

March 26, 1996

Dear Jim,

I'm the guy Jim O. brought to the prison SA meeting Friday afternoon March 8. We talked briefly, and I asked you several questions about the program there. I want to thank you for the opportunity to meet with you and the men. It was a special learning experience for me. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. More of us should go to meetings on the inside. The men and I wound up with a lot of give and take. I told my story briefly, then started asking them a lot of questions. I think we finally got to the bottom of things, and I'd like to share my impressions, with you as a sounding board – those of a layperson who knows very little, if anything about what's going on in prison.

I feel that sex offenders in prison who want recovery are in a double bind. On the one hand, they must engage and respond to the therapy programs mandated by the system and required for their possible release. This implies demonstrating evidence of their recovery, using their own willpower to control lust. On the other hand, they cannot truly work the 12 Step program of recovery because it is premised on personal powerlessness over lust and the concept that any true addict is never cured in the common usage of the term. Allow me to try and communicate the dilemma.

When I came into the 12 Step program for my sex/lust addiction, I had despaired of every therapeutic and religious solution that had been offered me: psychotherapy, group therapy, psychoanalysis, marriage counseling, and various religious experiences. When I walked into my first meeting, I heard the unbelievable: "My name is Joe, and I am a sexaholic." "My name is Ron, and I'm powerless over lust." *I am* – present tense. And these guys were sober, joyous and free! My heart leaped with joy. I knew I was home. What a relief! I cried inside my heart. I don't have to try to be good anymore. I can admit that I'm helpless and hopeless. No more pretending. Here are people transparent from their insides, out, while I can't even admit what I am on the inside. There's sobriety here. And my badge of belonging – perhaps even my badge of identity – is that I am a sexaholic. All denial is gone. That opens the door to recovery.

This is Step One of the program: "We admitted we were powerless over lust – that our lives had become *unmanageable." If we ever stop admitting this is, we can get into real trouble again. But men in prison seem inhibited from an in-depth realization and communication of this. One of the reasons may be that the system itself works against this very 12 Step starting point. This is also why so many SAs outside prison don't make it; they haven't despaired of self, of trying to control it themselves. The First Step has never really taken them.

Though I am some twenty years sober sexually, I still am a lustaholic, sexaholic, etc. It is the admission of powerlessness – deflation of ego at depth – that creates the only attitude that will let the grace of God come in and expel the obsession, and in our case, give us victory over that next memory, fantasy, or temptation.

I have experienced continuous sobriety from masturbation, pornography, adultery, prostitution, etc., with progressive victory over lust (what goes on in the head), yet last night, in the mall, I saw what was either a prostitute or police decoy, and I felt the impulse to "take a drink." For me that means open the door of my soul to that image and make the mis-connection through eyes and will. Make the snatch. Take. All on the inside of me, without blinking an eyelash. A part of me wanted to connect with her, and

I felt the power of my lust. Twenty years of recovery did not keep me from what comes naturally for a sex offender – feeling the pull and power of lust. There will always be times when I am so tempted. It's okay to be tempted! I hard-wired my brain that way. The joy of my recovery today is that I didn't have to take that drink. I was free not to. I felt the toxic power of the image, but didn't have to break through that inner line of defense within me, the presence and grace of the God. It is feeling the power of my powerlessness that helps keep me connected with the One who is keeping me sober. This, I believe, is the premise and promise of the Twelve Step program.

What I just described about myself is validated in countless recovering sexaholics on the outside since 1981. How can this be any different for the sex offender SA member in prison? He needs the same kind of recovery, or there is no real recovery for him. But it appears that the system is unwittingly forcing him to create the impression of a cure at any cost, even the cost of real recovery.

Understandably, this "12 Step program way" may not be good enough for the escalating demands of the public to insulate the population from perpetrators. That's why the new perpetrator laws are being passed. That may also be why some sex offenders in prison don't break through into working the 12 Step program that can keep them sober and in recovery. I perceived – rightly or wrongly – that the system is not letting the men admit what they really are. The system may thus be preventing the men from engaging in the kind of real recovery the 12 Step program promises to deliver.

Offenders who want recovery must realize at depth and confess to who they are. A sign of true recovery for the sex offender, as for any other sexaholic, would be for them to proclaim, from the reality of continuing sexual sobriety and progressive victory over his lust, "My name is Joe; I am a sex offender. That's me. Thank God I didn't have to act out or get drunk off of that memory or fantasy today!" But this puts the offender in a triple bind. If the prisoner says that, or even thinks it, the system pegs him as a loser. And the terror of the new perpetrator law is that that could put him away for life. A man *must be able to say that* – and mean it.

Let me raise a question arising from my ignorance: How can a staff member or professional know that a man is actually sexually sober and in real recovery? (Or does the system think it can judge a man safe if he is not in fact sexually sober under SA's definition? Something to think about. For a sexaholic like me, I am *not* in recovery if I'm masturbating to images, memories, or fantasies. I'm not sober if I'm masturbating to images of a blank wall; I'm still resorting to my drug.)

From our perspective in SA, the only assurance of recovery is for the man himself to remain sexually sober and live in true recovery, from the inside, out. This means he would have to be in a "safe haven" relationship with one or more other sexaholics on a continuing basis. Daily bringing their temptations to the light of one another, they will know and will be known. That's how I and many other sexaholics are doing it. That's how we get a feel for true recovery (and there certainly is false recovery). There are absolutely no secrets; the inside of our very souls is bared to one another on a continuing basis, and we are getting better, from the inside, out. It is the light that drives out the darkness.

This kind of 12 Step program "buddy" required in the above paragraph, who would be available to our sex offender in prison, could not be prison staff or a therapeutic professional, even if they themselves were trustworthy recovering sexaholics. Such persons would still be part of the system. And having outside SA members with whom the prisoner associates involved in evaluation of the offender's recovery would be fraught with all sorts of dangers, including legal liability. So how can the system determine whether the man will perpetrate again or not?

How can a prisoner communicate his true recovery status? He can't. That's the tragedy, and that's why it appears that the system unwittingly militates against 12 Step recovery. The judgment call is left to the subjective opinion of the system professionals and the judicial system.

The problem is that if I admit to the "thoughts and intents of my heart" within the system, as I must do to recover – even in an SA meeting inside the prison – this can be used against me by staff or informers and threatens to keep me behind bars for the rest of my life! But if I do not admit to this, I can't recover!

Jim, it appears to me you've done a marvelous breakthrough job in allowing the SA option into the prison system there. What a risk you must have taken. And what a gift to us sexaholics! Thank you. I hope and pray we can become worthy of what you are doing, that the results will pay off in changed lives. Help us do a better job.

Off the top of my head, here's some "blue sky" conjecture about how we might be more effective. How might we immerse those men who qualify and truly want SA sobriety in some kind of "safe haven" context like we have on the outside, where they could actually work the spirit of the program? Everyone there would be committed to the SA program of recovery, with known sober members joining from the outside. Immerse them in *real* SA, with sponsors, working the Steps, service, occupational work, etc. Hopefully, some offenders there would eventually be honestly saying, as they went around the circle introducing themselves at every meeting, "My name is Joe, I'm a lust addict, sex addict, sex offender, and child abuser, and I've been sober since _____. I'd like to bring to the light the sexual dream I had last night and my fantasy today. I want to bring them to the light to break the power they have over me." If he can say that, in a continuing fellowship of intense light where some others are doing the same, he is progressively recovering.

Considering the hopelessness the men feel is why I encouraged them Friday to find that one other inmate whom they could dare to trust and with whom they could get current with every tempting experience, memory, and fantasy they encounter as they work the Steps. In the unit, in the exercise yard, in the chow hall. This is where both the action point of the malady and the front line of defense are – in the thoughts and intents of the heart, in the everyday moment. This is where recovery is – "impossible" as it is. The actual acting out is way down the line. It's "the stinkin' thinkin' that leads to drinkin'." As you know, being institutionalized in itself can cause acting out and other symptoms to diminish or disappear. We learn that from the institutionalization of alcoholics. A person puts himself under an institution's care, under the doctor's care, and lo and behold, the craving for alcohol often vanishes!

Thus, the only help I could offer the men Friday was to impress them with the fact that there is no way for them to control their prison destiny. Stop trying! The only thing they can do is to get and stay sexually sober, get into true recovery from lust, and trust God for the outcome. They are as powerless over the system as they are over their own lust. They must trust God even more than we on the outside. Trust him not only for that inner victory they cannot produce on their own, but also for their very destiny. That's what the Third Step is all about.

If I were in prison today, each morning and evening I would make something like the following commitment and prayer to God:

Today, just for this day, I surrender my having sex today, my sexuality, my orientation, my lust for [name the specific acting out or fantasy], my subconscious, and my fear of not getting out. I turn my stay in prison over to you just for this day. I ask that you keep me sober this day in thought, word, and deed, because I cannot. Help me to bring the thoughts and intents of my heart to the light today, and show me how I can help another sexaholic today.

Jim, I've been ranting "off the top of my head." If you have any comments, they would be greatly appreciated. We're working for the same thing.

I would like to offer you a copy of our book Sexaholics Anonymous, if you do not already have one. I would also like to share with you an as-yet-unpublished manuscript I've written titled The New Lust and the Myth of Sexual Orientation. It gives a broader psychological and cultural perspective of what every sexaholic is up against. May I send these to you?

My deep personal gratitude for your work there with sexaholics and your desire to help. If I can help in any way, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Roy K