



March/April 2019

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Defining My Sobriety

My first introduction to defining sobriety was through the Three Circles. I was taught to put my behaviors into three lists:

- Inner Circle or acting-out behaviors. These behaviors violate my own boundaries. They are not the kind of person I want to be.
- Middle Circle or slippery slope behaviors. These are behaviors that will lead to Inner Circle behaviors if I don't catch myself.
- Outer Circle or healthy behaviors. This circle includes behaviors that maintain my sobriety. It also includes behaviors that represent my ideals for myself and for who I want to be in the world.

When I filled out the circles, my outer circle included friendships, exercise, healthy eating, regularly attending my COSA meeting, Step work, and spiritual practices, among other things. All of these are vitally important to my sobriety. If I stay in these activities, and out of my inner circle, I stay sober. Right? Easy?

Well, making the lists was the right thing to do, and it was relatively easy—much easier than living out my sobriety! I quickly ran into a problem. I just can't keep all of these going at 100%. I can't always be going to meetings, getting exercise, doing Step work, etc. I need to keep my job, and I would never be able to sleep! (Sleep is in my outer circle too.) In fact, most days, I have to pick and choose. Over time, the key to sobriety has been less about the specific activities and more about prioritizing what I need to focus on.

That is why I'm a big fan of the slogan, "do the next right thing." To me, this slogan is a way of focusing my thinking. For instance, some days after work, I'm tired and I don't want to do anything, but I know that I should get some exercise, so I do and I feel better. But what about days when I'm tired and resentful? Maybe I need to talk to someone and then get some exercise, or focus on my Step work, or meditate.

I do not think I was ever this aware of my own needs before recovery. Now that I am aware of my needs, I can address them when they are small and manageable. For instance, I may get tired, but I rarely end up exhausted. I may be frustrated with my friends, but those frustrations don't threaten the friendships.

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I want to finish with two examples in my life where “the next right thing” is guiding my thinking. They capture two different aspects of my sobriety.

The Next Right Thing in Grad School

I am in a graduate program. I am finalizing my dissertation. In my program, everyone is told, “the best dissertation is a done dissertation.” But, of course, all of us want to have the perfect dissertation. I always want to read another article, understand another theory, or update some statistics I’m quoting. All of these are good practices. In fact, in my program, I’ve spent years doing them and being rewarded for doing them. For much of my graduate school experience, the next right thing has been to read article after article after article after article.

However, at this point, I need to focus on editing and finalizing my document. Adding new material will actually set me back. Each time I’m tempted to add to my dissertation, I remind myself, “next right thing.” I think of my goal and then think of what will get me closer to that goal. Most often, that means accepting that my dissertation will be imperfect or incomplete. Then, I work on editing what I have already written, because that is the next right thing.

The Next Right Thing before Surgery

I am planning to have jaw surgery soon, and I am wondering what that recovery will be like. I have eight years of COSA recovery, which feels like a good base, but surgery is a completely new thing for me. For several weeks after surgery, my life will look rather different. My diet will be restricted to liquids and very soft foods. I’m told that learning to eat again is a process in itself. I’ll have very little energy.

I have been worrying about how to handle all of these changes. In addition, I worry because this will be my first surgery and I wonder what will happen. But, when I catch myself worrying, I go back to “next right thing.” In this case, there are things I can do. I’m stocking up on soft and liquid foods. I’m planning what time to take off from work. I’m asking friends to help. Worrying is never “the next right thing” for me to do. When I find myself worrying, I go back to figuring out the next right thing.

I decided to write this piece because I wanted to think and meditate on my own definition of sobriety. I realize now that I set out to write about “defining my sobriety,” and in essence, I wrote that I’m constantly defining my sobriety. Going back to the circles, I can see how this approach helps me stay in my outer circle. I realized that I don’t really think about my inner and middle circles as much as I used to. I’m so focused on the outer circle!

~Sara L., St. Paul, MN



BY THE FELLOWSHIP FOR THE FELLOWSHIP

We encourage every group, intergroup and member to submit articles that share your ESH (experience, strength, and hope). Also, articles and announcements that share up-coming COSA events in your area; such as retreats, workshops, speakers, etc. We also would love to hear your ideas for what you would like to see in future articles. The *Balance* is a newsletter for the membership, by the membership.

Guidelines for Submitting Literature: http://cosa-recovery.org/PDF/lit_guidelines.pdf

Please send your articles to COSACopy@yahoo.com

or by mail to: ISO of COSA, Central Office, 9219 Katy Freeway, Suite 212, Houston, TX 77024 U.S.A.

Phone: 866-899-2672 E-mail: info@cosa-recovery.org

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Letter from the Chair

Dear fellow COSAs,

Momentum is gathering for our **United We Are Strong** convention in Houston! The Convention Committee is making their finishing touches toward creating a wonderful weekend of recovery and fellowship during Memorial Day weekend, May 25th through 27th. You'll hear speakers, workshops, and panel discussions in our shared COSA voice. You'll gather new insights and ideas as COSAs from all over share their experience, strength, and hope.

In addition to the convention, the Annual Delegate Meeting will be held on Friday, May 24th. Delegates from many regions across the fellowship will gather to share their meeting's collective voice and group conscience to chart our course for 2019–2020. This year, the delegates will be voting on nine proposed chapters of our basic text. Yes, NINE! Very shortly those proposed chapters will be posted on the COSA website on the Delegate Information page. I've had a sneak peek and I personally loved the writing and fellowship feedback that has been incorporated into them. The writing resonated with me and deeply moved me. I hope you'll take some time to read them once they're up on the website.

If you haven't yet been to a COSA convention, please consider attending this year. The gifts of recovery, fellowship, and friendship are phenomenal. Come and meet new COSA friends and reconnect with others. For me, the convention is a spiritual slingshot that launches me to greater places in my recovery. It's not too late to register. I hope to see you in Houston!

With a joyful heart,

Sandy S.

International Service Organization of COSA Board Chair

ISO of COSA Diversity Statement

- COSA Diversity is consistent with the Third Tradition of COSA, which states that the only requirement for COSA membership is that our lives have been affected by compulsive sexual behavior.
- The COSA Fellowship welcomes all genders, all varieties of relationship to the addict, all religious and spiritual preferences, all employment statuses, all marital statuses, all ethnicities, cultures, and languages. COSA does not discriminate on the basis of class, sexual orientation or gender identification, physical or mental challenges, race, financial status, or national origins.
- In COSA, we find hope whether or not there is a sexually addicted person currently in our lives.
- COSA Diversity is consistent with the First Tradition of COSA, which states that our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on COSA unity.

2019 ISO of COSA International Convention



The Méridien Hotel
Memorial Day Weekend
May 24-27, 2019

How to register:

COSA's annual convention on May 24 - 27 in Houston, Texas, is fast approaching. You can still register for the convention at [COSA Convention Information Page](#). The earlier you register, the more you'll save. Commit to your recovery and save money at the same time? Awesome! At \$185 for the whole convention, that comes out to about \$5.29 per hour of learning, growing and fellowship, plus a lunch AND a dinner banquet! If you are flying, making plans earlier usually mean finding cheaper flights too.

- Early Bird registration: \$185, includes Saturday COSA luncheon and Sunday COSA banquet, ends March 15
- Preregistration: \$195, includes Saturday COSA luncheon and Sunday COSA banquet, ends April 29
- Regular registration: \$100, NO meals, online ends May 15, walk-ins through May 24

Additional meals for guests can also be purchased:

- Saturday COSA luncheon with speaker: \$55, must be ordered and paid for by April 25
- Sunday COSA banquet with speakers: \$80, must be ordered and paid for by April 25

The convention will be at the beautiful Le Meridien Hotel. There are a limited number of rooms at the discounted convention rate of \$149 + tax (king or two queen) per night. You can reserve your room at [COSA Convention Information Page](#) but only until April 21. After that, rooms will be at the hotel's regular price and availability will be limited.

What is offered:

Opportunities at the convention include a multitude of workshops, Twelve Step meetings, outer-circle fellowships (including a trip to the Kemah Boardwalk and to NASA Space Center Houston), craft stations, shared meals, speakers, a hospitality room, a quiet room, movement classes and, best of all, COSA members. More information about convention speakers, workshops and panels will be posted on the Convention portion of the [COSA Convention Information Page](#) website and shared in fellowship emails as they become available.

How to give support to the convention:

Whether you are able to attend in person or not, you can support the COSA program, the convention, and the personal growth of fellow COSAs through your contributions of service, material items, or monetary donations.

- **Service:** Volunteer positions to help the Convention run smoothly are available for COSAs (attending and not attending). Just ask what you can do by e-mailing: conventionvolunteers@cosa-recovery.org
- **Service:** Panel discussions need participants. This is an easy way to participate in a workshop while enhancing the Experience, Strength, and Hope of the session. Please consider checking Yes to the panel participant question on the Convention Registration form. There is more information in a separate Panel Participation article in this month's Balance.
- **Material items:** The Silent Auction and the Serenity Store raise seed money for the following year's convention. COSAs donate recovery books, CDs, DVDs, original artwork, jewelry, clothes, items for the home, services such as photography or life coaching, restaurant coupons, and experiences such

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as a spa packages or timeshare vacation slots. Even gently used items can be just what someone else wants. Items should be reasonably sized and of good quality. You can bring your donation with you or (preferably) ship it to arrive by May 21. For the mailing address or questions, contact: silentauction@cosa-recovery.org.

- **Monetary donation:** Individuals and groups can donate to the Convention Scholarship Fund using the online registration form on the convention website: [COSA Convention Registration Page](#). All donations to COSA are tax deductible.

How to get support from the convention:

There are many ways to help an attendee's comfort level and financial needs from monetary help to mentors to roommate matching. These options can be requested on your registration form or via email.

- **Monetary:** Scholarships to help defray the convention registration fee are available. Scholarship recipients must volunteer for at least four hours of service work at the convention and pay a small fee. Scholarships are awarded on a first come, first served basis.
- **Convention mentors:** To ease any nerves, especially for a new attendee, a convention mentor can be requested on the registration form.
- **Roommate match:** Sharing a room is always an option to help with hotel costs. You can ask for help finding a roommate by emailing roommate@cosa-recovery.org.

What the hotel has to offer:

Le Meridien Hotel is a fantastic, newly redesigned, just right-sized hotel in the heart of Houston's cultural center. Reservations can be made at [COSA Convention Information Page](#) for a king or two queens at \$149 per night, but only until April 21. There are a limited number of rooms at the discounted rate. Rooms include free in-room Wi-Fi, mini fridge, and free access to Houston museums for a week with a room key.

Le Meridien Hotel is a six-minute walk to the Marriott hotel hosting the SAA meeting and to many restaurants and cultural activities. Attendees also have the use of a free shuttle to the Marriott and a multitude of local museums, fine arts, cultural events, parks, and restaurants. Le Meridien also has an excellent in-house restaurant, a good gym, beautiful rooms, and a deck lounge with a perfect view of the downtown Houston skyline. There is also a Houston rail and bus transportation system with easy access from the hotel with info at <https://mobile.ridemetro.org>.

What Houston has to offer:

Where to begin? Houstonians are quite proud of their city. Houston is the most diverse city in the U.S. and the country's fourth largest city. As a result, you can find pretty much anything you're looking for. For a focus on Houston attractions and activities, please visit the Local Area Information tab on the COSA convention website at [Houston Local Area Information](#).

How to get there:

Houston has two major airports: Hobby and IAH, both are roughly the same distance from the hotel. <https://www.fly2houston.com> is an excellent resource for flight information. More information about transportation can be found at <http://cosa-recovery.org/2019/GroundTransportation.html>.

Questions?

Email convention@cosa-recovery.org. You can also go to the [COSA website](#) main page main page and click on the "United We Are Strong" logo at the top right, or go directly to [COSA Convention Information Page](#) and browse the page and the drop down items.

The Convention is a wonderful chance to meet other COSAs from around the country and world, strengthen our bonds and deepen our recovery. We hope to see you there!

COSA Convention Spotlight:

Panels need your ESH!



Panel conversations are one of the best ways to share Experience, Strength, and Hope (ESH). Better yet, very little preparation is needed because the ESH of the members is the focus.

This year, the Program Committee is presenting several panels. If any of these are something you have ESH to share on, please consider serving on a panel or being a leader for the panel. Being a leader simply means introducing the panel and keeping the conversations on task and on time. Conversation stems are listed below, and you can add your own as the conversation progresses. You can also be a panel member. Being a member simply means you are willing to share your ESH on the topic.

The Panels presented by the Program Committee, along with the direction for each conversation are:

DIVERSITY IN COSA RECOVERY

- We are a diverse group and welcome all genders, varieties of relationships, religions and spiritual preferences.
- Statuses: single, married, all relationship statuses and economic incomes- we are all affected.
- We learn from each other regardless of ethnicity, culture, language, or physical or mental challenges.
- Acceptance in COSA.

THE DECISION TO SEPARATE – IN MARRIAGE, WITH A PARTNER, OR FROM FAMILY MEMBERS OR FRIENDS

- The outcome of separation, whether temporary or longer.
- What we learned as individuals and in our relationships.
- What changed, what improved.
- Focusing or refocusing on your personal recovery.
- Practicing self-care.
- Being supportive but not controlling or responsible for another's recovery.

SELF-CARE AFTER RELAPSE

- What are my needs in order to feel safe?
- What are my needs in order for us to stay in the same house?
- Clarifying, reviewing, and re-establishing my boundaries.
- Asking for an action plan - it's about safety.
- Technology boundaries.
- Broken trust - what needs to change?
- Re-energizing my personal recovery.

WORKING WITH THE NEWCOMER: GUIDANCE IN PREPARING A LIST OF NEEDS AND BOUNDARIES AFTER DISCOVERY

- Helping the newcomer understand what boundaries are.
- Working with the newcomer to establish boundaries, when they are ready.
- Showing them simple tools of the program, to get them through each day.
- Sharing your own personal experience, strength and hope.
- Helping the newcomer to define for themselves what it means to feel safe.
- Explaining physical or sexual boundaries, if it would be helpful.
- Encouraging words, recommended readings, etc.

COSA/SAA COUPLES - Recovering couples share their experience, strength, and hope about being involved in their meetings and how this recovery has helped them both individually and as a couple.

- The benefits of sharing of ES&H with other couples
- Out of isolation as a couple, help from others in similar situations.
- Working with a sponsor couple.
- Learning new ways to communicate.
- Understanding our partners pain or anxiety like never before.
- Progress not perfection.
- Please contact the program committee at programcommittee@cosa-recovery.org with any questions or to offer your ESH as a panel member or leader. Thank you!



Can you donate a gift certificate, item or basket for our upcoming COSA convention silent auction?

Any donations of time, talent or treasure are welcome!

Popular items from past years include:

Artwork: paintings,
needlework, photography,
crafts

Scarves

Plants

Electronics

Themed Gift Baskets

Books/CDs/DVDs

Gift Certificates

Journals, notepads

Jewelry

Housewares

Personal Services:

massage, hair stylist

Please email descriptions and the estimated value of your donations by Tuesday, May 21, 2019, to silentauction@cosa-recovery.org. Donations may be shipped early (our preference) or dropped off at the Serenity Store upon your arrival at the convention.

Please contact us via email for the shipping address.

All proceeds benefit the ISO of COSA

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!



REGISTRATION Convention

(click [here](#) to download printable form)

2019 ISO of COSA Annual Convention
Le Méridien Hotel
 1121 Walker St., Houston, TX 77002
Memorial Day Weekend May 24-27, 2019

Please complete the following:

Name _____

City, State/Country _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Name tag (suggested format is first name, last initial, city, state, country (if outside U.S.):

Convention Registration Fees

Full Registration Fees (Friday, May 24 - Monday, May 27, 2019)

- ☐ Early Bird registration (ends March 15, 2019) (Sat. lunch & Sun. dinner included) \$185
- ☐ Online pre-registration (March 16, 2019 – April 29, 2019) (Sat. lunch & Sun. dinner included)..... \$195
- ☐ Regular registration (online by May 15 or walk in for the entire weekend (no meals)..... \$100

Day Rates

- ☐ Early registration Saturday day rate by April 29, 2019 (includes Saturday lunch)..... \$105
- ☐ Early registration Sunday day rate by April 29, 2019 (includes Sunday dinner)..... \$130
- ☐ On-site registration Saturday day rate (no meals included)\$50
- ☐ On-site registration Sunday day rate (no meals included)\$50

Meals must be ordered and paid by April 25, 2019

- ☐ Saturday luncheon with speaker (for each additional guest).....\$55
- ☐ Sunday dinner with speaker (for each additional guest)\$80

Indicate special dietary restrictions/preferences:

- ☐ Vegan ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Gluten-free ☐ Dairy-free ☐ Sugar-free ☐ Kosher

Scholarship Donation: My donation to the scholarship fund \$.....

Care & Support for Attendees

- ☐ I am a first-time COSA convention attendee.
- ☐ I would like a "Convention Mentor" to support me at the convention.
- ☐ I would like a temporary sponsor at the convention.
- ☐ I will be a "Convention Mentor" to first-time convention COSA attendees.
- ☐ I will be a temporary sponsor for returning convention COSA attendees.

Additional Information

- ☐ I am a delegate for my home fellowship (***please note, delegate registration is done separately***).
- ☐ I attend teleconference/telephone meetings (a phone icon will be included on your badge).
- ☐ I attend online meetings (a computer icon will be included on your badge).

I will volunteer to (shift lengths will vary):

- ☐ Work the registration table
- ☐ Work during the Delegate Meeting (Friday only) as a Zoom volunteer
- ☐ Lead a COSA Twelve Step meeting (materials will be provided)
- ☐ Work in the Silent Auction/Convention Store
- ☐ Work in the ISO Bookstore
- ☐ Be a Room Host (includes doing the recording of workshops)
- ☐ Work in the Hospitality Suite, where food and drink will be available
- ☐ Help with the Silent Auction before the Convention
- ☐ Help on the Care & Support team
- ☐ Help with scheduling other volunteers
- ☐ Help decorate the COSA Banquet Room (Sunday night)

Workshop and Panel Participation (if checked, someone from the Program Committee will contact you)

- ☐ I am willing to be on a panel or workshop.
- ☐ I am willing to organize a panel or workshop.

Arrival Date: _____ Departure Date: _____

THE ISO of COSA Annual Convention is a 100% volunteer effort and we need your help!

Silent Auction Donation: I will donate to the Silent Auction (someone will contact you with further details)

Yes _____ No _____ **Payment** (required at time of registration) amount enclosed \$ _____

If you are requesting a service scholarship, please complete the following:

- ☐ I am requesting a service scholarship.
- ☐ I acknowledge that as a service scholarship recipient I am to pay the \$50 administrative fee (\$25 is non-refundable if cancelled after May 10, 2019) and volunteer for a minimum of four hours at the convention.

Complete this form and send with check or money order in \$U.S. payable to ISO of COSA

ISO of COSA - Convention Registration
9219 Katy Freeway, Suite 212
Houston, TX 77024

Registration Online Go to www.cosa-recovery.org/2019 payment by credit card only (via website interface)

STEP 1·2·3·4·5·6·7·8·9·10·11·12

MADE A DECISION TO TURN OUR WILL AND OUR LIVES OVER TO THE CARE OF GOD AS WE UNDERSTOOD GOD.

In times of strife, it is extremely challenging to remember that I decided to turn my will and life over to the care of God. It's difficult because oftentimes I don't catch myself in the moment trying to control things. Leaving my will to a Higher Power can feel like throwing away or abandoning all my hopes and dreams. But by working the Steps, I later learned that it's more like simply letting go of attachment to the outcomes.

I came to understand that the process of "turning my will and life over" isn't something I just "do." It's something I experience and apply daily in all aspects of my life. Sometimes it's easy and sometimes it's hard. It can't be rushed, pushed, or forced. But it can, for certain, begin, after I take that first step. And then the second. And then the third. And keep walking forward. Step by step. Day by day. I move forward courageously—I am not used to letting go of my perceived control over life.

It means trusting. Just like knowing the feeling of warmth by experiencing cold, I must learn trust by experiencing deceit. Sometimes life's greatest blessings are life's toughest lessons, and without them I would not be where I am or who I am, or have what I have.

To me, "turning my will and my life over to the care of my Higher Power" means trusting that life isn't happening to me, but for me, and that it's OK to let go of the desire to only feel "warm" and just allow it to be cold sometimes.

I come to trust that my Higher Power knows exactly what I need in order to get to where I need to be, and I acknowledge and accept that even though sometimes I think I know better, the fact is that I don't. I make mistakes. I am human.

I come to understand that my strongest moments are not when I'm fighting against that which simply is, but when I learn to find peace in the midst of it all, or when, in looking back, I recognize my resilience.

When I'm able to find peace in the moment (that is, trust that my Higher Power has got it under control and I don't have to worry, fight or control what's happening), it gives me clarity into the situation, the people I am dealing with, and who I am and how I want to respond. It gives me strength to hold off on impulsive reactions that I may later regret, and guides me into making decisions I know I can live with. Sometimes "turning my will and life over to God" is something big like entirely letting go of the situation, and sometimes it is simply putting myself in a "time out" while I calm down and open myself up to my Higher Power's guidance. When I am able to calm my mind, body, and spirit, it helps me "see" what is going on without any of my default filters (e.g., anger, sadness, or insecurity). By turning my will and my life over to the care of my Higher Power, I come to know that I'm in good hands—always have been and always will be.

I reconnect with myself and my heart. I come to understand that my heart, like any muscle, can only get stronger through exercise. It is normal to find myself tired of exercising my mind, heart, and body, because it requires quite a bit of effort, consciousness, mindfulness, and a little bit of being uncomfortable. It's okay to rest sometimes. But exercise, I know, is the only way to get the results I want (a better body, a better mind, or a better heart). So I bravely continue exercising my heart, which can sometimes feel like tension. I know tension all the time is not good, but no tension at all is also bad for me. I need good balance. When I start to understand that (and don't let myself

fall into one extreme or another) I am beginning the process of “turning my will and my life over to the care of my Higher Power.”

When I do this, I find a sense of calmness, which in turn makes me better prepared to make decisions that will positively help me through sticky spots, rather than my past “shooting from the hip.” When I make well-informed decisions, disappointments affect my inner peace much less. But when I get myself to this place of calm, I begin to truly feel like the captain of my own ship.

Gratefully,
~Tamiko

Every COSA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

When sending donations to the ISO of COSA, please include your meeting number so we can record it properly and post it in *Balance*. We thank you for all your donations!

To find your meeting number:

- Go to <http://www.cosa-recovery.org>, click on the Meetings and Events tab, and then on Find a Local Meeting.
- Search for your meeting and note the meeting number in parentheses next to your meeting name.

RECURRING DONATIONS

Keeping Updated

Thank you for your donations to the International Service Organization of COSA. Currently, our system is set to automatically update your credit card when it gets a new expiration date. If you need to increase, decrease, or cancel your recurring donations, please contact the ISO of COSA at iso@cosa-recovery.org. Thank you for your support!

Seventh Tradition: Financial Report

December 2018

AZ-02 (Tempe).....	\$ 20.75
CA-20 (Claremont)	\$ 22.00
CA-23 (Long Beach).....	\$ 75.00
CA-29 (South Bay)	\$ 100.00
CA-34 (Laguna Hills).....	\$ 75.00
FL-14 (Longwood)	\$ 265.00
MN-02 (St. Paul).....	\$ 125.00
WI-08 (East Madison).....	\$ 50.00
WI-09 (Fitchburg).....	\$ 275.00
Individual Donations	\$ 976.00
Recurring Individual donations	\$ 1193.00

December Total.....\$ 2881.00

January 2019

CA-07 (SF Bay Area Intergroup)	\$ 2000.00
CA-08 (East Bay).....	\$ 149.00
CA-13 (Irvine)	\$ 78.75
CA-27 (Santa Rosa)	\$ 52.75
FL-11 (Orlando)	\$ 38.25
FL-12 (Orlando)	\$ 40.00
NE-03 (Omaha)	\$ 30.00
TX-22 (Houston).....	\$ 58.00
TX-23 (Houston).....	\$ 20.00
WI-04 (Eau Claire).....	\$ 50.00
INT-19 (Vancouver)	\$ 150.00
Individual Donations	\$ 300.00
Individual Recurring.....	\$ 945.00

January Total\$ 3911.75

February 2019

Individual Donations	\$ 76.00
Individual Recurring.....	\$ 963.00

February Total\$ 1029.00

STEP 1·2·3·4·5·6·7·8·9·10·11·12

MADE A SEARCHING AND FEARLESS MORAL INVENTORY OF OURSELVES.

I came to COSA depressed, beaten down, emotionally and spiritually bankrupt. I also came with a lot of “whys.” Why had I become such a depressed, unhappy person? Why did the people I loved and felt I had done so much for turn their back on me? Why had I done the things that made me feel so worthless inside? I hated myself and felt profoundly victimized.

The Fourth Step was the beginning of my journey towards answering those questions, towards self-knowledge and taking responsibility for who I had become. As I wrote each part of my inventory, I began, for the first time, to understand what shaped my character. There it was, written in black and white before me. I came to see and understand the places inside me that had become warped or crooked, that were unhealed, that no longer served me (a.k.a. my defects). As I looked at my fears I began to understand the core beliefs that were driving my life. In looking at my assets I began to understand that I was not a hopeless waste of a human being. Step Four gave me the knowledge that I would need, not just to work the remaining Steps but also to have a new and more honest awareness of who I am. It empowered me, with God’s help, to be able to begin the process of change.

In reflecting on all of my own actions and all the things I had carried inside of me for so long, things that brought me tremendous shame, I also began to understand and have compassion for my own humanity for the first time and I began to learn how to forgive and let others be human too. The spiritual housecleaning was bittersweet, but wonderful. It was tremendously healing. The relief of letting go of so much emotional dead weight was profound.

One of my favorite aspects of the Fourth Step is that it is not something that I do once and then forget about. Anytime I feel a lack of balance or those first festering seeds of resentment, this Step reminds me where to begin to look for answers. I trust that if I embark on this endeavor with the help of my Higher Power, and with a willingness to be as honest as I can, I will find exactly what I need.

And when the bad things in life happen, when I am hurting, terrified, furious, or ashamed, this Step is there to gently focus my attention back onto me, back onto the solution, instead of my flailing about and demanding that the world and the people in it conform to my expectations and wishes. This Step has often been a very important part of the process by which my Higher Power restores me to peace.

From time to time I have heard this Step referred to as the “dreaded Fourth Step.” Indeed, when I have looked honestly within, some of my defects have been hard for me to face. But I have never once regretted undertaking this Step. If done gently, with love and support, it is a simple way to keep my emotional and spiritual house in order. It is a relief from the burden of walking through each day resentful, afraid, and hurting. It is a step in the direction of humility and self-responsibility. As of today, I have returned to this Step many times, trusting that if done with compassion for myself, it holds the key to much of what I need to understand in order to live my life in a calmer, saner, more peaceful way.

~Amy E.

TRADITION 1·2·3·4·5·6·7·8·9·10·11·12

THE ONLY REQUIREMENT FOR COSA MEMBERSHIP IS THAT OUR LIVES HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY COMPULSIVE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR. THE MEMBERS MAY CALL THEMSELVES A COSA GROUP, PROVIDED THAT, AS A GROUP, THEY HAVE NO OTHER AFFILIATION.

The Third Tradition is foundational to our COSA program, as it spells out who can be a part of COSA and how our groups can be identified as COSA groups. Anyone who believes that their lives have been affected by a problem of compulsive sexual behavior in a family member, a friend, or anyone else in their lives (current or past) may participate in and benefit from the COSA program.

The words “as a group...have no other affiliation” are also very important. Avoiding group affiliation with any group, therapy, religion, or other cause outside of COSA does not limit in any way what other outside sources of healing or spiritual comfort we as individuals may choose to pursue. It does keep the COSA program undiluted and available to all, regardless of the group members’ individual religious or therapeutic affiliations (or even if they have no such affiliations). While we as individuals may avail ourselves of outside resources, such as psychotherapies or specific spiritual paths, the discussion or announcement of these things within an official COSA meeting or event might easily be interpreted as endorsement or affiliation, so it is therefore best to avoid this.

It is comforting to know there is no “eligibility test”; we need not fear that our fellows in COSA will judge or exclude us. That is comforting indeed for someone like me who has always felt “out of place” in life. COSA is the first group I have truly felt a “part of.” We welcome newcomers of all stripes and allow them to determine for themselves if their lives have been affected by compulsive sexual behavior.

This Tradition reminds me of the importance of welcoming newcomers into COSA whether their life circumstances resemble mine or not. I first came to COSA due to my current husband’s sex addiction, but over time I realized that my life had been affected by compulsive sexual behavior many times over. I saw clearly my historical pattern of attracting partners who were sex addicts. After delving into my family-of-origin history, I came to believe that my father had been a sex addict, and I came to see the evidence of sex addiction throughout my family tree. I realized that my personal history of sexual assault (and how I had buried that memory and dissociated from those feelings) was another example of how my life had been deeply affected by compulsive sexual behavior. I carried the effects of those experiences (and the necessity of focusing on my own healing) long after most of those people were no longer in my life.

I now see that the effects of compulsive sexual behavior on others’ lives are more similar to than different from the effects in my own life. Even when another person’s circumstances are very different from mine—different gender, gender identity, ethnicity, background, age, or sexual orientation—if I focus on our similarities rather than our differences, I benefit greatly and learn so much from my fellow COSAs. I have the priceless gift of friendship, fellowship, help, guidance, and support from a wider range of people than I otherwise would have had the opportunity to know—and love!

The importance of welcoming all whose lives have been affected by compulsive sexual behavior and of keeping the COSA program undiluted and available to all is foundational to my personal sobriety, as well as to the sobriety of my meetings and my fellowship. I am grateful for the spiritual guidance of the Third Tradition.

~Linda P., Northern California

TRADITION 1·2·3·4·5·6·7·8·9·10·11·12

EACH GROUP SHOULD BE AUTONOMOUS EXCEPT IN MATTERS AFFECTING OTHER GROUPS OR COSA AS A WHOLE.

Having grown up in a family with multiple dysfunctional behaviors, I oftentimes wanted to separate from them and be autonomous. It was hard, because I also depended on them for food, housing, and love. It took becoming an adult to begin separating their dysfunction from my choices and behaviors. It took longer to remember and honor all the good they gave me in life. And there was gobs of good parenting, love, and lessons that made me into the good person I am today.

Yet when I look back, many of my adult ways of separating from them—distance, rebellion, earning a degree in psychology then judging them, complaining, being a victim, trying to change them, fighting, guilt, blaming, refusing to talk to them, gossiping, etc.—still tied me to them emotionally. I was fighting a dysfunction on my own rather than learning self-care, working the Steps, and slowly growing into having healthy relationships.

It took a great deal of Twelve-Step-group work on my own addictions, my own childhood dysfunction, and my own codependent thoughts and behaviors to truly be autonomous. I also had to learn patience, gratitude, boundaries, forgiveness, healthy love, self-care, and living in the present. My autonomy from unhealthy living is an ongoing process of working the Steps in an autonomous COSA group.

For me, in a way, COSA became a healthy family. Because others loved me as only COSA members can, I could be a better group member, supporting the group purpose—recovery for codependents of sex addicts. I healed.

As our group operated autonomously, except for matters involving other groups or COSA as a whole, it kept me out of politics, self-centered agendas, judgmental attitudes, codependency to non-recovery-oriented groups, and other mucky muck stuff that could impact my precious, tender, sacred recovery. Life is better now.

Autonomy from my family dysfunction only happened because I was part of a group that could function within the single-purposed unity of what affects COSA and other related groups for recovery. That's all. No more. I can now trust that I won't be pulled into other dysfunctional groups that don't honor the Twelve Steps. Because COSA is only about COSA recovery.

This means I can heal and be part of healing with others as we create happy, joyous, and free lives in recovery. And we can be safe from agendas not supporting our recovery.

And all I have to do is allow myself and the group to work the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts as they were meant to be worked. Then allow the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts, along with the group, to work and transform me.

For this, I am ever grateful for COSA, a life-saving spiritual program.

~Robin