather, it meant letting go of resentments — resentments we had carried around to our detriment for years. Resentments had poisoned our souls. We acted out over them. They tainted our world: everything we said, thought and did. Everyone we came across, all of them; all of our relationships were warped by our resentments. The disease of our soul found temporary release in our old friend — sex and love addiction. But only for a while, and then its soul-crushing devastation took over again. This was why we were here, why we must work the Steps, and why we must work a Fourth Step. We uncovered our part which was hanging on to the resentments.

We began to realize that our problem was our inability to form a true relationship with another human being. At work, at play, at home, we continually failed to be a partner. Our egos, our self-centeredness, prevented healthy human connection. We finally understood that we needed to change. We understood we were finally on the right path. We began to see how we inflicted emotional pain in order to meet our own selfish needs, We unmasked our self-delusion, we identified our self-centeredness we added these to our list.

At times we got caught up in shame as we described our past behaviors. While relief and liberation were close at hand, the pain of our memories may have caused us to hesitate. We were in danger at this point. We called someone. We stayed in close contact with our sponsor and the Fellowship. It was important to press on. We attended as many meetings as possible. We stayed centered and maintained our willingness and hope.

We saw how fear had driven our behaviors. Underlying every dishonest statement, every secret, every emotional outburst, every act of avoidance, there was fear. We had been afraid of life. We were afraid of failure. We were afraid of success. As we assembled our inventory, these insights into our makeup became clear.

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We saw how shame had shaped us. Shame and fear were tightly linked. Shame includes embarrassment and guilt. We were afraid that we would be ridiculed. We were afraid we would be excluded. We saw that shame brought us to despair. At times the feeling of shame was so profound that we were desperate. We would do anything to escape despair. We saw that we were driven by fear to cover up our shame. We saw how shame and fear drove our addiction. As we inventoried our behaviors, we also saw that shame was a waste of time. It was another detour that prevented us from living a contented and useful life. We brought our painful burdens into the light. Ultimately, we released our shame by becoming aware of it through the inventory process.

We saw how our dishonesty had not only sabotaged our relationships with others, but wounded us as well. We prayed for honesty and more honesty. We saw how truthfulness led to acceptance. We saw that integrity was the basis of sanity. We recorded our dishonest behaviors. We became dependable and trustworthy by doing our Fourth Step. We were rigorous about listing all of our behaviors no matter how painful they were to contemplate.

At the same time, however, we quit beating ourselves up. We realized we were not our disease. We began to let go of shame, guilt and remorse. We began healing. Truthfulness became an urgent goal. We remembered to list our positive traits. We learned we were driven by a disease — we were human beings, frightened and self-centered. We gained a renewed dignity, no more nor less than any other human being. We were free to love others. We saw that at times we could be honest and helpful, not self-centered. We were worthy. We realized we were sick people who sometimes behaved badly. We were not bad people.

We had found our way back into the light. But we could not stop here. It would be dangerous to stop here. We needed to keep growing. We would make amends to ourselves and others by working the remaining Steps and by making sobriety our number one priority. We needed to expand the spiritual connection that we had

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started. We needed to practice the rest of the Steps.

The most important thing was that we kept moving forward; we kept working the program — no matter what. We kept building this list, this inventory. When we had our most obvious problems captured — and we had acknowledged our positive traits — we were ready to share. We needed to move on to Step Five.

We trusted our Higher Power to manage our life, *all* of our life. We had committed to turning our thoughts and our actions over to our Higher Power.

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## **Tradition One: Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon S.L.A.A. unity.**

Our challenge is how to maintain, how to preserve and how to grow the Fellowship of sex and love addicts we know as S.L.A.A. We are a society of human beings with a common illness and a common solution. As human beings — fearful, self-centered, imperfect — our natural tendency is to split apart. In general, the pursuit of prestige, power and wealth characterize our behavior. This Tradition guides us in a different direction.

Group unity is required for our individual recovery. Without the Fellowship, most of us would be unable to get sober; without the Fellowship, most of us would be unable to stay sober. Without sobriety, we lose our lives. Without the Fellowship, most of us would tumble into that darkness and despair we were so happy to escape from not so long ago. Without the Fellowship, those still mastered by the addiction would not have a lifeline, would not have a way out.

The first word of the First Step is *We*. I cannot stay sober by myself, but *we* can. If the *We* of the Fellowship is lost, so am I. We often hear that sobriety always has to be our first priority, in every situation, but it is actually our common welfare, our common daily striving toward sobriety, that is our first priority. We must relinquish our own self-centered goals for the sake of the group. Without the group, our individual sobriety is at risk.

Our Fellowship gave us a new life. We make a commitment to S.L.A.A., to the members of our Fellowship. We place the health of our Fellowship ahead of our individual needs and wants. The survival of our Fellowship is essential to recovery. Alone we cannot recover, but as a group we can. And so, we sacrifice our self-centered goals in favor of the group, as expressed by our group conscience.

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The Traditions demand self-sacrifice. We are asked to put aside our egos for the sake of the community. We put aside our desires in order to happily live and work together. No surrender is too great for the preservation of our society. Unity is preeminent. Without our Fellowship, we will surely fall back into shame, isolation and despair. By caring for the well-being of all sex and/or love addicts, by having less judgment and more compassion for each individual member of our society, we are actually caring for ourselves.

From time to time, for any number of reasons, our meetings need to find new locations. I may prefer to find a space that is more convenient for me, closer to where I live and with more parking. I state my preference but listen to the rest of the group. Others bring up health issues and cost issues. For others there is a site closer to their work or home. What is the best solution for this meeting, this group? What is best for the majority of group members? I don't have to take care of the group at my own personal expense, but neither do I take care of myself at the expense of the group. We come to a mutually acceptable solution.

Tradition One is about commitment. Instead of a focus on increasing our individual reputation, or power, or self-satisfaction, we commit ourselves to focusing on maintaining the health of our Society. Harmoniously living and working in groups are not natural skills for us. We have never felt comfortable with the word or the idea of commitment. But now we see that we cannot survive on our own. We need the group. While we never muzzle our thoughts or our beliefs, we do submit to the decisions the group makes. We engage in open discussion and debate, but after thorough airing of issues we accept the opinions and actions of our groups. We commit to the success of the Fellowship.

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Unity does not mean uniformity. The flexibility of the individual within our Fellowship is cherished. We insist on the freedom of each member to work the Steps and the Traditions to the best of his or her ability and understanding. We insist on the autonomy of each group. Every member of S.L.A.A. has the right to say, think and act as he or she wishes. Every group has that same freedom. We do not prescribe or proscribe. We encourage discussion. Disagreement can be widespread, but after discussion, no matter how long it may take, we, as a Fellowship, will come to agreement and action.

Our common well-being is possible only if we are unified as a Fellowship. As a Fellowship, we have one purpose and we avoid outside issues. But we are also concerned with each member's personal welfare. Without a solid focus on the sobriety and welfare of each individual member, we could not adequately nurture the health and security of our community. Within S.L.A.A., individual freedom is cherished. We make no rules nor do we insist on any particular beliefs. The prosperity of our Society is strengthened when each member is free to think and act as he or she thinks best. We have no authority over our members. Our disease is the authority that will kill us if we ignore these instructions.

Our first priority is to stay sober. We stay sober by trusting in a Higher Power. We stay sober by realizing the Fellowship, the collection of recovering addicts, is more important than any individual addict. Our first priority, then, is the active guardianship of our Society. By focusing on the health and fortune of S.L.A.A., we provide each individual, including ourselves, the chance to recover. The paradox is that we focus on the group in order to protect the individual. We are able to stay happily sober when we admit our own defeat, trust in our Higher Power and attend to the support of the society of sex and/or love addicts. Affirming the Fellowship as a daily practice is part of our spiritual practice. Our spiritual life includes those who are traveling the road of

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recovery with us. Our first priority is the mutual well-being of our Society; it is what comes first.

We are no longer alone. We are united in a common focus: dealing with our addictive sexual and emotional behavior. We have found a common denominator in our obsessive/compulsive patterns, which transcends any personal differences. We cherish and protect personal differences. We protect the rights of the individual. We honor personal welfare as much as we honor our common welfare. Within our Fellowship, we are provided the tools of recovery. We are a unified Society reaching out to help the next addict, thereby preserving our own recovery. We are committed to helping all sex and/or love addicts.

The effectiveness of our program, if it is to continue, depends on group unity. Only a few decades ago, there was no remedy for our disease. With our Higher Power's guidance, and conscientious practice of our Steps and Traditions, our program will be available for the time to come; our Fellowship will remain whole; it will continue to be a lifeline for the addict wishing to recover.

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**Tradition Two: For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as this Power may be expressed through our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.**

Who's in charge here? The answer is clear and precise: our Higher Power as expressed by our group conscience.

Our leaders at all levels are servants who do the chores, not bosses who direct the operation. We do not have a government. No one gives orders. We have a service organization, a hierarchy, to support our Fellowship. We turn to the consciousness, expressed by democratic action, by majority vote and extended discussion, of the entire Fellowship for the decisions to maintain and grow our Fellowship.

The old saying rings true for us: *Leaders should be on tap, not on top.*

The Traditions are characterized by self-sacrifice, by humility and by letting go. We are guided by a power greater than our individual selves. And yet there is work to be done to keep the Fellowship operating. Who decides which work takes priority? Who decides how our meager financial resources are used? Who directs the volunteer efforts needed to do things to support our Fellowship — for example, how does this collection of essays on the Steps, Traditions and Concepts get written, come together and get published? These questions are answered in the following Traditions.

The point here is that we do not have a director or a leader who tells us what to do. We are not governed. We live the principles of the Steps, as we each practice them, and they guide our behavior. The Traditions will provide us with a path of working together in unity. We trust that the spirit and practice of equality will guide our decisions. We believe that, even as we make mistakes, we will be guided by a Spirit of the Universe that will ultimately lead us to unity in our recovery. Our goal is to help sex

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and love addicts recover and each one of us grow in recovery. After all, this disease is fatal if left unchecked. We have a responsibility to share the solution that has been shared with us, the solution of the Steps and Traditions. We can only do that if we are in *Fellowship*.

We have endless gratitude for those who do the chores to keep our Fellowship functioning. In addition, we cherish the example of those who have many twenty-four hours in our program and provide real examples by the way they live the program day by day — those are our true leaders.

Elsewhere in this volume [on page xx], you will find the upside-down triangle that describes how we are organized for service. The highest level is the individual meeting. Each meeting elects a chairperson, a secretary, a treasurer or similar roles plus a representative to the Intergroup or the Conference. These folks, our officers, are not our leaders; they are our servants. We trust them to fulfill their roles, and we show our appreciation. They believe in the Fellowship and donate their time, intelligence and effort to help keep things running.

The same is true for lower (not higher) levels of service: the Intergroup, the Conference, the Conference Committees, the Board of Trustees. These are our servants, not our leaders. We trust them to make decisions, using democratic practices, to serve the health of the Fellowship.

To make it all work, volunteers step up to take on service roles. We believe in those volunteers. We call them “trusted servants,” and each of those two words carries heavy meaning. All of us are expected to be mindful of the faith that the Fellowship bestows on each of its members. And each of us, as members of this Fellowship, is responsible for honoring that conviction. We are all representatives of the principles of our Fellowship. We serve, and we are trusted. We trust, and we are served.

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We are reminded from time to time that we are in a life or death situation. The disease of sex and love addiction, if left unchecked, can steal away the worthwhile hours of our lives, drive us to prison or suicide, and eliminate togetherness and friendship from the hours of our days. We have found a way out and have an intense interest in the survival of the Fellowship that supports our well-being.

In Tradition One, we made a commitment to the program and to our Fellowship. In Tradition Two, we trust that our Higher Power will nourish and grow our Society. The guidance we receive comes from our Higher Power. With patience and tolerance we do the footwork, expecting little other than the satisfaction of providing service to those who are suffering from this disease. We get out of ourselves when we provide service to the Fellowship.

We have many tools to help us stay sober. Our slogans, often corny but always appropriate, keep us sober. One favorite: "Anything worth doing is worth doing slow." How unlike the world we live in! Our program is often the reverse of what we see at our jobs, on the news, even in our homes. This is not modern, everyday life in which we need to increase the speed, increase the customer satisfaction, increase the profit. We are, instead, in the Fellowship of S.L.A.A., living on a spiritual path, trusting our Higher Power. Our process is slow; it is representational. We believe that ultimately, through democratic process and ample discussion, our Higher Power will guide us to the decisions that will maintain and grow a vibrant Fellowship.

And while this is a selfish program — we work it to find peace of mind, satisfaction and a contented, useful life — it only works if we are unselfish. It is unlike the world outside where each individual is driven by self-interest. Instead, with Tradition Two as our guide, we are driven by a God-interest. No matter how we individually view our Higher Power, we are willing to sacrifice what we want, for what is

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best for the Fellowship. We take part in discussion and debate, often vigorous debate, in order to find a common ground to protect and grow our Society.

We are living on a spiritual plane, and therefore, we trust that our Higher Power will take care of the results, will guide us, will guide our servants ... to make the best decisions for the continued existence and unity of our fellowship.