



Welcome Secular OA Newcomers!

If you are new to OA and you bristle at the god-talk and patriarchal language in traditional OA meetings, Secular Overeaters might be able to help. Here are some resources that can show you a path to recovery without a theist higher power and help you find others like you. Please note that many of these resources are not “OA-approved” and will not be found at traditional meetings.

Secular Resources

All of these resources can also be found on secularovereaters.org.

Facebook

Secular Overeaters: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/secularovereaters>

Google Group

Secular Overeaters Community: Connect with the larger secular community, to join email secular overeaters community@gmail.com.

Literature

Secular Translations of God Questions in the OA 12&12 Workbook: Check out rewritten god questions in the Twelve Step Workbook of Overeaters Anonymous, and add your own! <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1j4Nm89mdraXOvJ3uxYrXS9siw5AKFT-cRvmvMseghW0g/edit?usp=sharing>

What If I Don't Believe in "God"? (OA brochure): <https://secularovereaters.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/doc-195-What-If-I-Dont-Believe-in-God-2016.pdf>

Meetings

Complete list of secular meetings listed in your timezone: <https://secularovereaters.org/so-meeting-schedule/>

Podcasts

Look in your favorite app for these OA podcasts featuring awesome stories of OA secular recovery!

The Secular Overeaters Podcast

Overeaters Anonymous Secular Podcast for Atheists, Agnostics, and Freethinkers

Overeaters Anonymous East Bay (look for speakers from the Freethinkers Meetings)

WhatsApp

Emeryville Freethinkers WhatsApp Group: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/EfF-6Pmz2Wyz6Cqt0xwWCIO>

Websites

Secular Overeaters: (Lists OA and secular recovery resources) <https://secularovereaters.org/>

Secular OA: (Lists only OA-approved resources) <https://www.secularoa.org>

The Power is OA

This OA Lifeline story illustrates one secular member's way of navigating the program.

I rarely use “agnostic” or “atheist” to describe myself, and the question “Is there a God?” is not one I give much thought to. Many people have religious or spiritual answers, others have scientific theories, and it's clear they believe these narratives with passion and certitude. But I came to believe it would be intellectual arrogance for me to feel I have even a clue about how the universe works.

A speaker at an OA retreat shared this analogy: Imagine a goldfish in a bowl watching its world happen. Sometimes lights come on; other times it's dark. Sometimes bits of food drop into the bowl. Sometimes the water is clean; sometimes it isn't. Imagine the goldfish with its little brain trying to understand what's going on: A pet owner controlling electricity? Offering manufactured fish food from a pet store? Periodically changing the entire environment using clean water from pipes? That little fish wouldn't have the slightest chance of understanding as much as we do, and we humans have only been civilized for about 10,000 years on a 4.5-billion-year-old planet, part of one little solar system out of many trillions. It seems to me that thinking, believing, and claiming we know how it all works makes as much sense as that goldfish knowing the greater story.

I joined OA more than twenty-seven years ago, and I feel very grateful that for much of that time I've been able to keep off 150 pounds (68 kg) and

refrain from compulsively overeating. A critical part of that has been working the Twelve Steps of OA, which has been a challenge because if I simply have no idea how the world works, and suspect that nobody else does either, how can I work the Steps with their many references to God?

God comes up a lot in program. While OA literature indicates we can choose our own definition of a Higher Power, the more frequent message suggests that the way to recover is to find God and turn your life over to him. It feels like the program is politely letting nonbelievers join the club, providing they know they need to buy into God or similar down the road. I recoiled at this language for years (and sometimes still do). I came from a very orthodox religious childhood, and it took quite a bit of searching to come to my current worldview. But I want to abstain from compulsive overeating, so here's how I work OA without a God story.

In **Step One**, I know there's a power that can make my life unmanageable: compulsive overeating, aka binge foods and behaviors. In **Step Two**, I have to look for a Power stronger than food.

Very simply, that Power is OA. Here is a Fellowship that has many members working together to not eat compulsively, and every time I go to a meeting I see evidence that it works. I just need to be open to the idea that there is something more powerful than the compulsion to overeat. What I call it or how it works is not important. For me, OA is a Power greater than me. When two or more people come together to help each other, their combined effort

is more powerful than individual efforts alone. Put quite clearly, I can't stop overeating, but we can.

When I started, I was told all **Step Three** had to mean was committing to keep working the Steps. I did that, and it was a great choice. I am still exploring and finding now that Step Three is also managing the "me-we balance," that is, taking care of myself while also interacting with others. I eat right, sleep, exercise, earn a living, and have some fun, and I regularly review how much I can serve the world around me. Service happens at a host of levels: listening to my sweetie, trying to do right in my professional life, giving OA service, supporting causes I believe in, being thoughtful of the environment, and more. Managing the me-we balance helps me be part of the world instead of lost in a world of self-centeredness.

Step Four is simply a thorough inventory of my morality, and **Step Five** the sharing of it. The sharing and self-reflection have worked quite well for me; this is a "we" program.

When I got to **Step Six** and heard the term "defects of character," I preferred the interchangeable term, "instincts gone astray" (AA Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 50). When my natural instincts for safety, society, and self actualization get out of balance on the me-we spectrum, it can create havoc. I experience Step Six as realizing I'm out of balance, desiring to change, and being ready to come back into balance. **Step Seven** is using the program, my efforts, and any other helpful resources to re-balance. If I'm plagued by greed, resentment, or pride, I need to move in the opposite direction and

cultivate generosity, kindness, and humility. Again, this is where the "we" part comes in. I can't do it alone; I need help that can come from OA sponsors, other members, professionals, friends, family members, and more. These changes take time, and often it's a lifelong journey to keep moving toward balance. OA is a program of progress, not perfection.

Step Eight is very straightforward: for me, willingness is linked to abstinence. If I want to stay abstinent, I have to forgive and get ready to make amends. **Step Nine** though, was quite intimidating: my list had over seventy items on it! In order to survive a very difficult childhood, I'd learned that getting my needs met at any cost was the way to survive, so I gave little or no thought to how my behaviors affected others. If I was going to make these seventy-plus amends, I had to change my fundamental worldview and move from a me focus to a we focus. I now choose to consider others in my choices as I work on balance and progress. And I treat **Step Ten** as a mini-version of Steps Four through Nine, described above.

Step Eleven is probably the most challenging Step for someone who does not believe in God, understand God, pray to God, believe that God has any will for us, or believe that God provides power to those who pray to him. It's a tall order for me, so for many years I have used meditation in its various forms. I do it, not to communicate with God or become spiritual, but because I think it helps give me some inner peace and is good for my general well-being. There are many ways to meditate; I find whatever seems helpful, then do it as long as

that holds true. Right now, I meditate on mindfulness with a recording to guide me, bike while listening to affirmation music, work on being present in my life, read OA literature, meditate at my OA meetings, and practice mindful eating, where I am present to the taste and texture of my food as I chew slowly. Sometimes I say the OA prayers simply because I enjoy that. When I hear the God word, I think about it being an acronym for either Good Orderly Direction or Great Out Doors. When I was into dance, it was an acronym for Go Out Dancing.

Finally, for **Step Twelve**, the “spiritual awakening” means I have found a way of living that allows me to not compulsively overeat, one day at a time. It’s that simple. To me, the important part of this Step is to carry the message to others and live a life of OA Principles; in short, to keep working on the me-we balance. The world is not just about me or you; it is about us.

—Alan S, Alexandria, VA USA
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Freethinker Alternative 12 Steps for Overeaters*

Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over food—that our lives had become unmanageable.

Step 2: Came to believe and to accept that we needed strengths beyond our awareness and resources to restore us to sanity.

Step 3: Made a decision to entrust our will and our lives to the care of the collective wisdom and resources of those who have searched before us.

Step 4: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Step 5: Admitted to ourselves without reservation and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs.

Step 6: Were ready to accept help in letting go of all our defects of character.

Step 7: With humility and openness sought to eliminate our shortcomings.

Step 8: Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

Step 9: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Step 10: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

Step 11: Sought through meditation to improve our spiritual awareness and our understanding of the OA way of life and to discover the power to carry out that way of life.

Step 12: Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to compulsive eaters and to practice these principles in all of our affairs.

**These were used by the Emeryville, CA Freethinkers Meetings until OA Region 2 asked their Intergroup to delist them unless they desisted.*

The Serenity Poem

We seek the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference.