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TO: ~~Off Prison Ministry, The~~

SUBJECT: mp 72 serenity prayer and step one revisited

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mp.72      serenity prayer & step one revisited      6.20.14

I am reviewing my first step in my recovery program. What jumps out at me is how I really set myself up for failure. Using the serenity prayer: I looked around and tried to control issues that were beyond my ability to control (serenity to accept the things I cannot change). In addition I ceded control on issues that I could influence (courage to change the things I can). The frustration of being doubly unsuccessful led to my seeking to distract myself with pornography/internet. The acting out only was a temporary fix and only led to increased acting out and increased unmanageability and eventually to an inability to stop acting out.

I chose to not act on things I could influence (wisdom to know the difference): like address feelings of inefficacy in my marriage or career or spirituality by directly making changes in each area of my life. I focused on trying to present an image of the person I wanted to be and not on being the person I wanted to be. By choosing to act in ways that only undermined my happiness I set myself up for failure and made some form of addictive escape more likely.

The failure led to powerlessness over my addiction and a life that was unsustainable and unmanageable.

My powerless over porn is really rooted in my addiction to distraction in general of which porn was just the most recent example. I sought distraction first in music and numbingly repetitive story hooks in my head. Then came the internet and its powerful narcotic of 24 hour availability of endless accumulation of trivia and facts. Then one of the streams of consumable packages produced for the web was porn. Interestingly I came to this pretty late and even when I did, it was in the non-image form - text - erotica. Erotic stories in text form were where I found the elixir of insatiable quality in taboos. Then I took my interest in spinning my own stories to the chat rooms. I found the drive to write stories which aroused others to be quite irresistible. In the chat rooms is where the drive for images came from my would be partners. So I started collecting.

The drive to arouse was very strong and mystifying. I could not explain the irrational drive to repeat the same process over and over again. It fed something, but inadequately, so that I had to repeat the process again and again, always failing to complete the circle - find resolution. The process only seemed to fan my desires rather than satiate them. I spent more and more time involved in both the collecting pictures and finding places to share my fantasies. The theme that seemed to stick were initial sexual experiences.

My extremely retarded (as in slowly developing) sexual expression makes the theme sensible. I was a virgin till 19 and then in a repressive gay relationship for the next eight years which did not allow for any freely expressed sexuality (I must seem straight but not act on it). The sex was purely about appeasing my "partner." I masturbated for my own enjoyment. Sex with other was about pleasing the other - not me. When I finally escaped that relationship I quickly jumped into another one (this time hetero). While sex was not a problem in this relationship, the lack of acceptance of my bisexuality was. Again another repression - passing as straight.

Eventually after my 40th birthday, I began exploring erotic writings online. It became a place of exploration at first. The exploration took on a life of their own. Both the drive to distract from outside issues (marriage, job, spirituality) as well as pull to express my sexuality freely combined with porn and taboo sex to create a wild fire I could not control but controlled me. I could not stop myself. Starting off just occasionally at night after everyone was asleep, to longer nights, to weekends, to eventually taking it to work. I was unable to stop myself. What started as curiosity ended in total captivity.

I tried many times to ignore the impulse to connect to the internet websites and found myself there anyway. At home I would purposefully stay away from the computer, but would find myself getting up at night after going to bed to get my fix. At work I would be diligently working at a work assignment, then open up the browser and back I would be in the fog of porn. Then as it got worse, I would be thinking about when I could do it next. I would come into work later than normal, or would sneak off from family to act out. No amount of shame or feelings of responsibility to my work or family could keep me from it.

While it started out as an occasional escape, because of the repetitive choices became first habitual then addictive with no easy line to say when I crossed the boundary. All I can say for sure is that the line of free choice and addictive impulse was crossed. I could only say that I could not retreat while under the influence. My powerlessness only happened late in the process. Early my choices were freely given. I choose to spend my time in the way I did. I denied the risk and the danger with which I was playing. Repeatedly acting in ways contrary to what was in my own best interest. I choose to place myself in harms way over



and over again. Until the pattern became compulsive and unstoppable. I could not for the life of me imagine how to escape my addictive prison.

The effects of this powerlessness was my life was unmanageable. It affected my work. I was performing poorly on even mundane tasks at work. I was placed on probation as my errors were mounting in severity and influencing the work of the group even risking professional shame of having to retract published work with major errors in it. Not only did the acting out take time away from work, it influence my work that I did. I was scattered and unfocused. I could have been creatively contributing to the group, but was at best doing the minimum. If I had not been arrested, I could see the likelihood of even losing my job.

At home, the unmanageability was in deteriorating relationships with my wife and son. My marriage was not the strongest, but my mind was AWOL. I was gone when acting out, but also gone mentally when I was not acting out. I was just as distracted and unfocused at home and in my relationships as I was at work. I just floated through life making only a minimal effort to engage with my wife, son and others. I can remember so many times being in conversation and not really remembering anything my wife or son was saying. I was cheating on my wife with a sexual life that did not include her. I was a bad husband and a bad dad. I hurt my wife and son and other members of extended family. Getting arrested only speed up the process of family dissolution.

My relationships outside of family and work were equally affected. I retreated from active engagement with others as I became so self absorbed. I occupied space in several social organizations, but could not function effectively. I took up space that should have been someone really committed to those groups. The unmanageability also was mirrored in how I treated my body. I did not get enough sleep. I did not get enough exercise. I drank too much. I ate too much junk food. I was depressed. I was breaking down my body just as much as my mind. My relationship with money was out of control. I spent more than I made month after month. My debt had reached 5 figures in the depths of the addiction. In addition, my spirituality had basically stopped functioning as well. My connection to myself (mind-body), others, the world had ceased to exist. I was disintegrating fast.

All the unmanageability and powerlessness I felt became a feed back loop to more acting out. It became a reason to escape as much as a cause. I was in downward spiral that I could not for the life of me extricate myself. Thankfully I was extracted by an outside force - by the FBI. I may have wished they could have used something short of 12 year prison sentence, but the fact that they acted - saved my life. I am not sure how much longer I could have gone on in the state I was in.

I can look back 6 years later. The government gave me the gift of time out. Then the program of 12 steps and a spiritual practice of mindfulness gave me the process of retraining my mind to use my human capabilities to make healthy choices and create new mental habits which transformed the downward death spiral into upward health spiral. The first step was important because in order to take the next eleven steps I needed to first acknowledge how really harmful my life had become under the influence of my acting out behavior. How powerless I was in the fog of that addiction, how my life was totally out of control in all areas, and that I wanted to try another way of being. I am thankful that my addicted life which was powerless and unmanageable, is no longer that way now. I am thankful for a methodology to both get out of addiction, but to get into a healthy meaningful relationship with my own body and others.

This is what my life was like before.

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This is what my life was like before.

Before - as in then, I was this way; now, I am that.

Before, I fought with the weeds of my life.

Now I am more present with these qualities that I cannot change.

Now I know I can move toward them and I will not be overwhelmed.

I don't have to beat them back, deny, repress, or run.

I can just be there in there midst - Relax.

I will not only survive...but thrive.

As long as I fought what I disliked, I remained under its control.

As soon as I began to engage with my fears the the possibility of freedom began to take root.

Step One is this is what I was like before.

How that present moment was transformed into "before" is the story of steps two through twelve.