

ANOREXICS AND BULIMICS ANONYMOUS™

PREAMBLE FOR MEETINGS

Welcome to Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous. My name is — — — and I'm in recovery from — — —. Please join me in a moment of silence to reflect on why we are here, followed by the Serenity Prayer.

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

OPEN MEETING / CLOSED MEETING INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

This is an open meeting of Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous. We welcome all of you, and particularly any newcomers. In keeping with our primary purpose and our Third Tradition, which states that “the only requirement for A.B.A. membership is a desire to stop unhealthy eating practices,” we request all who participate to limit their sharing to problems related to their eating disorder.

OR: *This is a closed meeting of Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous. In keeping with A.B.A.'s primary purpose, attendance at closed meetings is restricted to those who have a desire to stop unhealthy eating practices. If you think you have a problem with unhealthy eating, you are welcome to participate in this meeting. When speaking about our problems, we request all who share to limit themselves to difficulties related to their eating disorder.*

Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous is a Fellowship of individuals whose primary purpose is to find and maintain sobriety in our eating practices, and to help others gain sobriety. **A.B.A. is not allied or affiliated with any other 12-Step Fellowship or outside organization.** There are no dues or fees for A.B.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop unhealthy eating practices that we have come to realize are progressively destroying our lives, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

In this group we discover that our insane eating, starving, exercise, and purging behaviors are addictive in nature—that is, out of our own control—and that we actually *use* these behaviors, and the inner physical

changes resulting from them, to numb our emotions and escape from ourselves. In doing so, we also fall out of touch with others and out of step with the universe of which we are a part, and we deprive ourselves of the opportunity to be fully alive in our present time and space.

Furthermore, we learn that we are carrying out these insane eating, starving, exercise, and purging practices in obedience to a deceptive, immensely powerful voice within our own minds. This is the voice of a *disease* that is chronic, progressive, and potentially fatal. The first action of this cunning and baffling disease is to cast us into a state of unawareness, in which we fail to recognize that we are in mortal danger when we carry out its insane commands.

We learn that the payoff we receive from this disease for our obedience to its demands is nothing more than a mirage: an *illusion of control* over our lives and our future. We learn that the disease's principal weapon is overwhelming and paralyzing fear, and that it holds us in its lethal grip by inducing profound guilt and shame within us. The disease lies to us at every turn. It even convinces us that we are *to blame* for our own sick condition, that we freely choose to do the insane things we do, and that we are unlovable.

In this circle of healing we learn, one step and one moment at a time, to awaken to the truth about our disease, to recognize its lies, to see how it entraps us, to trust in a Higher Power who loves us unconditionally, and to turn our will and our lives over to this loving Power.

As we recover, we come to experience this Higher Power—the Spirit of life itself—at work within us, empowering us to live without any illusion of control. We also learn to truly *own* our lives and to take charge of ourselves in a way that had not been possible before.

Our program is deeply spiritual, but not allied with any religion. We have found it applicable to our healing journey regardless of our religious beliefs, for we know that our eating disorders are *primarily* mental or spiritual diseases, although they also comprise a physical component. More specifically, we have a mental obsession that compels us to restrict our food and/or to binge and purge, coupled with a physical “allergy” in our bodies that ensures we will continue restricting or bingeing and purging, once we have begun.

In our healing process we use the Twelve Steps, adapted from Alcoholics Anonymous, as the foundation of our spiritual journey. Here are the Steps we take: (*Ask the group or an individual to read them aloud.*)

THE TWELVE STEPS OF ANOREXICS AND BULIMICS ANONYMOUS

- STEP 1:** We admitted we were powerless over our insane eating practices—that our lives had become unmanageable.
- STEP 2:** Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- STEP 3:** Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, *as we understood God*.
- STEP 4:** Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
- STEP 5:** Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
- STEP 6:** Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
- STEP 7:** Humbly asked God to remove 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 prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood God*, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
- STEP 12:** Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others suffering from eating disorders, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

We also adhere to our adaptation of the Twelve Traditions developed by Alcoholics Anonymous. I've asked — — — to read the Traditions today.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ANOREXICS AND BULIMICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.B.A. unity.
2. 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.
3. The only requirement for A.B.A. membership is a desire to stop unhealthy eating practices.
4. Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or A.B.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the anorexic or bulimic who still suffers.
6. An A.B.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.B.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every A.B.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. A.B.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.B.A. 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, TV, and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

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We learned that it was impossible to work the Twelve Steps until we were “sober” in our eating practices. Without physical sobriety it is impossible to recover from any addiction, including anorexia and bulimia.

Many of us puzzled over precisely what “sobriety” means. We tried various ways of changing our eating practices. We tried modifying our exercise patterns. We tried cutting down on our binges or refraining from purging afterwards. We tried eliminating the binge/purge cycle, while simultaneously falling into the trap of anorexic restriction of our food intake. We tried allowing ourselves to eat, while continuing to exercise to compensate for the food we ingested. We tried many other half-measures, while still clinging to little vestiges of control to avoid that most fearsome state: getting fat! Or, if we were already overweight, we clung to these control measures to lose weight. Some of us appeared unconcerned about our weight and instead engaged in controlling behaviors to avoid feeling our feelings.

We learned through all this experience that the intoxicating “drug” to which we are addicted is not the act of starvation or exercise or the binge/purge cycle itself. Rather, the “drug” of anorexia and bulimia is *the feeling of being in control of our food and body weight and shape*. This sense of control is generated in us through restrictive eating practices, or through purging after we binge, or through exercise. Many of us learned that to become fully sober we needed to let go absolutely and *surrender all control of our food, exercise, and body weight and shape to a Higher Power*. In early recovery this Power worked through other human beings. Later, as we are restored to sanity by following the Twelve Steps, we come to connect with this Power alive within ourselves.

SOBRIETY IS SURRENDER. And it is not a passive state of submission but rather a highly active, entirely voluntary letting go that requires intensive work on a daily basis. We learned that sobriety is experienced only one day at a time (or one meal at a time!), and that we

cannot be sober through willpower. We learned that sobriety is a gift from our Higher Power and that we can ask for this gift on a day-by-day or meal-by-meal basis. We learned that when we honestly asked for the grace to surrender *for this meal*, we received it. We learned what tools of recovery worked for us in the difficult process of getting sober and staying sober. Here are some of the tools many of us have found useful:

THE TOOLS OF ANOREXICS AND BULIMICS ANONYMOUS

- 1. Prayer:** asking a Higher Power daily for the means and strength to stay sober...even though we may not yet truly believe in such a Power.
- 2. Quiet Time:** in which we center ourselves and clearly focus our energy on receiving the gift of sobriety.
- 3. Reaching Out:** telephone contact with another recovering person before and/or after meals.
- 4. Meetings:** both A.B.A. and other Twelve-Step meetings are critically important in maintaining sobriety. Many of us in early recovery attend ninety meetings in ninety days.
- 5. Reading:** the textbook of our Fellowship and the “Big Book” of Alcoholics Anonymous are especially useful.
- 6. Sponsor:** we ask someone in the Fellowship with more sobriety than we have to sponsor us. This person is essential to guide us through the Twelve Steps and is often available to assist us in maintaining sobriety.
- 7. Journaling:** periodically recording in written form what we are feeling and learning on our journey through recovery.
- 8. Service Work:** our most powerful tool. Even when all else fails, working with another anorexic or bulimic will save the day and allow a Higher Power to keep us sober!

Is anyone here for their first time? (*If so, ask a sober member to speak to the newcomer, outlining “what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now” as a result of joining this Fellowship and working the Twelve Steps.*) Is anyone coming back who would care to identify themselves?

Does anyone have a topic to put forward for today? (*If there are newcomers, the topic of the first three Steps is strongly suggested.*)

The meeting is now open for sharing, either on this topic or any other that you need to speak about, related to your eating disorder. I'd like to remind everyone that, out of courtesy, we refrain from interrupting others as they speak. We are not here to counsel or practice therapy on anyone, but to share our personal experience, strength, and hope. Please identify yourself each time you begin to speak. (*If the group is large, add: "Since our group is large today, please be aware of the time so that everyone will have an opportunity to share."*)

(Five minutes before closing time, resume leadership as follows.)

We are nearly out of time. Does anyone else wish to speak?

Our Seventh Tradition states that we are fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions. At this time we pass around a basket and invite A.B.A. members only to contribute toward our expenses.

In closing, let's remember that we are an anonymous group meeting in deep trust of one another. Whom you see here and what you hear here, let it remain here.

I've asked — — — to read the Ninth-Step Promises today from the Big Book (*found on pages 83-84*).

Are there any announcements for the good of A.B.A.?

Are there any sobriety milestones? 30 Days? 60 Days? 90 Days? Four months or more? (*Give a token to anyone celebrating these milestones.*) This group celebrates yearly birthdays at the last meeting of the month.

Can I please have a couple volunteers to clean up after the meeting?

Would all who care to, please join me in closing the meeting with a prayer. (*The Serenity Prayer, Lord's Prayer, or Third Step Prayer.*)

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CONTACT INFORMATION:

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