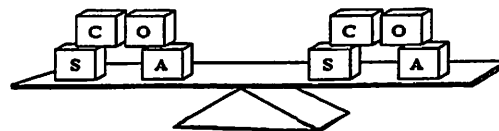


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Love Is Always A Choice



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STEP TWO

STEP TWO: *"Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."*

STEP TWO

I've heard this step simplified to: "Somehow, somewhere, there is a solution." I've also reworded it for myself as: I have gone beyond human endurance in an intolerable situation. I have tried with every fiber of my being to figure out a solution and have come up empty. I realize (came to believe) that only a spiritual solution can help me.

The part of Step Two that talks about "a power greater than our selves" has been the key for my finding a way out of the problem and into the solution. When I consciously acknowledge a power greater than myself I am in the solution.

How long does it take "to come to believe" in this greater power? It seems this miraculous moment comes when it comes and cannot be forced or predicted.

I remember one of my first conscious awarenesses of a power greater than myself. It seems trivial on the surface - I call it "The Day God Dressed Me." I was getting ready to go to a 12-step meeting and none of my clothes seemed to coordinate. By the time I was done there were clothes all over my room. I started out in my usual casual combinations, but I ended

up dressed in a nice evening outfit - kind of fancy for a meeting. It was as if someone else had decided what I would wear. At the end of the meeting, a 12-step dance at another meeting location was announced. Normally I would just ignore something like that for all the usual reasons (isolation, nothing to wear, don't know anybody, it's too weird).

But this night I felt a little like Cinderella, and I was already dressed for the "Ball." So, I went! Was this a mistake? Absolutely not - I treasure this early recovery moment, not because the dance was so great (it wasn't), not because I met My Prince (I didn't), but because I *did* something - something *different* on that night - I trusted that somehow it had been approved by the one that dressed me. This happened during the second or third month of my recovery and it was just the beginning of the many new and different things I was on the verge of trying. All of which would happen with the Higher Power's presence and preparation which was sometimes visible and sometimes invisible.

I dearly want to have all the answers (solutions) and Step Two gives me just one solution from which all solutions can come. The solution for me is to stop the old thinking, the figuring, the spinning and remember the source of the highest solution. It's really that simple.

Lisa Mc

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I've come to realize that wonderful whooshing feeling is enmeshment not intimacy; it's an illusory addictive rush that's just going to get me in trouble.

I think I had such a chaotic unpredictable childhood that I needed an addiction, a medication for my fear and pain, that I could carry with me at all times. So I developed fantasies and romances. I discovered that I could nearly always escape into a remembered fairy tale or pretend to be in a love story where I was loved and cherished and kept safe and adored and... all the things I wasn't given in real life. All the things I wasn't given because I wasn't good enough, as my parents made clear time after time. In fantasy I would be good enough. Sweet enough. Pretty enough. *I'm going to give my daughter all those things even if she is covered in mud and breaks her toys and kicks the dog and says she hates me and has freckles and is fat and...*

What is it that we discover in the fourth step? That we've warped our God-given talents into obsessions and addictions? I think God gave me an incredible imagination (for a purpose) but I had to use it to medicate the pain of the real world of my childhood.

I think that fantasy of one day being "pretty enough" is why my partner's sex addiction hit me so squarely between the eyes. After years of going without a boyfriend (out of secret knowledge that I wasn't "pretty and sweet enough") I got myself a boyfriend to prove that I was pretty and sweet enough. At first everything was as I dreamed it would be. He kissed me. He brought me flowers. He couldn't keep his hands off me, every part of me. I acted a part. The "sweet and pretty" part. I was very careful during our first year of dating never, ever to let him see anything of the real me.

Then I slowly came out from behind the part. The real me. The me that gets mad and cries and wants things. The needy child part of me. The more this part of me came out, the less he did for me. It was like I was a little child in a desert and there was an oasis over there. But the closer I came to the oasis, the further away it got, the faster I ran toward it, the faster it receded. Then I would get absolutely enraged that I was getting starved and teased in this way and I would explode. Then he would REALLY get all cold and distant and go off with his addictions.

My explosion would rock me to the core because it would expose me to the awful truth that I would never be sweet and pretty. Thoroughly sweet and

pretty like Cinderella and Snow White, who never even thought to get mad at their stepmoms. Who were starved and beaten and came up smiling and loving. Yeah right, and if I couldn't be Cinderella and Snow White then I must be a stepmom because there are, after all, only two kinds of women in the world: those who deserve love and those who don't.

I think I am going to buy a Cinderella storybook and tear it to shreds. Maybe God gave me my imagination to invent some new fairytales. Ones where stepdaughters get mad at DAD's and stepmom's get to say "Honey, what's wrong?"

His coldness and distance after my explosion would send me frantically trying to cram my anger back down inside me. I would hit and hate myself into a small, weak, humiliated huddle of womanhood and crawl back into his arms, begging to be taken back and he *would* because a small, weak, humiliated, huddle of womanhood was womanhood he could deal with.

Then I would feel the wonderful whooshing feeling of love again. Even while I was curled up into a tight little hurt ball inside me. I knew if I wanted to stay loved, I had to stay in that ball.

But eventually as time went on, I would uncurl a little and begin to live again a little and the whole sick cycle would start all over again. For years, I thought I was unhappy because I couldn't stay curled well enough, I couldn't hide me well enough, I couldn't be *angerless* enough. I could never be Cinderella; I always would get mad at that b---- of a stepmom.

For months I have been trying to stay uncurled, through whatever his moods. I'm getting there. I'm learning that one of the keys to staying uncurled is to not want the perfect loving fantasy relationship that I thought I had in our first dating days. Another key is to not chase that damn oasis. When I'm feeling needy, I don't turn to him. I sit myself down in the middle of the desert and look for my own shovel and seed and start digging my own well and planting my own garden. I have discovered that God really has given me all I need to take care of myself. And when I look up from my well and my garden I discover that there are many oases around me, that I was never alone, that I have many friends who love me, care about me, and will listen to me and even invite me over to their well. I've just been so busy chasing a chimera that I could not see them.

Name Withheld Upon Request

Convention News

"HOW CAN I PARTICIPATE IN THE BUSINESS MEETINGS AND HAVE MY FEELINGS TOO?"

I have a very good friend in recovery who says it's IMPOSSIBLE to go to business meetings and have feelings too. She goes to business meetings and participates, and still finds it difficult to have her feelings there.

Business meetings are work-oriented and different than our regular support meetings. I suppose they could be more like support meetings - depending on who is running the meeting. Some people get hung up on rules and order. Others stumble on control and agendas. My problems in business meetings come somewhere in between these. Maybe the question for me is "How do I attend business meetings and stay present in my feelings?"

In the past I gave gotten huge headaches at business meetings and have stored up lots of tension. My goal this year is to set and keep some boundaries for myself.

- 1.) Support a system of regular breaks throughout the day. My body and mind are much healthier if I take care of myself.
- 2.) Speak my truth - say what I need to say and have faith that my Higher Power will take care of me.
- 3.) Remember the big picture. COSA is moving forward, I don't have to be in control or have everything go my way.
- 4.) Remember the First Tradition: Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon COSA unity.

Service is important to me; I attend business meetings because I want to help shape and guide COSA as it becomes a united and strong program. My attitude toward the proceedings does affect the outcome. I can trust the quality of the meeting is enhanced when I bring my highest self (that includes my feelings) to the meeting.

NEXT MONTH: "I CAN'T GO TO THE CONVENTION ALONE"

IT HAS BEEN MY EXPERIENCE ...

the media and Hallmark[®] have made February "The Love Month". According to these experts, LOVE is candy, cards, flowers, candlelight dinners, lacy red lingerie, wine, and weekend liaisons all for the underlying purpose of giving or getting sex! (Which is supposed to prove I, matter, am loved, am noticed, belong.) I spent my life giving sex looking for love.

My first child was born on Valentines Day and my mind immediately zoomed to LOVE (Prince Charming) fantasies for her. At the same time I was totally devastated when I felt no great rush of "maternal love" when she was first placed in my arms. Neither did I feel any great feelings of love (or anything else) from my spouse for "my great accomplishment". Rather than feeling love I felt trapped, betrayed, empty and overwhelmed. Doomed to a lifetime of responsibility with this thankless baby, who had never read the rulebook of How to be a Perfect Baby and demanded more of me than I had to give. What a shock to discover that having a baby did not make my marriage better, did not make me feel loved, did not make

me fit in with my friends, and did not improve my outlook on life!

It has been my experience in recovery that I have had to redefine many words, ideas and concepts. I discovered I was functioning under misconceptions, misinformation, or just plain wrong interpretations - especially when it came to love, sex and marriage.

Recovery has taught me to learn to love myself before I give love to others or receive/accept love from others. I believe LOVE is not sex and sex is not LOVE. I have learned not to give myself (my power, my talents, my time, my body) indiscriminately to anyone who asks. I have had to learn to *increase* respect for myself and *decrease* self abuse and self neglect. Loving myself involves many facets. When I am able to balance the aspects of loving myself, then and only then am I in a place to be sexual with my partner who must also be in a state of self love. Only when I am able to love myself can I be a loving mother to my daughter.

[Continued on page 4]

