

Dear Greg and others in leadership in SA Australia: Greetings

Thank you so much for the invitation to be with you in your get-together of March 2007. And thank you for such a well-researched and well-written response to my questions. That deserves a thoughtful reply, especially concerning your question, “We wonder if similar problems have afflicted the U.S. fellowship?” Good question, because all this bears on SA as a whole.

Yes, similar problems have afflicted the US fellowship, and have since the beginning. This is true not just in SA, but apparently in all the other S-fellowships as well. The question, “Where’s the recovery?” has echoed persistently throughout the history of the whole movement. Many come in with the Problem, but few experience the Solution. Let me take the risk of sharing with you things as I see them where I am, in a spirit of helpfulness. Of course, I speak only for myself. First I’ll try to suggest a couple of the many reasons contributing to our common condition and then suggest what we might do about it.

From the beginning, SA has been working with two built-in liabilities: 1) the fact that SA got started from the outside in instead of from the inside out, and 2) the nature of sexaholism itself. Understanding these may give us some needed perspective. Knowing nothing of the inside story Down Under, I’ll speak frankly of my own personal SA experience here.

Starting from the Outside In

SA got started, not from the inside out, as AA did, but from the outside in. AA took root in Akron Ohio in 1935 when Bill and Dr. Bob stayed sober and began working with others, who also stayed sober—one person at a time. Over the next couple of years, a growing core of sobriety developed with this band of men and a few women. Note that they had no Big Book, which was not written until 1939, after recovery was already a vital reality and growing from the inside out. There was no 12 and 12, since the Steps and Traditions had not yet been conceived, though Bill and Bob brought with them certain spiritual principles they had seen working in the ecumenical Christian Oxford Groups. The early AAs had no name, no status, and they did not advertise.

AA multiplied by division, from the inside out, *one drunk talking to another, bearing witness to the miracle of recovery in his own life and passing it on*. The key here is “bearing witness.” Here was a motley crew of formerly hopeless men who were living testimonials of God doing for them what they could not do for themselves. (Yes, theirs *was* a God program!) The AA movement grew out of a small band of men who were staying sober and were experiencing a spiritual awakening. (See “The Fire Strikes—Akron, Ohio, 1935,” which is in chapter 2 of the *Surrender and Accountability* booklet, attached to this e-mail. I hope you all get a chance to read it.)

In contrast, SA got started from the outside in. In 1981 the Dear Abby newspaper column, responding to my personal letter about the woman in Chicago, hit some 1100

papers. Myself and two other AA men who said they wanted sexual sobriety were all there was. The three of us had never met together and were not even in the same city, even though we were all in AA. The other two would lose their sexual sobriety and would never be heard from again. But that's how SA got shotgunned across the country. (See our SA pamphlet "Beginnings—Notes on the Origins and Early Growth of SA," available from www.sa.org)

New SA groups had to start from scratch, from the outside in, with no central critical mass of lust-sex recovery which could then spread outward in expanding circles, as in AA's origins. It was each SA newcomer or group getting the word remotely catch-as-catch-can from Simi Valley. "Remotely" is the key word here, there being little if any face-to-face, person-to-person salvation at work. We'd throw some literature at them, wait for phone calls, and hope it "took."

The Nature of Sexaholism Itself

In addition to this outside-in liability, the very nature of sexaholism itself presents extraordinary built-in problems, not only for the individual trying to recover, but for SA itself. According to Tradition Three, which was hammered out in our early failures before 1981, *the desire to stop lusting* is a requirement for membership in SA. That also means that stopping lusting is as much a part of recovery as stopping the acting out. Yet this is commonly overlooked or disregarded, as though sobriety from physical acting out is the goal, an end in itself. And lust, after all, doesn't seem to be as much an "act" as sex is; it's part of our inner life, our thinking, our very consciousness, and spirit. Thus, putting the priority on the acting out seems to be typical; but this limits recovery. We might even say it *prevents* recovery if such an attitude becomes entrenched.

When most of us come into SA, it's the acting out that's hitting us in the face. The feeling is that stopping that will solve the problem. And if we find our acting out has stopped, even for a brief interlude, what a relief. "Hey, we can do it!" There's that false sense of accomplishment. We feel we've made it. And if we relapse, we start over again in hope of stopping the acting out again. And again. This pattern is so typical in SA that we've given it a name—the Slipper Syndrome. It can take *years* for men to first discover that lust is the driving force behind it all, then make the decision to stop lusting, and *then* discover how impossible not lusting really is. (Women members, for the most part, can't help us out here because so many don't identify with aspects of lust which are typical for most men. But underneath it all, of course, is the spiritual Mis-connection, which is the common denominator intrinsic to both sexes.)

Part of this built-in liability inherent in sexaholism is the difficulty in *assessing* SA sobriety. To start with, SA sobriety is more involved than alcohol or chemical sobriety. Historically, for various reasons, we've stayed away from evaluating lust sobriety/recovery. Most in SA seem all too happy to "Live and let live" on this issue. But this has led to accommodating both sexualizing and lust in SA in various forms and guises. Being drunk on lust we can still look pretty cool and "together." We often seem afraid to ask principled questions of one another, like, Where am I in lust recovery? or Where are you?

I see that the one question left unanswered from my 6-21-06 e-mail was how you all are doing— “especially victory over lust.” Thus, allow me to share the following, since they reveal what I’ve been seeing over here with regard to lust and why I feel this is so crucial.

Here are some comments written recently in a lust inventory meeting I happened to lead in a long-established SA group: “I tell myself at least I surrendered *after* lusting.” “I say she wants it, so I tell myself it’s normal to want something other than what I have (my wife) as long as I don’t act on it.” “I am powerful enough to push down and temporarily enjoy the lust by my own strength and not act out.” “I’m not lusting; I’m just staring at a pretty girl. It’s like looking at a beautiful flower.” “I’m a guy; I’m made to lust.” “I’m still recovering from my delayed adolescence.” “I still hold myself on top of my pants and let go when really triggered, which makes me want to lust more.” (This was a man three years in SA, still unable to maintain sobriety. His sponsor had suggested treating this continuing pattern as a loss of sobriety, but was met with more denial.)

Now note the following comment written by a young newcomer male in that very same meeting (his second meeting): “I don’t want lust to be a part of my life at all. Not only do I not want to be controlled by it, but I also do not want to think about it.” What’s going on? Here’s a newcomer who wants real SA recovery, but the established members are generating the spiritual atmosphere of unintentionally accommodating lust. There are some members in SA who would say, “That young newcomer, without realizing it, has, in his very first SA meeting, been inoculated *against* the very recovery he craves.”

Recently I walked into another long-established SA meeting, one reputed for its AA foundations and sponsorship. It turns out the meeting leader is calling himself sober 18 months and takes an 18 month chip. He earlier had led the inquirers meeting for a newcomer and had raised his hand when the “Who’s willing to be a sponsor?” question came up during announcements. When he shared later in the meeting, he said that he was still deliberately watching Internet porn, especially when his wife’s away. It turns out that the newcomer he 12th stepped that night had come into that very meeting wanting to stop watching porn! Another man in that same meeting took a nine month chip, sharing that he too was still watching porn. How typical is this kind of thing in SA? Is it important for us to find out? Why?

Why this kind of thing is prevalent after a quarter century of SA should be urgently pursued as a most crucial issue. It should force us to “*Stop, Look, and Listen.*” The questions we should be asking are, “How has this kind of thing affected SA? How does it affect my own recovery? What *is* SA recovery?” Is lust recovery possible? Maybe we’ve never really come to terms with our Step One, that we—and SA—are truly powerless over lust and that we need the promised spiritual awakening.

And what about our Third Tradition? “*The only requirement for SA membership is the desire to stop lusting . . .*” This implies that the desire to stop lusting is not optional. It’s the prime requirement for membership. If we can see and admit it, recovery from lust is the heart of the SA program and message. It implies that we *can* stop lusting. So the

question is, “Does the 12 Step program really work on the impossible?” If it does, what’s wrong? What might we be missing?

Potential Liabilities

Here are some of the more obvious potential liabilities that spring from the outside-in approach of SA’s formation and the nature of sexaholism itself:

- Instead of growing in concentric circles outward from an originating center and proven sobriety base, SA happened in different ways in different places
- Individuals and groups had to find their own way
- Lack of a solid core of sexual sobriety
- Lack of a solid core of lust recovery
- The idea that “sober”—meaning physical sobriety—is “well,” giving a false sense of status and pride in the badge of one’s calendar sobriety
- Lack of unity of spirit in the leadership and membership
- Two or more “kinds” of SA developing from the beginning, reflecting differing views on sobriety and recovery, as in the sobriety controversies
- Fudging on the membership requirement (Tradition 3)
- Fudging on physical sobriety and lust recovery

Thus, the very nature of sexaholism can, if we let it, open a Pandora’s Box of relativism. And the original vision and promise of real SA recovery, discovered and borne witness to in our origins, can go out the window. And we don’t have to admit our intrinsic powerlessness and the need for the “Find-God-or-die” tough love the early alkie had to discover.

Given the way SA got started and the nature of sexaholism itself, we might have expected such liabilities. But that does not mean we have to stay where we are. We can learn from our history and from where we are today! This is where seasoned, sober, proactive leadership with spiritual unity and vision can step in. There can be a new beginning, if we humble ourselves to our true condition before God and each other.

SA’s Incredible Dilemma In only the last dozen years we’ve seen the explosion of Internet porn and its instant addiction in multitudes. It is called “the crack cocaine of sex addiction.” There are 4.2 million porn websites; 372 million porn pages; 68 million daily porn search engine requests, 116,000 of which daily are for child porn. The largest consumer of Internet porn is the 12-17 age group. (These data are now way obsolete.)

Can we see the dilemma? On the one hand, we offer a unique 12 Step program for what the world increasingly needs—real sexual sobriety and lust recovery, recovery from what only recently has exploded into the most pernicious plague ever let loose on the human race. *Yet we really don’t know how well this Program is working—or not working—because we have no idea of the extent of either true sexual sobriety or real lust recovery in our SA fellowship. We’ve never taken the measure of SA. We’ve never taken a searching and fearless moral inventory of our fellowship.* (Your letter to me was a good beginning.) Without realizing it, are some of us trying to promote SA before its promises have been fulfilled in our own lives and fellowship?

SA's Incredible Challenge.

After twenty five years, SA's infrastructure is now in place! God has seen me and seen us through so many truly impossible times! God delivered the impossible in 1935. He does deliver hopeless self-obsessed lust/resentment junkies like me and many others in SA. With all our problems, ours is a history of miracles. Thank God! If there were no real lust recovery happening in SA, we could not be looking at ourselves this critically. Because some *are* experiencing the Awakening means it is possible. I believe God! I believe that the One who has begun a good work in me, broken as I am, will bring it to fulfillment. And I believe the One who has begun a good work in our Fellowship, with all its shortcomings, can continue to bring it to fulfillment. For I truly believe this is a God program, not man's.

I believe we have been called out by God amidst a world of increasing darkness. And I believe we have been led, from the very beginning and before—in spite of ourselves and in spite of all our sins and failings (just read our history if you don't see the sins). But— We must be faithful to that calling; if not, God will have to use other channels. Yes, God's love is unconditional, but God's *work* is always conditional; how could it be otherwise, knowing the characters God has to deal with? Our survival at any level of SA as an instrument of God's grace is conditional. (Remember the Washingtonian Movement, where people got sober before AA. It later evaporated. See *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, p. 125.)

A Challenge for All of Us

Why not take a **Fourth Step** *searching and fearless inventory of SA's true condition*, just where we are, in our group or Intergroup? Then take the indicated follow-up actions, just as we do when we're working the Steps for ourselves. What would happen if we worked the 12 Steps and Traditions together at the group/Intergroup level in absolute honesty?

For example, starting with **Step One**, what if a few in leadership, persons of like mind and heart, would get together and discuss—maybe even write down—how their group/Intergroup measures up to that Step? Is our group powerless over lust and is our group recovery unmanageable? If so, how? Why? Etc. . . . **Step Two**: What is the emotional and spiritual condition of our group? Does our group "sanity" need to be restored? Do we believe that a Power greater than ourselves and our group can really restore our group to sanity?

Of course, one prerequisite for such an undertaking would be absolute honesty, the first of those four absolutes the early alkies took over from the Oxford groups. (See page 54 in *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*.) Another prerequisite would be implementing Tradition Two completely and at depth. Also helpful would be reviewing chapter 5 of the *Surrender and Accountability* booklet (attached to this e-mail). Those working principles can help in making such a group effort an unusual fellowship experience of the highest order.

Step Three: Have we turned our SA group's will and life over to the care of God? Is this possible? How? What does this mean for us here? **Steps Four and Five:** Can we see and admit to God, ourselves, and the fellowship the exact nature of our wrongs? What are our group wrongs? Here, the examination might also turn to seeing if and how the Traditions are honored and implemented. **Six and Seven:** Are we ready to and can we ask God to remove our group's defects? **Eight and Nine:** How have interpersonal relations affected our SA fellowship here? Our recovery? We'll be surprised if we talk honestly and constructively about this. How can we make amends to our group? **Ten:** How can we continue the attitudes and actions undertaken in our inventory? **Eleven:** Have we, or how can we seek through prayer and meditation to improve our group's relation to God's will? You get the idea; I think the way to do this would quickly evolve once we get to it. The questions and issues should reveal themselves as we work at it together.

Implied in all this is the promise that if especially the group's leadership works these Steps together, that fellowship will have a spiritual awakening, out of which our recovery will flow to those in need (**Twelve**). If these Steps are spiritual principles which work for individuals—and they most certainly do!—then why should they not work for the group? Such an inventory would best be undertaken slowly and thoughtfully over time. I am not aware that this has ever been done before in SA, but I've been thinking about it for a long time. It's an exciting prospect. Maybe this letter is a beginning. Take whatever you find helpful and leave the rest.

Some Points to Ponder:

1. Be Sure You're in the Right Fellowship—SA is not for everybody; it's not for those who need it; it's only for those who want it—want all of it, one might even say those who are called to it. Nothing will happen without absolute unity in the concepts of what constitutes sexual sobriety and lust recovery.

2. Be sure you have unity in your fellowship; there's no recovery without it according to Tradition One

Are you united around the Third Tradition's requirement for membership—the desire to stop lusting and become sexually sober?

Are you united around the fact that our underlying problem is lust?

Are you united on what constitutes sobriety?

Are you united on the principles of the 12 step program 12 and 12?

Are you united around the fact that for us no human power could have relieved our lust?

Are you united in your need for God?

4. Get those of like mind and spirit together and consider doing your group inventory through the Steps, as suggested above.

5. Take a lust inventory in your group. See page 9 of the *Surrender and Accountability* booklet, or draft your own.

6. Have some key members study the *Surrender and Accountability* booklet to see if anything clicks.

Finally: We've learned from our history that we don't have to be captive to it. We can change. Let's work and pray for a new beginning, right where we are, wherever we are, *from the inside out.*

Sincerely,

(signed) Roy K.

Attached: *Surrender and Accountability* booklet. Download and copy as desired.

Notes: 1. The *Surrender and Accountability* booklet attached to this e-mail is the current (84 pages) compilation of pieces developed over a few years to find ways of improving our success in recovery. Some have found it useful. It's not for everybody. Most have never heard of it. The approach is still in process of evaluation, and it is not SA leadership-approved literature.

2. The book *Impossible Joy* is my follow-on story, focusing on my 11th Step experience as it relates especially to my continuing lust recovery experience. I wrote it in the late Nineties (under the pseudonym Ron J.) to help Christian lust and sex addicts having difficulty. It is very personal and thus not SA leadership-approved, available from amazon.com.

Australia letter 8-24-06