

A photograph of a thatched hut on a wooden pier over the ocean. The hut has a thick, brown thatched roof and is supported by wooden posts. A person is sitting on the pier, looking out at the water. The water is a deep blue, and the sky is a clear, bright blue. The overall scene is peaceful and tropical.

theJournal

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S.L.A.A. and Mental Illness

Characteristics of Sex and Love Addiction

1. Having few healthy boundaries, we become sexually involved with and/or emotionally attached to people without knowing them.
2. Fearing abandonment and loneliness, we stay in and return to painful, destructive relationships, concealing our dependency needs from ourselves and others, growing more isolated and alienated from friends and loved ones, ourselves, and God.
3. Fearing emotional and/or sexual deprivation, we compulsively pursue and involve ourselves in one relationship after another, sometimes having more than one sexual or emotional liaison at a time.
4. We confuse love with neediness, physical and sexual attraction, pity and/or the need to rescue or be rescued.
5. We feel empty and incomplete when we are alone. Even though we fear intimacy and commitment, we continually search for relationships and sexual contacts.
6. We sexualize stress, guilt, loneliness, anger, shame, fear and envy. We use sex or emotional dependence as substitutes for nurturing care, and support.
7. We use sex and emotional involvement to manipulate and control others.
8. We become immobilized or seriously distracted by romantic or sexual obsessions or fantasies.
9. We avoid responsibility for ourselves by attaching ourselves to people who are emotionally unavailable.
10. We stay enslaved to emotional dependency, romantic intrigue, or compulsive sexual activities.
11. To avoid feeling vulnerable, we may retreat from all intimate involvement, mistaking sexual and emotional anorexia for recovery.
12. We assign magical qualities to others. We idealize and pursue them, then blame them for not fulfilling our fantasies and expectations.

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S.L.A.A. Signs of Recovery

1. We seek to develop a daily relationship with a Higher Power, knowing that we are not alone in our efforts to heal ourselves from our addiction.
2. We are willing to be vulnerable because the capacity to trust has been restored to us by our faith in a Higher Power.
3. We surrender, one day at a time, our whole life strategy of, and our obsession with the pursuit of romantic and sexual intrigue and emotional dependency.
4. We learn to avoid situations that may put us at risk physically, morally, psychologically or spiritually.
5. We learn to accept and love ourselves, to take responsibility for our own lives, and to take care of our own needs before involving ourselves with others.
6. We become willing to ask for help, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable and learning to trust and accept others.
7. We allow ourselves to work through the pain of our low self-esteem and our fears of abandonment and responsibility. We learn to feel comfortable in solitude.
8. We begin to accept our imperfections and mistakes as part of being human, healing our shame and perfectionism while working on our character defects.
9. We begin to substitute honesty for self-destructive ways of expressing emotions and feelings.
10. We become honest in expressing who we are, developing true intimacy in our relationships with ourselves and others.
11. We learn to value sex as a by-product of sharing, commitment, trust and cooperation in a partnership.
12. We are restored to sanity, on a daily basis, by participating in the process of recovery.

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Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous Preamble

Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous is a Twelve Step, Twelve Tradition-oriented fellowship based on the model pioneered by Alcoholics Anonymous.

The only qualification for S.L.A.A. membership is a desire to stop living out a pattern of sex and love addiction. S.L.A.A. is supported entirely through contributions of its membership, and is free to all who need it.

To counter the destructive consequences of sex and love addiction we draw on five major resources:

1. **Sobriety.** Our willingness to stop acting out in our own personal bottom-line addictive behavior on a daily basis.
2. **Sponsorship/Meetings.** Our capacity to reach out for the supportive fellowship within S.L.A.A.
3. **Steps.** Our practice of the Twelve Step program of recovery to achieve sexual and emotional sobriety.
4. **Service.** Our giving back to the S.L.A.A. community what we continue to freely receive.
5. **Spirituality.** Our developing a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves, which can guide and sustain us in recovery.

As a fellowship S.L.A.A. has no opinion on outside issues and seeks no controversy. S.L.A.A. is not affiliated with any other organizations, movements, or causes, either religious or secular.

We are, however, united in a common focus: dealing with our addictive sexual and emotional behavior. We find a common denominator in our obsessive/compulsive patterns, which transcends any personal differences of sexual orientation or gender identity.

We need protect with special care the anonymity of every S.L.A.A. member. Additionally we try to avoid drawing undue attention to S.L.A.A. as a whole from the public media.

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The Twelve Steps of S.L.A.A.*

1. We admitted we were powerless over sex and love addiction - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with a Power greater than ourselves, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to sex and love addicts, and to practice these principles in all areas of our lives.

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Letter From the Editor

Dear Reader,

I was surprised to receive so many responses to the question of the day for this issue. Mental illness is often a taboo subject in our society. It is a testament to the strength of the S.L.A.A. Program and the 12 Steps and Traditions that fellows have the ability to share openly and honestly on this subject and help others. I learned a lot from reading these articles. I hope they convey the same experience, strength and hope to you that they did to me. I am grateful for the shares.

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

The Conference Journal Committee, a service body within Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, publishes *the Journal* for the good of the international S.L.A.A. membership. Oversight and policy is provided in accordance with the Ninth Tradition.

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Journal, but it is impractical for all of the content of a periodical such as *the Journal* to be Conference-approved. Each recovery group can determine its own position on the use of content from *the Journal* at its meetings.

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COVER PHOTO: PUNTA GORDA, ROATAN, HONDURAS

Question of the Day

& Answers from Yesterday

“HOW DO YOU FIND SUPPORT WITH MENTAL ILLNESS (BIPOLAR, DEPRESSION, SCHIZOPHRENIA)? HOW AND WHEN HAVE YOU DISCLOSED YOUR ILLNESS TO FELLOWS IN S.L.A.A., AND/OR HOW AND WHEN HAVE YOU DISCLOSED THAT YOU ARE A MEMBER OF S.L.A.A. IN MENTAL HEALTH GROUPS? HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR RECOVERY?”

It's interesting having co-occurring mental health issues while you're in recovery for S.L.A.A. I have Multiple Sclerosis, depression, and anxiety. That's a whole lot of stuff. If I don't go to meetings, call fellows, and practice fellowship or self-care, my recovery is out the window. As someone who works in mental health, I see bits of my story in my clients every day — but I couldn't get to this place until I started recovery in S.L.A.A. I had no sense of self-awareness or mindfulness or even a sense of community until I began S.L.A.A. S.L.A.A. became my source of strength that pushed me towards giving strength to others. Practice the steps each day. Check in with yourself. Be there for others.

— **Alessandra, Los Angeles**

A huge part of helping my depression is eating healthy (water, vegetables, fruit, grains), taking vitamins and exercising. When I practise self-care in all areas of my life, I feel more balanced.

— **Jaki Jo, London**

I rely on sober members of our Fellowship who suffer from mental illness as a resource. They give me insight on the way that those with mental illness think and act.

— **Gabriel G., Sacramento, CA**

It was thru the experience of the Fellowship, and the sobriety gained that I was able to identify conditions of bipolar and autism. My addictive behavior patterns obscured the symptoms of these conditions. My addictive behavior patterns were consequences of coping with these conditions. I don't view bipolar or autism as a mental illness. They are conditions where the brain functions differently than the statistical norms. The support of the Fellowship facilitated clarification of these conditions.

— **Anonymous**

I have disclosed my mental illness to members in S.L.A.A. that I trust. I usually only talk about it when I feel like I can be of service by sharing my experience, strength and hope. I will on occasion, share about it in a meeting if it relates to or triggers my sex and love addiction. I don't use meetings as therapy, mistaking the Program as treatment for clinical depression. In my experience, the 12-Step process does not cure mental illness, just as it would not cure any physical illness. I have made the mistake in the past, believing if I got enough recovery, I could go off my medication. This led me to a stay in the psychiatric ward. Because of my depression, if it is not treated outside of S.L.A.A., I tend to self-medicate by using fantasy and extreme dependence on other people. I lose conscious contact with my Higher Power.

— **Kim S., Huntington Beach, CA**

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “How do you find support with mental illness (bipolar, depression, schizophrenia)? How and when have you disclosed your illness to fellows in S.L.A.A., and/or how and when have you disclosed that you are a member of S.L.A.A. in mental health groups? How does it affect your recovery?” Please share your experience, strength and hope.” The next two themes are: #170 — Hospitals and Institutions — “Have you ever been incarcerated/hospitalized because of your sex and love addiction? Please share your experience, strength and hope.” — The deadline for submissions is Nov. 15, 2017. And #171 — 11th Step — Please share your experience of practicing the 11th Step and/or any prayers or practices of meditation that you have found helpful. The deadline for submissions is Jan. 15, 2018. Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

As a recovering alcoholic and sex and love addict, who has been sober for 27 years in A.A., and six years in S.L.A.A., I have been honest with my doctors, therapists, sponsor, and any group members who seem safe. As someone who cherishes her recovery, I take it seriously, and thank God, have nothing to hide now. Yes, I have had depression and anxiety under control for many years, thank God again.

— **Marsha Z., Jamaica Plain, MA**

Occasionally, I will briefly talk about it if I feel it is appropriate.

— **Andrew E., Pittsburgh**

I have major anxiety disorder. Almost all of my fellows in S.L.A.A. who have heard me share know this. I have no more shame about my mental illness because of working the Steps and Traditions in this Program.

— **Sarah C., San Antonio**

I work the Program in conjunction with my work with a therapist. I encourage all sponsees to do this also. Most sponsees disclose their mental illness to me and I am allowed to demonstrate loving boundaries and compassion.

This resulted in completed Steps and a whole new life strategy that works.

— **Suzanne, CA**

I was diagnosed with depression in my third year in S.L.A.A. I was glad to hear from another Fellowship that recovery is not a doctor, implying that I should see a doctor for a medical problem. I am open about this in S.L.A.A. as hearing from others who are on medication gave me strength.

— **Trevor G., Seattle**

I have PTSD and was seeking therapy. I didn't and don't feel any need to be ashamed or sensitive about this. I found that therapy addressed issues recovery was not able to address. The support of the Fellowship simply helped me feel more supported to get the resources I needed.

— **Jean**

I do not know if I am bipolar. I feel a lot of acceptance with friends that are. For me it has been a learning process.

— **Amalia, Boston, MA**

I have chronic depression. Recovery has helped a great deal in moderating my mental issues. I find like-abled members and stay current with them after I have disclosed with them. I make myself available to others who share that they are challenged with mental issues to give the support that I so freely received.

— **Rick B., Largo, FL**

Question of the Day

In West Palm Beach, I have a close friend who introduced me to an association that deals with mental illness issues. They have weekly meetings and share experience, strength and hope. I use my discretion when disclosing mental illness when appropriate. And I use the same discretion when discussing S.L.A.A. with those in the area of mental health. Both areas affect my recovery in a positive and healthy way.

— Anonymous

I can share my experience as a sponsor of those with mental illness. I do consider mental illness as an outside issue. I tell my sponsees that I am not qualified to address those issues or counsel them. I refer them to address those issues with a therapist. I can point them to the Steps – How are they powerless over their mental stress? And trusting a power greater than themselves can restore them to sanity. I quote the A.A. Big Book that the HOW programme uses – that some of us suffer from grave mental illnesses, but we do recover if we have a willingness to be rigorously honest.

— Liz D., Dallas, TX

I have a sponsee with a borderline disorder. Thanks to his good work with the Steps, the psychiatrist changed his diagnosis to an anxiety disorder. A mental illness can be difficult in your recovery, but it's still about dealing with anger and fear.

— Maarten, the Netherlands

I support my girlfriend with her issues as a result of being a Program fellow and a partner with the tools of the Program and because I surrender to and rely on a Higher Power. I find support with my issues from fellows and my sponsor. I disclose mental illness to S.L.A.A. individuals and very occasionally when it is useful to others. It humbles me and frees me of guilt and judgement. Like the Big Book of A.A. says, "There are those too who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest.

— Dion M., Orinda, CA

I get support with mental illness by attending a psychiatrist and a counsellor. I take my medication and practice the 12 Steps, stay close to my fellows, my Higher Power and my sponsor. I have disclosed this through sharing at meetings and one-on-one. It affects my recovery sometimes but I work the tools and get outside help.

— Faye, Dublin

I am open in my recovery programs about bipolar disorder. I am open in all areas of my life about my S.L.A.A. participation.

— Nancy G., San Diego

Recovering With the Help of Friends



It was the wee hours of a June morning in 2013. I desperately needed to rest, but instead was compulsively searching through sites on my phone for evidence that the world was out to get me.

Kicked out of my house by my wife a week earlier, I was staying at the home of dear friends that I had known for 12 years. I had every reason in the world to trust them, but in my paranoia, I concluded that the people living in the house were out to get me.

I got up that Sunday morning and walked 2 miles or so to church, where I walked in and demanded the chance to speak to

the congregation.

I don't remember what I thought I was going to say, only that I was not in my right mind and this was fueled by terror.

Denied that opportunity by people wiser than I, I left and frantically wandered the neighborhood, ending up curled up on the floor of a hospital.

My phone rang. Dear friends concerned about me had come to look for me and moments later drove me to their house, where for much of that summer they put aside their lives to care for me.

A few days later, I was driving to a therapy appointment and my mind interpreted the radio

commercials and road signs I passed as directed to me.

That's the picture of me when my mental illness is at its worst. I've been diagnosed with Delusional Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Major Depressive Disorder with Psychotic References, and Unspecific Psychosis. These disorders play out when I am triggered by a stray thought, a phrase said by a friend, anything at all that triggers the memories of the terror that day in June 2013. The terror is the fear that people would really know me, the me that struggles with Sex and Love Addiction, the me that much of

the world would label a pervert, the me that obsessively and dysfunctionally interacts with women in my life and on the Internet.

It was those dear friends who got me through that first spell in 2013, a spell brought on by my addiction and its consequences. Later that year, a friend who I had known for 10 years told me I needed to be in recovery and took me to a meeting. He tells me that he was afraid he would have to punch me out to get me to go with him, but I knew I needed it and no such altercation was necessary! After a year in the generic step meeting he took me to, I had learned much about myself but found no consistent sobriety and it was then that I stumbled into the rooms of S.L.A.A.

It was in S.L.A.A. that I learned that I was not alone as I sat around a room listening to others share their struggles. I realized that in these rooms, the real me could come out and be welcomed and accepted. It also pushed me to grow and change and become healthy. Two weeks after finding that comforting group of people meeting in a church basement on Wednesday evenings, they asked me to chair a meeting. With the binder in front of me, I read out loud, "Welcome to the downtown Wednesday evening meeting of S.L.A.A. My name is I— and I am a recovering sex and love addict." I had found a home group.

From when I first walked into a 12-step meeting in fall 2013 until the spring of 2015, I was plagued by a terrible darkness, my mind churning and rehashing painful memories and words and mistakes. It was horrible to be alone with myself. It was in the rooms that I began to learn the coping skills to be able to process that pain and darkness. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change" became my mantra for accepting the past.

Somehow that darkness began

to lift. Twice since then I've been hospitalized, by my own choice, for mental illness. It isn't gone. It can be triggered easily and I can very quickly tailspin into that darkness. When I first checked myself into the psychiatric hospital in May 2016, one of the first calls I made was to the head of our local Intergroup. A few days later he and another member of the Fellowship visited me there. They brought me the comfort of knowing that I was not alone, that I was valued enough for them to come to see me and empathize with me.

Later that year, driving with my mother and kids across the state to visit family in New Jersey, a phone call and a radio recording triggered my trauma reaction of fear and paranoia. I was ready to check myself back into the hospital. Instead, I texted several recovery friends and resumed driving. By the time we reached our destination, I had concerned voicemails from my 2 closest recovery friends and another who had said to call him once an hour through the night. As I spoke with these dear friends on the phone that night, I laughed and cried and the darkness lifted. I didn't need to go to the hospital. The next day, Thanksgiving, I was in bad shape as the day wore on, the stress of the holiday taking its toll on me. All that day, I got through knowing that there was a phone meeting that night of the Thursday night group in my region. That phone meeting got me through that night and I was able to come out of that spell of darkness without needing to return to the hospital.

Come February of this year however, my mental illness was back. I was terrified and my mind was misinterpreting reality again. So it was that I found myself in tears at a Thursday noon meeting. While I don't know that anyone there really understood, they cared and they listened and they

comforted me and I knew that I was loved and accepted despite being terrified.

I also knew I had to go back into the hospital. But I am one of the two committed openers of the Friday evening meeting. *I'll just go and chair the meeting before I go to the hospital*, I thought. Only two other S.L.A.A. members came to the meeting that night. When I shared my situation, a woman I hadn't even met before offered to accompany me to the hospital. The other, a recovery acquaintance I've known for a few years, offered to take care of things for me while I was away.

So it was that I sat in the waiting room of the hospital with a woman I didn't even know a few hours earlier. The chance to have a get-to-know-you chat made those hours in the waiting room go by faster and far more pleasantly than if I had been there with only the fearful inside of my mind. "How do you two know each other?" the doctor asked. We looked at each other and laughed. "We know some of the same people..." one of us offered. "How long have you known each other?" We laughed even harder. "A few weeks" my new recovery friend responded. What a blessing, to have someone to laugh with at such a dark moment in my life.

I guess that about sums up how recovery has interacted with my mental illness. In recovery, I am not alone. I am not alone. I am loved and accepted, complete with my faults and failures and regardless of whether it's a day when my mind is working right or not. I have people to laugh with and cry with, people who can tell by the tone of a text that I need a phone call, people who can help ground me in reality, people who will fight alongside me in these battles called life and recovery.

I am not alone.

—Anonymous

Mental Illness and S.L.A.A.



I was diagnosed bipolar in 1994. I used to tell everyone about my diagnosis upon meeting them — not realizing that most people tend to shy away from bipolar people. After I started S.L.A.A. in 1998, it seemed my bipolar behavior got better. Bjork has a song “It’s oh so quiet” that seems to sum up my typical bipolar behavior. A friend played the song for me and I thought it was hysterical because it was right on! My life was somewhat settled when I was not in a relationship. When there was someone new and

exciting, I was MANIC!

I had a male therapist who helped me work through my mental illness and S.L.A.A. behaviors. What has become apparent to me is that I don’t need to lead with what is wrong with me when I first meet people. I don’t have to make excuses for my behavior. If I know my behavior is inappropriate, then I should be able to modify the behavior when I’m around people.

It has been extremely important to me to have a healthy sponsor and/or fellow recovering

people to talk to before I enter a situation that may trigger inappropriate behaviors. S.L.A.A. saved my life. One of the best tools I found was the chapter on withdrawal in our text. Now that I understand the withdrawal process, after repeating it enough times, I know what is coming. I know I will survive the pain and anguish and am grateful for the process — even though it is painful, I learn a lot about myself.

I live in a smaller town now that doesn’t have S.L.A.A. meetings, so I had to start going to

Al-Anon meetings. I'm grateful for the dual membership. Al-Anon has helped me learn when to keep my mouth shut; what information is necessary to share; and how to pause and think about what I'm about to say or do.

So, I no longer believe I need to spill my guts to someone about all of my dysfunction upon meeting them. If it is someone I'm dating, I don't rush to tell him I'm mentally ill or a recovering sex and love addict. I have no idea how long the relationship will last, but there is time to get to know a person. There are a lot of great conversation topics in layers as I

get to know someone.

I may discover I don't like their political viewpoints, religious beliefs, opinion of women, speech patterns, the way they laugh or gossip. My point is, I finally learned it is important to get to know the other person for who they are, before vomiting all of my stuff on them. I used to think that just because the person liked me, I should like them. Not true. I get to decide if I like this person. I can be weird without explaining why; especially if the explanation makes me sound worse.

The bottom line for me is that all people have stories and

behaviors from their past. Other people have their baggage too. I've become comfortable with who I am and have learned to take lots of deep slow breaths when I feel like blurting out my list of dysfunctions. I switch gears and ask more questions about the other person to find out about who THEY are. I am responsible for taking care of myself, which includes waiting to see how long I'm going to have a relationship with someone and then gauge when I feel safe sharing more about me.

— Anonymous

Finding the Willingness to Explore Mental Health Issues

I am mentally ill. As a result of our disease I had a psychotic break in the mid-90s. Blessedly, I came out of it (even prior to being appropriately medicated); but as our text so wisely notes, there is the threat of "irrevocably" losing sanity. I'm scared to death of that so I stay in recovery.

I am very open about my illness in our rooms. A long time ago, a friend in another fellowship shared that she had been psychotic and it opened the door for me to share it too. I find acceptance and support in the rooms. I meet many fellow sufferers. It's good to be among

"my kind" – on many levels.

I have contacted the local branch of a national mental health organization to volunteer but there was not a suitable opening for me. In addition, many of this organization's events in New Jersey seem to be in the more southern part of the state. I would love to do a walk to raise awareness and funds for the organization and watch closely for notice of one locally.

I wish I could say I feel "stigma-free" (the term many communities use) but I'm not. I believe unfortunately there is still a stigma attached to mental illness, and I'm reticent to share it

with others.

In my psychiatrist's office, I speak liberally about my S.L.A.A. involvement. I believe it has been key to my getting well, and that the Program has done for me far more than therapy.

It's funny that this should be *The Journal* Question of the Day. I have only just very recently come to accept that I am mentally ill – it's been a long journey to that!

Finally I am powerless over that too...and God can restore me to...SANITY! The rooms are miracle-makers in many ways!

— Christina, NJ, recovering romantic fantasy addict.

Challenging to Accept Myself for Who I Am



By the time I joined S.L.A.A., I was 50 years old and had 37 years of therapy under my belt due to my struggle with depression from family of origin dysfunction and violence. As a result, I was pretty open right away in meetings about my mental health history. When I share at meetings, I often describe what I'm learning in therapy and how I apply it to childhood trauma symptoms and daily life.

What I didn't understand, though, was how my tendency toward depression would complicate my recovery from addiction.

I got a sponsor soon after I joined, and I began writing on the 12 Steps, but I stayed stuck on Step 1 for almost 9 months. I resisted surrendering to a Higher Power for a very long time. Even though I had a spiritual practice, what I lacked was faith that I

could live a happy and free life in this world.

I had no idea how my depression contributed to my difficulty connecting to myself and my Higher Power. Low self-esteem and lack of self-worth made it challenging to accept myself for who I am – and self-acceptance is a mantra my sponsor has repeated after almost every conversation we have. My self-loathing was so complete that

it took me two years before I could even start to be gentle with myself and treat myself with kindness and compassion.

One way that depression made it hard for me to stay in recovery was that it made me vulnerable to emotional and social anorexia. I learned growing up that my family and friends felt uncomfortable in the presence of “depressed” people. I was literally told that if I was “going to be depressed,” they didn’t want me around, as if I had any control over my depression! I must have felt angry about this response, but at a very young age I learned to suppress my anger and instead turn it inward – which made me even more depressed.

I soon developed the idea that, in a state of depression, I was undesirable. Since I couldn’t “get out of my depression” with the snap of a finger, I retreated. Instead of going out and trying to meet people, I stayed home and escaped by watching romantic movies, reading romantic novels, or writing romantic fantasy short stories. I developed ferocious attachments to movie stars or fictional characters, even traveling long distances for the opportunity to meet an actor that I had a crush on. Inevitably, I would experience unrequited love and disappointment. I would crash emotionally, and my depression would deepen.

All through my twenties and early thirties, this “love addict” pendulum swung back and forth. My tendency to retreat intensified.

I didn’t realize it until much later, but in many ways my depression stemmed from being bored and lonely. I have a creative and intelligent mind, and for much of my adult life, these assets were underutilized. I was under-stimulated. When the Internet and online chat rooms burst onto the scene in the late 1990s, I became easily hooked.

It was something I could do

alone, in private, and be very creative. I developed an online persona and hooked men in chat rooms. We would stay online talking for hours, sometimes until dawn. Soon, intense flirting wasn’t enough. I became drawn into conversations involving bondage and submission. I eventually met some of these men in person to engage in scenes and sadomasochistic relationships. This went on for more than four years. I had no idea that my “sex addict” had been awakened.

Throughout all of this, a low grade depression was a regular part of my make-up. I was pulled between dark feelings of not wanting to live anymore and desperately wanting to connect with others and be happy. Unable to end my own life directly, I acted out in ways that indirectly put my life at risk on a regular basis.

Finally, when my behaviors had reached a height of insanity that I found difficult to manage, I confessed to my therapist what was going on. I had even hid what I was doing from her! She ordered me to attend an S.L.A.A. meeting, and I did.

With the help of my sponsor, I immediately went cold turkey on using adult websites and chat rooms and meeting men I didn’t know for sex.

I’ve been sober on these bottom lines for four years. Believe me – that was easy compared to truly addressing my depressive tendencies and developing a positive relationship with myself.

Most of my recovery work over the last four years has been focused on affirming who I am. I’ve had to find the courage to look at my character defects, and to struggle to identify and celebrate my character assets. I’ve had to let go of resentments and the need to control situations and people.

I’ve had to appreciate my intuition and wisdom. I’ve had to build my capacity to trust others

and be intimate with them. I’ve had to develop confidence in my ability to navigate relationships, and to work through my discomfort when there’s conflict and tension.

I get to practice my relationship skills all the time by talking to recovery partners every day.

I’ve tested the waters of acceptance by opening up to several people when I experienced a dark and gloomy day, and they didn’t reject me. I’ve confessed to my sponsor my fear that if I disagree with her about something, she’ll abandon me, and she’s stuck by me for four years so far.

I’m showing up more authentically with my family, and they still welcome me into their lives.

From these experiences, every day, every week, my hope grows that I can be in a healthy intimate relationship with a romantic partner.

I haven’t disclosed to mental health groups I’ve attended that I am a member of S.L.A.A. because I don’t feel comfortable doing so. Instead, I let them know I’m in a 12-Step program, and I share a lot of the tools I’ve learned with them, which they’ve told me they find beneficial.

Now at the start of my fifth year of recovery, I would say that more than 75 percent of the time I naturally look at myself with positive regard, engage in self-care, and feel connected to others.

About 90 percent of the time, I look forward to living and manage my depressive tendencies successfully.

I’m still trying to close those gaps. I plan to stay on this path for the rest of my life because I recognize that the potential for personal and interpersonal growth in recovery is unlimited.

— Anonymous, Arizona

Sharing Brings Healing and Hope



I remember being so depressed that my libido was completely gone. For so many years, I had cursed my desire for love and longing.

When I experienced episodes of major depression and could barely find the strength to feed myself or get out of bed, the desire for affection or for physical pleasure seemed like a luxury I simply couldn't afford. It seemed like trying to pack a washer and dryer when I was really trying to survive being lost in the wilderness.

My mental health issues took first priority and I was not able to come into the meetings until after I had become healthy enough and had enough treatment to have some recollection of a desire for

sex or for affectionate relationships.

And as I became healthier, my desire to escape in romantic relationships came back full swing. I knew if I didn't come into the rooms and put my program first, I was doomed to repeat the mistakes that created such a dark pit of depression that caused me to be so sick that I could not even make it to meetings.

Putting my program first, I was able to incorporate my story and needing psychiatric help as well as medication to overcome major depression and chronic pain into the discussions in the meetings.

I have always felt very welcomed and welcoming of other people that struggle with complex

problems.

The more we share the more we can get better and today I am so grateful for the program as well as for all of the help that I got from my doctors because my life is so full of joy and meaning that I can barely remember the girl that could not get out of bed.

I am in a committed relationship with the most wonderful person God ever created, I feel. We are so respectful and encouraging of each other. We put our Higher Power first, our Program second and a relationship third so that it has room to grow. Knowing that each of us has struggled with major depressive episodes in the past keeps us quick to encourage

each other and to say kind things so that we keep our own doubts and fears at bay. I'm so grateful for the Fellowship as well as others that work their Program.

Together we can recover not just from compulsions related to love and sex addiction, but also from severe health and mental problems. As long as I am willing

to do the next right thing and be humble, I can be open to experience all of the ways God is using other people to heal me.

— Anonymous, TX

Bipolar & S.L.A.A

Hi, I'm S. and I'm a Sex- and Love Addict.

Thank you so much for the topic of this issue. I've got a lot of personal experience on this topic.

I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder when I was 25 years old. I came to S.L.A.A. 8 years later and have been in the Fellowship on and off since 2003.

I have been and still am hugely supported by psychiatric hospitals, treatments, medications, psychiatrists and psychologists, rehabilitation and recovery places regarding my bipolar disorder. Privately my family and friends totally support me. Part of my S.L.A.A. history is the story of how my first manic episode started because I was unhappy in love which turned into promiscuity. Somehow, I think part of my sickness is having a bipolar disorder and part of it is me being a sex and love addict.

Sometimes they have been feeding each other. My recovery in each has also been feeding helpful. At that time, I didn't know of the Fellowship but had I known of it I definitely would have entered the rooms of S.L.A.A. many years before this event occurred. My love life has been hurtful from the very beginning. Even as a teenager until now, I have had no sense regarding my sexual behaviour. My sex and love life has always been unmanageable.

I haven't disclosed my membership in S.L.A.A. to my family. But my friends are very

happy that I've found this place to get help because they've seen and been affected by my unmanageability. My mom has certainly also been affected by it. She knows I'm getting help. But I haven't revealed that I'm getting help from a 12-Step program that isn't in the psychiatric system. She does know of my interest in the A.A. program.

I've had my concerns in S.L.A.A. throughout the years about whether or not I should tell newcomers that I have a mental illness. I am concerned that they might judge me and might think I didn't have any recovery to share with them, especially if they asked for sponsorship. My experience is quite the opposite. The more open I was about my illness, the more I saw that it was me attaching stigma to it and not them.

Maybe some have judged me but I haven't noticed. In reality, sometimes when I am open and honest, others are relieved that they can also be open about their mental illness.

When I get calls from Program fellows who know of my mental illness, they show me that they don't really care. What matters is that they know I have recovery in S.L.A.A.

When I am the speaker at a meeting, I reveal that mental illness is part of my story. This is a part of what it was like before I entered S.L.A.A., what happened and what it's like now for me. At some meetings I might also mention it if I find it relevant.

I haven't disclosed my membership in S.L.A.A. in my mental health groups because I need to take care of myself and my vulnerability.

This is a very delicate sickness and topic. I have disclosed one-on-one with people who also might have some S.L.A.A. issues. That is taking care of both me and the other person and showing respect for people who actually don't want to hear that part of my private life.

I have certainly disclosed to my psychiatrist and other professional helpers. I have shown them the pamphlets of S.L.A.A. and told them I'm a member. I tell them how the Program helps me and that I know working on this part of myself supports my recovery from mental illness. Unfortunately, they haven't taken it seriously.

Finding support with bipolar disorder; disclosing the mental illness to fellows in S.L.A.A.; taking care of whom I tell about my membership in S.L.A.A. affects my recovery. It helps me to be more loving to myself and accept who I am no matter how my life turns out. I have to be observant of people, places, and things.

I'm loved by my friends, and respected by my fellows in S.L.A.A. even with my diseases. I get acknowledgement for working towards healing both of them.

I'm grateful for this Fellowship. Thank you for the topic. Thank you for letting me share.

Best,

— S., Denmark

Share space

Lust and the Internet

Hi, I am JL, sex and love addict.

A book was at the corner of the dining room table. I looked at its cover from the corner of my eye, but thought nothing of it. It was a book on breaking free from compulsive online sexual behavior written by a respected counselor in the field of sex addiction. We are at the end of April 2005. My wife had bought it as my behavior had been more and more radicalized.

My grandiosity did not even think that this might be something to look at. I never thought that I had a problem with my lusting. My risky behavior extended to compulsively looking at sites on the Internet, not only on my computer, but on any computer, including hers. At times, the searches would open windows faster than one could close them, leaving a trail of destruction behind.

A few days later, she confronted me, and I am grateful she did. I can only imagine today the courage that it would take to confront a man who always denied any link to Internet porn sites or other potentially suspicious activities.

I had always lied and denied any wrongdoing. But that day, I stopped lying and I admitted the truth as well as 25 years of unacceptable behaviors.

In my arrogance, I actually thought that it would pass quickly,

that, in a few hours, there would be nothing of it. But this was not the case, I realize now that it was a tremendous blow to my spouse that shattered the trust of 19 years of life together, in 3 different cities and so shortly after the passing of her mom.

It was like a ton of bricks hitting her. And I was somewhat oblivious to all of it, typically focusing on me and my needs only.

I was so isolated, I had nobody to turn to. After more hours of pain through questioning, I had made the choice to provide honest answers. Her love for me came in the form of a phone number to call “if” I wanted help.

I remembered calling and scheduling a meeting with a sex therapist. I was so egocentric, I wanted to meet when I was available and I wanted the “solution” to this problem. Little did I know. That was the beginning of a road to recovery, one in which the Internet continued to be a part of life. But I realized that it was not only the Internet but admitting to my powerlessness to my compulsive acting out that needed to be addressed. I was an addict before the Internet. I remembered being frustrated by the time it would take in the early days to download pictures with the modem. The lust was compulsive. I wanted more and more. I was isolating more and more. I did not think that

anyone would notice, as I always tried to cover my tracks.

Compartmentalization and secrecy was part of who I was. I wanted people to see the good worker, exemplary team player, and the good husband providing for family and friends.

I remember telling the therapist that I was present 99.9% of the time, but that I needed my private time to take care of myself. But as I said it, I realized the selfishness of that statement. I also thought I would die with that disease, that nobody would know about this, and that I would keep it forever a secret. I sometimes spent hours and hours planning trips where I could act out. With no accountability and money in my pocket, I could delay acting out for weeks or months. The lustful images or interactions were only to please myself without caring for who I could hurt by those actions: not my wife, not the people I objectified, not even myself. Lust does not look at the consequences, only at what it can have right then and there.

The therapist gave me a brochure with a phone number for the 12-Step meetings in the area. I started going to meetings and understanding the Steps, sharing my deepest feelings and fears.

I continued the therapy sessions to expel the thoughts as early as they cropped up in my mind.

I remember going to a weekend

retreat that had a profound impact on me: I really knew that I belonged. To mitigate the impact of the Internet, I had monitoring software installed on my computers. I was uncertain of what would be the consequences of even “attempting” to look at pornography.

It was hard to ask for help. Asking for a sponsor was also a big step. My fear of rejection was strong especially since at the time I was also unemployed. I wrote my emotions in a diary almost daily. I now can go back through the notes and see those moments of lucidity, and the clarity that becoming sober gave me.

At the time, the situation at home was difficult; my father-in-law’s health needed attention and my wife went out of state for several weeks.

But we kept in touch and I shared honestly my pains and difficulties, but also the little successes over lust and the power of addiction. I started to understand the pain that I had created.

Of course, I read and worked the sex addiction therapy book that I mentioned earlier, underlining the truths, and accepting my behavior. Later on, with more therapy and meetings, I also became totally involved in working the Steps as well as in another sexual addiction recovery book. I came to realize that this is a disease, in which I was afraid of myself and was building a wall of protection to avoid feeling pain and attachment.

The little victories are like peeling an onion. Objectification can come from all media, not just the Internet. It can hit at any time or any place.

This is why for me, I must live the Steps of the Program and make sure that I am honest with my struggles. But the work is needed.

I like this statement from my

sponsor: “It is not because you took a shower last week that you don’t need to take one today.” Well, a few years ago, I travelled a lot and I missed too many meetings. I thought I had it under control because I was not actively acting out. During one of my international travels, I could hear the voices in my head. I relapsed.

The guilt was immediately overwhelming and I admitted to it right away in my diary, and in phone calls to my wife, to whom I promised honesty, and to my sponsor. I accepted my arrogance, and returned to the Steps.

Finding the will to avoid

I realized that it was not only the Internet but admitting to my powerlessness to my compulsive acting out that needed to be addressed.

clicking on something that can get me down the slippery slope is always tough; it no longer needs to be pornography, but it could be embedded in memory and recall, it can be in movies, on TV, advertising or in the newspaper.

I need to stay aware of it and really have to ask myself why I would want to do this.

Often, I can trace it to some elements of my life that deal with fear of the future, of the unknown, and even fear of success. What pain am I trying to medicate? I am lonely, anxious, depressed, scared, feeling rejected, feeling tension.

Why am I afraid to face it? Why am I procrastinating still?

And when I face it, admit that I am powerless over it to another, often my spouse, the power of the compulsion seems to fade away and those little victories over lust

help me to be a better person.

My acting out history was to rely on compulsive activity for good things or bad things happening in my life. It was always about me and making me feel good at the expense of others. It progressed to be very dangerous and destructive. I do feel today that I am blessed to pass the message to others, and, if my testimony can help, I will have done good for the day.

I remember how I felt before my very first meeting, and the importance of being accepted and not judged. Today, meditation and reflection on passages from recovery related readings, many coming directly to me from the Internet, occupy my life.

The program has given me so much. It has given me peace of mind and more confidence, as long as I remain vigilant and honest, using the tools of the Program to feel and live in the present. I have been given the gift of the serenity prayer written on a necklace. It can protect me if I listen to its words. I am not alone in this. My Higher Power and my fellows are my friends. My spouse is my partner. I owe her so much. If it wasn’t for the confrontation 12 years ago, I honestly don’t know where I would be today.

I recognize the pain that I have created in her life and in the lives of many others, and now try to live my amends by offering a better me. I am no longer going to die with my secret. I believe that things happen for a reason. My philosophy is that I don’t always have to understand it or agree with it, but I have to accept it. I am grateful for having found a spiritual connection, which supports me with love and compassion, and I am thankful for all the support of my sponsor and all the fellow addicts, who, by their sharing, have touched and enriched my life.

—JL

Finally Giving Up on the Lies



Hi All, my name is Becca and I am a sex and love addict. I am grateful to have this opportunity to share my story.

I started coming to S.L.A.A. online when I was desperate and hitting my bottom around the end of 2012. My sobriety date from my personal bottom lines in this

Fellowship is April 1st, 2013, so I have been sober for almost 4 years.

I first started exploring S.L.A.A. when a therapist suggested to me that I might be a sex addict. I really wanted to fix myself at that point because I was pregnant and was desperate to make things work with my husband. We got

married in November 2012, a month before my daughter was born. The shame caused by my actions surrounding sex and love addiction had never been worse.

This disease started creeping up in my life very early on and the shame was always there, but most of my behavior was secretive. Now my issues were at the forefront in

my life and undeniable to those people closest to me and I couldn't handle it. I was so angry, depressed, and hopeless. I was mad at myself but I was blaming everyone else in my life for what I was going through.

Lying was second nature to me. Lying was how I was able to manage having a double life from my teenage years and into early adult life. But now, I was being held accountable by being confronted. When I finally gave up on the lies, I found S.L.A.A. online.

For once, I felt like there were people in the world that I could relate to regarding these issues.

It wasn't just the behaviors that I related to, but the emotions, the traumas, and the sense of not being a worthwhile person. During my early journey in recovery, I cried every day. I see now that my sadness was necessary. I was, for the first time, getting honest with myself.

I was grieving the good relationships I had throughout my life that I neglected so I could pursue the unhealthy relationships. I was grieving my changing identity.

I was grieving the fact that I didn't get to have that fairytale wedding.

I was grieving the pain I inflicted in the lives of those people who were most important to me. For once, I was experiencing the pain that I numbed through acting out.

When I was first coming to meetings at S.L.A.A. online, I would hear some people say that it was important to come to meetings for a while to see if this was the right program for me.

And the next step was to find a sponsor and work the Steps. So, one day, I mustered up the courage to ask a familiar person in the room if they knew of a female

in the program who was accepting sponsees.

God worked a miracle in my life that day, because that day I gained a sponsor. Working the 12 Steps with guidance and a person I learned to trust is really what set me on the path to freedom from the addiction. The process was therapeutic, spiritual, at times painful, but honest and freeing.

I was led to faith, and experienced a spiritual awakening. For the first time in my life, I felt whole. There wasn't that void anymore. I had a purpose for my life now. I felt unconditionally loved by my Creator and forgiven. Soon thereafter, it became time to work on making my amends.

Boy, was this one tough! During my process of early recovery and with counseling, I was beginning to understand how family dynamics played a part in my life and what my role could be to contribute to improved relationships with them. My relationships with my husband, parents, and my sister at that time were very strained.

My husband and I were wavering back and forth on wanting to divorce and there was a lot of conflict between myself and my family of origin. I felt out of control again but I trudged forward with drafting my amends letters. One by one I made amends to my mother, father, sister, and husband.

What happened after that was nothing short of a miracle. My relationships with everyone in my family are much stronger, more sincere, and loving now.

I believe that this step was the catalyst in bringing forth some healing in these relationships. My marriage is better than it has ever been.

And I am learning alongside my partner the meaning of partnership, commitment, and

love with God as our guide and I am so grateful that he gave me a chance to change.

I was truly receiving the blessings of this Program, and I was being prepared to start to give back what I freely received. While doing step work one day, I came across a prayer that changed my attitude regarding service in the Fellowship. It is the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi.

It goes, "Lord make me an instrument of your peace, where there is hatred let me sow love, where there is injury, pardon, where there is doubt, faith, where there is despair, hope, where there is darkness, light, and where there is sadness, joy. O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen."

I'm sober today because of people that have continued to practice the principles and traditions of this Program. Whenever this recovery journey gets tough, I can remember, "I am not alone." My recovery never was all about me, or only because of my own efforts.

It is because of the Fellowship, and everyone who shares their own journey and cares about the addict who still suffers. I'm also sober today because of an Almighty God that has ultimate control of my destiny.

This Fellowship has brought a joy to my life that I didn't have before. Today I can look back at my process of hitting rock bottom as one of the biggest blessings of my life. Thanks everyone for letting me share.

—Becca

Finding Courage

I was in S.L.A.A. for many weeks before I realized I was saying, “courage, strength and hope” instead of “experience, strength and hope.” But I like it, still.

Courage struck me as the part of the Serenity Prayer I most longed for in my life. I had never believed I could have the courage to set boundaries to protect my body and spirit. I barely found the courage to face my shame and work the Steps, facing my part in the wrong relationships and pain and loss that had marked my experience.

But I did come to the rooms

and I felt welcomed first by the Inspiration Line. I was unable to stand up to my qualifier and I was unable to face others in person at meetings to admit my trauma and fear and sadness.

But for four months, I listened to the Inspiration Line at night alone and no matter the message, I heard, “Have courage.” In time, I asked my qualifier to join me in S.L.A.A. recovery. I told him he could come with me or I would go forward alone.

I told him I was going to be healthy and loved and healed. Then many weeks later, I came to feel this in my heart. I came to

believe it. I came to the rooms of S.L.A.A. alone but I am not alone now. I have recovery buddies who seek their own healing.

We help each other along. I have a dear sponsor. And now I have found courage time and again, courage that I did not believe could be my own.

I feel a sense of unity in my S.L.A.A. home group. I feel my Higher Power loves me. I feel worthy of healing and peace about my past. By the grace of God may we keep lifting each other up and sharing our courage, experience, strength and hope.

— Anonymous

Rainchecks to Recovery

The number that I posted the second semester of my sophomore year of college was “0.69.” That number represented something far more damning than an equivalent grade point average, for that was my combined weekly BAC (blood alcohol content). Clearly I was on a death mission; my addictive vices would be my ultimate demise. But the alcohol and drugs weren’t the only culprits. My inebriated dating hook-ups had become the powerful poison that would eventually take me down.

Instead of the clichéd Little Black Book, I called it my Red Book. It contained random phone numbers of guys I had met in bars, clubs, dorms, and the sixth lane of

the university’s indoor track. Hey, I was a short-distance sprinter. I acted with efficiency and speed. That determination was how I approached potential suitors, and I was collecting options for rainy days and lonely nights, something I would later find out to be “rainchecks.” (Page 11 of the S.L.A.A. Basic Text — *The Augustine Fellowship*. (1986). *Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous*. San Antonio, TX: Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc.)

I had a faint idea that I had developed a substantial drug problem at that point, but the love addiction was sly and covert. Both addictions were so intertwined that it was almost impossible to tell which one was worse. After

getting caught with my roommate’s boyfriend, it became glaringly apparent that my behavior was totally unmanageable.

I hadn’t necessarily planned this ill-fated tryst. One of my roommates and best friends was dating a college basketball player, to whom I was extremely attracted, all the more so because he was technically off limits. It was risky and highly unethical, but morality and libido are rarely in agreement. Our S.L.A.A. founder, Rich, describes this phenomenon in the S.L.A.A. text: “But for me my sexual nature is the baseline—the foundation for who and what I most truly am.” (Page 10 of the S.L.A.A. Basic Text.)

My two roommates, the basketball beau in question, and I were hanging out one evening watching movies. I could feel the tension in the air as I continually glanced over at him, fantasizing about my eventual “bait and switch” seduction strategy. He wasn’t exactly fighting my flirtation.

By the end of the night, I had quietly exchanged words with him near the bathroom, propositioning him to meet me in my room. The synchronized soiree was pure genius.

All would have gone off smoothly and no one would have known about my master plan except for one blatant faux pas: He left his jacket on a chair in the kitchen, so it was obvious he was still in the apartment! Luckily,

none of my roommates actually believed I would stoop so low, so no one initially dared to investigate the scene.

The morning after he left, in the early “walk of shame” hours, one roommate informed me that our other roommate, the one I had betrayed, had discovered our one-night stand and was so distraught that she would be moving out. It was a hard lesson to learn about friendship, love, and the foolishness of overstepping boundaries for selfish gain.

The bright side is that this is one event that launched my sobriety and eventual recovery from sex and love addiction. Similar to Rich, sobriety from alcohol abuse had brought me many blessings, but it was just the tip of the iceberg; there was more

work to be done, the hardest work I’ve done yet. Joining S.L.A.A. has been the most challenging and wisest decision I’ve made. Today, I’m pretty clear about what’s acceptable in the world of life and love. I have boundaries. I value and respect myself, and understand relationships on a much deeper level. My life has changed dramatically through S.L.A.A., professionally and personally.

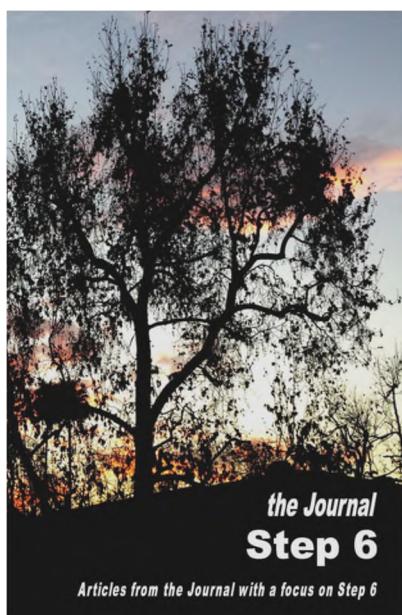
I guess that unhappy endings are the only way to forge new beginnings. S.L.A.A. was that new beginning for me, and I’m constantly amazed by the gifts this ever-unfolding journey bestows upon me.

— Grateful, IL

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Finding Real Love



I would pick men that I felt were defective in some way, overweight or emotionally damaged, depressed etc. Unconsciously I thought, since I'm so unworthy, if I think they are defective they might want me.

Recently I noticed I also covertly bargain with the person — “I have a good business. I have a nice home.” My belief I am not enough led me to enter into these

unconscious negotiations.

Now, through a spiritual awakening, I realize that the greatest gift I can offer another is my awareness, love, peace and completeness. I can join with others from this place and then any future partners. I can consciously explore if we are compatible to be life partners. Though I can love many people, there are less people who would

qualify to be a life partner.

Though a similar state of spiritual awareness leaps to the top of the list, I also want a partner who eats healthy food, exercises, etc. But my first criteria is to find someone who knows he is whole. I don't want someone with a delusional ego. I want a man who has presence and radiates love to all.

— Anonymous



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