

Steps of Transformation

An Orthodox Priest Explores the Twelve Steps

By

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My Story

Started my OA work on March 13, 2016

Struggle w/ food issues since I was 13 years old.

Binge eating, exercise bulimia,
compulsive dieting and food restricting.

Mental obsession w/ these issues and w/
overcoming them and with my body...

which is a big part of what food addiction is.

Secret Functional Alcoholism



What is Addiction?

Addiction is Sin

Sin is Addiction

Addiction is a disease of the body and of the spirit...it is a spiritual malady with physical manifestations/elements.

Addiction is slavery.

Addiction means you can't even get to the starting line of spiritual growth.

Addiction means being STUCK.

How Much is Too Much?

National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism:

Binge Drinking:

- NIAAA defines binge drinking as a pattern of drinking that brings blood alcohol concentration (BAC) levels to 0.08 g/dL. This typically occurs after 4 drinks for women and 5 drinks for men—in about 2 hours.
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- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), which conducts the annual National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), defines binge drinking as 5 or more alcoholic drinks for males or 4 or more alcoholic drinks for females on the same occasion (i.e., at the same time or within a couple of hours of each other) on at least 1 day in the past month.

Heavy Alcohol Use:

SAMHSA defines heavy alcohol use as binge drinking on 5 or more days in the past month.

Problem drinking behaviors might start out as:

Not knowing when to stop

Not wanting to stop, overfilling your glass

Secretive drinking

Drinking in the afternoon, or mixing wine with lemonade

Drinking alone to numb the day.

How Alcoholism Begins...

Instantaneous or gradual

Making excuses: If you had my pain/stress levels, you would drink, too.

I only drink at parties

I only drink at home after the kids are in bed

It is entirely possible to become an alcoholic just by drinking on all the wine days in the Nativity fast...that's the beginning, and then you are making excuses and drinking on the fasting days, too...because it is medicinal. (It's always medicinal...)

Low risk drinking is defined as: no more than seven drinks per week for a woman,
(with no more than three on any give day)

And for a man:

No more than 14 drinks in a week, with no more than 4 on any given day.

Remember: A drink is a wee tiny five ounces of wine.

Physical and Spiritual

“Addiction to alcohol is, at the most basic level, physical. Acting out that addiction, however, is a spiritual malady, and the way out-the cure-is not physical in nature because the individual cannot turn off the source of his longing using physical means. The longing is spiritual in nature and must be countered by spiritual means.” -p. 34

Spiritual sickness

“Once it has been established, even as a possibility, that addiction to alcohol is a spiritual malady which involves drinking, the way is clear to see a much bigger picture. Other addictions are similar, but instead of alcohol some other substance (for example, narcotics) [or food] or some other behavior (gambling, sex addiction) [binge eating, purging, food restricting, shopping] is involved. From this perspective, all addictive behaviors have a spiritual disorder at their center, manifested in a variety of ways, depending on the nature of the particular addict.”

p. 34

Characteristics of an Addict

Ego is king.

Terminal Uniqueness (“Who wouldn’t drink if they had MY problems?”)

Control (situations, people)

Manipulators

All of this boils down to a bad case of “My will be done”.

...and when an addict doesn’t get their way...an addict will use.

12 Steps

Is the program of reversal

Go from “my will be done” to “Thy will be done”.

Re-establishes the free will

Recovery is the starting line...it is not an advanced spiritual state, but it puts a person in a place where they can finally start to grow spiritually an as a person.

Addiction is extremely common

“Addiction, whether to a substance or to a behavior, is such a common phenomenon in the modern world that it is often necessary to deal with it before other, more traditional forms of spiritual education can be attempted.” p. 12

“It is possible that everyone alive, particularly anyone who lives in relative affluence, is affected by addiction in one form or another.” p. 12

Orthodoxy

“It is possible that even a brief glance at the steps may be enough to encourage a person to live the Orthodox faith with greater awareness and clarity...since each of the Twelve Steps can be shown to share some element in the thought and experience, the Scripture and prayer life of the Orthodox Church. I hope to demonstrate that it is quite possible for Orthodox Christians to incorporate these steps into their own lives in order to deepen their spiritual experience.” p 13

Stigma

My experience is that there is a great amount of stigma against 12 step groups.
“Is that where they try to save you without Jesus?”

“OA is a cult and is super creepy and controlling You should not be in it if you are an Orthodox Christian.”

“You should not be doing that. I think it is unhealthy to completely give up certain foods. You need to learn moderation. OA is too controlling. Doesn't your sponsor tell you what to do? How can you let someone control you like that?”

“I can't do that because....blah blah blah.”

My response and experience

As a person who has determined herself to be a food addict, I choose to completely abstain from the foods that pull me in farther towards over-eating. In OA parlance, these are called ones “alcoholic foods”.

Individualized

Figure it out w/ doctor and sponsor’s help

I’m not going to talk in detail about what I do and don’t eat, because that always distracts from true recovery.

The food plan is a part of recovery, but it is not RECOVERY.

Sobriety/Abstinence and Recovery

A person can be sober and NOT be in recovery.

Lion in cage versus Lion lying down with the Lamb

White knuckling and the dry drunk (interpersonal dynamics and how life is approached). -ego vs. humility, self-serving vs. serving God and others, self focus vs. other-focused. Self-pity vs. gratitude.

Recovery: You no longer WANT to use. Today, I can be in a room with gluten free, dairy free, allergen free cake...and not want that cake. Whether that is true tomorrow and the day after depends on the decisions I make today, tomorrow and the day after, to continue living the spiritual life up to the level growth God has granted. .

Praying with the non-Orthodox or non-Christian

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.

Courage to change the things I can.

And the wisdom to know the difference.”

-there is only one true God.

-people know this God at different levels

-the miracle of the 12 step program is that it allows a person who is distant from God to draw near at his/her own pace.

Even God is Anonymous

“There is another dimension to this issue which must be confronted, even though to do so is hardly comfortable for those who profess to be religious. It seems fairly clear that if this “spiritual” treatment becomes too religious, the healing stops. Put more succinctly, if this spiritual treatment becomes too religious it hardly gets a chance to start. To be successful, the treatment has to be based on a spirituality that stops short of blossoming into a religious faith. It has to be a spirituality in which God Himself remains anonymous.” p. 18

Higher Power: The Unknown God

2 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 23 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: 24 "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. 26 And He has made from one blood^[a] every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and have our being... Acts 17: 22ff.

Footnotes:

My Experience w/ Step Work and Religion

My Orthodoxy is what pulled me towards doing a 12 step program.

My realization that I needed recovery is what brought me to Orthodoxy.

And my recovery has happened as an Orthodox Christian..the two are not separate.

What has been helpful to me is that the 12 steps have given me a pattern and learned skills to live a spiritual life as an Orthodox Christian, and not just a religious life. Living a spiritual life means actively seeking to die, to renounce, to abstain from those things which hinder running the race set before me:
Renunciation and Abstinence.

It is possible for a person to recover from addiction outside of a 12 step program

But I would almost guarantee that if a person has found recovery outside a 12 step program, they have learned what they needed to learn about living the spiritual life, in order to be in recovery.

Recovery is not Theosis

Recovery means living enough of a spiritual life to not longer be a slave to the particular passion one is actively seeking to recover from. Theosis is broader and much deeper in scope.

Recovery from one addiction might sublimate you into another addiction, or it might show you that you need to work on recovery from more than one thing.

Metanoia. Turning. Repentance.

Recovery is the starting blocks of running the race set before us.

Ephesians 3: 12-20

¹² Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵ Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. ¹⁶ Nevertheless, to *the degree* that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule,^[a] let us be of the same mind.

¹⁷ Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. ¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹ whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is their* belly, and *whose glory is* in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. ²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,



THE GOOD

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The 12 Steps

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—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 Him*.
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 Him to remove our shortcomings.

The 12 Steps (continued).

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 a personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His 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 alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Inexhaustible Cup



Song I wrote on 4/11/05

I could run to my addiction/and indulge my predilections/and continue this
conniption/as I sit here in my shame/I could strive to feed the hunger/and be
present to some anger/while I stay here awhile longer/and wallow in the pain (but)

Take this away/...from me/help me lay it down/and walk away

So I seek your intercession/and I take it to confession/that I stop this old
progression/towards the hell that is my shame/Light a candle and remember/only
You can feed this hunger/I will stay here awhile longer/and ask you once again...

...and only drink from the one cup/the Inexhaustible Cup/the fountain of immortal
life...

I was made for this communion, to shine brighter than the sun.

I was made to be both flesh and holy fire

Send Your Spirit to restore me to this place I know is home,

Face to face with You, Jesus, my desire.

...and only drink from the one cup,

The Inexhaustible Cup, the fountain of immortal life.

Next Week:

How the 12 steps intersect w/ Orthodox life in the Church.