

TAKING A STEP EIGHT INVENTORY

I participated in a Step workshop in 1992 that taught me a very effective method of working Step Eight. This is not, of course, the only way of working Step Eight, but it has meant a lot to me over the years. I use this approach for formal Eighth Steps as well as when a conflict or situation is taking up space in my head. It helps to remove the resentment, see the other person's point of view, and most important, soften my heart so that I can identify any amends I may owe.



The chapter on Step Eight in *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous* (Second Edition, 2018, pp.57 - 62) suggests that I generally owe amends to people I resent or whom I believed have harmed me. I was dumbstruck the first time I read that passage, as it had never occurred to me. The more I thought about it, however, and the more I practiced Step Eight, I realized that I would only be able to make amends if I had fully forgiven the object of my resentment.

The Eighth Step process consists of four parts.

1. Write a letter to the person, situation, event, or institution that is the object of your anger. Go all out with what you want to say. You won't be sending this letter, so you might as well acknowledge and own the darkness that is in you. I start off with a list of all the reasons for my anger. Many times I go off on tangents, ranting about situations seemingly unrelated to the main issue, which may actually be indirectly related.

The key is not to censor yourself. Whatever I write is already in my head. Not writing it down doesn't make it go away; instead, it gives me a chance to see the truth of what is in my heart and mind.

This is usually the longest part of the exercise. It is important to do this resentment list first, as it releases the anger and rage. I won't be willing or able to move on until I get rid of all the negative energy.

Once I am done with the letter, I usually feel much better and may be tempted to stop at that point. Continuing is important, however, as the subsequent writings are a vital part of being rid of the resentment.

2. Once all the resentments are down on paper, I next write down a list of ways in which I have harmed the person, situation, event, institution, or whatever is the object of my ire. Ouch. These facts are hard to face, but usually true. This step intentionally follows writing about my resentments—I can only make amends for my behavior if I have fully transferred resentments from my head onto paper.

So onward, OA says that we don't have to make amends for our thoughts, and that is true, but I still write out those negative thoughts, because they likely contributed to my harmful behavior, however subtle it may have been.

3. The next exercise is to write a letter that I believe the other person would write to me. For example, if I am writing this inventory about Mary, I pretend to be Mary and describe how I believe she is feeling about the incident, situation, or me in general.

This is a very powerful exercise, as it moves me toward developing compassion and forgiveness. Writing this letter helps me see the other person's perspective. If my anger is about a situation or institution, as opposed to a person, I can still write about my powerlessness or acknowledge all the factors that are out of my control. This step helps me see beyond the problem to a solution.

4. Finally, I write a prayer to God, asking for the willingness to forgive the other person, situation, or institution and to make amends as needed.

It is very important to read these writings to a sponsor or someone else in OA. It's like a mini Fifth Step. To symbolically let go of the situation, I usually throw the pages away when I am done.

Sometimes this four-stage process takes a long time, but other times I can get it done quickly. However long the effort takes, I always feel lighter and happier when I am done. I have more clarity about my role in the conflict and a deeper understanding of what I need to do to clean up my side of the street.

--Anonymous



ZOOMING IN ON AUGUST'S SPONSORSHIP WORKSHOP

Attending the August Sponsorship Workshop via Zoom allowed me to learn from the experiences of three longtime sponsors in an hour – no commute involved! (I wasn't wearing my pajamas, but it was definitely an option.)

The sponsors' assignment was to offer tips that they had garnered along the way to would-be sponsors. The overarching theme can be summed up in two words – compassion and boundaries. Compassion as in treating each sponsee with respect and understanding, listening to their stories, and responding to their concerns. At the same time, the sponsors stressed the need to set time boundaries and to establish clear expectations about sponsees doing the Step Work and using the Tools of the program to move into recovery.

Each sponsor talked about the importance of meeting sponsees exactly where they were at that moment. The sponsors saw themselves as guides and sounding boards, not as Mr./Ms. "Fix-It." At least one person mentioned that they allowed sponsees to work at their own pace. Sometimes, the sponsee would just stop calling, which was okay. That's where they were at that point in time.

What I learned for my own journey in sponsorship is that I need to provide a safe space for my sponsees to talk, not only about their food issues, but also about the events and emotional triggers that lead them to eat compulsively. I'm neither a nutritionist nor a psychotherapist. My job is to present the OA program, which encompasses the Twelve Steps and Nine Tools of recovery in a way that makes sense.

--Lynn H.

SELF-DISCIPLINE?!

Okay, so I did it again. I leaped. Then I looked. I committed to writing this article before I checked out August's topic.

Oh. Self-discipline? Uh...

"Self-discipline" brings to mind dark connotations of self-punishment and restriction. Of not enough self-will. Falling short. Shame and guilt.

Ahh. Maybe "self-discipline" has a cousin that's warmer and fuzzier.

My search found a list of synonyms, including "self-control," "willpower," and "restraint."

Ugh.

For about a week, I mulled over "self-discipline," re-read Step Eight, and at last reached a conclusion. Crash-and-burn. No can do. Sorry.

The screen went dark.

But wait. What's that? A spark? A light bulb moment!

Oh yeah, I'm not alone! I don't have to do this by myself!

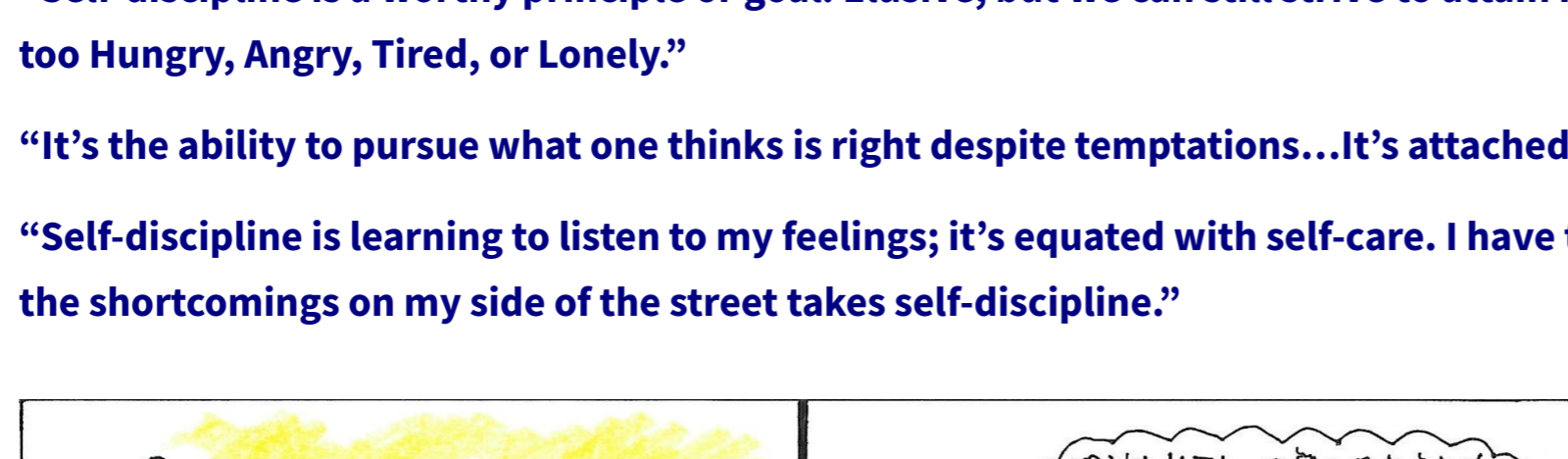
I began making phone calls and asking other OA-ers, "What does the Eighth Step's spiritual principle, self-discipline, mean to you?" The responses I received were as many and varied as those who responded:

"It's beating up on myself because I never have enough of it...I'm always shaming myself...But it's also figuring out what my character defects are and then making an action plan for self-care."

"Self-discipline is a worthy principle or goal. Elusive, but we can still strive to attain it...It's practicing H.A.L.T.–taking care of myself before I'm too Hungry, Angry, Tired, or Lonely."

"It's the ability to pursue what one thinks is right despite temptations...It's attached to Step 8. It's willingness."

"Self-discipline is learning to listen to my feelings; it's equated with self-care. I have to care enough about myself to do the work...Looking at the shortcomings on my side of the street takes self-discipline."



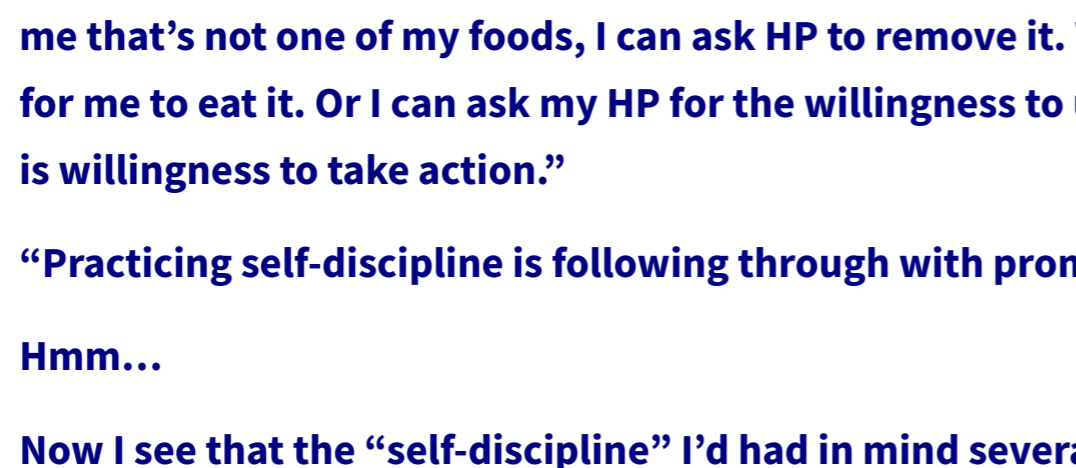
"Self-discipline is practicing self-control...It's practicing daily surrender, asking HP for willingness. For example, when a food is presented to me that's not one of my foods, I can ask HP to remove it. When the food doesn't miraculously disappear, I can say that God must have meant for me to eat it. Or I can ask my HP for the willingness to use my own hands and toss the offending food into the trash...Self-discipline is willingness to take action."

"Practicing self-discipline is following through with promises I make to myself just as I would follow through with promises I make to others."

Hmm...

Now I see that the "self-discipline" I'd had in mind several weeks ago at the beginning of this was shadowed with self-will and will power, aka "stubbornness." That's one trait I have a whole lot of but never enough of to break my eating addiction, get me to workouts, take time to meditate. It's the character defect that feeds my soul's shadows with guilt and shame.

Unless there's a crack. The crack of willingness. The merest sliver of willingness can let in even the most minuscule particle of light.



Self-will can change to God-will, with access to a Higher Power that can transform stubborn willfulness in resisting lifestyle changes to a willingness to practice persevering self-love and self-care.

Healthy food behaviors, physical exercise, and meditation become self-caring treats. They become a loving means to healing amends for the lifetime of harms I've caused myself with my addiction.

Once again, my way of thinking has been subtly changed by this program.

--Anonymous

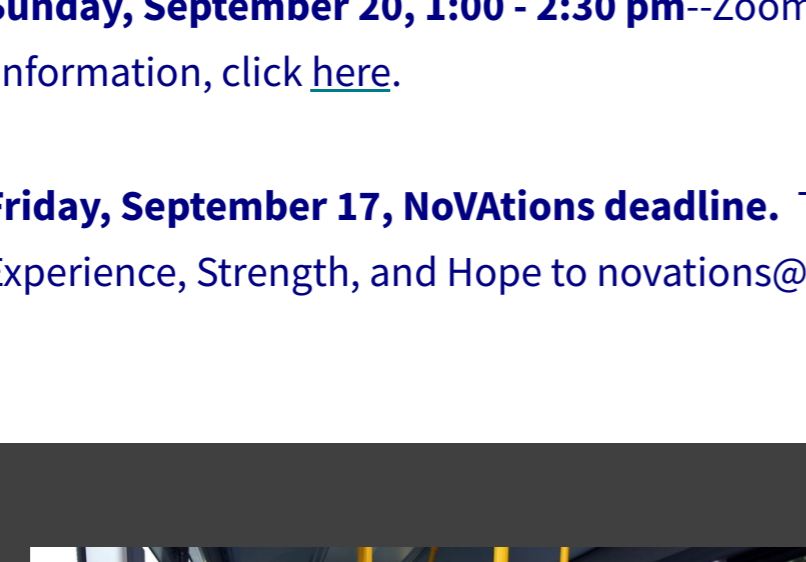
SEPTEMBER EVENTS

Sunday, September 13, 2020, 2:00 - 4:30 pm—Zoom workshop: The Power of Surrender, New Jersey Intergroup of OA. For more information, click [here](#).

Saturday, September 19, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm—Intergroup meeting. Please come! Zoom meeting id: 635 187 2048, regular passcode.

Sunday, September 20, 1:00 - 2:30 pm—Zoom workshop: Ninth Step Within (Making Amends to Yourself), Baltimore Area Intergroup of OA. For more information, click [here](#).

Friday, September 17, NoVations deadline. Topic is Step Nine/Spiritual Principle: Love. It takes a village to produce a newsletter! Send your Experience, Strength, and Hope to novations@anova.org.



STEP EIGHT: FACING REALITY

Step Eight forces me to accept two important truths about myself—I am just another passenger on the bus. Second, no matter how hard I try to "clean up my act" or hide my thoughts and emotions, I—like other compulsive overeaters—specialize in CHAOS (Creating Havoc Around OurSelves). Given the insanity I've acknowledged in Step Two, how could it be otherwise?

