

# The Check IN

Volume XV

“ . . . *Spiritual Progress Not Spiritual Perfection* . . . ”

Winter 2008

## Intergroup Meeting On the Move

After many years of meeting at the Canary Café in downtown Indianapolis, IISAA is looking for a new meeting space.

The Canary Café suspended operation as of December 31 and the building is up for sale.

Members of the Intergroup began looking for a new meeting site as soon as the closing was announced.

Hopefully, by the time you read this a new meeting location will have been found.

However, if you know of a possible replacement, please let your group representative know. Or, call the Info Line (1 866 205-8564) to suggest a site. If possible, please include a contact name and number for the suggested site.

## Twelve Step Workshop Forming

**When:** Thursday evenings, 7:30-9:00 PM, starting January 24, 2008

**Where:** Club Room of North United Methodist Church (large room in basement, use west entrance) which is located on the northwest corner of 38th and Meridian Streets in Indy.

This workshop will follow the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions of SAA. We will study the 12 Step program of action as originally spelled out in the Big

Book of AA, and later in SAA's Green Book. This will be the fifth time a group has met in Indianapolis to work the steps in this way. Our shared experience tells us that it will take about nine months to work through this process. Workshop participants can anticipate an intense and rewarding experience.

Members are expected to commit to the process by attending each week, checking in before a meeting if they cannot attend, working the steps, and supporting others as they work the Steps. The workshop is not a substitute for regular SAA meetings, nor is it a substitute for working with a sponsor. Members will be expected to get a sponsor if they do not have one.

Our intention is to work the Steps together with the support of the group and our sponsors. The workshop will be closed to new members after we've all worked the First Step, probably no longer than 4-5 weeks from the start. Cross-talk and discussion will be encouraged; and, we ask you to remember that our goal is to have an experience of working the steps, rather than an experience of talking about the steps. Everything shared at the meetings, except how we are working the steps and your own experience of that, is to be held confidential.

*See, Workshop, page 4*



2008

## The Year of Relationships

The Special Events planning committee has selected as its 2008 theme, “Relationships in Recovery”.

During this year, our fellowship activities will focus on the concept of relationships as they help or hinder recovery.

The Spring Workshop will follow the theme, *Recovering Relationships*.

Relationships are one of the most precious things that we tend to lose in our acting out. We relate to others in a variety of ways; to our significant others, to our families, to our neighbors and friends, to our co-workers, to our Higher Power and to ourselves.

The workshop and the retreat, along with Check IN articles, will address how we can repair, rebuild, and/or release old relationships and how we can establish new, healthier ones.

An article detailing the workshop can be found on page 3.

## Keeping Meetings Focused On The Solution Rather Than The Problem.

*Jim K.*

What is the solution?

My answer is that the solution is the 12 Steps, the 12 Traditions, and the Promises.

The “problem”, in this discussion is Sex Addiction.

We have all endured meetings where the focus was on the problem rather than the solution. The topics at these meetings are such things as:

- “How do I make my wife understand my needs?”
- “How can I survive if I don’t have . . . .?”
- “What did you think about the new law they passed last week?”
- “I want control of my life; I’m tired of everyone looking over my shoulder.”

And where the check-in’s are:

- What I did at work this week.
- “I am so pissed off at . . . .”
- “Everything is fine . . . .”
- “I saw this new TV show this week and I really thought . . . .”
- “It’s bull that they make me come to these meetings . . . .”

Why is focusing on the problem an issue?

Everybody’s problem is different; the particular problem offered for discussion may be damned interesting, so why is it “bad” to spend time talking about a particular aspect of the problem?

My judgment is that even though the problem is interesting it isn’t going to help me work my recovery. I hope it doesn’t shock anyone that I actually go to meetings to work on my recovery.

Discussion of the problem is about the individual and about individual circumstances, which, however difficult and painful, are the result of the problem. What I need and want is to know how to work out of the problem, how to change the circumstances and move forward, not wallow in the mire that the problem has created.

Now, a friend of mine would remind me that a certain amount of wallowing in the mire is necessary. In Step 1, I had to wallow long enough to see the extent of the mire I had created, to see how bad it smelled, how nasty it tasted, and to allow my higher power to begin to lift me out of it.

So, in that case talking about the problem is not only acceptable but is essential to the recovery of the addict. But after that First Step presentation, that “big step”, as some call it; it is time to move on to the process of recovery.

That doesn’t mean I can’t revisit the 1<sup>st</sup> Step, but I need to make sure I am revisiting the 1<sup>st</sup> Step and not simply bemoaning the consequences of behavior, looking for sympathy, or hoping to justify my past behavior. I have to make sure that I am not trying to weasel out of recovery. “Jez, what I did wasn’t that bad.”


And there are other aspects of the problem. Most revolve around the circumstances created by my behavior, the reactions of the people I have harmed, the consequences of the legal mess created, and other issues that are real but have no bearing on recovery or the recovery process.


I go to meetings to work on my recovery, anything else is not simply a waste of time, it is a possible impediment to recovery, it has the potential to shift my focus and get me thinking about, “Jez, what I did wasn’t that bad.”

So what do we do when the discussion at a meeting shifts to the problem rather than the solution?

My experience in group discussion has been that I will do one of two things, I will tune out and mentally go away, (more likely I will get angry and rail in my mind about “what crap this is”), or I will try to change the topic.

*See, Solution, page 3*

The Check  N is the newsletter of the Indiana Intergroup of Sex Addicts Anonymous (IISAA) and is published quarterly.

The Check  N is provided free of charge to SAA members and others upon request.

Material for inclusion in the newsletter, permission to copy all or part of the newsletter, or comments for improving this publication may be addressed to:

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## 2008 Calendar

### January

12 IISAA Meeting, 4 p.m.

### February

9 IISAA Meeting, 4 p.m.

### March

8 IISAA Meeting, 4 p.m.

31 Check **IN** Deadline.

### April

5 Spring Workshop

*Recovering Relationships*

12 IISAA Meeting, 4 p.m.

*Solution, from page 3*

Sometimes it's easy to change the topic; the discussion will play out and the opening is obvious. Sometimes it is more difficult, and I will try to comment on the topic at hand and then shift the focus by posing a question that is related to the discussion at hand but shifts the discussion to recovery, without seeming too obvious. And sometimes I will be the jerk who just says "this topic is not about recovery and I would like to talk about . . ." I hate to choose that last option but sometimes it is unavoidable. I am stepping on someone when I do that and I don't like the feeling. But I have come to understand that feeling as my "nice guy" shadow at work.

In check-in I do my best to keep my comments about my recovery, what I have been doing this week to work on my recovery, significant challenges to my recovery and my response to those challenges. What other people do is up to them.

## Spring Workshop, Recovering Relationships, To Be Held April 5

IISAA will present its thirteenth annual Spring Workshop on Saturday, April 5, at the Southport Presbyterian Church. The meeting will address the topic *Recovering Relationships* which will reinforce the IISAA Special Events theme for the year, *Relationships in Recovery*.

Webster offers a number of interesting meanings for the word "recover": to get back; regain; to bring back to a normal position or condition; rescue; to find or identify again.

One of the major consequences of any addiction, due to the self centered nature of the illness, is the loss of relationships.

Some addicts become estranged from their significant others, some become alienated from their families, some are separated from their co-workers and/or employers, some even lose their true self.

Once the dust clears from the experience of bottoming out and the addict has committed to 12 Step recovery, there remains the collateral damage that has been caused to family, friends, colleagues, and victims.

Is it possible to regain these relationships? Can the relationships be restored? Do old relationships have to give way to new or redefined ones? Where does one begin the process of recovering relationships?

These are the kinds of questions that the spring workshop will address. Can such questions be answered in three ninety-minute sessions? Of course not. However, the presentations and ensuing discussions will, no doubt, enlighten those who attend and the topic will be further studied in Check-IN articles throughout the year and at the fall retreat.

The answers to these questions reside in the experiences of those who have traveled the road of recovery. The workshop planning committee is seeking presenters who can share their experience, strength and hope concerning this issue. The workshop is open to members of any "S" group and anyone who attends qualifies to be a presenter. **You** would be a perfect candidate to share the successes and/or failures that you have experienced in attempting to move from self-centeredness and self-involvement to a healthier, more social lifestyle.

Each session will last for 90 minutes. Each presenter will be asked to provide introductory material for about 15 to 20 minutes. The remainder of each session will be devoted to discussion and sharing by those present. The planning committee's goal is to have three breakout groups for each session. To do so will require nine volunteer group leaders. You can contact **Dale W.** at (317) 339-6958 to offer your services.

Whether you need to recover your "inner child" from the chaos of your childhood or you need to renew, remodel, or release former relationships, this workshop will provide a good starting point.

Workshop, from page 1

But I will help you guide others through the Steps.” Thus this workshop was born. It started in the fall of 2003 and since then there has been one started in the fall of each year (or early winter like this year).

Each workshop has been attended by 15-25 people with a completion rate of somewhere around 50%. The workshops have typically taken 8-9 months to complete and have usually ended with a study of the 12 Traditions of SAA. Initially the workshops were open to men only. That has resulted in some women being turned away, so we are considering dropping that requirement.

For the first couple of years of the workshop, the format was unchanged. We simply read through the Big Book and followed the instructions for working the Steps. Then the Green Book (Sex Addicts Anonymous) was published by SAA. There was considerable discussion about switching texts. We decided that, since our purpose was to share our experience of recovery, and since our experience was based on the Big Book, we would stick with it. Changing books and working the steps based on the Green Book would have been counter to our purpose, since we didn’t have any direct experience using it for recovery. Plus, we had had tremendous experiences with the Big Book. We knew it worked! Who were we to tell someone, “We have this thing that works really well and has for decades, but here’s something new we want to try out on you instead. If it doesn’t

work, we’ll tell you about what worked for us later”? So we’ve stuck with the Big Book, augmenting it with readings from the Green Book. Our experience over last couple years seems to have led us to a successful blend of the two, working the steps from the Big Book while gaining insight into sexual addiction from the Green Book. (This is the history as recalled from my sometimes fallible memory – I hope I’ve got it mostly right!)

Workshop members will need copies of the Big Book, “Alcoholics Anonymous” (available at most bookstores and from ISO of SAA) and the Green Book, “Sex Addicts Anonymous” (available from ISO of SAA). Bring writing materials too!

If you would like to join the workshop or have questions, please call Dick T. (730-5896), Roger R. (414-8948) or Mike M. (443-0087).



of SAA maintaining p. or the Book. We assumptions

sents the program of recovery that resulted in a high recovery rate for alcoholics.

- That program will work for us as sex addicts.
- What is in the book is true and will work for us whether we are brand new to recovery or have years of recovery work under our belts.
- By working the Steps as spelled out in the big book, we will have our own experience of the Steps and will test these assumptions.

This workshop started several years ago when a member of our fellowship had the experience of working the Steps as laid out in the Big Book. That led to his recovery from sexual addiction and his taking another member through the steps in the same way. This second member also had a tremendous recovery experience. When he asked the first man if he would take him through again, he was told, “No.

The meeting described below is not an SAA meeting. IISAA is providing the information about the group as a service to the sponsoring organization and for any addicts who believe their program of recovery might benefit from attending.

New COSA Meeting

*Hope For a Day*

Women Only

Mondays at 7:00 p.m.

Northview Christian Life Church  
5535 E. 131<sup>st</sup> Street  
Carmel, IN

Usually in the Stadium Room

Contact: Liz (317) 385-2245

Retreat Reflections

## Twists and Turns

*Mike M.*

As the weekend of the fall retreat was dwindling to just a few precious hours, I took a walk. Disappointed that I had not found a true connection with nature, I walked alone on the lane sculpted through the forest. My gaze was focused on the greenery and the stately trees. Since I didn't have a camera, I slowed my pace and tried hard to concentrate on the green ferns on the forest floor, the green-gray moss on the tree trunks, the shapes and hues of the leaves on the surrounding trees. That's when it hit me.

The lane carved for the vehicular traffic left a void on the forest floor as it wound into the woods. This void was covered overhead by a canopy of intertwining tree limbs. The lushness of the tree limbs blocked the sun and nothing much grew on the lane due to the heavily foliated tree branches. But when I looked up, I found that the canopy directly overhead was formed by just two trees. Following the branches downward I was surprised to find that the trunks were quite deformed. These two trees had grown straight up for about 10 or 15 feet and then they each began to twist at obtuse angles and then curved and twisted and curved again to meet at about equidistance from the other. I had ridden on the

hay wagon down this very lane the day before, but only when I slowed my pace and looked around did I notice this part of the landscape.

As soon as I saw the twisted and curved trees, I could see an analogy to the addictive life. Just as every other tree in the forest, they had begun life with a good chance of growing to a "perfect adult life". Their trunks were straight, aiming upwards to get nourishment and warmth from the sun, so had we begun our life journey. Then, as the adjoining canopy spread and blocked the way for these trees, they bent and twisted to get through to the life-giving light.

To me the obtuse angle is the bad data I received and processed as best I could as an adolescent. Going off on the resulting tangent I encountered more bad data which I blindly deciphered as good, because the prior results felt good. So instead of righting my moral compass I continued on my ill-informed path. At this point I remembered this statement I made and many others have uttered, "If only I could have stopped when I first acted out."

I made promises to myself and to God that I would never act out again, only to find myself in the same predicament over and over again. I might have done well for a few months or for half a year, only to fall into the depths of addiction again. While at times I didn't recognize it as an addiction, I now can see that it looks like a duck and clucks like a duck, so it must be a duck. Then came the turns and twists as I lied, cheated, and covered my secret life. The twists and turns of the tree trunk mimic every addictive pitfall of my scarred life.

All of us living in recovery are the leaves basking in the sun. Our paths may have been bent, twisted, and full of devious curves, but if we persist and work our program each day we can find the life we all truly desire. Those two trees also gave me a lesson in persistence. Every time the adjoining trees grew into their path, they redirected and eventually got to where the life-giving light was. I was reminded to take my daily inventory and redirect myself as necessary. The two trees didn't take the most direct path to the light of day but they eventually found it, so can we.

## The IISAA Retreat

*Phil B.*

On the weekend of October 19-21, 2007, the Indiana Intergroup of SAA presented its annual fall retreat at Camp Pyoca. This was my third retreat and one of the best in weather, camaraderie, and time for reflection. As always our brother in the fellowship, Mike C., did a bang up job of setting everything up and letting it go with only a "little" leading at times.



The summer-like sunny weather made for great outdoor activities both day and night. Whether one chose reading, hiking, fishing, swimming, chatting, stargazing, or whatever, the weekend was

*See, IISAA Retreat, page 6*

*IISAA Retreat, from page 5*

fabulous! The peace and relative quiet allowed each participant to find the activity (away from the daily stresses) to most benefit his/her program of recovery.

I was thankful for the opportunity to see some "old" friends and make new ones from all over the U.S.A. What a GREAT time to get "real" and be allowed the freedom to speak honestly and without condemnation.

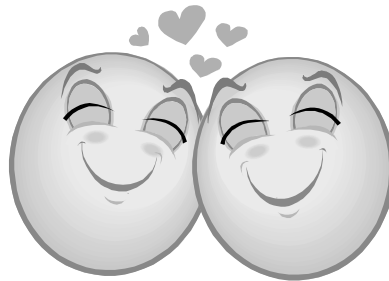
I also appreciated the opportunity to give back a little service by helping in the kitchen and chairing a workshop. There were many interesting workshops which offered time for all in the fellowship to share their experience, strength, hope, and ideas. The one I helped with was on the "little t" traditions that individual meetings may have that are apart from the "big T" Traditions listed in the Group Guide.

Several ideas were fairly well accepted and tried. Others were found interesting by members who contemplated if such traditions might aid in the flow of their home meetings. Some used egg timers to discourage long winded check-ins. Different openings and closings were shared, as well as the order of meeting functions. Having discussion before check-ins helps some "get it all in", and keeps one activity from over taking another's time.

The only drawback to the workshops was that of time slipping away before we knew it. So much more could have been covered; but, then what would be left for next year?

Please remember these events are put on by IISAA for the benefit of the fellowship--you and I. Participation is a blessing to all and our contributions help others in their recovery--while allowing us to work the Steps. Activities outside our meetings such as this retreat at Pyoca allow us to meet others in the fellowship, and have a great time. These events help us build healthy relationships with those who understand and love us.

Keep coming back, it works!



## A Little Visit From My Wife In Paradise

*Bob H.*

I was concerned about my wife coming to visit. My wife is great. My friends in the fellowship are great, but I have never really mixed the two. I was also worried that she was going to "invade" a special thing I had going for myself. Well, she came.

I decided to journal when she was gone as a way to remember what we had done that day and as a way to connect with God. Also, I wanted some time to myself as I had learned that I would be facilitating (that is a good word that gets me out of CONTROL mode) the "Half Hour With Your Higher Power" the next morning. I

don't have my journal in front of me, but I remember writing about the Meditation Walk.

The Meditation Walk is usually facilitated by Jim K. It is an "essential silence" walk through the camp grounds including the Meditation Trail which goes through the forest. It was and always is a wonderful experience. Every year I see it as the "start" to my retreat/spiritual experience.

Next was the start of the meat of the weekend for me which is the breakout sessions and the SAA meetings. I really enjoy the SAA meetings because they are always bigger (30+ people) than the meetings I attend, and there are always people there that I only get to see at the retreat.

Saturday's lunch this year was the wiener roast. This seemed like the perfect time to have my wife join me and meet my friends.

The people were extremely friendly and my wife was late. Neither of these things surprised me. I was glad to have introduced her to Mike C. as one of the first few people because he is so welcoming and friendly. Once she had a nametag, she was part of the group.

For the first time on an SAA Retreat that I can remember, I gave myself permission to skip a program session. I chose to use that time to spend with my wife. I didn't think it very eventful until I wrote in my journal later that night. The second thing we did together was "nothing". Nothing consisted of sitting on the grassy hill, chatting, soaking up some sun, reading to each other and enjoying the beautiful glistening lake and amazingly colorful trees.

*See, A Little Visit, page 7*

*A Little Visit, from page 6*

Since I love the Meditation Walk so much and have expressed my thoughts about the trail to my wife, we decided to go take a walk together. It was a completely different journey from the morning but an amazing experience nonetheless. We prayed together before we left for the walk/hike.

This time we stopped at each of the seven “prayer stations” to pray together. We read the SAA messages that were there, and we also had the trail map, which explained the religious symbols that were put there by the Pyoca crew. We prayed for our unborn child, our family, the fellowship and anything else that came up. It was a very special trip.

When we returned, it was time for water activities. Canoeing around the lake gives yet another perspective to the grounds. It was relaxing and majestic at the same time. Looking back on the retreat experience right now is also relaxing and majestic.

More activity . . . It was time for a game of Bocce Ball. The two victims, I mean, other contestants were Brian & Mike. We had a great time while using most of the backyard and not sticking very closely to the rules. Next it was Baggo or Corn Hole as it is sometimes called. Larry the cook and Brian challenged us, if you can call it that . . . ha ha. Did I mention that I work on pride and competitiveness as character defects? We won. We also enjoyed the “hay” wagon ride. I had never taken advantage of that before this year. It was beautiful and fun. I mostly enjoyed the fellowship and the scenery.

It was sad to see my wife go, but it was late and dark, and she had stayed much longer than we originally planned. We had experienced quite a day, and I didn’t even realize all we had done until I wrote about it that night. I bet my journal looks a little different than this account, but they both have this in common . . . I love my wife, and the retreat and the fellowship play a huge role in who I am and where I want to be.

With that I am in.



## The Greatest Good For The Greatest Number

*Shelly J.*

Is it important for us to study the Traditions? Is it important for us to follow the Traditions? Are we reading them in our meetings--all of them? I asked myself these questions as I sat in a meeting during the recent IISAA retreat near Indianapolis, IN. This meeting was entitled, “Group Conscious, A Meeting of the Minds”. I noticed that the members who chose to attend were those who have years in the program. There was a panel who discussed various ways they had seen group conscious work to resolve issues or reach decisions. One AA member noted that when they deliberate and start to vote, if there is a significant minority, they stop and take a look at that and

take it into consideration before the final decision. I had never heard that before but felt that it was compassionate seeing how so many of us come into the rooms having had our rights violated.

One member read the Traditions in an earlier meeting I attended and a sense of awe came over me. That same feeling returned and I began to think how I felt about it all. For me the Traditions were such a new concept in the beginning--carrying a message so important that it was the only focus. No “Big I’s or little you’s”, only God being in charge. The newcomer was the most important person. I had heard the saying before that we are only as strong as our weakest link I thought to myself . . . but they care about the weak? I was touched.

The most profound Tradition for me was that the only requirement for membership was a desire to stop. So I just needed to want to be here. I knew then that this was my kind of place; I could qualify to be here even though I had failed to qualify so many other times in life. I really didn’t have an excuse to leave. Today, I sit humbly and gratefully because I didn’t.

I have noticed that the groups who read all of the traditions tend to follow them. Because of this, I think we should always read them. I have seen how powerful the group is and how our attraction should not be taken lightly. I have watched people who were clueless about recovery and spiritual principles be around those in recovery and achieve sobriety. I have witnessed group members unknowingly accept guidance for

*See The Greatest Good, page 8*

*The Greatest Good, from page 7*

themselves that may have been meant for others in the group. I have even seen solutions reached that I would never have imagined, after the opinions of all the members were expressed. I realized then that we desperately need each other and these wonderful Traditions.

I always try to remember the First Tradition which states, "Our . . . personal recovery depends upon S.A.A. unity. Furthermore, that our unity depends on how well we work our Traditions. This is directly related to our own personal recovery. We need everyone to participate for the best results. We need everyone working the 12 Steps so that we can be able to follow our 12 Traditions. A knowledge and study of both is imperative.

Our purpose is to carry the message of recovery and our mission, you could say, is spiritual growth toward the end that all will survive the disease of addiction. But it is my personal belief that the greatest power of the group lies in the fact that we have the ability for all of us to get all of our needs met. There is enough knowledge, experience, talent, gifts, and resources that there can be recovery for all in every area of life. All we have to do is to tap into it and the power of God. We can have the greatest good for the greatest number. No addict should ever have to die in the horrors of their addiction. The greatest miracle to me is that I didn't.



## Group Conscience

*Ken S.*

At the retreat this year we had very good workshops. One of them concerned group conscience. It started as a panel presentation by three members with experience in various 12-Step fellowships. This brief overview led to an interesting discussion. We were attempting to define group conscience: what it is and what it is not. The following is a summary of that discussion.

One of the first terms I heard was "consensus." It is an agreement among a group. It is not necessarily a democratically voted decision. It would seem to be a process whereby everyone comes to an agreement on a course of action even though some present do not agree completely with every aspect of that course. They hear the opinions of others and realize that their own view, while important to them, should not be the final one.

We all have the right to be heard. I have been present when a group conscience was reached and have simply tuned out all those who did not agree with me. This was not in keeping with my recovery program: I was not respecting others, as I must do to maintain my own recovery and humanity. I must keep an open mind and listen to other's opinions respectfully.

A group conscience must be "informed" in order to have validity. The way I get information on the topic is to listen to others. This is why it is so important to give careful consideration to the "minority" viewpoint.

I also must be familiar with recovery literature because it comes from others who have walked this path. Probably the most important items to keep in mind are the Traditions. It is in the Second Tradition that we state, "For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as expressed in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern."

It is important to participate in the group conscience process. No matter how long you have been in the program, your opinion may be the one my Higher Power wants me to hear. If you have an opinion, express it. I have heard of groups in which new members are required to just shut up and listen until they have a specified period of abstinence. I cannot agree with that. I need to hear what newcomers have to say.

I have discovered a real spirituality by working Step 11 as I participate in arriving at a group conscience. Only by praying and meditating can I even guess at what my Higher Power wants me to do. That is what the group conscience is supposed to be: the will of our Higher Power.

One thing I heard in the discussion takes me back to my active addiction. Someone said, "I'm just one person," or something to that effect. There is no 'just' or 'only' in this Fellowship. We are all here for the same reason: to stop our addictive sexual behavior. It makes no difference whether we came in yesterday or twenty years ago. No matter how far down the road of recovery I have gone, I always remain just one footstep from the ditch of relapse.

## A Yogi's Approach to Recovery

Finding A Path From The Physical To The Spiritual Using Yoga To Work Through A Few Of The 12-Steps

Matthew A.



Through examining *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* and the *12-Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous*, this article will present my physical, philosophical, and

spiritual journey in recovery through the first three Steps utilizing various forms of Yoga in an effort to heal the distorted images I had of myself and my addiction.

From the night I went to my first meeting, I realized the Steps were at best an emotional and spiritual endeavor that were going to encompass the rest of my life. Since I was not an openly emotional person and one who had been actively fighting any concepts of spirituality, tackling the Steps seemed like an impossible task. Still, I knew they were essential for me to recover. I could feel in my gut that I should stick with the program. So I made a commitment to myself to give it every bit of my being. In all honesty, the Steps seemed like my last hope for repairing my shattered life and possibly, my last chance at ever achieving happiness.

No matter how good my intentions were, I knew that I had a problem approaching the Steps. Being an educated person who adores well researched facts and academically defined concepts, I needed something that was concrete in the physical world on which I could literally put my hands. A suggestion was made to me that I should try some exercise to clear my mind. Hatha Yoga has been said to be one of the greatest tools in recovery from addiction and coping with life's torments. This is because freedom is created by focusing on the physical aspects of spirituality rather than solely the metaphysical. I personally have experienced this in my own practice while going through a very heartbreaking divorce and dealing with my own struggle with addiction. Both came on rather suddenly and I did not really know how to cope. While each of these issues had the potential to cripple me emotionally, I found a level of serenity in Hatha Yoga that had not been present in the many years of practice before these issues came to light. I recommitted my energy towards my Yoga practice in an effort to deal with the physical aspects

of withdrawal that I knew would be taking place soon. For nearly eight years prior, I had toyed with Yoga as an exercise regime but never really gave myself over to it as anything other than a way to be in better shape. It took hitting **rock bottom** for me to realize that the physical act of Yoga was a gateway to serenity and ultimately sobriety.

When I started to go to meetings after my bottoming out experience, I was amazed at the possibilities of the 12-Steps from a spiritual and life rebuilding aspect. I quickly turned my energy from my addiction towards the Steps in an effort to get my life back where I thought it was meant to be. Some may say that I traded one addiction for another (there is some truth in that) but I came to a realization that I was at a crossroad of my life: this was my chance to become the man I have always wanted to be.

Powerlessness and unmanageability weighed on my every thought and action because of my rock bottom experience. New levels of blinding pain came in each waking thought causing numerous sleepless nights and deep despair that colored each of my relationships and deeds. With this in mind, it was not hard for me to accept the *First Step* in my life. Many say the chief destroyer of serenity is varying levels of pain. Human beings live in a constant flux between these levels because of how pain is perceived. According to Sutra 2.15, "*everything is painful, due to its consequences.*" This pain is a result of fear of loss, increased cravings for something, and/or feelings of constant change in one's life. I truly loathed my situation in life; yet, I feared the change from what I was use to. I hated myself for not being willing to grow or change. My rock bottom had left me doubting myself and filled me with only negative thoughts lingering in my mind like a wild beast waiting for the death of its prey before it pounces on the carcass. Now, I see the extreme luck in having this experience; but, only through hindsight. When I was in that moment, there was nothing but depression and sorrow. I later found a verse in the *Sutras* that explained how mindset was malleable and kept me from achieving serenity in the moment of pain.

See *Yogi*, page 10

Yogi, from page 9



When disturbed by negative thoughts, positive ones should be thought of. This is *pratipaksha bhavana* (the process of substituting opposite thought forms of the mind.)

*Sadhana Pada 2:39*

My negative thoughts were only producing more negative thoughts. Since these mentalities consisted of self-deprecation, I was staying in the self-hating mental space that some psychiatric professionals claim is the root cause of addictive behavior. The only way to break the cycle was to make a conscious choice to try to turn my negative thoughts into positive ones. This was extremely hard at first. However, any negative situation can be turned around if only some contemplation takes place. An example is “I hit rock bottom and could not get any lower.” One could turn it around by saying: “There is only upward motion in store for me from this bottom in which I have found myself.” *Rock Bottom* is a wonderfully descriptive term. I imagine a vast ocean of iniquities in which one is metaphorically drowning. And yet, a metaphoric *rock bottom* exists. With dark water all around, there is a foundational seafloor on which to momentarily stand. There is no place lower in this sea. In an effort to return to the surface where life-giving air is available, one can push off the ground below to provide momentum in the ascent from this ocean of pain. Unfortunately, direction is very difficult to determine when underwater. It is, literally, almost impossible to know which way is up. But, when there is a reference point of *bottom*, the direction of up is very apparent. It may sound trite but “there is nowhere to go but up.” At least there is something to push off of now and an understanding of which way not to go.

Whatever time I “saved” in my work on Step One, I spent on Step Two and Step Three. Toiling took place for months in an effort to see a Power greater than myself, mostly due to my overbearing ego. It was the main reason I could not come to believe in any form of god. I believed in a spiritual realm but this was devoid of a deity for me. There was nothing more I wished to do than to cry out to the heavens begging for some form of aid. I even tried sometimes, late at night. Despite my efforts, I could not conceive of a god that could answer my pleas and therefore I saw no way to even approach Step Two or Step Three from my present mindset.

Like many people entering 12-Step programs, I had a very narrow view of what that Power could be. What came to mind because of the wording of the Third Step was the traditional Judeo/Christian God. Herein was the root of my struggle: How could I come to believe in a Power that I did not think existed? It was not until my grand-sponsor (my sponsor’s sponsor) suggested to me that the Power could be **anything greater than myself** that I had an epiphany: Hatha yoga was that power! I came to this realization one morning when I was having a major physical struggle in difficult sequences of poses (*vinyasas*). No matter how hard I tried, I could not get a steady flow between a set of poses. I kept saying “I won’t let this beat me, I can do this.” It was in the first part of this statement that I found my answer to how I could do Step Two. Hatha Yoga was **greater** than me. No matter how hard I worked at it, I would never “beat” it and achieve mastery. There was always room for growth. In this realization, I had completed Step Two.

In the days following, I spent almost every moment exploring my physical limits. Literally, through both sweat and tears, I had a huge problem with the concentration required for certain poses. There was no way physically to solve these lapses of concentration because, no matter what I did, I could not keep my mind clear during my practice or during mediation. Images of the horrible things I did while I was in my addiction kept clouding my mind. I recalled the words of Step Two: “*Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity*”. Since I had chosen Yoga as my “Power greater than myself,” I began to search for a way to use it in more than a physical sense to help bring serenity to my troubled mind as well as to work on Step Three.

I started to question how to integrate a spiritual element into my practice so as to solve my problem of concentration. During my undergraduate study, I had heard in a religion class that there was a philosophical/spiritual practice of Yoga that could be mutually exclusive to Hatha Yoga. It was called Raja Yoga and was detailed in *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. This was a written collection of the aural yogic tradition by a sage named Sri Patanjali that ranged from 5000 B.C.E to 300 C.E. I was enthralled with what I read and every day I tried to integrate it into my practice. Still, with all of the rest of my life

See Yogi, page 11

Yogi, from page 10



demanding my time and energies, I could only read and comprehend at a slow speed.

I was facing difficulty in working through Step Three. I could not fathom how I could give my will and life over to *God, as I understood God*. A strange irony was present in trying to work this Step. As I stated earlier, “There was nothing more I wished to do than cry out to the heavens begging for some form of aid.” Yet, I could not think of a way to give myself to God as the Step dictated. The desire for God was truly there but I lacked a way to commune in a way that was useful. Throughout my life I have always searched for some element of the divine but had been left wanting. Due to the experiences of my youth, I had given up on the idea of God or even the necessity of God. After quite a bit of contemplation and meditation, I realized that as an intellectual who needed facts and research for things to have validity I did not have a sacred source that I could rely on which showed any necessity for God other than the 12-Steps. The Steps were not enough because they were what I was currently working on and any good researcher would say that a single source is never enough to prove an argument. So I needed another reference. I had studied almost all of the sacred texts of both eastern and western religions and did not consider any of them valid because none of them spoke directly to me.

Then it came to me: maybe the *Yoga Sutras*, which I discovered in Step Two, might show a necessity for God. Luckily, I found what I was looking for in the *Sadhana Pada* (Portion of Practice 2.1) one night while I was exceptionally depressed. It read:

*Accepting pain as help for purification, study of spiritual texts, and surrender to a higher power constitutes Yoga in practice. Sadhana Pada 2:1*

I had been trying with all of my being to become a more spiritual person through the study of Raja Yoga and this verse seemed to be the “Rosetta Stone” of my recovery. In this was a microcosm of how I was not only going to recover from my addiction but also a justification for the heartache I had suffered in coming to terms with Step One. Almost instantly my depression left me and it was replaced by joy.

I was now capable of having a complete understanding of the statement I made in my *Step Two* work--“I won’t let this beat me, I can do this.”

Not only had I made a realization that I would not cease in my Yoga endeavors, but I now understood what I meant in the second part of the statement. “I could do this.” I needed to:

1.) *Accept pain as help for purification.*

Which, I easily did because I kept having the feeling that there must be a reason why I went through all of the aforementioned lifelong pain. Herein was the crux of Step One.

2.) *Study spiritual (sacred) texts.*

I did this by studying both the *Yoga Sutras* but also the 12-Steps themselves. Most likely, many religious leaders would claim these two books were not spiritual/sacred texts but rather man-made commentaries on culture. The definition of “sacred” was what was in question. Sacred was not directly something dealing with the divine but a focus on something in which one places a great level of importance. These books were very important to me. Thus, they were sacred to me.

3.) *Surrender to a higher power.*

I did not know exactly how I was going to do this. However, I now had a source that was valid (in that it spoke directly to me) that showed that I needed some form of God to truly practice Yoga in the way that I wanted. Now, I had a way to approach Step Three. Even *Samadhi Pada 1:23* showed an almost direct rewording of this step:

*“Samadhi (enlightenment) is attained by devotion with total dedication to Isvara (God).”*

The *Sutras* contain more wisdom than one could understand in a lifetime. I realized that to continue reading them with no guidance would be more detrimental than helpful in my search. Knowing this, I was overwhelmed. Many friends in the program suggested that in order to seek God one must understand how to envision God in the present moment before trying to delve into a haphazard metaphysical search.

Through work with a therapist and my sponsor, I was led to the original source of the Steps, the A.A. Big Book, to do further study in how I viewed God from a psychological viewpoint. Bill W. wrote, “First of all, we had to quit playing God. It did not work.” This (along with many conversations with those in the program) helped me realize that I viewed myself as the only God I needed. I spent almost all

*See, Yogi, page 12*

Yogi, from page 11



of the time in my life trying to control and literally “play God.” Bill W. was correct, it did not work. My image of God was that of a mortal man (myself) who was fragile, controlling, ego-centric, and limited. It was no wonder that I could not give my will and life over to that image of God. I was already serving that idol of self as my sole source of the divine and was left wanting.

I came to believe that not only was I attached to my ego as my only deity, but I was full of contempt for myself for having this approach. On a constant basis, I was punishing myself. Some psychologists would even go so far as to claim that all of my addictive behavior was embodied in an attempt to ultimately punish myself. In all honesty, I was not sure I could attribute all of my addictive issues to self-hatred but it was definitely a part that could not be ignored. In fact the Sutras claim:

*Ignorance, Egoism, Attachment, Hatred, and Clinging to the affairs of the body are the five obstacles (to achieving Samadhi (enlightenment)).*

**Sadhana Pada 2:2**

Nearly all of these traits were present in my life now and even more so during my time in addiction.

The Big Book also presented the idea that I might be condemning what God could be by dismissing other peoples’ beliefs and ideas in view of their personal shortcomings. In the rereading of earlier sections of the Sutras, I found another verse that instructed me in how one should approach God from a Yoga point of view.

*Isvara (God) is the supreme Purusha (true self), unaffected by any afflictions, actions, fruits of actions or by any inner impressions of desires*

**Samadhi Pada 1: 24**

This confirmed that I was seeing God from a biased viewpoint. I was being affected by my afflictions (addiction), actions (fight against anything spiritual), fruits of actions (disconnection from any spiritual influence), and inner impressions of desire (that I, in my ego-centric mindset, wanted to be self-serving.) With light shed on all of these ideas, an exploration into a completely new approach of communing with God, as I understood God started to take place.

In the coming weeks, I came to my personal vision of God through meditation and the suggestions of friends and family. Admittedly, I still considered God to have negative traits and I thought these would

never go away. Then I remembered the work I did in the First Step. What I gleaned was that all things perceived as negative should be viewed as strengths rather than weakness. Thus the “flaws” of God could be viewed in a different light. I came to the realization that I did not know everything about how intricate God’s workings were. Knowing this, I could only give God, as I understood God, positive traits. Characteristics such as omniscience, omnipotence, and benevolence were the first to come to mind. When trying to add any other trait, I realized all other positive traits would be encompassed in these three

Day by day, as I started to build an idea of what I thought an all powerful Supreme Being might be, my perception of the divine changed. Because I now embraced my limitations of understanding something much bigger than myself, I knew that this mentality was an okay way to view God. There was not a possibility of anger or wrath about what I was doing or what I had done. My image was of a forgiving God who was only there to help me in recovery.

Unwittingly, I had moved from a physical form of exercise to a metaphysical spirituality using Yoga in many forms. By no means am I a finished project; but, I am learning. From what I now understand, that is what spirituality is all about. It is a thirst for knowledge for a relationship with the divine. For some there may be no god involved in this journey and thirsting. That is okay. What matters most is that one tries with all of their being to find a way to be part of the metaphysical realm of spirit.

Please remember that this is just a story of how I worked through the first Three Steps and not the only way one can recover. What is the most exciting aspect of the telling of this story is that it might help you start your own journey. It is only through the attempt at being spiritual that one can truly recover from addiction and in life. Why else would we even try these Steps? It is my opinion that we desire something to help us grow (even if it is unconscious). Only through a constant working at being spiritual, can we achieve this growth. The words we chant at the ends of most meetings are apt, “Keep coming back, it works if you work it.” This is very true with spirituality. It works, if you work at it.