

Spirituality and Recovery

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“If, on the other hand, love undergoes the transformation of the eternal...it does not become characterized by habit; habit can never get power over it. To what is said of eternal life, that there is no sighing and no tears, one can add: there is no habit.” (Soren Kierkegaard, in the Works of Love)

“Your soul is oftentimes a battlefield upon which your reason and your judgement wage war against your passion...” (Kahlil Gibran in The Prophet)

Recovery is difficult. It means doing things that are unfamiliar and frightening. It means facing the unknown. To help with this dilemma, I suggest that recovering love addicts consider getting in touch with their spiritual nature – that “vital principle or animating force traditionally believed to be within living beings.” I recommend this because somehow tapping into this rich inner resource transforms us, or alters our attitudes and feelings to the extent that we can change what we have never been able to change before. This transformation is a vital part of the love addict's recovery.

Spirituality, or a relationship with a “Higher Power,” can also give recovering love addicts the unconditional love and acceptance they were denied as children.

How spirituality works is a mystery. It is something that is often observed but not necessarily understood. I have observed people overcome their addictions with the aid of spirituality. They start out at

the mercy of their dependencies. They are powerless over their inner compulsions and have no strength to fight back. They habitually re-enact behavior that is self-destructive and life-threatening. Then, in a moment of agony, they call out “God help me,” and somewhere deep in their soul they surrender. They admit they are powerless and they ask for help. Then, sometimes quickly and sometimes slowly, they are filled with the power of the spirit and...

- They feel willing, when before they felt hesitant;
- They feel courageous, when before they felt terrified;
- They feel guided, when before they felt lost;
- They feel loved, when before they felt abandoned;
- They feel wise, when before they felt confused;
- They feel hopeful, when before they felt despair;
- They feel as if they are at the start of a glorious new journey, when before they felt near death.

Spirituality can also dissipate the obsession love addicts have with romantic love and intimacy. Once again, this is a phenomenon that is observed more than it is understood. I have observed God-conscious people just naturally become less interested in romantic love and more interested in other forms of life sustaining love. Along with their new love of a Higher Power, spiritual people become interested in helping others in a non-codependent way (brotherly love); they discover the warmth of friendship (platonic love); they allow their love for parents, children, and siblings to blossom (familial love); and they begin to love themselves, often for the first time. It is as if their values have changed

and they see the world with new eyes. Romantic love is not everything to them anymore. It is not an obsession. It is just one of life's many ways to experience love. This is a crucial step in recovery.

There is more than one way to have a spiritual awakening. For some people it will happen suddenly during one dramatic moment, a moment from which there is no turning back. For others it happens slowly. Over time, they just find themselves with a new attitude about a Higher Power and spirituality. Their closed mind becomes open and curious. They pray and they feel connected to their Higher Power. Or they act “as if” a Higher Power exists, and in time they come to believe. Some people practice meditation to find a Higher Power. Others may read spiritual literature or talk to people about spirituality. Whatever they do, recovering love addicts must do it repetitively, and they must not give up. If they are really seeking spirituality with an open mind they will find it. If they really ask for spirituality with a humble heart, it will be given to them.

Finding spirituality is one step. Holding onto it is another. Spirituality tends to recede if left unattended. Traditionally, spirituality can be retained, and even enhanced, by keeping the channel of communication open between the provider of spirituality (God or Higher Power) and the receiver of spirituality (yourself). This means using such spiritual tools as prayer, meditation, repentance, compassion, charity, forgiveness, spiritual literature, and surrendering to God's will – whatever seems suitable or comfortable.

Some people will want to reinforce their budding spirituality with a supportive group – church or 12-step program. This is optional, but spiritual fellowship can be very fulfilling. However, be warned that even within a group spirituality is a personal experience. Spirituality means searching the deep recesses of your mind, and finding a spiritual power that can lead you to a new level of consciousness. Standing in the light

of another person's faith is not enough to promote recovery.

While spirituality is not mandatory, I recommend the spiritual path because it makes recovery easier.

Suggestions for Beginners

Spirituality means activating, or getting in touch with, that part of our psyche that connects us to a power greater than ourselves (greater than our fear). It means getting in touch with the “eternal” via our own “inner light.” To do this, to embrace spirituality and receive the gift of psychological healing that goes with it, here are some suggestions:

1. Acknowledge a power greater than yourself.
2. Be open to the experience of spirituality. Allow the process to begin by discarding your prejudices. To paraphrase Herbert Spencer, ignorance is contempt prior to investigation.
3. Do not confuse spirituality with religion, theology, or church; it is a personal experience between you and God.
4. Read about spirituality (anything and everything).
5. Seek out spiritual people and spiritual organizations.
6. Once the door has sprung open (or even before), begin talking to God (prayer) and listening (meditation).
7. Surrender to God and become humble. This means giving up some of your will (ego) in order to acknowledge God's superiority. It means allowing God to guide you from God's point of greater wisdom – “thy will be done.”

8. Give credit where credit is due. Be grateful to this “higher power” when you start to feel more peaceful, serene, and confident.
9. If the changes in you are slow (if the benefits don't seem readily apparent), don't lose hope. Some people have instantaneous spiritual awakenings but most of us grow into spirituality.
10. To keep your faith strong, incorporate some spiritual exercises or disciplines into your life.
11. Imagination and personification can enhance and maintain your spirituality. God is spirit, but I can give God human form and imagine that he or she is:
 - Protecting me
 - Walking with me
 - Holding me
 - Talking to me
 - Sharing my anger and frustrations
 - Giving me strength
 - Helping me let go of my anger
 - Helping me forgive my persecutors
 - Helping me look at others through his or her eyes
 - Loving me unconditionally
 - Helping me “accept what I cannot change”
 - Help me “change” what should be changed.
12. If all else fails, ask (pray) for willingness to know God and then build on that. Leave no stone unturned, and remember that “ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find.”

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