

DRAFT for endorsement

CSC 2024

Issues with the God word?

**Co-Dependents Anonymous**

***Issues with the God word?***

is CoDA Service Conference endorsed literature.

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**CoRe Publications**

[www.corepublications.org](http://www.corepublications.org)

Email: [info@corepublications.org](mailto:info@corepublications.org)

For general information about CoDA, contact:

**Co-Dependents Anonymous, Inc.**

[www.coda.org](http://www.coda.org)

Email: [info@coda.org](mailto:info@coda.org)

PO Box 33577

Phoenix, AZ 85067-3577, USA

1-602-277-7991

Toll free: 1-888-444-2359

Spanish Toll Free: 1-888-444-2379

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## Introduction

*The only requirement for membership in CoDA is a desire for healthy and loving relationships.* - Tradition Three

Many in the CoDA Fellowship struggle with using, and even hearing the word “God” read in the *Twelve Steps of Co-Dependents Anonymous* and in CoDA literature. *Issues with the God word?* recognizes this conflict by giving voice to the many CoDA members who have found a non-traditional spiritual path to working *The Twelve Steps of Co-Dependents Anonymous*.

Although religion is an outside issue and CoDA is not a religious program, we recognize that the terms “God” and “Higher Power” have strong religious associations for many who come to CoDA. Some are positive, some are negative, and some are mixed. Many members of twelve-step fellowships are or were rooted in Judeo-Christian religious and cultural traditions and practices. Many members were brought up in other religious backgrounds or no religious background.

Newcomers enter the rooms of Co-Dependents Anonymous because of broken relationships, feeling empty and lost, and childhood trauma, including trauma within religious organizations. For many, hearing the words “God” and “Higher Power” creates doubt and turmoil about the CoDA program of recovery.

Despite strongly identifying with the Patterns and Characteristics of Codependence, and finding resonance in hearing the experience, strength, and hope in meetings, and in CoDA literature, many are genuinely concerned that

this program may not be for them. We are indebted to these members who chose to stay and work through their inner conflict within the CoDA program of recovery.

The purpose of this book is to reach out to all codependents who still suffer and to create a bridge to a new understanding through these stories. The spirit of CoDA recovery lives and grows when we open our hearts and minds to all our stories.

*Higher Power, deepen my awareness to include the welfare of the whole, setting aside my discomfort and personal agenda. Help me speak my truth and allow others the same privilege, trusting that the spirit of unity supports my own recovery.*

- Tradition One Prayer

## Quotes from Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition

“This is not a religious program, but a spiritual one; it’s a program for finding peace within.”

– *Co-Dependents Anonymous*, Third Edition, page 13

“Some of us become nervous at the mention of spirituality and a Higher Power. Even if you’ve given up on a Higher Power or wonder if such a being exists, you are welcome to the program of Co-Dependents Anonymous.”

– *Co-Dependents Anonymous*, Third Edition, page 13

“Some of us are atheists or agnostics. Organized religion may remind us of an abusive, authoritarian God. Some of us may be angry at our Higher Power for the negative experiences we faced, or we may discover we’ve been angry at this higher Power for years but didn’t know it... Whatever our past beliefs, we can begin building a spiritual foundation for our program of recovery.”

– *Co-Dependents Anonymous*, Third Edition, pages 20-21

“Some of us have little or no concept of a Higher Power, or we may have forgotten or abandoned our learned concept of God.”

– *Co-Dependents Anonymous*, Third Edition, page 35

“We’re not required to believe in another person’s personal God, religion, or spiritual concept. Our Higher Power must feel right and safe to us. Our Higher Power must be one of our own choosing and concept.”

– *Co-Dependents Anonymous*, Third Edition, page 36

“Given the wide variety of people, cultures, and countries, CoDA chooses to extend respect to all people and their varied spiritual beliefs.”

– *Co-Dependents Anonymous*, Third Edition, page 103

“...many CoDA members have difficulty separating the messages, shame, fear, and pain from their concept of God. To them, God has the personality of these abusive and/or neglectful individuals...”

– *Co-Dependents Anonymous*, Third Edition, pages 102-103

“The form of this Higher Power is ours to discover – whether it be unconditional love, divine intelligence, God, nature, music, an image of an ocean, river or tree, or our own CoDA ‘home group.’ Above all, it’s important that we become willing to entertain the possibility there is something that can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.”

– *Co-Dependents Anonymous*, Third Edition, page 101

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# Personal Stories

## My Spiritual Practice Can Co-exist with CoDA

For many years in the program, I bristled when I heard certain words in CoDA meetings, such as “God,” “He,” and “Higher Power”. However, what I ultimately learned about my spiritual practice within the CoDA program surprised me.

Hearing words like “God” and “He” irritated me. I sometimes thought, “The word ‘God’ is so limiting!”, “And why not ‘She’ as God?” In addition to the fact that men were most harmful to me in both my childhood and adulthood, the male God I learned about and continued to hear about in various spiritual paths was not loving, but fearful and controlling. Also, “Higher Power” didn’t make sense to me because *my* understanding of a god is neither *higher* nor a *power*. “Higher Power” sounded so hierarchical. With all of my irritations about some of the language of the founding documents, it’s a wonder that I continued to go to meetings at all!

Despite my feelings about these words, I continued to show up to meetings, and for a while I just rolled my eyes internally whenever I heard words I did not like. The pain and loneliness I felt in my codependency was so unbearable at times, and the love I received from others was such a gift, I just kept showing up. I coped by drowning out the words that irritated me (including whispering to myself acceptable substitutes) and focused instead on what benefits the program had to offer. I slowly began to trust others in the meetings, partly because I stayed long enough

to hear about the many, different ways others defined their “god”. It was truly amazing!

Eventually, I talked to other CoDA members about the program’s language. I learned that CoDA was born out of the original 12 Step program of AA which was first formed in 1935. Much has changed in our world since then. And like many old founding documents, the language might feel clunky or less inclusive. But I have never felt excluded in CoDA. Because the documents stress we defined “God as we understood God,” I began to trust *my* beliefs about “God.”

Today, I’m grateful I stuck with the program long enough to meet members who not only accept my spiritual beliefs but continue to teach me how to strengthen and maintain these spiritual practices and beliefs in concert with how to learn to heal from codependency. I’ve developed some grace and acceptance around those words in CoDA that I thought were outdated, too gender-specific, or too limiting. I know that, even if the original language never changes, my spiritual practice and beliefs can co-exist with CoDA.

by D.B.

## Letting Go of the God Word

I appreciate this opportunity to talk about my struggles with “the god word.” Although I am not currently struggling, I sure did when I was new. I came into recovery with barely any ego and extremely low self-esteem. To give my power away to anything, was and is, offensive to me. My desire for healthy and loving relationships screams, “No! Not again!” I’ve given myself away my whole life. I couldn’t do it again, especially with an imaginary figure who has yet to reveal itself to me. Although my childhood was less than ideal, I feel lucky to have grown up without religion because I don’t have to unlearn that particular childhood conditioning.

I came into substance recovery in 1996 and found CoDA in 2010. I often say, NA (Narcotics Anonymous) saved my life but CoDA makes it worth living. Over the years of working steps in CoDA and other programs, I’ve had to physically edit the language of several steps to fit my nervous system. This allows me to concentrate on the meaning and purpose of the step I’m working on instead of constantly editing in my head. I find the steps written from a secular point of view helpful too.

I don’t pray, I meditate. I joined several meditation groups and practice every day. This time of quiet reflection allows me to stay grounded in my truth and helps me distinguish between fact and fantasy. In this contemplative state, I am more able to figure out what it is I really need and want.

I currently sponsor four people, three of whom are religious. Before taking on a sponsee, I always tell them I am an atheist, and no one seems to mind. I have worked and continue to work a CoDA program, which helps me to separate other people’s beliefs from my own. I’ve grown to respect other people’s choices because they are true for

them. When a sponsee is struggling, I often suggest to pray because I know some sponsees find comfort in this process.

When I first came to twelve step meetings twenty-eight years ago, I was very sensitive to the language used by others and felt different. Over the years, working the steps in Codependents Anonymous and attending meetings regularly, has given me the ability to detach from the language others choose to use. Today, it is okay if other recovering people use the god word. It doesn't ruffle my feathers like it used to. I've come to understand that we all must find our way and how others choose to do this is none of my business.

by Paulette C.

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## Love Above

I was in my first CoDA meeting when I heard the word:

“God... grant me the serenity...”

Beads of sweat dripped down my brow. The God word burned a hole in my temples. My stomach rose and churned, but I wasn't sure if it was the word or the hot sauce doused tortilla chips I had inhaled before the meeting.

CLICK!

And as quick as I signed on, I logged off. I came to CoDA spiritually and emotionally bruised after the breakup with my ex-girlfriend. I had never considered myself codependent. In fact, I considered myself a hero of sorts — rescuing “strays” and “projects.” Reading the room for any deviation in emotions. I'd even do it when nobody asked. Apparently, I was spiritually starved, seeking a higher power through other people. “God's always looking out for you!”, others would comment. If God were looking out for me, then why did I suffer so much? Why did I have unsuccessful relationships? Why did I go through trauma throughout my childhood and adolescence? What was wrong with me? Why did the world have no justice? I cursed God and any mention of a being I couldn't see, hear, or touch.

“God only sends his toughest soldiers on missions like this”, one of my close friends would tell me constantly. I wanted to vomit (and still do) every time she said that. God must hate his soldiers, then. Why would a benevolent higher power send their own creation to slaughter? And though I still struggle with the concept of a god, I have come to realize that this whole higher power thing isn't as omnipotent as I was taught.

Throughout my recovery, I made my higher power another person because people are real flesh. It was no wonder that I constantly felt abandoned when people disappointed me and chased serial monogamy for my survival. I realized I was never authentically living for myself, but what I thought was acceptable to the people I've placed on that pedestal. In my recovery (and lots of therapy), I learned that I made my ex-girlfriend a higher power because she was the first person I was able to explore my sexuality and truest desires with. I now know that my higher power is love. Love is giving myself and others the permission to see the authentic me that I've shrouded for years. Love allows me to discard my codependent patterns of denial, compliance, and low self-esteem to help me grow. The Serenity Prayer to this day does not resonate with me. However, I can ask for the spirit of love and acceptance to guide me throughout my life.

by Eden

## Full Stop

I grew up going to the largest and oldest Protestant church in my city of origin. My father was a deacon of the church and my mother a deaconess. I was a member of the young people's fellowship while I was in high school. In addition, I attended a Christian prep school for thirteen years and a Christian university for four. I stopped attending Sunday services in college but always considered myself a Christian. I also learned that, in English, capitalizing the word "god" (God) was meant to refer to the Christian God. All other gods were spelled with a small "g".

I went through life believing that I was a Christian. Both of my marriage ceremonies were in a Christian church officiated by an ordained Christian minister. I am a thirty-three year member of another twelve step program and blindly accepted their version of the twelve steps and literature verbatim. It wasn't until I joined CoDA thirteen years ago that I began to question my beliefs in the tenets of Christianity. I was working the steps with a co-sponsor when I came to step seven, "Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings." I realized that I did not have an image of God and, in fact, no longer believed in tenets of Christianity that I had known throughout my life.

"Full Stop". I decided to clear the deck. I would have NO God in my life until I built my own image and belief in a god. I listened at meetings to people who had recovery. I invited some of them to lunch and asked them for their concept of their higher power and how they arrived at their belief. All of them were extremely open and helpful. They described their journeys and suggested sources of information that I could access. These books ran the gamut from philosophical, to meditative, to instructional. I studied all of them. From this research, I created a god that had no physical representation but had characteristics: powerful, loving,

caring for me, speaking to me through everyone I meet, and is everything I see and touch. I chose to call my god, “Higher Power.” I also realized that everyone has a version of a Higher Power and that is a personal choice. I learned in Step One of the CoDA Steps that I am powerless over others and their versions of a Higher Power. When I encounter the word “God” in our Steps or literature, I substitute “Higher Power” in my mind.

I appreciate that CoDA alternates between Higher Power and God in our literature. I see CoDA is evolving and doing more to show respect for all religions, including the Spiritualism of no religious god. As I grow in the program, I too, am evolving. I can, must, and do accept the current terminology used within CoDA.

by Sam C.

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## Science with Spirituality

I am not religious; I am learning to appreciate my spirituality. I believe that God is a concept people created to embody things that are difficult to understand or accept - a way to give external meaning and order to the world. I have gradually learned to find explanations for these things that mesh with my scientific understanding of the world and the human psyche. The mind is a powerful thing.

The way things are "meant to be" or "God's plan" for us - these are how we accept pain and let go of responsibility for things outside of our control.

I appreciate the language of "a higher power of our own understanding". I've seen people choose many things that are not God. When I need a third party, I sometimes refer to "my awakened self". I am a fusion of many beings. In recovery, I am learning that while my inner child and intellectual critic both deserve to be listened to, it is my awakened self that must ultimately guide my decisions.

I once heard that praying for strength does not mean God grants you strength but gives you opportunities to demonstrate the strength you already have within. This is how I believe praying works. Instead of praying to God, I can pray into the ether - the echo chamber of my mind - I am beseeching myself (in the present or in the future) to remember the way I want to live.

In this moment, may I (please) have  
the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
The courage to change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.

May I have Patience with the changes that take time,  
Appreciation for all that I have,  
Tolerance of those with different struggles,  
And the strength to get up and try again  
One day at a time.

by Kristin L.

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## I Kept Coming Back

I grew up in what I thought was a middle-class family. We lived in the suburbs; Dad had a steady job and Mom was a housewife. As a family, we participated in school, sports, neighborhood events and Sunday church services. On the surface, all of this was idyllic. Other neighbors and friends thought we had a happy household, but behind closed doors, Dad was an alcoholic and Mom had untreated mental health issues. As a kid I did what I could do to survive the chaos and instability in our home.

To perpetuate a pious family persona, Mom insisted that I attend after-school religious training. While there, I encountered confusing messages. I heard that I'm a sinner, that I'm loved, but I deserve nothing but punishment from God. I read that I'm without merit or worthiness, yet He loves me. I remember as a young girl that this felt shaming and demeaning. God was supposed to be loving but I didn't feel loved by Him. I couldn't reconcile the belief in a god that proclaimed love for me and at the same time diminished my soul.

After I completed high school, I left home and did not practice any form of religion, nor did I embrace any type of spirituality. I left all that religious training behind and found myself living the free-love and careless lifestyle of the 1960's and 70's. Ultimately, that lifestyle caught up to me.

After an emergency hospitalization I found myself in an inpatient treatment center where I had to face my addictions. While there, I was introduced to the Twelve Steps, God-word and all. To me, hearing the word God in the Steps was like hearing fingernails on a blackboard. I could barely concentrate on the program messages because I had built so many resentments to that word. But I

stuck it out, for a while. I participated in the treatment as best I could at the time and attended meetings for about a year after I was discharged. Ultimately, I quit attending meetings. I just couldn't buy into all that God stuff.

Decades later, after several failed, long-term, romantic relationships I found my way to my first CoDA meeting. I knew CoDA was based on the Twelve Steps and that those Steps contained the God-word, but I was desperate. I was in so much pain that I was willing to tolerate a little God-talk if I could find some relief. During those early meetings I cried a lot, but I could see, through my tears, that there was recovery in those rooms. People seemed to have what I wanted; serenity, self-esteem, and healthy relationships. I wanted what they had. They invited me to come back. So, I did, God-word and all.

My first attempts at working the Steps were challenging. I was asked to create a Higher Power of my own understanding, but I couldn't. I found it really difficult to let go of the old resentments I held against the God of my religious training. I hadn't resolved those resentments, nor did I know how to deal with them. So, I stuffed them. I just kept working my Steps as best I could without a solid sense of a higher power. I was as confused as ever, but I kept coming back, hoping some sort of spirituality would emerge.

Over time, with the help of people in the program, I resolved my resentments with God. I let go of my previously held religious beliefs and found a higher power of my own understanding. Today, I identify as agnostic. My Higher Power is simply "the energy beyond my awareness." This energy is outside of myself and a piece of it is inside me too.

It's taken me a long time to come to this simple understanding. It's amazing to me that I kept coming back to CoDA but I'm happy I did. I'm grateful for the multitude of benefits I have received as I pursued and continue to pursue my recovery from codependence. I've opened my heart to the teachings of this program, let go of my religious resentments, and come to a place of serenity with my idea of a higher power. I'm really grateful I kept coming back!

by Carol

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## My Spiritual Journey

Hi, I am Karen, a codependent. My spiritual journey has been confusing, difficult, and not mainstream. I am what is called an agnostic...seeing is believing to me. I like to think of myself as a realist. I struggle with spiritual practices that rely heavily on magical thinking.

I am a seeker; I have gone from hating and avoiding spiritual and religious people and places to living in communes. If I joined a spiritual community, I had to quit it soon after. I have learned I am very private about my beliefs or lack of beliefs.

I have learned and have become self-sufficient. This is a dilemma for me as I have come to the end of myself with my codependency. This has taken me to search for principles, ideas, and ways of living that I believe in and practice. I have learned that many things are spiritual practices, like pausing, going to CoDA meetings, writing, learning and asking for help to name a few.

I have come to know that the answers are within me, my higher self, my intuition, my community, quiet time, and the belief there is always a solution.

One practice I have used is two boxes, one as a symbolic way to take my hands off a problem: I date and write it down and put it in a box. I do this for a year. The second box I use is to move those items written down once a year from box #1 that have come to the solution over the year. Box #2 demonstrates that everything works out somehow. This practice shows me real solutions in a visual way. I have been doing that for a little over two years and love going over it on January 1st. It helps me.

by Karen W.

## **Wednesday was a Great Day!**

Since joining CoDA several months ago, I had struggled with connecting to a higher power. Past experiences with my family using religion to shame and guilt me, had kept me feeling numb and blocked whenever thinking about a higher power.

The more CoDA readings I read, and shares I heard in meetings that explained the difference between religion and spirituality, the more I came to understand that my higher power shouldn't be something that makes me feel bad. So, I started opening up to the possibility of a higher power. I meditated and journaled. Slowly I discovered what my higher power means to me and let down my walls and let my higher power into my life. I started to let go. When I faced a really difficult situation, I started turning it over to my higher power.

I have a particularly difficult recurring problem that I stress about every weekday. I used to try to anticipate and control this problem in an attempt to avoid it happening.

Early one Wednesday morning, I woke up and did steps one to three in my head. I felt a little relief but was still worried. Well, Wednesday was a great day! The problem wasn't a problem that day. I did the same on Thursday, working steps one to three before getting out of bed in the morning. Thursday was even better, something else was removed to help stop the problem. Again, on Friday I let go and turned the problem over to my higher power and it was the best day of the week by far!

I thought about the affirmation shared during my meeting's closing: "Many things turn out well without my direct intervention." It's so true and I never would have imagined that before CoDA. I'm feeling so grateful and thankful for

recovery and this wonderful supportive community. Thank you for letting me share!

by Laura E

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## Awareness is Spiritual, Too

I've felt like an outsider most of my life. I certainly didn't fit in the religiosity native to the Deep South (USA) where I grew up. My senior high school yearbook quote was, "A heretic is a man who sees with his own eyes." Growing up, the idea there was some divine plan at work was laughable. My mom was alcoholic and verbally abusive. My dad was remote and absent. When I managed to get out of that town and go off to college, it was entirely due to my own efforts.

I don't have issues with people's personal beliefs. But the point at which their individual views intrude on mine, they become my business. It's like once a member starts talking about God, I feel left behind. And it's not somewhere I want to go.

In theory, the term "Higher Power" is supposed to keep everyone on board who isn't big on God. But in practice, it seems like I'm hearing people meaning God when members say Higher Power. It is as if there is intentionality and compassion behind the concept. It feels like an outside superpower, and it's just too much for me.

I've heard of people having to **go back** to a past Higher Power as an internal guide, just not tied to ego. Now, that is a concept I can get behind.

One of the later steps mentions that "We sought through...meditation..." Here, I should mention my spiritual experience around this. Four and a half years ago, a friend had me join her and her family on a Buddhist retreat; a core practice of which was extended sitting meditation. I had practiced meditation on my own for a couple of years by that point and had certainly enjoyed using it to get some mental space. At the retreat however, I got this sort of

awareness that let me start examining who I really was. It wasn't a quick fix, but it gave me the perspective to start healing.

I find that the agnostic CoDA meetings promote this guiding principle of awareness that is able to flourish without the "God word" being tossed around. I believe that addressing issues of codependency requires a great deal of awareness, both of one's own words and actions, and those of the other person.

by Robert

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## Big 'G' Energy!

In 1972, at age seven, Child Protective Services (CPS) removed me from my home. My thirteen-year-old sister had run away and disclosed to the police that violence and incestual rape were the status quo in our home. My father terrorized us all, and my mother did her best to alleviate our suffering. I treasure my earliest memories walking hand in hand to church with my mother.

The first foster home was a Mormon family. I was thrilled to learn they had a girl my age and they went to church. In my mind, going to church meant I would see my Mom.

I didn't get to go with the children. I had to sit with the adults. I watched the people in their Sunday best, hugging and shaking hands. When the trays of tiny white cups of water and bread (the sacrament) came around, the foster lady blocked my hand, shaking her head, "No". In my mind that meant I was unworthy.

The second foster home was twenty miles down the road. They went to the Catholic Church. They had four kids, all teenagers, none interested in me. I was lonely and had recurring strep throat; I couldn't voice my pain. On the way to church, a small part of me remembered my Mom's hand, and a huge part felt apprehension.

People walked up to the stage at this church to take the sacrament. It surprised me when the foster lady grabbed my hand and led me to accept it. I was worthy in this family; that day is my happiest childhood memory.

In 1974, I was adopted. They didn't go to church. Again, I was abused and incested. I coped by going to church with

anyone who would take me. I didn't trust the sacraments or Jesus saving me. I prayed for my real family to find me.

In my twenties, I found Eastern philosophy. I understood the concept of faith. God, as a male, "No." God, in church, "No." To me he is undependable. I decided to call it "Big 'G' Energy" instead of God. It is omnipresent, the same as goodness, gentleness, and grace, and it's the hardest for humans to master.

At age 58, I attended my first CoDA meeting. I had been in and out of therapy for over thirty years. I could not stop behaving codependently. I was full of rage and fear. My behavior was ruining my life. I was shocked to realize that I bristled momentarily with the Third Step of turning my will over to God.

In my first meeting, I felt "Big 'G' Energy;" it was right there in the room. Bigger than anything I'd found in a religion. It was the sharing and proof in recovery. It was the promise of living without terror that hooked me.

I'm now living the promises of CoDA. I know a new peace and Grace in my life. Through CoDA, the CoDA Fellowship, and the help of "Big 'G' Energy", my relationships with myself and others are finally healing.

By Ali R.

## Choosing to Change

Growing up, I was taught that it was a “nice” but foreign thing to believe in god, something that was only for wishful thinkers. My parents were academics and god had no place in their lives. As a young adult, I followed in their footsteps, because: who believes in something they can’t see?

Naturally, the first time I worked the third step I struggled with it. I was skeptical and afraid to denounce this atheist identity that tied me to my family. To accept a god, any god, was to turn my back on the way I had been raised, with facts, data, and a distrust for the spiritual. And yet, I came to realize that this was exactly what I needed in order to change, to break the family legacy, to not live out the same patterns of dissatisfaction and codependency as my parents and those before them, for all my life. In my meetings and program friends I saw fulfillment, growth, and change. As awkward as it felt to turn towards a belief in god, I came to accept the absurdity of assuming that I or any human is smart or aware enough to understand, let alone control, all things. In that, I find a power greater than myself, even if it is just the physical laws of the universe in which we all live.

by Julia F.

## What does the word “God” mean to me?

I was born into a Hindu family where the word God meant several things. God was representational of beings (deities) who walked our planet in the past and were written about in epics like the Mahabhata and Ramayana, each one having a characteristic or quality that people strive to absorb into themselves. It was also a reflection of oneself and everything in existence. God was what we found within ourselves and in each other. It was what *namaste* to another meant (seeing God in the person in front of you). God was omnipotent.

As a kid, I saw God as a binary entity, simply because that was how I was taught God showed up for us, despite the fact that in Hinduism there are representations of God in transgender forms and who are gender fluid. Since that wasn't a popular belief, it was held back in the teachings.

Over the years I started questioning everything. I observed the way that the word God incited violence, arguments, misunderstandings, exclusion, and pain all around the world. Wars have been waged for centuries over the debate of whose God is the right one. Why would I want to follow a religious practice that creates division from others? The word God is manmade, as is religion. I haven't officially studied theology but from my observations through life, religion was created to unite and educate. The issue I see is that each religious group thinks their belief is the correct one. I concluded that if I wanted to contribute to peace, then religion wasn't the path.

I also asked myself, “why would I want to follow the blind faith of other people who have chosen to gender God as a male and Goddess as a female, limiting the existence of this unseen power to the binary?” I'm trans non-binary; neither

of the words God nor Goddess resonate with me and who I am.

My belief systems have evolved over time to realize the magical delight of the universe and the synergy of nature. I don't limit myself to seeing one or eight images of a God. I see the cosmos, the galaxies, and the stars above as radiant energy that all of us have come from and what one day our planet will become when our time as humans comes to an end. For me, that is what God is.

It's a power I believe in, that I can rename as a higher consciousness, higher power, inner guide, spiritual guide, inner light, universal power, the moon, or trees. I want to see a world where the words we choose are as powerful as another's, and it doesn't matter what they are. A world where there is no competition, no battle of words to find the right one.

In my steps of recovery as a codependent, I see myself continuing to explore these words and how they resonate with each step, saying a new word each time, feeling into the vibration of it and the meaning for me.

by Cosmos (cos/they)

## Love is the Answer

As a child, life delivered me a torn unnatural reality. I was isolated, violated, and my soul was torn to choose over my closest loved ones. I grew up knowing love as a reward, sometimes as a lucky token to see the ones I loved. That's the description of a prisoner. That was my beginning to my life and initial conditioning. For so very long I've walked a road alone and searching for a higher power. Finally, one day I learned I wasn't alone in this perilous journey of life. I was joined with my Fellows and found a way to unbind the chains to my soul to free me.

For me, I view a higher power as the love of mother, child, self, and partner. I find my higher power in all my creative pursuits. I find completeness when I seek love and creativity.

My disease of codependency is a yearning to be complete and when I am in my disease, I reach out to others for completeness. It is strange for me to think that I search for approval from others in my disease. It becomes an endless pursuit of fulfillment.

The realization hits me, I am already complete. I am love. My mother and father, for whatever the reason, couldn't love me the way I needed when I was a child. In CoDA, I was able to heal the hurt of despair, the emptiness, and the total feeling of helplessness.

CoDA showed me a path, and a system where I can receive support and offer support to others in recovery. I am on my CoDA journey. I participate and devote the energy I have to be connected to my total self. I find more wholeness every day.

by Michael L.



## My God Filter

Hello. My name is Ashlea and I am a codependent. I joined CoDA almost three years ago. I cannot believe it's been that long already. My life has changed so much. Once upon a time, someone said the word "GOD" and I cringed. It wasn't just an internal cringe either. When discussing God I would become aggressive and stubborn. I became willful, controlling, and demanding. I was judgmental. I would go into what I would eventually learn was a codependent spiral. To say that I feared and hated God would not be an understatement.

I started my schooling in Catholic school. I was introduced to God in Kindergarten. In elementary school, I learned that God was our savior. If we were good enough and listened enough, then he would save us. I also learned that he was judgmental and demanding. Follow the ten commandments and listen to your parents and worship only him, or your soul will forever burn in the fires of despair in hell.

I was taught to be quiet. To be small. To accept whatever was given to me and be thankful for it. I was taught to go to God and admit my faults and beg for his mercy. I was taught that God knows all and sees all. That he is a power greater than any human can even begin to imagine. It's odd as I type this, I realize that God is all those things but not in the way that I received the teachings. The culture took what I now believe to be the truth and twisted it into some horrible version of itself. Or maybe I did that.

When I was about nine years old, I had a conversation with that God. I begged him to save me from my house. I begged him to rescue me from the physical and emotional pain I was always in. I remember to this day, thirty-one years later, how I felt. I was so sad at such a young age. I was lost. I was hurting and angry and scared. I begged God

to save me. When he didn't, I decided he didn't love me, or see me, so I wouldn't love or see him. I decided right then that God was just like every other adult in the world. That I couldn't trust him. He wouldn't help me.

For thirty-one years, that was my relationship with the word God. It had so much meaning. I gave it so much power. Now I realize that the word God is just that. It's a word. I can filter that word in my head to mean anything I want it to mean. And that meaning can change as I grow and my relationship with my higher power or God grows. I still don't like the Catholic God. He is not my God. But my God, my higher power, my god is kind and loving. He is compassionate and protective. He has a sense of humor and wants nothing more than for me to experience the best life I possibly can. My God is patient. My God loves everyone, even if another's god doesn't love me. Yes, he may teach me some hard lessons sometimes, but that is life and sometimes learning is hard.

by Ashlea M.

## HP=Nature

My struggle with the Twelve Step program was always the mention of god, even in our serenity prayer I never uttered the word. The program would be perfect ... without the mention of G-O-D. It would be all inclusive. I became defiant and adamant about that three-letter word. For me there was so much trauma, instilled fear, and shame that I shuddered every time god was mentioned.

I knew I needed something bigger than myself to release my fears and obtain courage. I began to search for my “higher power” and struggled. Could it be a rock? Could it be a tree? Could it be the air I breathe? Then the resentment to even find a higher power would seep...could it be my cell phone? Could it be a puzzle? Could it be a road trip?

One day I took a walk, and I started my gratitudes. Grateful for the air, grateful for the sky, grateful for the birds, grateful for the trees, grateful. And there it was right before me all along, my higher power became nature.

Suddenly, the gifts of CoDA opened up to me. The resistance, fear, the shame, and resentment no longer blocked me from seeing my truth, feeling peace, feeling loved, and light.

My higher power relieved me of the weight of my fear, shame, and anxiety and the years of behavior, both projected and expected of me.

I could finally release, forgive, love, and find a peace in the surrounding wonder and endless gift of nature.

Singing every day,

by Cristal G.

## Too Many Questions

“I’m sorry. We don’t think you would be a good witness right now. You have too many questions.” To my youth group leader, being a good Christian witness meant exemplifying everything the church taught me without doubt. I just couldn’t do that.

I was seventeen, an avid member of my church and youth group, spending at least four days a week participating in a variety of religious programs. I was also a singer and had just asked, “Is there a date set for me to sing at service this month?”

There was no date set because I was a bad witness. Why? Was it because I was confused about the church's stance on people considered “different?” What questions were so tainted that I was being silenced?

“Why will my friend go to hell because she was born into a Jewish family? Why does a person in another country who has never heard of Jesus get allocated to hell? Why can’t my friend who is gay, love whomever they love?”

Not long after my singing “probation,” a member of my family had a mental health emergency. I was scheduled to stay overnight at the church that following week and participate in a youth group service project. I explained to my youth leader that I couldn’t attend for personal reasons. At a retreat a month later, that youth minister confronted me about my absence and used it as another example of my wavering spirituality. I angrily explained our family’s emergency and finished by shouting, “And you didn’t need to know any of that.” I was done.

For twenty-five years, I stayed clear of any Christian church. The word God made me shudder. I equated it to judgment, fake niceties, and closed-mindedness.

However, I missed spirituality and a connection to community. I tried to figure out where I belonged. What would be my label? Universal Unitarian, atheist, agnostic?

The answer came during the pandemic of 2020. The ground beneath me crumbled. I lost my dad to Covid. I left my job to take care of my two boys who were virtual learning, my mother who had Alzheimer's, and her mother who had dementia. The final blow was when my husband of nineteen years left. I was a shell.

Three spiritual practices saved me: Buddhism, Mindfulness, and CoDA.

Buddhism and Mindfulness helped me lean into the present, accept groundlessness, and let go of suffering.

I began attending CoDA Zoom meetings in 2021 upon my therapist's suggestion that I see if it "speaks to me." It did. But...that word, "God." I couldn't stand reading it in the literature or hearing it over and over again. I began crossing it out of my CoDA books writing "The Universe" instead until I realized I was fighting a losing battle. Higher Power was more comfortable, but the word "God" was everywhere.

I have tried to make peace with CoDA's language choices, knowing that the benefits to my life far outweigh the temporary discomfort. But now, with this project, I have hope. Hope that I might have an opportunity to read literature that makes me feel safe and at home within a community that changed the course of my life.

by A.W.

## **Without Religion and With Hope and Faith**

At the end of my first CoDA meeting, people held hands and said prayers out loud. It felt religious to me. The feeling of being an outsider overwhelmed me. I ran from that meeting, never intending to come back.

Three years later, I was divorced. I ran from my problems, moved to another state, and lived alone. I was angry and suicidal. I was drinking to get through the day. Turns out, codependency is a progressive disease.

I was not raised with a religion, but as long as I can remember, I knew something bigger existed. I would lay in my bed at night and pray the only prayer I knew from a children's book of poems, immediately followed by an apology, because it was the only prayer I knew.

Growing up, I went to church on occasion with our neighbors. I remember feeling very confused by the rules and recited prayers that I did not know. I felt like an outsider even though they were being inclusive. At four years of age, the neighbor boy who was seven years older than me began trading sexual favors with me for candy. Human experiences like this confused me about the goodness of religious people.

In the 1970's, it seemed like everyone but me identified as Christian. I began to feel judged in high school. I felt like there was something wrong with me. I know that I didn't think, act, or believe in the same way.

At the age of fifteen, I had begun to have a clear and definitive connection to the beyond. I began receiving what I would call divine warnings. One very specific time, was

when at seventeen, I was driving home tired, a voice said, “Put on your seat belt in case you hit a tree.” Thirty minutes later, I fell asleep at the wheel, two blocks from home and plowed my car into a giant palm tree. The doctor told me, my seat belt saved my life.

In my twenties, I began seeing snapshot-like pictures in my dreams that foretold the future. When sharing this with a friend, she called me “the work of the Devil.” So, now, on top of feeling outcast, and not good enough, the Devil was inside me.

When I got married, my father-in-law called us “unequally yoked” and told me I was not worthy of his son. This is the same man that approached me for sex in my home.

Over time, I became jaded towards religion and its followers. I felt nothing but hurt and rejection where I needed kindness and acceptance. In the end, I became very judgmental and guarded towards people who professed faith.

In my thirties, I found a personal connection to my higher power through books written by a man who had conversations with the beyond on yellow legal pads, much like me with my journal. A psychic I knew, spoke of the soul’s perfection, which I could relate to.

Eventually, through CoDA, things began to make more sense. CoDA is a spiritual program. We all belong. It does not matter our beliefs about God and yet, the words are still there in CoDA literature. Over time, I have learned to be grateful for the words. They have taught me to accept others as they are. I see that differences are not threats; judgements have no place in my life. I understand we are all equal.

Through CoDA, I found my religious problem was actually a human problem, not a God problem. Few people choose their religious preferences, following their family's belief system instead. This is no different than my family of origin, who struggles with codependency.

My spiritual journey feels as personal to me as my CoDA journey. It is based on my experiences, my life, and my response to them.

What I also found was that I had my own spiritual dilemma to face. Before coming to CoDA, I thought I was one of the most selfless people in the world. The more I dig up and work through the CoDA Twelve Steps, the more peace and love exists in me.

One of the gifts of my CoDA journey has been an ability to embrace things I once detested. I see others' way of thinking, feeling, and acting as equal to my own. I no longer dislike religion or distrust religious people. Instead, I have compassion and understanding for everyone. I see the humility and humanness in us all.

On my CoDA journey, I have found freedom and inner peace. My relationships are healing and I am grateful.

by Michelle M.



## Coming Back Home to Myself

Growing up under the equally strict control of religion and my father's abuse, I was primed for codependent relationships practically from birth. The worst thing that religion taught me was to suppress my inner moral compass. I was taught that a true believer submitted to God's will without question and honored their parents just well have been as unquestioningly. My inner voice might as well been satan, since it urged me to such sins as standing up for myself and others, giving and receiving kindness, and resisting my father's cruelty. I eventually gave up on having any will of my own. What was the point?

Becoming an atheist at eighteen freed me in many ways, but it didn't automatically restore my ability to trust my own judgment. I was left feeling lost and alone. Unsurprisingly, I latched onto unhealthy relationships as a source of meaning, especially the one that would become my abusive marriage.

Following my divorce, I swore off romantic relationships in the hopes of both avoiding abuse and focusing on my healing. That wasn't enough, as my codependent tendencies resurfaced in a toxic friendship. I was at my lowest point, wondering if I was condemned to choose between a life of either loneliness or abuse.

I will forever be grateful to the friend who recommended CoDA to me in my hour of need. From my very first meeting, I knew I'd found something life-changing and powerful. I started attending regularly with great enthusiasm. To date, the only meeting where I have declined to participate was the one focused on a relationship with a higher power.

As much as CoDA did for me, I was reluctant to work the steps, and for good reason. The steps, especially the first half, assume that you will be giving up your will to a higher power. That sort of surrender is a one-way ticket back into the low self-esteem that had landed me in codependency in the first place.

Fortunately, not long after I started attending CoDA, I had the opportunity to hear from someone who works the steps in their own way. This guest speaker was very straightforward about not believing in any higher power beyond the fellowship experienced in CoDA. This person taught me to unapologetically take what works for me from the steps and leave the rest. Best of all, I learned that I can offer service in CoDA meetings and become a dedicated CoDA member without compromising my principles.

I've since worked the steps with my needs in mind. I am not shy about crossing out anything that would be unhealthy for me or reframing a step so that it's more appropriate for me. For example, for Step Three, I let go without letting God. To move forward, I don't have to surrender custody of myself to anyone; instead, I can just release.

I hope that, by sharing my story, I can pay it forward and inspire someone else in their journey to healthier relationships and a better life.

by Eli H.

## Freedom in My Faith Journey

At the age of almost four, as part of a strong, spiritual foundation Mom led me to accept Jesus as my Savior. Mom taught me the power of trusting God in all aspects of life. Dad taught me the importance of broad-mindedness and inclusiveness. He also conveyed a love of freedom. My Dad used to sing the song “Don’t Fence Me In” where it talks about wanting lots of land under big skies with no fences or constraints.

From childhood I felt that, as a Christian, I was part of a select group of people who knew the truth and whose job it was to help convert others.

I was a missionary kid raised in the wilderness of Northern Canada, and then at sixteen, I was yanked from my “natural habitat” and sent to a strict Christian boarding school in Florida. Desperately homesick and trying to navigate this new world, my spiritual life began in earnest as I prayed and read my Bible diligently.

By age nineteen at Bible school in England, I found myself popular and enjoying my newfound freedom and joy. Never have I had so many friends or so much fun. But then I was plunged into a deep depression. I felt unspiritual and superficial. Who was I to deserve this much fun? It felt like God was punishing me. I should be thinking about converting the lost world, not learning to taste my first wine, and attracting boyfriends! I did not laugh for three months. Mom told me I must have let in the devil.

Then just before Easter I awoke one morning and God said to me, “Get up, hold your head up, look people directly in the eye because you are worthy!”. It was an overnight change. I reconnected with my alienated friends.

My plan to become a missionary, was interrupted by marrying Michael on the way to becoming a Baptist minister. We joined the Episcopal church, and he became an Episcopal priest. In the Episcopal church, I no longer had to believe that women couldn't be ministers or that the first eleven chapters of Genesis are literal, that the world was only four thousand years old. The scientific part of life did not have to fight the spiritual part. I could take what I like and leave the rest. Doesn't everyone do this?

It was about then that I discovered Eastern wisdom literature. It broadened my mind and enriched my spiritual life. I began to feel uncomfortable with what I perceived to be the us/them aspect of Christianity. I met spiritual people who did not believe as I did. I realized that in sales, business, parenting, and marriage, I was enriched by various wisdoms, so I began to experience my spiritual life. The airtight dome of Christianity began to crack and let in the sunshine and fresh air. It was a relief not to have to prop up a rigid belief system and retrofit my life into it. I could trust the mystery of the universe in a new way. My faith grew.

In 1989 everyone in my life, including me, was surprised by my great success in sales. I began to be able to celebrate my love of business and making money. I could do what I was gifted at and stop believing it was a "less-than" calling.

Then in 2016 my husband introduced me to Twelve Step programs. I found CoDA (Co-Dependents Anonymous) and those brilliant little words where we learn that our Higher Power is one of our own understanding. What a relief. What freedom! I was able to stop telling the world that my truth was the only truth. I was able to receive the experience, strength, and hope of others and their spiritual journeys that differ from mine. I now could surrender (something always hard for me) to my own understanding of my Higher Power.

Today life is good. I am free to love myself. No, I must love myself, that is my job and the better I do, the more I am able to love, feel equal to, and stop comparing myself to others. I am enough. I belong. My faith today is the same faith I've always had. It's only the beliefs, the outside wrappings, that have changed. Now I can let my Higher Power be a mystery. In my experience, faith, like an airplane, rises through the dark clouds of doubt and uncertainty into the sunlight of spiritual growth. In my view, it's the same sun that we all see however and whoever is describing the journey.

by Kay A.

DRAFT CSC 2024

## I Love Cats

I was born in the USSR, Russia. Religion was virtually non-existent. The government was the higher power in a very non-spiritual, controlling way.

There was no mention of spirituality in any book or conversation I had. I didn't hear that spirituality and religion were different things. Around my adolescence, the USSR fell apart, and religion made a strong resurgence. It came across as something as a fad, more about rituals than spirituality. Religious holidays became a reason for many to get drunk. I saw this ritualistic religion as something that wasn't for me.

I went on with my life having no concept of spirituality and retained my aversion to organized religion. Then I met an American man, moved to the USA, and had a child. My marriage deteriorated to a point where violence was involved. I left my house with my son and got help from an organization for domestic abuse survivors. They had counseling groups for battered women and that's where my healing began. Once a CoDA member joined us. She listened and participated in the group. Afterwards she said, "This is not the right group for me. I won't be coming back." I found it curious that she had a choice to attend or not. Having a choice was never a thought that crossed my mind. I had to find out more about CoDA. I found and attended my first CoDA meeting.

My first CoDA meeting was inside a Christian church and it seemed like there was God in every sentence I heard. It scared me. I saw a lot of people in the group who had the same troubles I had, and it didn't shake them to their core, and I wanted that. At the end of the meeting, I was approached by an old-timer who saw how frightened I was

and offered me her kindness. That group became my home group for the first five years of my recovery. A year in, the message that “I am not alone, and I belong” sank in and I was ready to work the steps. I asked several people to be my sponsor, and everyone said “no.” I started a step-study group. Everyone in my group had already worked the steps before. My group treated me as an equal, even though I felt behind in my recovery.

By the second step it seemed like I had to have a higher power to work the program. The absence of higher power in my upbringing made it challenging. I discovered that religion and spirituality are two different things. Being very anti-religious, left me with only spirituality to work with. I asked other CoDA members who had more time in the program how to approach spirituality. They replied, “It had to be something that made sense to me and that my higher power wouldn’t be like anybody else’s.” I was frustrated with having to find my own answers. At the same time, I felt reassured that I could find a spiritual concept that worked for me.

I wasn’t sure whether god existed but I kept an open mind; allowing for the possibility of a higher power. But how could I talk to a higher power that I wasn’t sure existed? And again, I heard “It had to be something that made sense to me.” I love cats. For the next five years, whenever I needed to talk with HP, I imagined an orange cat on my shoulder and said what I needed to say to the cat. The cat wasn’t my god, rather the conduit to a higher power I couldn’t quite comprehend. That worked well for a surprising amount of time. My first set of steps was imperfect but led me to finding something beyond myself.

I now know my understanding of HP doesn’t have to stay the same, it can grow and change as I grow and change. I

put no emphasis on what to call god. I couldn't prove that the Great Spirit exists; rather, I have a relationship with it because I feel I want and need one. Now higher power is like a sponsor or kind friend that's got my back, and I can ask for help or input any time. HP talks to me through people and circumstances. I learn a lot through my sponsees, attending meetings and doing service. With each step study or set of steps my understanding of HP deepens as I find out more about myself. It's a beautiful journey that I've come to appreciate, and I keep coming back for more!

by Cat

DRAFT CSC 2020



## Trading Fear For Love

Growing up as a Christian, the word 'God' held a very specific meaning for me. It represented a loving and all-powerful judgmental deity who watched over and guided my life. I was taught to pray to God for guidance, forgiveness, and protection. I was also taught to fear God. However, as I entered CoDA, my understanding of God began to shift. I learned to see God not just as a religious figure, but as a higher power greater than myself. This perspective allowed me to let go of my own control and trust in a power beyond my understanding. I now view God as a force of love and support, guiding my recovery journey and helping me overcome my struggles. I'm grateful to know this new found God's unconditional love and nonjudgmental nature. I'm grateful for CoDA, the outreach and constant reminder that I deserve to love myself and love others in healthy ways. I chose recovery and am willing to do whatever it takes to recover from codependency. I'm so grateful for a fellowship that encouraged me to share about my thoughts on who or what God means to me. I am a unique and precious creation, and so is my Higher power which I sometimes call God.

In the spirit of love and truth,

by Deniré

## **Reframing Recovery: My Journey of Personalizing CoDA**

When I first joined CoDA, my life was not in crisis, nor was it in chaos. Instead, I was on a path of introspection, having noticed persisting patterns in my thoughts and relationships that seemed deeply rooted, despite years of therapy. I was drawn to the idea of healing within a community of like-minded individuals, hoping that this collective journey might offer a new depth of understanding and recovery.

As an atheist, my approach to faith is rooted in a fundamental belief: I simply don't hold faith in the existence of a deity (or multiple deities). Thus, encountering the frequent references to God and Higher Power in CoDA's literature initially felt like an immense barrier. These terms, so central to many recovery narratives, seemed out of place in mine. The substitution of "Higher Power" felt particularly unsatisfying; it seemed more like a placeholder, a veiled reference to a concept I didn't connect with.

Driven by a need to reconcile these foundational aspects of CoDA with my personal beliefs, I embarked on a personal project. I took a copy of the CoDA Blue Book and began the painstaking work of removing every mention of "God" and "Higher Power." In place of those words, I wrote in language that resonated with my own worldview. For me, this became an empowering act of reclamation, a way to integrate the program's wisdom into my personal ethos.

I replaced these terms with "My Wisest Self." To me, this represented the part of me that is connected to a deeper, universal wisdom—a wisdom that we all possess and can access. It wasn't about looking outward for guidance, but rather inward, towards an intuitive understanding and

knowledge I hold within. My Wisest Self became a symbol of my own capacity for insight, resilience, and the ability to navigate the complexities of life.

This personal adaptation transformed my experience with CoDA. The steps took on new meaning, no longer prescriptive instructions tied to a theistic framework, but rather guideposts on a journey towards self-awareness, personal growth, and emotional healing.

As I began my journey through CoDA with my reinterpreted guide, I cautiously shared my book project with a few like-minded individuals within the program. To my relief and encouragement, these conversations were met with positive affirmation and resonance. This response was heartening, reinforcing the idea that personalization in our healing paths is not only possible but also valuable. While I'm still relatively new to the community, these early exchanges have given me a sense of belonging and have validated my approach, affirming that even within structured programs, there is room for individual interpretation and growth. This experience has illuminated my path, offering a profound reminder of the diversity and individuality that each of us brings to our collective journey towards healing and self-awareness.

by Kitty K.

## A “Long Think” and a “Long Ask”

I was raised a Roman Catholic and looked to God for the moral guidance and support which I did not get from my father. At boarding school, I attended mass every day for two years in my teens. I needed it, but I don't think I enjoyed it.

I then lost my faith and struggled to try to find one, first for my wife, a Roman Catholic, and then for our daughter. In recovery, I was confronted with the G-word every few minutes, and I became quite unsettled. I realized I was angry at God for not existing. I felt betrayed by him/her, and all the faiths around me. I find myself jealous of people who have faith. People of faith seem more accepting and more serene in their lives than me. I listen to Gospel music all the time, and the faith I hear causes me to mourn the loss of my own. I get angry when I see the tragedies of the world, the famine, war, and heartbreak. There is an absence of magic and miracles. I try to see the miracles in the world, but my cynicism and fury make it hard.

So, after years of peer pressure to believe in fairies and an omniscient, all-powerful, cruel old man with a big beard, who laughs at me, I have rejected the notion of a traditional God. In CoDA meetings, I have to hear the God word, and a small part of me is angry every time, and at the same time longs for it to be true.

Now I avoid any mention of organized spiritual belief in my non-meeting life. When I need to settle my troubled head, I do what other people call prayer and meditation. I call it a "long think" and a "long ask". I think about what the world is asking of me in a challenging situation. What can I do to resolve or improve that difficulty? Sharing that I had a strong faith and lost it, can help others with similar struggles.

When working the steps, when the God word comes along, I think about the CoDA program as a substitute. My conscious

contact with God involves working the program and doing some “long thinks” and “long asks.”

I am especially grateful for finding a sponsor with very similar beliefs and background. At the same time, I am repelled by the idea of some spooky entity looking after me.

A girlfriend once said to me "You can't make anybody feel anything." I can not control the emotions of others and I can not control my own. If I react to my feelings, it can be self-defeating or self-destructive.

When people talk of "spirituality", I talk about my emotional life and its trials and rewards. I have used spirituality sometimes, though it feels like I'm standing on the edge of a cliff. So instead of seeing it as a cliff, I have decided to see it as a new adventure. When confronting my fears, I think of the process as a new adventure.

I am angry that God betrayed me like my father did. I wanted my father to be a god to me. I am angry that God gave my daughter asthma.

Honesty, equality and The Common Good are the most crucial guides for my life. I spent a lot of time looking for The Truth, and found it - God is not available to me; God can not rescue me. I sometimes grieve the loss of my faith, I relied upon him/her to be my moral guide, cocoon, my crutch, and my parent.

I found CoDA and continue to work the program through “long thinks” and “long asks.” I no longer need to rely on my old manipulative patterns. My communication with others, through equality, is less codependent than it was.

I thank CoDA for that.

by Toby P.

## Identifying My Needs

When a therapist first told me to seek out a Twelve Step group like CoDA, I had my reservations. I asked my Dad, who had attended another Twelve Step group in his past, “how religious is this stuff?”

I desperately wanted change and I didn't know what else to do or where else to go. So, I attended my first CoDA meeting over Zoom. I don't believe that I would've had the strength to walk into an in-person meeting and be the vulnerable, broken person I believed I was.

In the meetings I attended, I heard shares from others with varying religious and non-religious beliefs. I still felt an intense aversion to learning that I would be subjected to prayers and all this God-talk and assumed it would be like when I was a child. My Mom had forced me to “save” myself and pray to Jesus and **beg** to be in His graces. I didn't understand that spirituality and religiousness **are** different. I didn't understand what a “Higher Power of what my own understanding” could even mean.

I had been attending meetings for three months and continued internally fighting the words I recited every meeting within CoDA's *Twelve Steps*, *Twelve Traditions*, *Twelve Promises*, and most of all – the dreaded *Serenity Prayer*. I chose to not repeat the word “God” when I could avoid it and abbreviated “Higher Power” to “HP” because I still couldn't accept this idea of a “Higher Power.”

I stubbornly believed that I was strong enough on my own, but the shares of others in recovery gave me hope that I was not alone in this struggle, so I continued attending meetings. However, I could not yet identify **what I needed**

for myself, so how could I possibly understand what I would need to find strength through a Higher Power?

There is no universal right way to start this process. It took working through my Fourth Step before I understood my own needs and could begin to separate the enforced childhood belief of “God” from a new, loving understanding of a “Higher Power” and making a connection with this unknown thing was not a simple task. I began with listing traits that I valued and needed from this unknown presence: security, acceptance, and unconditional love. I did not yet believe that such things could be provided to me, but I finally had identified what I needed from a power greater than myself to finally begin **trusting**.

Today, I am three years into my journey of recovery. I see that acknowledging my needs was my first step towards accepting my Higher Power. My Higher Power doesn't care if I believe without any doubts or not – it accepts me as I am day to day. I surrender – release my need to know and control the future – and trust that I am where I need to be now.

by Lauren S.

## In a New Light

When I first came into CoDA, I was angry that “God” and “prayers” were spoken about at every meeting. The God I grew up with abandoned me a long time ago. I was sexually abused as a child and then sexually assaulted as an adult, so there was no God. If there was a God, why would they allow these horrific things to happen to me?

At a young age, my mother would remind me constantly; “If you are good, God will always protect you. He will not allow bad things to happen.” I took this to mean, I had to be perfect in order for God to love me enough to keep me safe. I tried hard to be the best little girl, then woman, I could be. I was generous, put my needs aside, and always worried and cared for others instead of myself. Unfortunately, it did not matter. Those terrible events still occurred. I decided then, God, did not think I was worthy and I forgot about my higher power all together.

It was not until CoDA that I thought deeply about who God was to me now. I questioned, “Can God be anything else besides someone who I thought was resentful and conditional?” It was through a CoDA step study program when I started to think about God in a new light. At the start of the step study, I could not bring myself to say that word because it stung. I started off with the word, higher power, then mother nature, and finally God.

Although, I still had that question: “If there was a God, why would they allow these horrific things to happen to me?” I realized that God did not “do” or “allow” these devastating events to happen to me because God did not care for me. They never abandoned me. Even as I reflect on those hard times I can see that God was always there for me and hoped I would one day look to him/her for comfort.



I used to think I had no higher power and felt more alone than ever, but now things are different. When I feel I have no one, I know God is close by; I can let go and feel at peace. The God I think of now is kind, loving, patient, and just loves me; it is as simple as that.

by Natalie C.

DRAFT CSC 2024

## As Above, So Below

I'm new to CoDA and, of course, still learning. I, personally, have issues with the God word. I prefer higher power or something to that effect.

My dad was a Baptist minister, he **always** taught us **not** to take the Bible so literally. He said everyone interprets it in their own way, **and** that it was written by **man**. My dad was the most understanding and open-minded man I've ever met.

I think most people believe in some higher power; however, it's not always God. I personally believe in Karma. Whatever I do (good or bad) will come back on me. Many belief systems seem to share this sentiment, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

I honestly don't know what my "religion" is, I just know I don't believe in a Christian God anymore. I have felt judged in my church experiences. I relate to the teachings of Wicca and Norse. I also believe in angels or maybe spirits, although I don't know which.

To sum it up, the God word just makes me cringe. Maybe I'm the only one who feels that way; however, I doubt it. Seeing so much of that word **almost** made me turn away from CoDA, until someone in the group convinced me that it isn't all religion related and she asked me to please give it a shot. So far, I'm glad I did.

Thank you for your time reading this.

by Anonymous

## **Work the Steps. Trust the Process.**

As a kid, I was raised Christian. There was nothing wrong with it, but I didn't relate to it and, as an adult, I drifted away from it. When I got to CoDA, I didn't know I was missing anything spiritual. I just knew my life was falling apart, I could see no way out, and I wanted to die. I was out of options, and I was willing to try anything, even some hocus-pocus twelve step program, but "the God word" was problematic.

I wanted an answer for my pain, but I was not ready to buy the idea that "God" was the answer.

For a long time, I just quietly refused to say, "that word."

Fortunately, I didn't have to have the God thing figured out in order to work the program. I was told H.O.W. to begin: get Honest that my way didn't work, keep an Open mind, and be Willing to give the steps a try.

So, I kept coming back. First, I learned about higher powers I had used in my codependency, particularly attempting to use others as my sole source of identity, value, and well-being. I learned that human power, mine or others', wasn't getting me anywhere close to sane, let alone happy.

I read and I listened to what others in the fellowship had to share. (The combined wisdom in the rooms was my first Higher Power.) Members shared their experiences with "God" but also with the powers of Nature, Love, the twelve step process, Higher Consciousness, thinking of G.O.D. as "Good Orderly Direction," and even Glinda, the Good Witch of the North.

And I discovered that I could work the Steps without having a specific answer to the God question. So, I kept tinkering

with my concept of Higher Power. What brings me stability in the chaos? I still tinker with it. Today in my recovery, the non-theistic teachings of Buddhism are helpful to me. My goal is to meditate and pray fifteen minutes a day, although I don't always manage it. I meditate on the breath, getting to know the chatter in my mind as just stories, not facts. I don't pray for knowledge of "God's will," but for knowledge of the right action in body, speech, and mind and the power to carry that out.

And the twelve step process is working. I have developed a spiritual framework as the result of these steps and life is better. I don't want to die anymore. The God word no longer matters to me. What matters is the realization that my Higher Power can be anything, as long as I'm not it. I'm not the center of the universe, but I do belong here. I don't have all the answers, but I do have choices. I am not responsible for outcomes, but I am responsible for my actions. I am powerless over others and most everything else for that matter. And I've experienced, not resignation, but relief, freedom, and genuine happiness in that.

by Allison F.

## My Higher Power Journey

**Step Two** - *Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*

I was eleven and most of my friends from school were Catholics. My friends and I attended Catholic youth classes every Sunday. I have no memory of any of our parents joining us.

The mass felt more like a weekly ordeal as opposed to an opportunity to connect with a higher power. Our parents sent us off on our own. We went to Catholic youth classes, attended a service, went to confession, and we were supposed to feel renewed. No wonder I never had a real relationship with a higher power for as long as I can remember in those days.

My mother is Catholic and my dad was Protestant. I was told that the only reason I was Catholic was because my father refused to spend time bringing me to his church each week. I have always known intuitively that there was a higher power. I chose to call him God and I just figured that God was there, and he would watch over me.

When my wife and I started our family, we decided to raise our children Catholic. We took them to church each week and had them go through the same classes and teachings that we did growing up. We got active in the local church, but I still did not know about a real two-way relationship with a higher power.

Being a Catholic in Boston in the 1990's was an incredibly challenging time. The pervasive sexual abuse of children and the cover-up hit me extremely hard. It hit close to home. I know people who were abused, priests that did the

abusing, and the hurt that was brought to many people. Do I want to be involved with a religion that did this? Could this happen to us or our kids? As a result we stepped back from our active participation in the church. Also, my girls all chose to not be involved with what they say is a bunch of men telling women what they can do and cannot do – I don't blame them for leaving.

Looking back now, during this time I was moment to moment, not really thinking about a higher power, enjoying life, and expecting everything to fall in line just like a fairy tale. Things like money, expensive watches, social memberships, community prestige, and greed were the god of my understanding – so materialistic!

In 2010, our cherished family home caught on fire. Our house burned to the ground including all our possessions within it. It was a total loss. I was disoriented, afraid, lonely, and not sure how I would get through the next ten minutes of every day. We were homeless until we were finally able to get settled into a rental home. It was hard, and my family suffered. I lost faith in a god of love. Why would something like this happen to a good person and family? I was lost, angry, sad, lonely, anxious, scared, and broken.

I do not remember searching or asking my higher power for help. Looking back, I was lost in pain for at least five years of my life. I am not sure how I got through it.

I am happy to say – with CoDA I have found my higher power in a loving and caring god. I have stopped playing God or allowing other people or things in my life to be my god. I am now being led through counseling and a Twelve Step program every day. Some days are better than others. However, the CoDA wisdom and tools are providing me with the chance to know, probably for the first time in sixty years,

who I am, what I want, what I need, and how I can rely on a "power greater than myself" to show me sometimes small and sometimes bigger simple moments of Joy.

I am a CoDA work in progress for sure, committed to looking for Joy... hopefully, increasingly over time!

More to come... Peace.

by R.K.

DRAFT CSC 2024

## Honouring My Feelings

I have always felt uncomfortable with using the word “God.” As a child I went to a Church of England primary school where we sang hymns and prayed to a God I didn’t believe in. It felt weird and somehow unfaithful to me. Being a child of the 1990’s and already compliant, it didn’t occur to me to express my feelings to those around me. I have only identified those feelings looking at my past now that I’ve come to write this. Even if I had recognised how I felt back then, a sense of belonging and acceptance was more important to me than expressing or honouring my feelings.

I felt a block between me and the idea of a “God.” My parents were not religious, and I followed suit. My mum told me she wanted me to decide my own beliefs in my own time and on my own terms, a freedom I have been grateful for. As an adult, I have come to recognise and somewhat envy, the comfort and relief religion can bring. Although I have always been spiritual, I didn’t know how to develop that part of my being until I got to CoDA.

In CoDA I have heard other agnostics like me share their spiritual experiences outside of organised religion. It gave me hope that I too can experience the deep connection to a higher power and the spiritual awakenings people speak of. Connecting to other members of Twelve Step fellowships and exploring their ideas of “God” has opened my mind. Some of the ideas I have heard align with what I feel: “God” is truth, “God” is the energy in all things. I realised that my ideas of a higher power can evolve and can be whatever feels right to me. I know a new freedom.

I am still developing a connection to my higher power and for me that happens when I am spending time in nature, practicing mindfulness, and meditating. I can feel more connected to that power when I am connected to myself



which I can do through checking in with how I feel, journaling, and honouring my feelings. These days I even pray, not to a God as such, but to the universe, to that power that is much greater than me, the power I can surrender to and trust with my life.

I've realised that "God" does not have to be this all-powerful, sometimes punitive, male figure that I once pictured. I still choose to use the words "Higher Power", but I am becoming more comfortable with the word "God" and appreciate that it can have very different meanings for different people.

Emily C.

DRAFT CSC 2024

## My Ninth Step Work

Recently, I have been working the ninth step in CoDA which asks me to “make direct amends to such people wherever possible,” that is, people I had harmed. At that time, I was advised to consider whether I needed to make amends to God. As the CoDA Blue Book says, “If our behaviors have been inappropriate toward God in our past, it is God to whom we owe our first amends.”

Leading up to this step, I had conflicting feelings about the “God word” in the CoDA steps and literature. How could I understand this word? In my life, I had gone from being part of religious organizations where the word God was used all the time to later religious organizations where the word never showed up. Who was right? What did I really believe? What amends might I owe to “God”?

Through reflection, I’ve come to realize that many of my thoughts and much of my behavior in religious pursuits (whether the word God was used or not) has been based in codependency. None of the following helped me feel closer to my Higher Power:

- Believing I’m special because I’m part of a religious group,
- Claiming the right to tell other people “how it is” even when no one has asked,
- Doing things to gain favor with other people in my religious group, despite often feeling internally uncomfortable with the group’s requests,
- Putting on the cloak of “good religious/spiritual person” to cover up codependency patterns of low self-esteem.

As part of my ninth step, I've taken responsibility for the misuse of spiritual concepts in my life including "God." Part of my amends is continuing to open my mind to the spacious, open, truthful, and accepting qualities of my Higher Power today. Part of my amends is claiming the power of my own experience. As I live my daily life, I can test out spiritual ideas and trust that I will resonate with those that are life-giving and authentic for me. It's no longer all about what others believe, trying to fit in with a group, or living life out of fear. It's also no longer about believing I know better than others what a Higher Power might look like.

I am grateful that CoDA encourages me to find a Higher Power of my own understanding. The more I trust that process, the more I find what resonates for me whether the word "God" exactly fits that process or not. I experience more and more that I'm part of a vast interconnected whole and my heart helps me find my way day by day.

by S.D.

## Hearty Dose of Desperation

A preacher's kid and Army brat, I grew up with the dual authorities of the military and "God" looming over my every act. Neither felt loving or compassionate, and my family was moved around at the whims of both. "God" was male, judgmental, irrational, and distant. Even though, when I was little, I tried fervently to feel a connection to "him," I felt nothing except loneliness for being the only non-believer in my family and shame for somehow being inherently sinful and wrong.

I stopped going to church as soon as I turned eighteen, and although I tried attending twelve step groups in my twenties, the use of certain religious-sounding words and phrases was an obstacle I could not get past.

In my thirties, after being knocked around a bit more by life, in a bad relationship, and living in a foreign country, I tried CoDA. Some people in meetings still shared about a specifically religious "God," but a lot of people didn't. Some of the terminology in the literature and meeting format sounds religious to me. Yet somehow, probably due to the acceptance that probably only comes with age combined with a hearty dose of desperation, I have developed the ability to mostly tune it out.

There is so much help and good that comes from being in CoDA, I'm glad I've stuck it out. I still feel angry and resentful sometimes when people's shares veer too much toward religious testimonials. I also hope that someday, revised editions of the literature will use terminology – even just "higher power" – that is inclusive for every person, from every background. Until then, I will keep tuning out the "god talk," take what I want, and leave the rest.

by Jennifer S.

## The Road

At the beginning of my CoDA journey, I thought I wouldn't be able to participate in the program because I was an atheist. I didn't believe in anything or any higher power. How was I supposed to fit in? A woman shared with me instead of thinking of a higher power or god in the text, envision:

- this CoDA group as a whole, or
- think of my best self

I started to think of the CoDA group. When I needed to let go, I gave it to my "higher" power. For me, instead of god, it was something dear to me that I was reaching for – the collective wisdom of my brothers and sisters on their recovery road. And so, I continue on my own recovery path.

by Lauren T.

## A New Way

The first time I attended CoDA, approximately fourteen years ago, it was very difficult to understand the concept of Higher Power, since I certainly associated it with the God of the Catholic Church, who, like the hierarchy, accepts the sinner but not the sin. I felt rejected.

Because of my sexuality, I knew that I couldn't be in the church, so I moved away from it. It took me years to understand that the Higher Power, which the Second Step asks me to build, had nothing to do with the God that had been instilled in me in the Catholic religion.

In my search for a place to grow spiritually, without feeling rejected or judged, I was able to relate in a different way through other, less punishing religions, which did not judge me and accepted me as I was.

In CoDA I discovered a new way of relating to my Higher Power. I found new attributes, each of them loving: understanding, accepting, caring, non-judgmental, and forgiving. It was like finding myself in a true paradise, where everything flourishes because there is a favorable terrain.

That has represented CoDA in my life, a place where I have been able to grow without judgment, with unconditional acceptance, where I feel loved and protected by my Higher Power and by my CoDA fellows. Since I arrived, members told me that they were going to love me until I learned to do it for myself. A promise that has been fulfilled.

Today I can understand the difference between religion and spirituality. As I have heard here, "religion is for those who do not want to go to hell, but spirituality is for those who have already been there."

My CoDA message to the people who have had negative experiences in a church setting as I have, is one of hope. I

have found acceptance rather than judgment and safety rather than fear. I can believe in my own higher power without debate or confrontation.

Irene C.

DRAFT CSC 2024

## **Arlene's Personal Twelve Steps**

I have been sober for 55 years. I studied the twelve steps for years and changed the words so that I could understand and use the program to live sober.

When I came to CoDA, I realized that I was still doing things for my grown children that they needed to do for themselves or do without. I decided to re-work the CoDA twelve steps to help keep my sanity one day at a time. I could see and hear in CoDA meetings that people were changing themselves in CoDA.

1. I accept that I am powerless over others - that my life had become unmanageable.
2. I came to believe that CoDA could restore me to sanity.
3. I made a decision to turn my life over to CoDA as I understand CoDA.
4. I made a searching and fearless moral inventory of myself.
5. I admitted to myself and to another CoDA member the exact nature of my shortcomings.
6. I became wholly ready to use the CoDA tools to change these defenses in my character.
7. I attend CoDA meetings to see and hear how the changes can happen for me.
8. I made a list of all the persons I had harmed.
9. I made changes in my behavior that harmed myself and others.
10. I continue to take personal inventory and when I was right, learned to take credit for myself.



11. I sought by reading and listening to improve myself.

12. Having had an awakening of my spirit as the result of these steps, I try to carry the message of hope to other Co-dependents and practice positive principles in my life.

These changes helped me to see that I am not defective. The biggest change for me is knowing that I don't have to give something away (money, sex, etc.) to be loved.

I had been admitting I was wrong all my life even when I wasn't wrong. I learned to accept when I was right in CoDA.

I'm still growing, I still have slips in my behavior, and I still recover: One Day at a Time.

by Arlene J.

DRAFT CSC 2024

# Higher Power: Poetry and Prayers

## Introduction:

Attached is a selection of narrative poetry I wrote over the past few months, while learning to open up to my Higher Power. Religious trauma during my childhood left me with a lot of confused feelings and programming that blocked my connection with and trust in Higher Power. With the help of support groups, the CoDA Fellowship, therapy, guided meditation, research, and somatic practice, I surrendered to my Higher Power and asked for help. One of the hardest parts of it for me was finding a name to use for my Higher Power that wasn't all tangled up with my childhood programming. I am experiencing enormous levels of gratitude, joy, and abundance as a result. I hope that my words may be of service to others.

## Poetry and Prayers

### How do we get out of the darkness? Head for the light.

I am a rush of words, overflowing, scarcely heard. My heart hurts, lungs fill to burst, and no one sees or understands. When I listen, that's what comes up. In the quiet, I'm safe enough. Breathe it in and wail it out, in a whisper or a shout. Why did I turn down my own music? I can hardly hear it anymore.

When the words run out, I sit in silence and wonder what will happen next. To be alone, to give undivided attention to myself, opens the floodgates of both pain and potential. Relax and let the flood rise and fall. It will take time. It will hurt. What flows out with the hurt— into writing or painting or song— is the blooming of possibility.

I greet the morning with a notebook, turned toward the window, breathing in the glossy green of my houseplants. I nurture this garden within warm walls while the world outside freezes solid. When we live in darkness, light makes us hide.

We must be ready to emerge before we'll reach for the light and grow.

Higher Power, I feel your light.

As a child, I felt sunlight in the mossy forest, peace in the blending of our voices. I rest with you now there. I smell the sunbaked grass. You come to me in gentle waves of rest. You hold me in the warming rays.

I call you creator, and I call you love. I found you patiently waiting, when I cleared enough blockage to see inside. You are there when I open myself to each moment's experience. Surrender is the key.

You are the sun-warmed rock behind my back— steady, immovable support. You greet me at the water's edge and fold me in your arms. A whisper: "I am safe; I am safe. It has always been safe to be just as I am." I sink into this safety.

I am supported. I am held. I reach up and breathe in the morning light. I bend, palms to floor, and breathe out anxiety. I send it into the earth. Quietly, I ask for peace. I surrender to the flow of my life. I am Powered by creation; I am dancing water in the air.

Learning to channel my Higher Power requires the same skills as learning to interact with other humans. I need to quiet my mouth and my mind and be present. Breathe love, in and out, and listen. Something in my heart is rushing free that has been caged for a very long time.

You come to me in the backyard, when I turn my face up toward the sun. You warm my cold hands and remind me to breathe. I smile, and jump into life with the joy of a child who knows a parents' arms will always be waiting, safe and strong.

by Hilary P.

## **Finding a Practice of Letting Go that Isn't about God**

I struggle sometimes with CODA because I don't identify with the way that God is spoken about. I don't know what it means to turn things over to God. I am still trying to find my way in the program after a year, but I keep trying different meetings. My home meeting that I go to every week is a special topics meeting for people who are codependent, identify as women or non-binary, and have chronic illness or care for those who do. I feel very comfortable there. I also sometimes find it helpful to go to agnostic or Buddhist meetings because of the perspective of practicing letting go of my codependent patterns.

by Debra G.

DRAFT CSC

## Higher Power is Unnamable, and That's OK

When I was young, I tried to **force** serenity into my life by studying, searching, controlling, obsessing, and so on. Having gone through trauma at the age of eight, I desperately needed something, someone, to tell me things would be OK and that life was stable, understandable and secure. No matter how much I tried, I could not find what I was looking for, at least not through my own effort and will.

Nevertheless, I continued to try to find the answers. I would go to church as a young man by myself, looking for solace. I went to the library and looked up books on philosophy. This obsession eventually led me to a master's degree in religious studies. Yet, the more I searched and tried to force it, the further away the solution felt. I finally had to let go, surrender, and allow a new way.

One day I was reading a book on Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, trying to figure out why I was feeling so alone, desperate, and uninterested in living. The author mentioned CoDA and said that this program was their favorite. I respected this author so much that I decided to give it a chance. Eventually I found myself on the CoDA website and on a Sunday evening, attended my first online meeting. I immediately felt a sense of fellowship and realized that I wasn't the only one who felt the way I did, I was no longer "terminally unique", as the program says.

I have a new set of tools to understand why I was so relentless in my desperate need to figure it all out. CoDA helped me to see these obsessions as part of my Codependent Patterns. I realized that Higher Power isn't something that can be rationally understood, and that my need to understand Higher Power was yet another control

pattern. I learned that it is OK to let go and understand that I don't have to name, label, manipulate, control, or understand Higher Power in order for It to have a loving and profound influence in my life.

I don't have to understand exactly how electricity works, or love, or any of the intangible mysteries of life in order to experience them. I can appreciate the miraculous unfolding of life as it is. This complex and vital process has brought me into this world and continues to sustain me. I am grateful. I appreciate every breath, every blade of grass, every smile, and the laughter of a child. I rest easily now, knowing that I am a valuable part of this amazing whole. Every time I connect with others, experience life, and step out of my false sense of control, the more I directly see Higher Power in my life.

I can simply allow life to unfold exactly as it is, that is enough.

by Ben B.

## **A Spiritual Life Beyond What I Could Have Imagined**

As a kid I was spunky and bright. But after I was molested, I had to pretend to be fine or risk losing what little warmth my parents offered. My mother knew I'd been abused but chose to ignore it.

As an adult, I found some healing in therapy. But I had grown up in a family whose motto was "Don't rock the boat." Afraid to look too deeply into myself, I created codependent chaos for my husband and children.

I entered Twelve Step recovery because my behavior only magnified my desperation. I'd been trying to over think and manipulate my way into relief. I couldn't see how fighting fear increased its power, driven by deep shame.

In the beginning I didn't realize my inner child was guiding my recovery. She was afraid; she needed to feel unconditionally loved. I believe my inner children are very wise when it comes to spirituality. They don't care about doctrines, theology, or believing the "right" thing.

Because people in the program showed me so much love, my first Higher Power was Love. I couldn't not believe in it. As I worked Step Two, I gravitated toward the Divine Mother because of my early "mother wound."

Today my Higher Power is plural. I have yet to admit this in a CoDA meeting, but the permission to choose a God of my own understanding brought me a spiritual life far beyond my expectations. Today I'm an animist. Animism recognizes that we live in a deeply conscious relational world. Just as I'm a human relating to other humans, I'm cultivating

friendships with trees, plants, and land spirits. Our ancient ancestors were on to something!

Sometimes I pray to my Divine Mother. Sometimes my long-ago Ancestor Grandmother comforts me when I call. Fear has been a huge theme in my life, and I'm grateful to have spiritual teachers who understand the need for spiritual boundaries. I'm learning to trust my intuition, and I feel much safer in my body.

Before recovery, I'd given up on prayer. Because my overthinking turned prayer into fruitless argument, I felt no connection to a higher power. Now I can sit and light a candle with clear intention and ask for protection. My Divine Mother hears me. Surrendering to Love is always safe for me, even though life isn't always safe.

CoDA gives me tools to address patterns of shame and control, but it also frees me to pursue my unorthodox spiritual path. In turn, this enables me to develop my own recovery tools, like feeling safe in the beautiful woods near my house. "Progress, not perfection" helped me develop a meditation technique that truly calms me. As I relax into my own recovery, my inner child emerges, and she shines like the sun.

by Helen M.



## Resonance

Although I was raised Christian, I have always found the word God to hold a tinge of pain and loss. As a child, I attended Sunday school regularly. This was mostly because my mom enjoyed the peace and quiet after a Saturday night of heavy drinking. I didn't mind attending because it gave me entertainment and the company was safe and pleasant. I was a loner most of my youth and enjoyed that most of the time in Sunday school, I only had to listen to the stories and occasionally answer a question. When my mother passed when I was ten year old, I didn't understand the point of going anymore. How could God, a great and powerful being take the only parent I had in my life? How could this God abandon me and my siblings and then allow us to be separated into different households? How could this God allow the abuse we encountered from our home life continue into the new homes that we were told would be safe?

I did continue through most of the years following my mom's death with the wonder of God and it wasn't until my third year of high school that I let all my childhood teachings be erased from my beliefs. This was the year my boyfriend took his life.

I am forty-one years old today, five years without a drop of alcohol, and a recovering codependent. I do follow the twelve steps and the word God has startled and confused me every time. It is still a struggle and I usually convert it to the words Higher Power. I am a believer in universal power and the existence of something greater than myself. I still struggle with calling that existence God. I am not sure if this is a childhood trauma related issue that encouraged my altered belief system. The question, "Issues with the God word?" resonated with my life story and I decided to take the time and write about my life experience.

by Laticia M.

## CoDA Recovery Without a Traditional God

For me, life on this earth is full of experiences and events, whether joyful or painful, which challenge my human ability to explain. It is more comfortable and effective for me to simply allow that mystery to remain **un-labeled**, than to insert an intentional, pre-planning, omnipotent being as the cause of it all, or the solution to it all. But even though CoDA refers to “God” in various specific ways which do not resonate for me, I have found miraculous recovery in my nine years with the CoDA Program.

I have never personally experienced spiritual trauma or religious abuse. I just felt like the instructions to seek some “loving” God’s will for why crappy things happen, or God’s plan for what I should do about them, never made sense to me. For me, it never made sense that there was any particular plan at all. What feels true to me is that infinite factors, seen and unseen, lead to the occurrence of events. Now at this point, it’s my own responsibility to accept the reality of cause and effect in my life, actions, and reactions. The CoDA program helped me learn that my serenity depends on recognizing the things that I cannot change, building the courage to change the things I can, and practicing the wisdom to know the difference.

Early in my search for a Higher Power, I heard that “God” can mean “**G**ood **O**rdery **D**irection”. Eureka! That was an approach I could work with! Considering the questions in the green *Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions Workbook of Co-Dependents Anonymous*, I gradually began to feel the benefits of meditating on the goal of a good, orderly direction, and taking actions towards that direction.

As my life continues to present surprising challenges, I strive to practice my list of liberating actions to maintain my sanity and serenity:

- 1) **Realizing** when something in my life is unmanageable; the way I am doing things is making me crazy (basically CoDA Step 1).

- 2) **Learning** about healthier options for how to understand, behave, interact, and respond (from reading CoDA literature about boundaries, communication, recovery patterns, etc.).
- 3) **Understanding** that no matter what happened to me in the past, there are things that *I* am doing to contribute to my own chaotic life in the present (like CoDA Step One, Four, Five, and Ten).
- 4) **Facing** the fact that I cannot control other people, but I can make new decisions for myself (like CoDA Step One, Four, Five, and Ten).
- 5) **Deciding** that I want to feel better, and that the goal of a good, orderly direction can be greater than my automatic codependent impulses (like CoDA Step Two and Three).
- 6) **Gaining the courage** to try *one* healthier decision, take *one* healthier action, practice *one* healthier response...and then another, and keep on practicing (CoDA Step Six, Seven, and Eleven).
- 7) **Manifesting** my increasing recovery in my interactions with others, by making amends and sharing the hope of CoDA (CoDA Steps Eight, Nine, and Twelve).

I still flinch here and there at some of the assumptions about God in some of the CoDA literature, but I remember how CoDA concepts continue to help me every day. And I remember that I need to be accepting of others.

by Renee S.

## **Steps that contain the word God and reactions from CoDA members**

What were your impressions when you first read or heard the Steps containing the words God or “power greater than ourselves”? As one with non-traditional spiritual beliefs, how did you work those Steps?

### **Step Two**

*Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*

“I got to a place where I believed that I couldn’t solve my problems with relationships on my own and that the CoDA program and the power of the group could restore me to sanity. I acknowledged that I couldn’t solve my problems by myself. That hadn’t helped in the past. I had to try something new.”

by Carol

“I don’t believe there is a god or gods that can magically do the work for me. To me, it is not an other-worldly experience. I see the CoDA group as that power outside of myself.”

by Claire H.

“Eventually, I had to put my ego aside and acknowledge that I needed strengths beyond my own thought processes or my own awareness to heal.”

by Lynn B

“I have redefined my Higher Power very vaguely. I come from a tradition of extremely specific theology where we

have systemized and defined God and everything “He” wants. I can’t do that anymore. So now my HP is a combo of my **best self** which connects me to some **mystery** or **power** in the universe, which I don’t have to define. That is the power that helps me heal and recover.”

by Kay A.

“At first, this step suggested that somehow I was *less than*; that something was supposed to have power over me in order for me to become healthier. I now know that “power greater” is the collective wisdom of the fellowship for me. I apply all that I learn from recovery and the fellowship to my own life, and, over time, see for myself if it works.”

by D.B.

“This step was difficult for me. I first had to believe that my higher power wanted to restore me to sanity. I had to accept that the version I had in my head of “God” was not set in stone. I had to completely tear down the belief I had formed for forty years of who or what my higher power was, as well as who or what “God” was, and replace it with a new idea, a new belief. This was such an important step that I believe is regularly overlooked. Once I decided who my higher power was, like what his characteristics were, I had a much better foundation for our relationship. Without this step, the rest would have been extremely difficult.”

by Ashlea M.

“Nature has always restored my sanity, as it has a force that can easily provide a sense of wonder and relief.”

by Cristal G.

“The words “came to believe” in this step gave me permission to experiment with different higher powers. I didn’t have to do it one specific way or have it figured out yet, and that was a big help. I decided that my higher power’s job was to restore my sanity, period. I didn’t need a God that was busy with the whole universe. I just needed a concept that could help me. I tried a variety of concepts over a ten year period, before I settled on what I have now. And they all worked. As my recovery developed, my concept of my higher power developed. As my life got better I “came to believe” that this program, including the higher power thing, actually works.”

by Allison F.

“In Step Two I like to use ‘grocery lists’. First, I write a list of characteristics that I thought HP had, based on what I learned before recovery. Then the second, more important list: if I could have any HP I wanted right now, what qualities and characteristics would it have? I throw out the limitations of others’ opinions and try to feel what fits for me. I work the remainder of the steps with the HP of my choosing and understanding, keeping the list visible, often as a bookmark in my workbook. This process also allows my HP and/or my understanding of HP to change with every new set of steps, as needed.”

by Cat

## Step Three

*Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.*

“The care of God was never comforting for me. I was raised as an atheist and my views on God haven’t changed as I’ve gotten older. This step really made my stomach turn. Turning my will over to a God I didn’t even believe existed was repulsive.”

by Claire H.

“Turning my will and life over to a god brought up the concept of spirituality for me. I had to define for myself what it meant to be spiritual. I didn’t turn to my old religious upbringing for that definition. Instead, I defined it for myself and continue to define spirituality as my serious and sincere approach to life.”

by Lynn B.

“The one thing I need to be reminded of is that I’m not God. There is ‘something that is larger than myself’ that I can consult with to get the care and understanding that I need to progress in my program. Usually that ‘something larger than myself’ is the CoDA Fellowship or those in recovery who have gone before me.”

by Carol

“I have always been resistant to surrendering or submitting to God, because it was always my mother’s definition of ‘God’ and her telling me what He wanted. But I have found something I can surrender to and that is the laws of the universe. I have no trouble submitting to gravity. I respect

and surrender to gravity. In CoDA the exciting journey is to discover and submit to those immutable laws that govern recovery. I am very grateful for this realization that has helped me feel safe submitting and ‘turning my life over’.”

by Kay A.

“Because the word ‘God’ has often had negative connotations for me, I chose to view this step as a way to come to terms with reality - what was true and accurate about my relationships with myself and others. I began to see clearly how my codependent patterns were harming myself and others and decided to turn my learning over to the care of my fellow recovery friends.”

by D.B.

“This is about letting go. In this step, I accept that taking responsibility for everything I think I might be able to control is insane and I will never find peace this way. It is for my own mental health that I must relinquish so much to whatever may come.”

by Kristin

“Once I got past Step Two, this wasn’t so difficult for me. I already believed that my God had my best interests at heart. I already believed that the version of God I created to believe in wanted me to succeed and be happy. That being said, my higher power couldn’t magically make everything better and “fix” it for me. It meant learning that for me, this step is like using a GPS. It doesn’t drive the car for me. It doesn’t make me turn where it guides me to turn. This step means using my God as my GPS.”

by Ashlea M.



“I read Step Three as "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over." Having the power to turn my will over is everything for me. I turn it over and begin again.”

by Cristal G.

“The first thing I got from this Step was that “God” didn’t have to be a “Him” and that was helpful. But I wasn’t at all prepared to turn anything over to some hocus pocus higher power thing. It took me about two years to struggle through this step my first time through. Fortunately, some wise CoDA friends brought to my attention that this step just asks me to make a decision. For me it was a decision to work the rest of the steps. What kept me stuck was the part about turning things over to the “care” of a higher power. I couldn’t imagine that the God of my childhood cared about me. But another woman in recovery shared an image of higher power that I could relate to. She envisioned the child she used to be inside of her. And she envisioned herself inside an older wiser self yet to come. I considered that my higher self cared about me the same way that I cared about my inner child. Over time, in my codependency, I came to understand that I had been turning my will and life over to the care of human power. I realized that human guidance alone doesn’t work. Today I view Step Three as a decision to seek out the guidance of a power greater than human power and greater than my codependent patterns.”

by Allison F

## Step Five

*Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs.*

“I don’t admit my wrongs to God or a god. Without reservation, I acknowledge and accept my unhealthy traits to myself. I study them, meditate on them, and freely discuss them with my CoDA sponsor.”

by Leigh L.

“I reveal myself (defects and strengths) to my Higher Power. My Higher Power is the power of the universe with all its physical laws. I need to understand and admit where I have departed from those laws.”

by a Claire H.

“I probably don’t admit my wrongs to God. I admit them to myself. I admit them to my **best self**, I sometimes put them out there to the universe so I can receive back wisdom. And I admit them to another person from CoDA. This is satisfactory to me.”

by Kay A.

“Since I could not relate to “God” when I first came to recovery, I relied on the wisdom of the CoDA program and those trusted CoDA friends I got to know in meetings and through service. In admitting the exact nature of my wrongs, I am essentially admitting them first to myself. When I admit them to another human being, I am coming out of hiding and moving into a more loving place of ease and serenity. That process might feel like a God presence to some

people. To me, it feels like a natural way to care for each other - a nod to the principle of 'unity'."

by D.B.

"I am learning to differentiate between my intellectual critic and my enlightened self. I must admit the exact nature of my wrongs to both. I may be able to slide past my intellectual critic, but I cannot lie into the face of my enlightened self, and my inner child will know."

by Kristin L.

"My God lives inside me. My higher power is a part of me, part of mother nature, and is entwined into every being in existence. I admit my wrongs to my higher power, a trusted CoDA friend, and every living thing on this planet. That level of accountability changed things for me. I am accountable to the universe. And yet the universe loves me anyway. I find that empowering."

by Ashlea M.

"I read Step Five as "Admitted to ourselves and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs." Admitting them to myself and others helped me to see my mistakes outside of myself and become more aware. By becoming more aware and sharing them out loud with another, I was able to find the power within to heal and move forward."

by Cristal G.

"I just kind of skipped over the "God" part of this Step when I started. I still do. I think of the "nature of my wrongs" as being denial, low self-esteem, control, compliance, and avoidance - the five patterns of codependency. And I need

to be accountable for that. Initially in my program I was afraid to tell another person how bad I was. Then my first sponsor said she didn't care about all that, "It's not a confession of sins, I just want to know the nature of what you did, what was driving it." It's helpful for me to admit my mistakes to another person, to get an outside opinion, because I can't always see my part in the problem clearly. But it's most important for me to admit them to myself and to make room for change."

by Allison F.

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## Step Six

*Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*

“I don’t believe that some outside force or god removes my unhealthy behaviors. In this Step I merely have to ‘become entirely ready’ and to me that means I need to get to a place of acceptance with all those behaviors. I turn to members of the Fellowship who have taken this CoDA recovery path before me. I learn from them, and practice letting go of my codependent behaviors.”

by Lynn B.

“When I work Step Six, I acknowledge that from time to time I exhibit unhealthy codependent behaviors and I become ready to eliminate them from my life. I am ready to begin behaving and responding to life in a healthy manner.”

by Mark J.

“I feel this is part of the amazing wisdom of being **willing**. Willingness is a step in itself. It is brilliant. When I am present in a situation, all I have to do is be willing and a healing process begins. And then, I tell myself and the universe that I **am** entirely willing to have my defects removed.”

by Kay A.

“Having a “God remove all my defects of character” at first reinforced this idea that I wasn’t able to do this step any other way. I learned to lean on my new-found wisdom, my sponsor, and the CoDA fellowship to help me look at the character defects I discovered in Steps Four and Five. With

the help of others in recovery, and a trust in myself, I was able to be ready to let go of all of my defects as best I could.”

by D.B.

“This is about the willingness to let go of the survival tactics that protected me as a child. It is terrifying to trust that I don't need them, but I recognize that this is the only way.”

by Kristin L.

“This step has nothing to do with my view of God. This step does not say some magical being from far away comes and takes away all the bad things I do. This step says I become entirely ready. That's the action: becoming ready for the defects to be removed. Yes, it mentions God, but really this step is all about me. Being willing to let go of all those traits I held onto for so long to keep myself safe.”

by Ashlea M.

“I read Step Six as "I have become entirely ready to remove all these defects of character." By becoming more aware and sharing them out loud with another, I found the power within to heal and move forward.”

by Cristal G.

“It took me a long time to figure this one out. Being ‘entirely’ ready seemed like a tall order. And the idea that God would magically remove my character defects just didn't make sense. But it's one of the Steps, so I did it to the best of my

ability which was pretty minimal at first. At that time, I basically said, “Okay, I’m entirely ready for my codependency to be removed” and moved on from there. Over time I have come to understand this Step as preparation. In order to prepare to let go of my character “defenses,” I first need to recognize them as they show up. Secondly, I need to identify what I want to do instead, a recovery pattern. Then I need to find a way to practice those recovery behaviors when I recognize the codependence bubbling up again.”

by Allison F.

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## Step Seven

*Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.*

“Humility is what keeps me ‘right sized.’ When I look at myself as no better than or no less than anyone, I can clearly see that I am equal to others. Equality keeps me humble. My shortcomings become fewer.”

by a Mark J.

“I seek to eliminate my shortcomings by becoming honest with myself and others. I’m continually learning and growing. The longer I’m in program, the more honest I become with myself and others. I find that honesty and humility bring self-acceptance and self-forgiveness.”

by Claire H.

“I humbly ask my Higher Power. And whoever or whatever or wherever that entity is – I don’t really need to know, I just put it out there and by following the process I slowly realize recovery.”

Kay A.

“Because asking a “God” to remove my shortcomings was confusing, I instead humbly ask myself and a sponsor, co-sponsor, or trusted CoDA friend to help me work this step. With the help and guidance of other trusted persons in recovery, I could begin to choose and act in healthier ways. And when I found myself relying on old behaviors to manage situations in my life, I could call on them to help me find my way back to Step Six.”

by D.B.



“This step is making the commitment to try growing up again. This time, I have a new understanding of my needs. I am emotionally aware and available to process my shortcomings that get in the way of me growing up.”

by Kristin L.

“By the time I got to Step Seven, I was in love with God. Not the God from the Bible or the God from church. But the God I had created. The loving caring higher power that I found in Step Two. Being in love with him, having a good relationship with “God” made it easy to be humble and to ask him to help me. I had to define God for myself, then I could ask him for help.”

by Ashlea M.

“I read Step Seven as “I allow myself to remove my shortcomings.” By doing Steps Five and Six, I’m able to come to terms with my shortcomings. I forgive myself for my journey of pain and suffering, whether it be by choice or ignorance.”

by Cristal G.

“Although I don’t think God magically removes anything, I believe that the value of this Step for me is in the act of asking. Asking a higher power to remove my codependent patterns doesn’t relieve me of my responsibility. I tend to go to these patterns when I feel my buttons get pushed. The “deeply rooted and compulsive” nature of these behaviors should not be underestimated. When I realize “Oops, I did it again,” I remember that I still don’t have all the answers, I

am not “recovered” yet, and I still need the program. That realization is humbling. And there is freedom in humility, because if I don’t have the answers and I can’t do it alone. I am not responsible for knowing everything and doing everything by myself. I still have work to do, but I have enough recovery to know it’s worth the work. There have been times where I have found that the desire to turn to the “old habit” has been removed. Situations that used to always “push my buttons” just don’t anymore, so I know it’s possible.”

by Allison F.

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## Step Eleven

*Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood God, praying only for God's will for us and the power to carry that out.*

“I don't pray. I meditate. To me they are about the same thing. When I meditate, I open myself up to the energy of the universe. I think it's like having what others call a 'conscious contact with God'. Meditating enhances my spirituality.”

by Carol

“When I am spiritually connected to my source, I find I am in touch with myself. I feel like I physically hold an intention to carry out the principles of the CoDA program and live my best life.”

by Leigh

“I do not pray. In fact, I react negatively to people praying for this or that. I do not believe in a God that pulls strings for us, or for some people and not others. I do meditate; I get quiet. I read wisdom literature and CoDA literature. I listen to the wisdom of the universe and of my own heart as I work on being honest with myself.”

by Kay A.

“Praying for “God's will” made no sense, as I had no understanding of what that looked like for me. However, with time, Step Eleven taught me that if I practiced some form of prayer or meditation regularly, I would best be able to consistently build upon the skills and wisdom I gained so

far from all my recovery fellows. I would witness an improvement in my life if I continued to practice all that I had learned and stay in touch with the fellowship.”

by D.B.

“Meditation helps me slow down and be present. This brings a greater awareness and understanding of what my body is telling me I need. The quiet helps me listen, to turn the volume of my inner critic down so that I can hear my inner child.”

by Kristin L.

“Reading Step Eleven was like nails on a chalkboard. It just got under my skin and made me want to scream about how I could never put my will into the hands of that God. I thought I knew who and what God was. I had to wait until I worked Steps One through Ten until I realized the significance of this step. I use “My God” as my GPS and ask it consciously, intentionally, and regularly to guide me. Then, I let it guide me.”

by Ashlea M.

“I read Step Eleven as “I have taken steps to become aware of the things that keep me away from my higher self.” By continuing my work on the steps, I can repeat the process of becoming aware of the things that hold me back and remove these obstacles.”

by Cristal G.

“The wording of Step Eleven made prayer very clear-cut to me. For this Step all I am praying for is knowledge which I equate with guidance. I am not asking for a specific outcome. I am simply asking to be pointed in the right direction to get through whatever is happening in a healthy, loving way. And my prayer has changed over time. “God the Father” is not my higher power, so now, instead of “God’s will” I pray for knowledge of the right action in body, speech, and mind. But the goal is the same, to get out of the made-up stories in my head and make conscious contact with the reality all around me. I have come to understand “the power to carry that out” as the feeling that arises when I “know” the action that is right for me in that moment. I have confidence in my decision, without self-doubt or worry about what others will think.

Meditation was harder for me as the Step doesn’t say how to do it. After exploring different forms of meditation, I have gravitated to simple counting-the-breath meditation. For me, counting breaths is intentional and directed thinking. When any thoughts other than counting breaths drift in, I can recognize them as unintentional, automatic thoughts, let them go, and direct my mind back to my breath. As a result, in my daily life, it becomes easier for me to let go of my unintentional, automatic codependent thoughts, and direct my thoughts to recovery instead. For now, my goal is fifteen minutes a day of prayer and meditation. It’s not very deep but it is sustainable, and that is good enough for now.”

by Allison F.

# **General Comments on Steps and Non-Traditional Spiritual Practices**

## **How do I as a person with non-traditional beliefs work the steps that contain the word God?**

“This is hard for me. Having only been in CoDA for a short time, I am only on Step One. I can't speak to the other steps just yet, although reading them, I don't feel good with all the words.

I have rewritten all the references of the word “God” I have come across. I have tried HC for higher consciousness, the moon, the trees, spirit, my guide, and inner light; I am still working on finding the one that resonates. For me, this is a journey of discovery for what my equivalent to the word “God” is. I have many beliefs in how I find purpose and meaning beyond myself. I use words to describe my beliefs. I don't unmute (when in an online meeting) to join in on opening or closing prayers since my words are not in sync with others. I would like to get to that point where I feel strong enough in CoDA that I can use my own language and not care whether I'm judged for it.

In the steps, some of the language feels defeating and I don't fully agree with the wording. I have been bringing it up with my sponsor. As I work the steps, I am breaking down each step. To me the concept of God is believing in something greater than myself, which I do believe in, as I have described in my passage about “What the word God Means to Me”. I have choice and the ability to think for myself. I can see what lies in front of me, recognize the patterns and behaviors that may make me choose one thing over another. They are all intellectual rationales that I have learned over time. What comes to me, though, is not

something I control, and that is how I feel my spirit works. My intuition, my inner guidance, the light bulb that goes on as an inner knowing is the energy I carry within from my higher consciousness. Bringing both my intellect and this spirit together are the ways I will address the steps and I have yet to see how that will work.”

by Cosmos (cos/they)

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## **Journey to Sanity**

“I form a spiritual connection with my higher power through reading meditation books in the morning. I love starting my day with my CoDA In This Moment Daily Meditation Book and some other readings I was recommended. When I read these, I feel calm, peaceful, and close to my higher power. All of the books contain the word God in some of the daily readings. I still struggle relating to these passages. With time I have realized the word God depends on my understanding. I do not need to hold onto what I traditionally thought of God when I was young. My thoughts about my higher power depend on my point of view. These daily readings also become a reminder of how I am not alone and how my higher power is always by my side.

As I continue to work with my co-sponsor, we recently read Step Two. This step reminds me that however I define God is up to me. When I read this, I take a deep breath. I feel relieved to let go of the pressure I put on myself to believe in the traditional God I grew up with. Step Two also tells me that my relationship with my higher power will change over time, which comforts me. This means I do not need to rush into a certain type of relationship with my higher power; this journey is a process.

I pray through journaling. I use journaling as a way to identify my feelings and also talk to my higher power. Some days I am more comfortable with the word ‘God.’ Making sure I incorporate meditating and praying into my life has helped me in my journey to sanity.”

by Natalie C.



## The Details Were Still Fuzzy

“By the time I got to Step Eleven I had chosen to believe that a power greater than myself could restore my sanity, but the details were still fuzzy. I believed that my higher power’s “will” is for me to feel happy, joyous, and free. So, if I feel unhappy, miserable, and trapped, then I am off track. I then “pray” to nothing in particular:

“Please grant me knowledge of your will for me in this situation, and make it really clear so I don’t miss it, and the power to carry that out.”

Then things happen. For example, once I was torn between a job decision between Baptist Hospital or West Hospital. The codependent crazies were in full force telling me “I have to figure this out,” “I have to get this right.” And my ruminating over pros and cons was getting nowhere. I paused, took a breath, and prayed for knowledge of the job that would be right for me. In that moment I passed a billboard for West Hospital, which was actually my heart’s desire. However, that wasn’t a “rational” decision, and I was afraid to trust it. My point is, as a non-theist, I do not think God swoops in to plant billboards for me. What I think happens is this: when I realize that my thinking isn’t getting anywhere and I stop and pray for guidance, that opens space in my mind for other possibilities. Possibilities that were there all along, but that I couldn’t see through my codependent crazies.”

by Allison F.

## “Aha” Moment

When I first joined CoDA, I wasn't sure how I'd be able to work the steps where the word 'God' appeared so frequently. My experience with God was based in my family using religion as a tool to guilt and shame me. The word God only left me feeling bad about myself.

But little did I know a power greater than myself was working to help me understand that spirituality is not religion and 'God' can be anything I choose it to be. The very first CoDA meeting I attended had ten minutes of guided meditation followed by ten minutes of journaling. These meetings became sacred to me as I meditated and journaled every day. My heart and mind opened to new possibilities and a new understanding.

A member shared their 'aha' moment when they read a passage on page 22 of Co-Dependents Anonymous. Immediately I grabbed my book and turned to page 22: "...many of us can surrender more easily to our Higher Power and experience this power's heartfelt presence within us." That became my 'aha' moment too! I came to understand that my Higher Power is a presence that fills my heart with love, joy, and acceptance.

When I see the word God in the steps, it is immediately replaced by a loving heartfelt presence. This is my Higher Power. I connect with this loving heartfelt presence during meditation. My 'prayer' is journaling or just talking to this loving heartfelt presence as I would talk to a good friend.

CoDA really did help me build a bridge to my Higher Power that fills me with love, joy, and acceptance. My Higher Power is there for me whenever I need its heartfelt presence. It doesn't judge me or shame me. It loves me and guides me. And I wouldn't have understood spirituality or connected with my Higher Power without CoDA. I'm very grateful!

by Laura E.

## Prayer and Meditation

“I like to meditate for twenty minutes daily. It’s a habit I’ve established over the course of my recovery. I have a hard time keeping up with it on my own though. So, I looked for and found a group of recovering people who meditate on-line. Meditating with them helps me stay consistent with my practice.”

by Claire H.

“I don’t pray. I meditate. To me they are about the same thing. When I meditate, I open myself up to the energy of the universe. I think it’s like having what others call a ‘conscious contact with God’. Meditating enhances my spirituality.”

by Lynn B.

“When I hold my higher power in my mind’s eye I am spiritually connected to my source, I find I am in touch with myself. I feel like I physically hold an intention to carry out the principles of the CoDA program and live my best life.”

by Mark J.

## Conversations with HP

“A prayer seems rather simple since I began interpreting it as a conversation with HP. Occasionally, I ask for something, like a direction in which to proceed. Most of the time it’s more like processing things with HP holding space

for me. Other times it's my expression of gratitude for what I appreciated that day.

Meditation for me is another thing entirely. My HP doesn't talk to me in meditation, I get my answers through people and circumstances. I use meditation to connect to my best self and get grounded. For day-to-day things I prefer somatic meditation. It grounds me in my body. I use energy work meditation before accepting a Step Five from a CoDA member. Guided meditation works better for me than trying on my own. Thank goodness for apps!"

by Cat

"Prayer and mediation for me are two very different things. Prayer is speaking and meditation is listening. I haven't decided who I believe I am speaking to or listening to, I don't think that's important. I also don't believe there is a "right" or "wrong" way to do either. I just do what feels right, in the moment. Sometimes when I pray I yell, sometimes I cry, sometimes I laugh. As long as I am communicating with my higher power whatever that is, I am praying. It can be talking, writing, crying and even just thinking. Meditation is the same. Sometimes it comes through a song. Sometimes silence. Sometimes I'm outside walking, sometimes, I'm inside sitting. As long as I am consciously and intentionally communicating with my higher power, that's what matters."

by Ashlea M.

Praying is talking to my higher power and meditating is listening. I've also heard that, "if I pray for strength, God will give me opportunities to practice having strength." When I take the God word out, the act of asking primes my brain and makes me aware of opportunities to demonstrate strength. Seeing my strength reinforces that I am already strong.

I really like the long version of the Serenity Prayer; without "God", I use this:

May I have the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.

The courage to change the things I can, and

The wisdom to know the difference.

May I have patience with changes that take time,

Appreciation for all that I have,

Tolerance for others with different struggles, and

The strength to get up and try again one day at a time.

by Kristin L.

"I use phone apps for meditation. I use meditation apps for breathing, sleeping, and calming down. I also like to go on meditative walks. A big tool I have is looking up into the sky. This helps me to break my negative thinking."

by Cristal G.

"I have found it difficult to meditate regularly on my own. I meditate with a group of people who, for the most part, are in a Twelve Step program. The benefits of this group are many: including relaxation, self-care through mindfulness training, learning new skills and attitudes for daily living, and building a safe and supportive community for anyone wanting to learn how to meditate."

by D.B.

## Living in the Questions

I think when I ask myself questions, something gets activated within me. Sometimes I'll go to bed at night fixated on a problem. I'll ask myself a question about how I can make the best decision. How can I find the best wisdom for a decision I want to make?

Then overnight, my subconscious mind, my dreams, my higher power, the power of the universe, or maybe all of the above work together to help me find the answer, and to help me become empowered to take the next right action.

Sometimes, of course, it doesn't happen, and I remind myself to not ruminate. Why not move forward with the cards I've already been dealt on that particular day? I begin to focus on my work and what I need to be doing for myself in my own life, and in my own recovery.

When I begin to get overly obsessed with "fixing" my loved ones, I can lovingly hand them over to a higher power of their own understanding.

I believe in the power of questioning, the power of the universe, and the power of good thoughts. Maybe it's as simple as "Wishing someone well."

All I know is that when I start asking questions and becoming aware of potential answers, it feels like higher power is working in my life.

by Kay A.

## **Meditation: A Train of Thought**

CoDA literature defines “prayer and meditation” in Step Eleven to mean that “prayer” is talking to Higher Power and “meditation” is listening to Higher Power. I believe that defining “meditation” in such a manner redefines and simplifies a complex process.

Prior to joining my first Twelve Step program, I had dabbled with meditation but with no success. After being introduced to Step Eleven, I tried meditating again. Still no success. I studied and researched the process in an effort to learn what meditation was and how I could learn to practice it.

I came to the following conclusions:

1. Meditation is emptying my mind of all conscious thought and sitting with the empty space.
2. I was not able to learn how to be totally without thought. No matter how hard I tried, including how hard I didn't try, thoughts kept rising up to interfere with my attempt to clear my mind.
3. I did achieve some emptying of my mind, but thoughts would pop up and disturb me.
4. I learned that when a thought occurred, I could pretend that I was across the room from a toy railroad track. The train represented the thought. I could hook the train with a fly fishing line and let the train pull the line until the train reached the end of the room. The hook would come off the train (the thought) and I could reach a few moments of emptiness. Then, when the next thought (train) came along I could repeat the fly fishing exercise.

On the rare occasion that I achieve mindfulness, a miracle happens: I gain an inner peace that feels like everything

within my body comes to a standstill and I am focused on my heart. I am alone and at peace with myself. There is peace when I return to the world. It's not that my secular problems have been solved but that my view of my problems has become more peaceful and loving. A CoDA moment.

by Sam C.

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## Becoming Present

A close friend helped me to feel the peace and power of meditation. I become present. Instead of ignoring distractions, which is a form of resistance, I take a break from obsessively trying to solve and orchestrate. I feel relieved. All things can be solved later. This moment is entirely mine. I focus on the now: the breeze over my skin, the sound waves interacting with my eardrums, the gentle pressure of gravity where my body parts rest. This is about accepting that life will handle itself, one way or another, and relinquishing what I think is my "control" over it. When I have a physical injury, I must allow time of inaction for that injury to heal. Likewise, in my psychological aspect, meditation is a time of "inaction". In that mental and emotional space created by emptying the moment, I find surprising new insights occur. It can simply give my system a chance to rest and some time to heal from the continual over-stimulation of life.

by Renee S.

# Sponsor to Sponsor

## Learning to Live in the Question

I heard someone in a CoDA meeting once say, “recovery is about learning to live in the question.” Life is uncertain. “Are they telling me the truth?” “Am I making the right decision?” Recovery doesn’t give me a crystal ball, but it does give me tools to cope with anything that comes my way. And one of these tools is a relationship with a power greater than myself.

What does that have to do with sponsoring someone with non-traditional spiritual beliefs? My experience is that there isn’t much difference in sponsoring someone with traditional or non-traditional beliefs. No matter what spiritual beliefs we bring into the program, those beliefs alone haven’t changed my codependency.

Before I start with a prospective sponsee, I ask if they are ready to challenge everything they think they know about themselves, other people, and God. They say “yes” because they are willing to try anything.

I start at the beginning. I am powerless. I tried everything I could think of to make my relationships work and nothing worked. My best thinking just got me here. I need a power greater than that. Then I ask my sponsees, what would that be like? What characteristics would a higher power have to have to help you feel sane and whole? Together we explore what their concepts of God or a Higher Power are now. I give them the option of tossing out any that fuel the shame and fear and keeping only concepts that are supportive.

After admitting that we can’t control others, period, we explore the realization that the world actually spins on its

axis just fine without any help. There is something greater than I am and it works. All I have to do right now is be willing to entertain the idea that I might be able to connect with that. I remind them that they are not required to believe anything yet. Spiritual awakening comes as a **result** of the Steps; you don't have to have it to start.

As we go through the steps we continue to explore together how a higher power fits in. We continue to cultivate concepts that contribute to peace and freedom and discard concepts that don't. I share my experience, nudge them gently through the hard places, correct misunderstandings along the way, but I don't make specific recommendations. It's their recovery, not mine. As they become increasingly aware of their codependency and the harm it causes, they discover healthier, more loving choices. Life improves. The pervasive undercurrent of fear subsides as they experience recovery working. The Twelve Promises start coming true. And that's what living in the question feels like. That's what experiencing a higher power feels like. Confidence that the world will keep spinning without my help and that I will be okay even when things are not.

by Allison F.

## Sponsoring

No matter who I sponsor, I strive to learn the spiritual language my sponsee feels most comfortable using. To the best of my ability I respect and use that language while referring to his/her higher power. Although we may have different languages for our spiritual beliefs, I remind myself that those differences do not matter. First and foremost, we are equals in relationship to one another and have a common goal of healing from our codependent patterns.

by D.B.

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## On Sponsorship

“Although most sponsorship tools universally apply to any kind of sponsee, below are things I find to be particularly helpful in working with someone who doesn’t have a relationship with a HP, or has been through religious and/or spiritual abuse.

- *Writing “grocery lists”* of their original perception of HP, then of the HP the person would like to have.\*
- *Re-writing steps.* We look up together meanings and synonyms for some key words, especially in the first three steps. The sponsee gets to pick words that are more relatable to them. The words we review: admit, powerless, life, unmanageable, believe, power, greater, restore, sanity, decision, will, and understand. I prefer to try steps as written on the first attempt, but for some, changing at least a couple words is necessary to keep moving forward. If a sponsee has worked the steps before (in any program), I offer the re-write option.
- *Consistency.* In my observation, a most frequent reason for sponsees not having a Higher Power is a deep sense of abandonment by whatever their past perception of HP. Therefore my job as a sponsor is to be there for them. The more I show up and show I am true to my word, the more they hear themselves.
- *Open mind.* Everyone’s HP is different. It doesn’t have to be a god of religion, or a commonly accepted concept. For some it’s a multitude of gods of their understanding, each responsible for a different area of life. For others it’s nature. Yet for another it’s their life’s purpose. I like to ask questions so we may figure out together what resonates for that particular person.
- *Observation.* When a sponsee can’t begin to figure out what their HP is like, or whether they have one, I wait,

watch, and listen. I look for a spark in their eyes. I listen for passion in their voice. Whatever they are talking about in that moment is where their HP has touched them. Then we follow the breadcrumbs to see if we can get a glimpse of their HP or a bit of understanding of it. And if we lose the trail, I wait, watch, and listen. We get to do it all over again.”

by Cat

\*”In step Two I like to use ‘grocery lists’. First I write a list of characteristics that I thought HP had based on what I learned before recovery. Then the second, more important list: if I could have any HP I wanted right now, what qualities and characteristics would it have? I throw out limitations of other’s opinions and try to feel what fits for me. I work the remainder of the steps with that HP of my choosing and understanding, keeping the list visible (often as a bookmark in my workbook). This process also allows my HP and/or my understanding of HP to change with every new set of steps, as needed.” See page 86.

## It's About Acceptance

I am an agnostic who has sponsored people with traditional and non-traditional spiritual beliefs. To me, the process of sponsoring folks with non-traditional spiritual beliefs is not any different than sponsoring those with traditional beliefs. In both cases, we work through the Steps and Traditions, one at a time, in order, using CoDA literature. No matter what my sponsee's spiritual beliefs are, I do my best to listen, practice compassion, and provide space to explore and share.

To me, sponsoring is a fascinating and miraculous process. No matter where a sponsee is coming from spiritually, I get to witness a blossoming. What a beautiful thing! If sponsees come with their spirituality intact, whether their beliefs are traditional or non-traditional, I get to learn how they have come to those beliefs. With sponsees who are struggling with spirituality, I get to witness their process of emerging. Either way, I am graced with the opportunity to practice acceptance, tolerance, and kindness.

Throughout my own recovery, I have been fascinated by how humans grow their spirit. Typically, it takes nurturing, love, and time. When I'm working with a sponsee I encourage them to nurture and be gentle with themselves as they decide what their path to spirituality might look like. I accept that they may decide to not decide right away. My own journey took a long time. It took years for me to process, accept, and ultimately come to believe in a Higher Power of my own understanding. Why would I expect this process to be faster for anyone else? I have found that people come to their own spiritual life in their own way, that no two spiritual awakenings are alike, nor do any two spiritual awakenings take the same amount of time. My expectations or judgements play no part in someone else's journey.

When sponsoring, I do my best to remain open to all types of individual differences. I have found that opening my heart and accepting those with traditional, non-traditional, or emerging spiritual views have opened my eyes to the beauty of compassion and my understanding of unity and inclusivity within CoDA. To me, it's all about acceptance.

by Carol

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## ***The Preamble of Co-Dependents Anonymous***©

Co-Dependents Anonymous is a Fellowship of people whose common purpose is to develop healthy relationships. The only requirement for membership is a desire for healthy and loving relationships. We gather together to support and share with each other in a journey of self-discovery -- learning to love the self. Living the program allows each of us to become increasingly honest with ourselves about our personal histories and our own codependent behaviors.

We rely upon the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions for knowledge and wisdom. These are the principles of our program and guides to developing honest and fulfilling relationships with ourselves and others. In CoDA, we each learn to build a bridge to a Higher Power of our own understanding, and we allow others the same privilege.

This renewal process is a gift of healing for us. By actively working the program of Co-Dependents Anonymous, we can each realize a new joy, acceptance and serenity in our lives.

## ***The Welcome of Co-Dependents Anonymous©***

We welcome you to Co-Dependents Anonymous, a program of recovery from codependence, where each of us may share our experience, strength, and hope in our efforts to find freedom where there has been bondage and peace where there has been turmoil in our relationships with others and ourselves.

Most of us have been searching for ways to overcome the dilemmas of the conflicts in our relationships and our childhoods. Many of us were raised in families where addictions existed - some of us were not. In either case, we have found in each of our lives that codependence is a most deeply rooted compulsive behavior and that it is born out of our sometimes moderately, sometimes extremely dysfunctional families and other systems. We have each experienced in our own ways the painful trauma of the emptiness of our childhood and relationships throughout our lives.

We attempted to use others - our mates, friends, and even our children, as our sole source of identity, value and well being, and as a way of trying to restore within us the emotional losses from our childhoods. Our histories may include other powerful addictions which at times we have used to cope with our codependence.

We have all learned to survive life, but in CoDA we are learning to live life. Through applying the Twelve Steps and principles found in CoDA to our daily life and relationships both present and past - we can experience a new freedom from our self-defeating lifestyles. It is an individual growth process. Each of us is growing at our own pace and will continue to do so as we remain open to God's will for us on a daily basis. Our sharing is our way of identification and helps us to free the emotional bonds of our past and the compulsive control of our present.

No matter how traumatic your past or despairing your present may seem, there is hope for a new day in the program of Co-Dependents Anonymous. No longer do you need to rely on others as a power greater than yourself. May you instead find here a new strength within to be that which God intended - Precious and Free.

## ***The Twelve Steps of Co-Dependents Anonymous***©

1. We admitted we were powerless over others - 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 God.
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 God 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 God, praying only for knowledge of God's 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 other codependents, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

*The Twelve Steps are adapted and printed with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.*

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## ***The Twelve Traditions of Co-Dependents Anonymous®***

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon CoDA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority -- a loving Higher Power as expressed to our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for membership in CoDA is a desire for healthy and loving relationships.
4. Each group should remain autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or CoDA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose -- to carry its message to other codependents who still suffer.
6. A CoDA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the CoDA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim.
7. Every CoDA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Co-Dependents Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. CoDA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. CoDA has no opinion on outside issues; hence the CoDA 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 all other public forms of communication.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

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Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc*

## ***The Twelve Promises of Co-Dependents Anonymous***©

I can expect a miraculous change in my life by working the program of Co-Dependents Anonymous. As I make an honest effort to work the *Twelve Steps* and follow the *Twelve Traditions*...

1. I know a new sense of belonging. The feeling of emptiness and loneliness will disappear.
2. I am no longer controlled by my fears. I overcome my fears and act with courage, integrity and dignity.
3. I know a new freedom.
4. I release myself from worry, guilt, and regret about my past and present. I am aware enough not to repeat it.
5. I know a new love and acceptance of myself and others. I feel genuinely lovable, loving and loved.
6. I learn to see myself as equal to others. My new and renewed relationships are all with equal partners.
7. I am capable of developing and maintaining healthy and loving relationships. The need to control and manipulate others will disappear as I learn to trust those who are trustworthy.
8. I learn that it is possible to mend - to become more loving, intimate and supportive. I have the choice of communicating with my family in a way which is safe for me and respectful of them.
9. I acknowledge that I am a unique and precious creation.
10. I no longer need to rely solely on others to provide my sense of worth.
11. I trust the guidance I receive from my Higher Power and come to believe in my own capabilities.
12. I gradually experience serenity, strength, and spiritual growth in my daily life.