

# FOR ATHEISTS OR AGNOSTICS IN SEXUAL COMPULSIVES ANONYMOUS

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If we have taken Step One of SCA's Twelve Steps, then we know that our sexual compulsion is not, or is no longer our Higher Power<sup>1</sup>. The first Three Steps get us to the point at which we are able to turn both our will and lives over to the care of a Higher Power, or as expressed in Step Two, we "*Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*" The implication is that we will be sexually sober or abstinent after taking Step Three. At least there will be time for sexual sobriety to settle upon us after a time being sexually abstinent. But how do we get there?

We are not here to disparage or denigrate anyone's religious beliefs. We will not withhold recovery fellowship from anyone who does not share a particular religious belief. You are safe. Furthermore, we do not think of a lack of belief in a deity as a belief or theology *in itself*. Since we each define sexual sobriety for ourselves, we also acknowledge that we each have our own Higher Power. Whether or not SCA members share the same Higher Power is *never* an issue. For recovery from sexual compulsion, we postulate that the important points are: 1.) Admission of powerlessness over sexual compulsion and its cumulative result of unmanageability in our lives; 2.) Recognition of a Power greater than ourselves, that can restore us to a sane, humble life and; 3.) Aligning our will with that of the Higher Power that cares for us.

We will define being agnostic as having no knowledge of, or recognition of influence from deities, such as those put forth by the world's great religions.

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<sup>1</sup> We capitalize "Higher Power," "Power" and "It" as proper nouns herein.

And we will define being atheist as having a belief that there are no supernatural deities. We in SCA have found that no one needs to suffer from sexual compulsion, and that is *our* message. Where you go from there is between you and the Power greater than yourself that can and will bring recovery from sexual compulsion into *your* life.

This apparent belief in our sexual compulsion and a lack of belief in a caring Higher Power is a real problem for those of us who have been abused, either as adults or as children. The people who were supposed to care for us and model the behavior of a Higher Power failed, and we got hurt. One SCA member hypothesized that the main task of our caregivers is to care for us long enough to impart knowledge of the caregiver's Higher Power. Upon completion, the understanding is that we will then establish and maintain a relationship with the same Higher Power. But sometimes the relationship does not germinate and/or grow. And sometimes we believe in a different Higher Power.

Those who have been abused sometimes find themselves standing outside any emotional understanding of a caring Higher Power, and intellectual knowledge is the closest they can get. This is somewhat like substituting book learning, for an ongoing interactive experience. Or like superstition, in the place of the meaningful presence of a Higher Power in one's life. This is not necessarily the response to a past trauma though. It could be our conclusion about the world, based upon our perception. We just do not see the same things others see. Only thorough communication in conversational tones can enlighten us as to the state of reality.

When it comes to belief in a Power greater than ourselves, many of us believe that we have free choice—a free will. And it makes sense to many of us that obsessing about the object of our sexual compulsion releases certain chemicals in our bodies. These chemicals we think, influence the choices we make in the near future, regardless of the effect on our long-term future. Can we change our minds after obsessing five minutes? How? And how about changing our minds after obsessing for an hour?

Some of us feel that we inherited a Higher Power that rejected us—a Higher Power that is not worthy of our worship. For example, if we were polygamous, sexually deviant or not heterosexual, and this was contrary to societal norms or the religious teachings we received, we may have been kicked out of our professional, civic, familial or spiritual community. And

then there are those of us who took a preemptive action and rejected our home faith before our community found out about us. Some tried to prod the God of other people's understanding into revealing Itself.

It is perfectly natural when we are all alone to think of ourselves and of what can bring us comfort. When we find something that works, we need not over-think it. It works! But self-harm, harming others and breaking the law during the progression of sexual compulsion causes damage. And when the long arm of the law, or the people we look up to tell us we have a problem, it is wise to listen.

We can be forgiven for thinking that our sexual compulsion could take care of us. And we can be forgiven for thinking that we can count on it to help us in times of need. We are sexually compulsive after all. So how is that working out? Apparently we can only give our undivided attention to one Higher Power at a time. This is most troublesome when two Higher Powers suggest conflicting messages. The loudest message is usually the Higher Power of the moment. But we can work on changing that.

If we want to progress to sexual sobriety, the heart of the matter seems to be found in Step Two. There are those who say, "Make sexual sobriety number one!" Wise sounding words, and this could work. Just being sexually abstinent from our acting-out behaviors grants most of us the time we need for sexual sobriety to develop. But what does that mean for someone who does not trust that sexual sobriety will solve all their problems?

We see others in SCA with a peaceful countenance who say, "Do what your Higher Power indicates." This certainly seems less brutal than the Higher Power of sexual sobriety. And with this Higher Power, the door is open to interpretation—open to how we see it. But does this Higher Power want us to experience all this pain? If we do not perceive It, we could say It does not exist. And where does that leave us? How will we know what to do?

If we have a Higher Power, we have an idea of what It wants for us. In the absence of the belief in a Higher Power, we start by composing our own sexual recovery plans. This codifies our bottom-line behaviors—those people, places and things from which we want to be free. It may also contain a gray area for hard-to-define behaviors or behaviors we do not

recognize as making our lives unmanageable. And we write down the actions we think of as sane. Some of these actions may even be fun, and things start to look up. We begin to see the person we had thought of being when we were younger, and see that we could indeed become that person. A vision of our future-self begins to emerge, and makes it easier to comply with our sexual recovery plan.

Again, some of us ask, “Where is this Higher Power of which so many speak?” Those of us who were able to hold onto the idea that a Higher Power cares for us began looking around for ways in which we are cared for. We started with gratitude lists—lists of people, places and things for which we were grateful. We left the big picture for later: where this gratitude would be directed. For now, we were just going to sense gratitude.

Then we found SCA’s *Tools That Help Us Get Better*. These *Tools* could be seen as ways in which our Higher Power might become evident in our lives. Each of the *Tools* was seen as a resource, like the ore of precious metals. Each needed to be refined. With work came proficiency, and these *Tools* became assets, upon which we could rely for help.

We tried prayer—or at least meditation—to make sure we were not rejecting a potentially valuable asset prior to investigation. If prayer did not seem to work, we continued meditating, because of its benefits. Gradually, by asking the questions, we discovered our answers.

Some of us could only figure out what our Higher Power was *not*. It was not the Higher Power our folks gave us. That Higher Power did not work for us—we worked for It and seemed to get nothing in return. The relationship was adversarial, or at best transactional.

Continuing to meditate helps us clarify our part in the life that surrounds us—the new life in recovery from sexual compulsion, and the old life in sexual compulsion. We examine our resources and assets, and begin to see that it will be all right. We discover and develop new resources. We see these new resources and rediscover old ones, because they are not just provided, they were developed.

Whether in the form of a single entity, or a nebulous collection of assets, we developed a familiarity with a Power greater than ourselves. Sometimes It is in the form of our home group of SCA members. At other times, we

detect our Higher Power in the agreement among drivers and pedestrians, to abide by vehicular codes of conduct and to obey traffic signals. We begin to depend upon our Higher Power in the same way we depend upon electricity. It becomes so much a part of our lives that It fades to the background. But It is there for us when we need It.

As we continue to attend meetings, our recovery progresses. Our understanding of the *Tools* available to us, and the various forms they take, reassures us that recovery is a good thing. We see our part and accept it. We are willing to commit to a course of action.

For most of us, sex is still in our lives. Our sexual activities are not the harmful or destructive activities of the past. We need not abandon ourselves to compulsive sex, because we have friends and loves in our lives who can say “no” to us, and to whom we can say “no.” They care about us as much as we care about them.

We enjoy our sexual activities. The people with whom we enjoy these activities, the places where we enjoy them, and the things we employ in the enjoyment are all part of sexual sobriety. How can we tell? When we are done we are satisfied, and our sexual compulsion to act out is not triggered. If the “allergic reaction” is activated and we want more sex, this may be a symptom of acting out.

For some of us the suspension of disbelief in a Higher Power was helpful. We acted “as if.” Acting as if, means we acted as if there was a Higher Power that cared for us—that could and would restore us to sanity. Or that would at least restore us to a life worth leading. We tried to sense what It wanted *for* us, and what It wanted *from* us. We trusted that the happiness we saw in others would in time, be ours as well. Is this unreasonable?

Think of a troupe of actors putting on a play, a platoon of soldiers carrying out a military action or an SCA group—think of an idea. When the play closes, the hostilities cease, or an SCA group breaks up, the actors, soldiers and SCA members remember their time together. Some would argue that as long as these times and ideas are remembered, they are in a kind of afterlife.

We see a difference between abstention from sexually compulsive behavior and sexual sobriety. With sexual sobriety, we no longer want to act out our

sexual and romantic fantasies the way we once did. We have people in our lives that love us unconditionally. They do not take advantage of us. In sexual sobriety, we want to act in ways our Higher Power would have us act, and we believe that Higher Power has our best interest at heart.

Bearing in mind that people who consider themselves atheist or agnostic may have a higher degree of skepticism than someone who can be described as a believer, we want to be reasonably certain about Powers greater than ourselves. Does this Higher Power care for us? Does It have intent, good or bad? If the answer is “yes,” taking the Third Step is so much easier.

If we are to turn our will and lives over to this Higher Power’s care, we will probably want to know what It wants—where It is going. In our effort to figure that out, we can try to discern a history of this Higher Power’s actions. In other words, do we see those that have gone before us sentenced to the no-fun corner of life? Or is theirs a genuine happiness and humility we can admire? Can we accept what we find, with the possibility that we may be called upon to do some of those same things they did—things which we may not like or understand?

We describe our Higher Power’s attributes. When we say attributes, we mean It’s characteristics and the things It can and cannot do. This is so we can say with some degree of faith, that this is what our Higher Power did or did not do. And we can say what we are responsible for doing.

In their acting out, many sexual compulsives believed that if they revealed their true feelings and values, they would be unlovable. This fueled their fear of entanglement with others: They could not afford to let anyone get too close. But when we find people with whom it is safe to share our feelings and values, we move away from being at the center of the universe and get a better perspective on our place in life. We develop a sense of humility.

Those of us who felt the need to take care of the world in order to get our own needs met, came to see that this was nothing more than a fear of abandonment: If we did not foster dependency, people would leave us alone. We had to take care of everything and become indispensable. Yet somehow people found ways to exploit us and then get along without us. Again, in recovery we are *not* the center of the universe.

In our efforts to control the situation, we paired with those whom we thought we could exploit. And in apparent contradiction, we who were afraid of entanglement often wound up with people afraid of being abandoned, or vice versa. For many, a series of failures formed an unmistakable pattern, and we saw where our lives were going.

When we are ready to consider options other than doing everything by ourselves, our mind is opened. We recognize the credibility of high stature individuals. People will tell us how we got here and how to get out of our current situation, but ultimately we will believe what makes sense to us. Meditation and taking time to think about life lets us decide what to believe for ourselves. We compare what we hear to our own set of values and beliefs.

## **FAITH**

Let us examine the difference between having a Higher Power and having a belief in God. A simple description of God is the Supreme Being who created all things. An atheist or agnostic may wonder as to the utility of this information, since our interaction with God is usually in the form of God's advocates. Finding ourselves powerless over sexual compulsion, and in charge of an unmanageable life, we become willing to consider getting help. If one could say that a friend is anyone who helps us, this definition of a friend opens up to broader interpretation, what a Power greater than ourselves *could* be.

Many atheists and agnostics would like to believe in God. Believers seem to be happy, but we want a convincing reason to believe. Everyone requires a different level of proof to believe in anything. So the question is, "How many dots do we need to connect, for the image of a Higher Power to emerge?"

Likewise, *spirituality* is a word with broad interpretations. When we discuss a deceased person, we could have their ghost in mind, or the essence of who they were; their spirit. These are two very different things. For the sake of recovery from sexual compulsion, and in the interest of developing the belief that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity, we will

not split hairs. We ask no one to suspend disbelief, we only ask for an open mind as to ways out of the sexually compulsive life. We need not disbelieve in God if we have a Higher Power, nor think of a Higher Power as a *false* god, if we already believe in God. We are looking for a Power greater than ourselves, which does a sufficiently better job of managing problems than we have done, and to which we can entrust our will and lives.

In the matter of turning our will and lives over to the care of the Higher Power we perceive, we must organize our values—our morals. But first, we must know what they are. In the fog of early recovery, it is enough to be abstinent. But in the long run, as we accumulate time away from our bottom-line behavior, we develop a vision of the person we want to be. What is important to us? Is it life? Do we love and care for this life? Do we strive to accumulate people, and things? What is heaven and is heaven important? Does our Higher Power take care of us? Answers to these questions will put wind in our sails. We are not here to define your Higher Power for you. You will find that for yourself. What we hope to do is help you find and develop a relationship with a Power greater than you.

We have both societal and religious rituals to mark important milestones in our lives. They are births, confession, maturity, welcome, commitments, sickness and deaths or goodbyes. We need not reinvent the wheel at each milestone. It works and we use the rites as adapted to our purpose. We keep in mind, where we want to be. Sanity does not mean we have an absence of problems. Being sane means we have the ability to handle our problems.

## **RESOURCES**

We gather our courage and look at our resources, to see what we are working with. We just want to inventory them first. There will be time later, to arrange them by helpfulness, depending on what we want to do. Right now, we want to know if we are going to sink or get through our troubles. Resources are like ore in the ground. We must mine the ore and refine it, to turn it into an asset. Some ore is easier to get to, more plentiful, more useful or of a higher quality than others, and may require less refinement to use it.



What follows is a series of questions and suggestions to help us find our way. On one hand are the resources we want to use, to get us to a happy place. On the other hand, a *Power* greater than us manifests resources. We may feel somewhat ambivalent about the ones provided by our Higher Power—those found in the landscape. But we would like to direct your attention to those intersections of people, places and things that *you* find valuable, with those that a decidedly greater *Power* than us has sustained. We think these intersections will be of particular interest to recovering sexual compulsives, as an image of the way forward begins to emerge.

This image is different for everyone. Resources important to one may be unimportant to another. This is similar to our patterns of acting out: Normal sexual activity for one SCA member may be acting out for another. But the intersections we think, will come to represent the convergence of your will with that of your Higher Power—ultimately the easier softer way. This is because it is where our Higher Power wants us to go, and where we are reasonably happy to go.

Here is the series:

- We list any family members who may, if asked, help in times of need. How about extended family members or in-laws?
- Do we have a spouse or love relationship? Does the care we take to maintain this relationship benefit us too?
- Are there any friendly people still in our lives as a result of past relationships?
- List each of our friends and confidants, which we consider to be a resource.
- Where is my SCA home group? **(The Tool of Meetings)**
- Do we have a local Intergroup? If so, does it have contact with the International Service Organization (ISO), of SCA?
- How many Twelve Step recovery programs do we attend regularly? Describe the schedule.
- Have we gained any wisdom from attendance at these Twelve Step meetings? Is that wisdom from its members? Its literature? What helpful practices have been introduced into our lives as a result of these other Twelve Step groups?
- Do we have the desire to recover from the life that brought us to the program?

- Are these meetings close by and open to us? Do we research meetings we can attend when traveling?
- Do we have meeting facilities in our town? (For example, semi-public spaces available for us to rent and hold meetings. These would be churches, schools, offices, or Alano clubs.)
- Can we advertise our meeting location discreetly? Where? Do we have access to locations where we can get information on meetings and other vital information?
- How many people have we exchanged phone numbers with? **(The Tool of The Telephone and Social Media)** Where do we keep the phone numbers? Do we have any social media contacts that help with our physical, emotional or spiritual needs?
- Do we have a sponsor? **(The Tool of Sponsorship)** The act of sponsoring someone else helps the sponsor too. Do we sponsor anyone? Has anyone asked us to sponsor them?
- What literature do we have from Twelve Step programs and other self-help literature? **(The Tool of Literature)** Does our SCA group have literature for its members?
- Do we have a library of books? Have we accumulated any literature for entertainment and self-enrichment, such as novels, fiction and nonfiction?
- Any other books, including text books from classes taken in school, workshop outlines and notes?
- Have we considered corresponding with any of the authors of books in our library? Do we make use of the list of references in our books?
- Are there any educational, dramatic or athletic programs we like to watch? Have we given ourselves permission to watch a reasonable number of them?
- Are we working the Steps? What Step are we on? **(The Tool of The Twelve Steps)**
- Do we set aside any morning quiet time for meditation? **(The Tool of Meditation)** Do we have or want to develop knowledge of a Higher Power and relationship with that Higher Power? Is our Higher Power an asset?
- Have we been able to accept without judgment, where our mind wanders during meditation? Do we have a kind of friendship developing, between our critical and perceptive sides?
- Are we developing a measure of mental discipline as a result of meditating?

- Do we keep this list of resources handy, for those times when we may feel uncertain of our recovery?
- **(The Tool of Writing)** Have we written out our First Step inventory? Has *this* list of resources been filled out? Do we compose at least three options to consider, before making any big decisions? Have we considered at least two consequences for each of those options? Even if we will not employ it, have we noted the option our inner sexual compulsive likes? (Some might call this “the offensive option,” and it is the counterpart to the “conform” option we may not like. The chosen option is often somewhere between these two extremes.)
  - Did we sit down and compose our Fourth Step inventory? If so, have we at least organized it into categories of morals we plan to share with another; morals we may consider sharing with another; and morals we will never, never share with another? Have we looked at our Fourth Step inventory and examined how each of those characteristics we consider to be defective, may have helped us cope? Do we still need them to cope and if not, can we let them go? Have we written about contrary actions we can take to counteract the shortcomings brought about by our defects of character?
  - Have we composed an Eighth Step list of all persons we have harmed? Have we crossed off names as a result of amends made? Have we written our Tenth Step? On a regular basis? Do we keep writing materials handy when meditating, so we can record important things? Do we keep writing materials nearby, such as at our bedside, so we can record dreams or important things? Have we written any messages to those who may benefit from our Twelfth Step experience, strength and hope?
  - Do we have any artistic outlets, of which we make regular use?
  - Do we have at our disposal, the means to generate any potential source of additional income?
  - Have we written down our sexual recovery plan? **(The Tool of A Sexual Recovery Plan)** Is our sexual recovery plan reasonable, or is it impossible to live up to? What part of our sexual recovery plans can we accomplish?
  - Have we committed to anyone that we will live with our sexual recovery plan or change it?
  - Can we share our accomplishments and setbacks in this area with anyone?

- Do we have the ability to refrain from sexually compulsive or other compulsive behaviors for *any* length of time? How often do we reach our goals? Do we celebrate that? **(The Tool of Abstinence)**
- Even if small, do we acknowledge and celebrate the accomplishments of recovery? In times of trouble, these may be our evidence of progress, to which we may return for sustenance. They may also be the handholds which permit us to let go of our acting out behaviors.
- Are there any particularly helpful slogans we use? **(The Tool of Slogans)** How about slogans or sayings from other areas of our lives besides the Twelve Step Programs?
- Do we belong to any outside self-help groups? List them.
- We list our educational degrees.
  - What reputation do these schools have?
  - What knowledge, skills and abilities have we gained as a result of the degrees?
  - List the scientific disciplines, laws and theorems we find particularly helpful in recognizing the presence of our Higher Power. (For example, gravity, thermodynamics, chemistry, evolution, geometry, physics, et cetera.)
  - Do we have any helpful social, collegial or professional contacts as a result of the degrees?
- We note any formal, informal or vocational education that helps us get through tough times. (For example, the school of life, an apprenticeship or seminar.)
- We list any licenses and certifications we have. What knowledge, skills and abilities do they foster?
  - Do we belong to any professional associations or organizations? What are they? Can they help us? Do they offer us any additional training or advancement opportunities?
  - What professional fields are related to ours, and are they reasonable alternatives to our current career? What training do we have, to keep up with technological advancements?
  - Do we get together socially with our coworkers? Are we all equals there? Do we keep in contact with any former coworkers? Do we share an equal footing in these relationships?
- Do we speak or write any other languages? If so, how many, what does this allow us to do—how helpful is this?
- How well do we express ourselves verbally? Fair, well or very well.
- How well do we express ourselves in writing? Fair, well or very well.

- Do we journal on a regular basis? Does this help us pick out any patterns or help us arrive at decisions?
- Do we correspond with anyone? If so, who?
- We list any insurance policies we maintain, such as medical, life, auto, and household.
- Do we have any bank accounts? Are we financially solvent? Do we have access to credit? Do we use it responsibly? (The things we *do not have* often exert a powerful influence on us. Once we have them, we are truly able to measure their value, if we pay attention to these assessments.)
- If we belong to an ethnic or gender-based minority, do we know what organizations support us? Do we know where to go, to access the help they may offer?
- What doctors and professionals do we have access to, in order to maintain our health? (For example, physicians, dentists, ophthalmologists, or other specialists.)
- What practices do we carry out on a daily basis, to maintain our health on our own? (For example: medications; supplements; physical, occupational or speech therapies; exercise regimens or diet.)
- If someone close to us or we are afflicted with a chronic illness, do we have a support group for it?
- Do we take advantage of the cyclical nature of life, which allows us to reboot and have fresh starts? (For example, hourly, daily, monthly, quarterly or seasonal cycles.)
- Does our routine bring us comfort? How often do we appreciate our routines? (Wake, meditate, write, sleep, eat, bathe, think, et cetera.)
- Do we have a list of things to do, to improve our lives?
- Have we prioritized it?
- Have we taken items from our “to-do” list and placed the important items on our calendar? Are we reasonably able to carry out the agenda we have set out, or is it unrealistic? What is more realistic?
- Do we consider our calendar to be part of a trusted system?
- What have we done to counteract the impulse for instant gratification? Do we belong to any clubs, athletic, academic or special interest groups? What are they? **(The Tool of Socializing)**
- Does our SCA group go out for coffee after meetings? Do we get together between meetings?
- Do we belong to any special interest groups outside SCA and the recovery community? Are we among equals in these gatherings? Is this a good thing?

- If we want to ask someone out for a date, do we have friends with whom we can double date? Can we tell when dating is out of the question? Do we have the ability to be a friend, if the prospect of romantic or sexual activity is out of the question? **(The Tool of Dating)**
- **(The Tool of Service)** Do we dedicate any part of our lives to helping others? What do we do? Is this part of our Ninth Step work, or is it because we want to do so?
  - Are there fellows in recovery who can offer services to us? (For example, help conducting SCA meetings.) Do we have the ability to recognize when we need help? Do we have the ability to ask for help? Can we forgive ourselves for needing help? Do we have the ability to accept whatever help is offered?
- What about our survival skills? Do we have any particular skills we can put to use in case the very worst possible scenario occurs? What are they?
  - How well would we be able to take advantage of what our ancestors called “the fat of the land,” to live on? (For example useful and naturally occurring air, water, plants, fungi, animals, seasons, rain, heat, cold, wind, sunlight and fire.)
  - We know that we can utilize our bodies in their current state, when getting through tough times. What are we doing to take care of our bodies? Do we engage in any sports? Do we have any friends who can practice with us?
- We list any electronic office equipment hardware and software program applications we can use in our recovery and daily life.
  - List any Internet service providers, websites and email accounts we have. List any websites and search engines we find particularly helpful.
- Do we have any professional or vocational equipment that we can ethically employ for our personal use? How about personal equipment to enhance our career?
  - Do we have a vehicle? Access to public transportation? Do we have the ability to utilize transportation opportunities for career and personal purposes?
  - Do we have any maps?
- Do we have a home? Can we safely store our personal and professional possessions?
- Do we live in a community where the rule of law is respected? Do we have access to protective organizations? Do we respect the laws and

ordinances of our locality? If not, can we change these unjust laws and ordinances? Are there others with whom we can ally?

- Do we have the desire and ability to enjoy life?

## IN CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we populate this list, and refer to it whenever we sense a lack of trust that we are going to be all right. If we can acknowledge that we are cared for—at the very least nurtured—by a Power greater than ourselves, then we are well on our way. We have an understanding of a Power greater than ourselves, to which we can turn over both our will and lives. In this way we will know the veracity of another person's statement about their Higher Power, because we have something to compare It to. We are equals once again.

If we can take Step Two in our SCA program of recovery, then we can take Step Three. Having established a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves, many of us have come to see that our Higher Power was not stopping us from sexual sobriety; it was us. We were our own worst enemy. Our Higher Power was fine with us as we were, or at least indifferent to us. We were impeding our own progress, but now we can resume building our lives.

Once we deal with our internalized oppression—our low self-esteem or self-worth—we are free to deal with our defects of character. And we can see them now. We know when we are sexually sober, and can set about repairing the damage we have done—that we may all have done—to ourselves, to our relationships and to society at large. We turn our problems over, or align our will with our Higher Power's will.

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