

**READINGS FOR THE
OA-HOW SUNDAY PHONE MEETING
(712) 770-4160; 754082#; 3:00-5:00 pm Eastern Time**

You do not have to be an OA-HOW sponsor to read the first eight readings or “Just for Today” (at the end of the meeting).

What Is HOW?

HOW is a movement within Overeaters Anonymous whose basic principle is that abstinence is the only means to freedom from compulsive overeating and the beginning of a spiritual life.

Where and Why Did HOW Begin?

HOW began in Phoenix in 1981 as a means of reviving a group called OA Victorious. Its meeting format is taken from Rozanne’s book, *I Put My Hand In Yours*, and centers on the concept of service. Many of the questions used in HOW sponsoring stem from the OA Plus and Westminster groups. The outline of service came from the OA Suffolk County, New York, sponsor’s guide.

The Only Requirement

Overeaters Anonymous respects the autonomy of each OA group. We do suggest, however, that any group that has requirements in addition to the suggested 12 Steps and 12 Traditions inform its members that these requirements are what that particular group has found effective in working the program and do not represent OA as a whole.

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The members of this group have found the HOW concept to be effective in working the OA program. The opinions expressed here this afternoon by those who share are their own and not necessarily those of OA. The Board of Trustees states, “We understand the Third Tradition to mean that individual ways of working one’s program should not exclude any compulsive overeater from attendance and participation at OA meetings anywhere, anytime. The only requirement for membership is the desire to stop eating compulsively. Anyone who says he/she is a member is a member. We of Overeaters Anonymous welcome all members with open arms.”

The HOW Concept

The Overeaters Anonymous HOW meetings have been formed to offer the compulsive overeater who accepts the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions as a program of recovery a disciplined and structured approach. HOW groups are formed in the belief that our disease is absolute, and that only absolute acceptance of the OA program will offer any sustained abstinence to those of us whose compulsion has reached a critical level. Therefore, we accept the nine tools of the program and the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions as necessary for our recovery.

Our meetings are dedicated to the concept of remaining honest, open-minded, and willing to listen. This is the HOW of the program. We pray that the collective group conscience and love that these ideals offer us will promote a strong sense of security that will enable us to experience a new unity and wholeness with all those around us, and that the HOW ideals will help us to progress in our program of recovery on a daily basis. To be certain, much of our strength is found in the structure of meetings and in daily adherence to the program as it is written in our literature.

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The Sunday afternoon phone meeting also firmly understands that after our recovery has begun through abstinence and taking the first three steps, our further surrender to the additional steps of recovery offers us a promise of happiness, contentment, and achievement in all areas of our lives.

We ensure our continued and sustained abstinence from compulsive overeating by being forever aware that God is doing for us what we have never been able to do for ourselves. May God, as each of us understands Him, open our minds and our hearts to the love that is manifested on this telephone meeting. Amen.

Reflections for the Newcomer

Welcome to OA-HOW. We are all so glad that you have decided to become a part of our fellowship. You know that the HOW concept is a disciplined program. We believe that the discipline of weighing and measuring, telephoning our sponsor at a particular time, attending meetings, and making phone calls all lead to a life based on the universal discipline, which is accord rather than discord even with many things going on around us. Therefore, if there is a breakdown in any of these areas, the concept is threatened, as is the individual's abstinence.

We have found that the discipline must remain as constant for the beginner as for the sponsor. If the newcomer shies away from this life's responsibility, the sponsor may give the newcomer's time slot to someone more committed to recovery. This is not a personal affront, but a matter of necessity. So many who think they should recover are not, in fact, ready. The rationale here is, if the newcomer insists on picking up the food before the phone, there is a breakdown in the level of communication between the sponsor and the

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newcomer. “Frothy emotional appeal seldom suffices” (“The Doctor's Opinion,” Big Book, page roman numeral 28). If a sponsor slips, get a new one. The pitfalls of self-deception cannot be overstressed if you are to recover; therefore a sponsor, in all self-honesty, must release all sponsees to continue their own recovery. A sponsor cannot give what they do not experience.

Finally, you must believe that we need each other; all problems that arise can be worked on via the phone or person-to-person contact. Only positive, upbeat recovery belongs at our meetings.

“A body badly burned by alcohol does not often recover overnight nor do twisted thinking and depression vanish in a twinkling. We are convinced that a spiritual mode of living is a most powerful health restorative” (“The Family Afterward,” Big Book, page 133). Good luck! Everyone in the fellowship is praying that you find the release from the obsession so many of us have. God bless. And no matter what, keep coming back! We'll always be here for you!

Excerpt from Step Two

When we look with complete honesty at our lives, we see that where eating is concerned we have acted in an extremely irrational and self-destructive manner. Under the compulsion to overeat, many of us have done things no sane person would think of doing. We have driven miles in the dead of night to satisfy a craving for food. We have eaten food that was frozen, burnt, stale, or even dangerously spoiled. We have eaten food off other people's plates, off the floor, off the ground. We have dug food out of the garbage and eaten it.

We have frequently lied about what we have eaten—lied to ourselves and to others

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because we didn't want to face the truth about what we do when it comes to food. We have stolen food from our friends, family, and employers, as well as from the grocery store. We have also stolen money to buy food. We have eaten beyond the point of being full, beyond the point of being sick of eating. We have continued to overeat, knowing all the while we were disfiguring and maiming our bodies. We have isolated ourselves to eat, damaging our relationships and denying ourselves a full social life. Because of our compulsive eating, we have turned ourselves into objects of ridicule and we have destroyed our health.

Then, horrified by what we were doing to ourselves with food, we became obsessed with diets. We spent lots of money on weight-loss schemes; we bought all sorts of appetite suppressants; we joined diet clubs and fitness centers; we had ourselves hypnotized and analyzed; we had major surgery on our digestive systems; we had our ears stapled or our jaws wired shut. All of this we did willingly, hoping we could still eat all we wanted and be free of the compulsion.

Some of us went from doctor to doctor looking for a cure. The doctors gave us diets, but we had no better success with those than with the other diets we'd been on. The doctors prescribed shots and pills. Those worked for a while, but we inevitably lost control and overate again, putting back on the weight we had worked so hard to lose and frequently gaining more.

Many of us tried fasting, with and without a doctor's supervision. Usually we lost weight, but as soon as we started eating again, the compulsive eating behavior returned, along with the weight. Some of us learned to purge ourselves with vomiting, laxatives, or excessive exercise. We damaged our digestive systems and our teeth while we starved our bodies of the nutrients we needed to live. Some of us were so terrified of gaining weight, we

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went to great lengths to restrict what we ate. We refused to eat certain foods, we developed complex rituals around food, and we tried to avoid eating whenever possible. Other people told us we were too thin, but we thought they were overreacting. Our weight went down, sometimes to dangerous levels, but we still felt fat.

Most of us got plenty of advice from others about how to get to our “ideal” size, but nothing permanently solved our problem. We found that no matter what we did to ease our turmoil, our compulsive eating eventually returned. Over time we became weary and discouraged from battling with weight, and our self-esteem went down. Still, we could never accept our powerlessness. The prospect of being obsessed with food and weight, sick, and out of control for the rest of our lives led some of us to conclude that life was simply not worth living. Many of us thought about suicide. Some of us tried it.

Most of us, however, never reached suicidal desperation. Instead, we took comfort in a feeling that everything was all right as long as we got enough to eat. The only trouble was that, as our compulsive eating progressed, we ate more and more, yet we were never satisfied. Instead of bringing comfort, the overeating backfired. The more we ate, the more we suffered, yet we continued to overeat. Our true insanity could be seen in the fact that we kept right on trying to find comfort in excess food, long after it began to cause us misery.

Excerpt from Chapter 5

Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born

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that way. They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty. Their chances are less than average. There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest.

Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now, If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it—then you are ready to take certain steps.

At some of these we balked. We thought we could find an easier, softer way. But we could not. With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start. Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely.

Remember that we deal with alcohol—cunning, baffling, powerful! Without help it is too much for us. But there is One who has all power—that One is God. May you find Him now!

Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked His protection and care with complete abandon.

Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery.

The 12 Steps of Overeaters Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over food—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.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with 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 compulsive overeaters and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

As the Big Book states on page 60, “Many of us exclaimed, ‘What an order! I can’t go through with it.’ Do not be discouraged. No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles. We are not saints. The point is that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.”

The 12 Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon OA unity.
2. For our group purpose, there is but one ultimate authority a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose-to carry its message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers.
6. An OA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the OA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every OA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Overeaters Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. OA as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Overeaters Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the OA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, television, and other public media of communication.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all these traditions, ever reminding us to

place principles before personalities.

TOOL 1: Plan of Eating

A food plan is a commitment to recovery. The HOW disciplines were designed for food-addicted people. We believe in a disciplined and structured approach. HOW abstainers do not modify their food plan to suit themselves and commit themselves to black-and-white abstinence. Deviations invite the return of many other problems.

A food plan is not a personal thing in HOW. This means that we depend on each other for the strength and growth that we need to remain abstinent. We join together in an effort to free the compulsive overeater from the bondage of food through the use of a food plan, positive thinking, and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous. We eat weighed and measured meals with nothing in between except sugar-free beverages and sugar-free gum. Food is written down, called in to our sponsor, and committed so that we can get on with our recovery and out of the food. We also believe that negative thinking is a large part of our disease, so we abstain from negative thinking.

Those of us who work the HOW program concept use the following guidelines for food plans:

We do not write our own food plan. We use a food plan given to us by a doctor, nutritionist, or dietician. We discuss it with our sponsor. We do not choose one that allows any of our binge foods. If some food on our plan becomes a problem, we avoid it.

We do not skip meals, switch meals, or combine meals. We do not deviate from or manipulate our food plan in any way. If we need to change our committed food during the day, we call a sponsor.

We weigh and measure all our portions so that there is no guesswork. We do not measure by eye. We use a measuring cup, spoon, and scale.

(Describe how you use your abstinence kit, with a two-minute limit, then continue reading.)

We weigh ourselves once a month until we reach goal weight and once a week on maintenance.

Unless advised otherwise by our doctor, we take a multivitamin and drink 64 oz. of water a day.

We do not drink alcohol.

We do not use foods containing sugar, except if sugar is listed fifth or beyond on the ingredients label.

Above all, we do not vacillate from or water down the disciplined nature of the HOW program. It is not the extra string bean that counts; it is the decision to take it.

(Two-minute pitch begins here)

TOOL 2: Sponsorship

Sponsors are OA members who are committed to abstinence and to living the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions to the best of their ability.

We ask a sponsor to guide us through our program of recovery on all three levels: physical, emotional, and spiritual. In working with other members of OA and sharing their experience, strength, and hope, sponsors continually renew and reaffirm their own sobriety. Sponsors share their program up to the level of their own experience. Ours is a program of attraction; find a sponsor who has what you want and ask how it was achieved. A member may work with more than one sponsor and may change sponsors at will.

A HOW sponsor is a compulsive overeater who has completed at least 70 days of back-to-back abstinence and who has taken the first three steps of the program. Sponsors

have also completed at least 70 days of assignments.

Reflections for the sponsor and suggestions for discussion

No list of reflections and meditations are end-alls and be-alls for the newcomer. A sponsor must be attentive not only to what the new person is saying, but also to what the newcomer is not saying. Many newcomers are reluctant to purchase books and are hesitant to throw themselves headlong into the program. Therefore, we have a list of precommitment assignments.

The HOW concept is an alternative for people who have tried everything else, Therefore, the program is an immutable triumvirate of tools, steps, and traditions. Using the tools of weighing and measuring our food, sponsors, meetings, phone calls, reading and writing, service, and anonymity, we follow the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions of OA in order to free ourselves from the bondage of food addiction.

Sponsors do not have the right to play God; we help each other.

TOOL 3: Anonymity

Anonymity is a tool as well as a tradition because it guarantees that we will place principles before personalities. It offers each of us freedom of expression and protection against gossip. Anonymity assures us that only we as individual OA members have the right to make our membership known within our community.

Anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, and television means that we never allow our last names or faces to be used once we identify ourselves as OA members.

Within the fellowship, anonymity means that whatever we share with another OA member will be held in respect and confidence. What we hear at meetings should remain there. It

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should be understood, however, that anonymity must not be used to limit our effectiveness within the fellowship. It is not a break of anonymity to give our names and email addresses to the secretary of our group or to other service offices of OA for the purpose of conducting OA business, which is primarily 12th-Step work. It is likewise not a break of anonymity to enlist twelfth-step help for group members in trouble, provided we are careful to obtain the person's permission to share personal information.

Anonymity is the part of the program that allows each of us to stand in front of our fellows and share for the first time honestly who we are, where we have been, and where we hope to go without fear that our story will be told outside these rooms.

For many of us, the OA rooms are the first place where we have no fear being judged or criticized. We are accepted as we are at that moment. This is the first time for most of us that we experience sharing where we are not told what we did wrong.

We come into OA at rock bottom, mangled emotionally, physically, and spiritually. We are supported back to health with honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness. We are encouraged to speak of our pain and we are lovingly told, "Your secrets are safe." Come share our recovery—recovery on a threefold level: physical, emotional, and spiritual.

Lastly, a word to newcomers: Please join us. However, if you decide that our program is not for you, please remember that our anonymity allows us to grow and recover from a very serious disease.

Whom you see here, what you hear here, when you leave here, let it stay here!

TOOL 4: Telephone

Compulsive overeating is a disease of isolation. The telephone is a means of communicating

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with another compulsive overeater between meetings. It provides an immediate outlet for those hard-to-handle highs and lows we all experience. The telephone is also a daily link to our sponsors and, as part of the surrender process, is a tool by which we learn to ask for help, reach out, and extend that same help to others.

In HOW we are asked to make at least four telephone calls a day—one to our sponsor and three to other OA members. These calls give us an opportunity to “talk program” on a daily basis. The telephone is our lifeline.

TOOL 5: Meetings

Meetings are gatherings of two or more compulsive eaters who come together to share their experience before and after recovery and to share the strength and hope OA has given them. Meetings are an opportunity for us to identify and confirm our common problem by relating to one another and by sharing the gifts we receive through this program. We find that being on time for meetings enhances our recovery and provides service to the meeting. Though there are many kinds of meetings, fellowship is the basis of them all. As HOW members we attend at least one HOW meeting a week.

TOOLS 6 and 7: Literature and Writing

Literature: We study the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, referred to as the Big Book, and the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, another AA book to reinforce our program. By substituting the words “food” and “compulsive eating” for the words “alcohol” and “alcoholism,” we can identify closely. We also read OA literature: *Overeaters Anonymous*, referred to as the Brown Book, the *OA Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, *For Today* and *Voices of Recovery* for daily

meditation, and *Lifeline*, our journal of recovery. When read on a daily basis, the literature impresses on us certain basic truths that we have found vital to our growth. Our literature and the AA books are an ever-available tool that gives insight into our problem, as well as the strength to deal with it and the very real hope that there is a solution for us.

Writing: In addition to writing our inventories and the list of people we have harmed, most of us have found that writing has been an indispensable tool for working the steps. Further, putting our thoughts and feelings down on paper or describing a troubling incident helps us to better understand our actions and reactions in a way that is often not revealed to us by simply thinking or talking about them. In the past, compulsive eating was our most common reaction to life. When we put our difficulties down on paper, it becomes easier to see situations more clearly and perhaps better discern any necessary action.

TOOL 8: Action Plan

An action plan is the process of identifying and accomplishing attainable actions, both daily and long term, that are necessary to support our individual abstinence and emotional, spiritual, and physical recovery. While the plan is ours, tailored to our recovery process, most of us find it important to work with a sponsor, fellow OA member, and/or appropriate professional to help us create it. This tool, like our plan of eating, may vary widely among members and may need to be adjusted as we progress in our recovery.

For example, a newcomer's action plan might focus on planning, shopping for, and preparing food. Some members may need a regular fitness routine to improve their strength and health, while others may need to set exercise limits in order to attain more balance. Some of us may need an action plan that includes time for meditation and relaxation or provides strategies

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for balancing work, personal interactions with family and friends, and our program. Others may need help to organize their homes, deal with their finances, or address medical, dental, or mental health issues.

Along with working the Steps on a daily basis, an action plan may incorporate use of the other OA tools to bring structure, balance, and manageability into our lives. As we use this tool, we find that we develop a feeling of serenity and continue to grow emotionally and spiritually while we make measurable progress one day at a time.

TOOL 9: Service

Carrying the message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers is the basic purpose of our fellowship and therefore the most fundamental form of service. Any service, no matter how small, that will help reach a fellow sufferer adds to the quality of our own recovery. Leading a meeting, calling newcomers, volunteering to read or serve as timekeeper, or doing whatever needs to be done in a group or for OA as a whole are ways in which we give back what we have so generously been given. Do what you can when you can. “A life of sane and happy usefulness” is what we are promised as the result of working the Twelve Steps. Service fulfills that promise. Always to extend the hand and heart of OA to all who share my compulsion; for this I am responsible.

Just for Today

I will try to live through this day only, and not tackle my whole life problem at once. I can do something for one day that would appall me if I felt I had to keep it up for a lifetime.

Just for Today

I will be happy. This assumes to be true what Abraham Lincoln said, that, "Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be."

Just for Today

I will adjust myself to what is and not try to adjust everything to my own desires. I will take my "luck" as it comes and fit myself to it.

Just for Today

I will try to strengthen my mind. I will study. I will learn something useful. I will not be a mental loafer. I will read something that requires effort, thought, and concentration.

Just for Today

I will exercise my soul in three ways. I will do somebody a good turn and not get found out; if anyone knows of it, it will not count. I will do at least two things I don't want to do, just for exercise. I will not show anyone that my feelings are hurt; they may be hurt, but today, I will not show it.

Just for Today

I will be agreeable. I will look as well as I can, dress becomingly, talk low, act courteously, criticize not one bit, not find fault with anything, and not try to improve or regulate anybody except myself

Just for Today

I will have a program. I may not follow it exactly, but I will have it. I will save myself from

two pests: hurry and indecision.

Just for Today

I will have a quiet half-hour all by myself and relax. During this half-hour, sometime, I will try to get a better perspective of my life.

Just for Today

I will be unafraid. Especially, I will not be afraid to enjoy what is beautiful, and to believe that as I give to the world, so the world will give to me.

Candles: Stepping-up Ceremony

CANDLE 1

The candle of truth is the keynote of those who strive to stop the advancement of compulsive overeating. It is the unrelenting force that permits no double standard. Its attainment brings the satisfaction of inward peace. We must fearlessly face the truth to avoid the ever-present pitfall of self-deception.

CANDLE 2

This is the candle of reality, and it is a new light. It opens the door to a new life. It holds the promise of new understanding. It offers the chance of personal renewal. It makes a statement that goes beyond fantasy, and it holds the dream of a better tomorrow. Without the light of reality, we are destined to remain in that sick, shadowy world of past mistakes and unrealistic dreams of false tomorrows.

CANDLE 3

This is the candle of surrender. In OA, surrender is the first and most important act necessary to launch you into the other steps. Without the surrender of your food, your ego, and your will, all else is hopeless. When you surrender, you suspend such negative emotions as disbelief and grandiosity, and you open yourself up to the process of learning who you are and where you fit in the scheme of things.

CANDLE 4

This is the candle of acceptance. Without acceptance, you could not have come this far.

Acceptance is seeing things as they really are. Acceptance is understanding that we have spent our lives denouncing everything, and now we must open our hearts, as well as our minds, and accept. We must accept the will of God—accept that only He can restore us to sanity.

CANDLE 5

This is the candle of knowledge, and it opens the door wide. We now know that God is on our side. We can see and hear his pronouncements in our lives. We recognize what it is that we can do and what only he can do. We acknowledge that the greatest gift He has given us is knowing ourselves.