

## The Daily Sobriety Renewal

My name is Bill; I'm a sexaholic, sober for four years and two months.

One of the most effective tools in my recovery has been the daily renewal. The renewal is a daily ritual in which two people in the program ask each other six challenging questions. By thoughtfully answering "Yes" to each question, one is making a truly active choice to stay sober.

Four years ago, a veteran SA member asked me to be his renewal partner. At first, it seemed to me to be a meaningless ritual, but I have found it helps me each day to decide whether or not I am serious about being lust-free and following God. I am still doing this "meaningless ritual" with this person each weekday.

I have recently realized that the six questions also progressively parallel my journey in recovery. Here are my thoughts on these crucial, honesty-provoking, uncomfortable questions.

1) *Are you willing to admit you are powerless over lust and sexual acting out, just for today?*

The phrase *just for today* is good news and bad news. It means that I need to focus just on today, not tomorrow, next week, the rest of the year. However, it also means that tomorrow, I must choose again to trudge the path; today's determination does not carry over. That's why it's a daily renewal.

*Are you willing?* My process of recognition of powerlessness was not immediate. At first it was "Are you willing to consider that...." I did this by coming to meetings. Then it was "Are you willing to take others' word that?" (by starting the program). Next it was "Are you willing to find out if...." This

was done by a written formal First Step which showed irrefutable evidence of a pervasive, extensive problem.

After this, admission of powerlessness was and continues to be undeniable. Finally this question recognizes that I have two problems: lust and sexual actions. It's not just a behavioral (doing) problem, but a mental one as well. The mental/physical connection is critical. All day sexual fantasies had to go in order to prevent acting out. By not fueling the fire with my mind, I was less inclined to take steps to engage in lustful activities. Likewise, by ruling out masturbation as an acceptable option, I was less inclined to lose myself in fantasy. Why bother if I wasn't going to act on it?

2) *Do you desire sobriety for the next 24 hours: freedom from the actions or obsessions of lust, freedom from fear, resentment, shame, and isolation?*

Sobriety is defined as a two-fold freedom.

- a) From actions and obsession: Before true recovery, I sometimes could control some physical behaviors but would have to desperately fight the obsession. The "victories" were barely worth it; I was still obsessed and lust-filled. I had to raise the bar of expectation from near misses and close escapes to true freedom as described in the promises of AA's Big Book.
- b) Underlying passions and emotions: fear, resentment, shame, and isolation. I call them the "Big Four." They fuel the addiction and are caused by it (a vicious cycle).

Through Step work, I dealt with the Big Four. In Step Four, as laid out in the AA Big Book, I explicitly reveal resentment and fear. Isolation gets blatantly rejected by doing Step Five (sharing my defects with my sponsor), and shame is dissolved in that sponsor's continued acceptance of me.

Now check out the question's first phrase: "Do you desire," not, "Do you think it's a good idea to..." Is this really what I want today? In choosing the freedoms, I have to abandon the false benefits of lust and the Big Four. With lust, the ecstasy of acting out is traded for a truer contentment. This is costly and not always easy. I've even been led to completely give up the expectation of marital sex. My wife and I enjoy intimacy regularly, but I no longer count days or become anxious and demanding. My agenda has changed.

Freedom from the Big Four is done through Step Six, choosing to let God free me from my defects. Resentment: I chose to forgive all who have hurt me. Period. Fear: I continually have to renounce my right to be pitied and helpless, and instead trust and rely on a powerful, loving God. Shame: I am learning to abandon the perverse pleasure of beating myself up. Isolation: I can no longer be so arrogant as to think that I have unique problems that are not shared by any one else in the world.

3) *Are you willing to do whatever is necessary to protect this desire, including spiritual reading, reaching out and calling others, prayer and meditation, physical care of your body, setting appropriate boundaries, going to meetings, and refusing all lust hits as toxic?*

The first two renewal questions are around discovery and desire. Now on to decision. Here, I still have plenty of growing to do. *Spiritual reading*: I do this most mornings briefly, but feel called to find times for extended reading and study.

*Prayer and Meditation*: sometimes this means choosing to pray instead of mindless TV or daydreaming.

*Physical Care*: I find this a tough challenge and I fall short. I must see exercise, eating right, getting enough sleep as part of "program."

*Reaching Out*: We are as sick as our secrets. I try to connect with someone within 24 hours if I experience anything significantly troubling or take a major lust hit. This derails the accumulation of "stuff" that leads to...

*Refusing All Hits*: no hit is a safe hit. I have finally, after years of wondering, found out how much lust I can afford. None.

*Setting Boundaries*: I'm learning to do this at work, church, life. This even applies to program.

*Going to meetings*: where I am motivated by others' success and sobered by those deep in the struggle. I add this phrase, although it's not in the renewal as I've learned it, "Admitting when I'm wrong" (Step Ten).

4) *Do you realize that at the end of this 24 hours, you are free to continue with sobriety or to go another way?*

Relapse (subtle or full-blown) is never impossible. Every day, I realize I could go back. And the phrase *another way* does not just refer to lust. It means any action or attitude away from God. Recovery is never automatic; it's a perpetual choice. With each new challenge I face (and lately, I've faced some tough ones), I can choose to go another way. My desire is to choose to do the "next right thing."

5) *Do you understand that this renewal does not keep you sober (God does), but it does make you aware of yourself and accountable to others?*

*This renewal does not*: There are some things that program doesn't take care of. I've used my church, counseling, and other resources to get the fullest healing I can. *God does*: the program has tools but is useless without the power of Almighty

God. I've had to seek for solutions not readily found in the Twelve Step model, and they've come from God's heart to mine.

*Aware of Self:* I am constantly self-evaluating with weekly calls to my sponsor, the dailies, the renewal, journaling.

*Accountable to Others:* Some months ago, I was facing some temptation with the Internet. Following another member's lead, I have since made it a practice to tell someone when I'm going on-line in a risky environment and check in with them afterwards. In stating my desire to be sober to others like this, I can either be diligently clean, contritely honest, or lie. I like the first choice.

6) *And, just for today, are you willing with me to hand over your will and the care of your life to the One Who kept you sober yesterday and has protected you from the full consequences of your lust in the past?*

The bottom line: Step Three.

*With me:* I am not doing this alone; there are many footprints on the road to happy destiny.

*Hand over:* I am not qualified to manage my own life; the opposite of the American spirit of independence and self-reliance. *The One Who:* By acknowledging God, I am in constant reflective gratitude. *Kept you:* Grace = getting what I don't deserve. *Protected you from:* Mercy = not getting what I do deserve. In being grateful for where I am and recalling where I was and admitting where I could be now, I'm less inclined to "go another way." As with all the tools of the program, God has used the renewal to not just keep me sober, but to guide me as I seek to live a joyous and free life. Thanks be to God.

**Bill**

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## Lust Based Decisions

Hi. I'm Bill. I've been sober for seven years. I'd like to share a new tool that's helped me in my struggle to become increasingly lust-free.

I've been able to maintain SA's sobriety definition, and I've had many behaviors, such as explicit pornography or extramarital fantasy, eliminated. For that I'm eternally grateful to God, to family and friends, and to the people and principles of the Program. What's difficult is that often I'll get tripped up in a gray area. Examples: the selection of a TV show or magazine article; choices made while web surfing; the path I take while driving home. Am I lust-free?

The tool God gave me is something I call a Lust-Based Decision. Or an LBD. Rather than focusing on the outcome, I challenge the initial intent. If I chose an action because of the possibility, however remote, of a lust-hit, it was still a concession to my disease and an intentional turning away from God. So now the question I ask: "Is there an underlying lust-based motivation in the action I'm about to take?" If so, it's an LBD and I need not go there.

I now disclose any LBD's in the shame question of the daily renewal and go through them in my weekly check in with my sponsor. I don't like doing this. It has destroyed my wiggle room, my ability to justify, but it's what I need. It helps me to recognize that I'm still a sexaholic who must continue to trudge the path of happy destiny, one day at a time.

**Bill, Boston, MA**

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