

Your Physical Nature



Part A - Discovery: What Have You Become?

INTRODUCTION

This week you explore your physical nature. In simple terms your physical nature may seem to be the same thing as your body. But things are not always simple. It is true that your body makes up a large part of your physical nature, but that nature extends well beyond your body to include your physical relation to the world outside of you. Your physical nature merges into a material connection with the physical and material world outside of your body. Your physical nature includes your materialism and your tendency to derive your identity and status and sense of belonging through the physical things you possess or want to possess.

In some respects (but not all) your physical nature is a polar opposite to your spiritual nature. Your physical nature involves the world as you perceive it through your physical senses (hearing, touching, seeing, smelling and tasting) and includes your own human bodies. Your spiritual nature includes the world beyond your physical senses and indeed beyond time and space, and includes your Higher Power which in these notes we often call God.

In this module we will cover the aspects of your physical nature that involve or relate to your body. Then we will explore some non-bodily aspects of your physical nature.

(A) In what ways does your physical nature extend beyond your body?

Your Human Body

Your body includes your brain, heart, liver, lungs, kidneys, genitals and other organs, plus all the complex chemistry that links all these physical parts and makes them tick. Your body includes your sexuality and your sexual attraction to the opposite sex (usually). Your attitudes to your body involve pride or shame (or something in between) about how you look, and how you use your body to achieve intimacy (or avoid it!) with others.

Your attitude to your body includes your past and present sexual experiences and how you feel about those experiences (good or bad), your sexual hopes, frustrations, fantasies and intentions. Finally, you have a place in this physical world through your physical body. In short, you can't live without it.

Your Body And Addiction

You started using and abusing substances and gambling because of problems effecting (firstly) your emotional nature and (later) your spiritual nature. These problems had many of their origins in your childhood and adolescence, but they are having their impact on *you* here-and-now. At some time in your past you began to achieve relief from these emotional and spiritual problems through a physical 'solution'. You began to use substances or indulge in an activity that had a pleasurable physical effect on you through your bodies.

It was the physical effect of these substances (including alcohol and other drugs, plus self-generated 'adrenalin') that first made them addictive. Your use became abuse. Through that use and abuse you became addicted. The 'solution' you found to your emotional and spiritual problems became a 'shortcut' to emotional peace (if not to spiritual peace). Therefore you began using the shortcut repeatedly despite ever-reducing success. Eventually you lost sight of the fact that there is a longer but more effective pathway to emotional and spiritual serenity.

As you became physically addicted, you continued to use substances or gamble *despite* the harmful physical effects on you. Through your physical senses or intellect, you became aware of that physical harm, but continued your addictive behaviour *anyway*. That's what addiction is! Your need for the physical pleasure had a greater and more immediate effect on you than your knowledge and awareness of the physical harm.

Your need was sometimes physical - when your bodies 'protested' the lack of substances that they had become dependent on. At other times your need was emotional or spiritual - when physical withdrawal was no longer a problem but you re-commenced using *anyway*. Relapse always followed abstinence. "We had regained good physical health many times, only to lose it by using again. Our track record shows that it is impossible for us to use successfully."

What started as a physical solution to your problems developed into a downhill disease effecting you mentally emotionally, physically and spiritually. "Mentally, we became obsessed with thoughts of using. Physically, we developed a compulsion to continue using, regardless of the consequences. Spiritually, we became totally self-centered in the course of our addiction."

"The tyrant alcohol wielded a double-edged sword over us: first we were smitten by an insane urge that condemned us to go on drinking, and then by an allergy of the body that insured that we would ultimately destroy ourselves in the process."

(B) Can you see the circumstances in your own life, where you felt spiritually or mentally 'down', but used a physical solution to get 'up'? What were they?

Your Body And Recovery

Your addictive disease started with a physical solution to your problems. Your recovery also begins with a physical solution: abstinence. Yet your recovery cannot stop there, if you are to be successful.

“Recovery begins when we start to apply the spiritual principles contained in the 12 Steps of NA [AA/GA]. We realise, however, that we cannot begin this process unless we stop using drugs. Total abstinence from all drugs (and gambling) is the only way we can begin to overcome our addiction. While abstinence is the beginning, our only hope for recovery is a profound emotional and spiritual change.”

All of this is fundamental Step 1 stuff. We keep coming back to it. All the intellectual knowledge *you* gain about your physical nature is useless unless you take, and continuously re-take, Step 1.

(C) Do you admit that you can no longer rely on a physical substance or activity as a solution to emotional and spiritual problems?

Your Body And Health

Let's now move on from Step 1 to other concerns about your body. You can have too little concern for your body, or too much. You can even have both too little and too much at one and the same time. For example, you can weight-train to develop your muscles while destroying your lungs with tobacco.

During your active addiction you were doing great physical harm to your body. You would have noticed intoxication fairly quickly, but some of the other effects may not show up for years. You may even have avoided tests and procedures that would have revealed the physical harm. This is part of the denial process. You may have involved yourselves in unhygienic practices, such as sharing dirty needles, simply because your physical craving for a 'hit' was so great.

One consequence of active addiction is that you stopped worrying too much about your physical health. Once you stop using, some of you go to the opposite extreme. You become obsessed with your physical health. You get very impatient with Program staff that don't seem to give your physical needs the urgent attention you believe you need. And your sudden need may be genuine.

As your bodies physically detox from all the poisons, they lose the pain-killing effect of these poisons. You began to physically *feel* your bodies again. For the first time in months or even years, you may become aware of the pain of injuries from accidents that you don't remember. You may become aware of liver pain, or the pain of a complaining pancreas. Or you may become aware your teeth need the urgent attention that you did not give them many months or years ago.

This leads to the issue of pain tolerance. Generally speaking, when you stop using and drinking, you have a low tolerance of physical pain, just as you have for emotional pain. You also have a low tolerance of physical discomfort caused by everyday illnesses such as colds and flu. You expect and demand full and complete medication, or full and complete rest. Your impatience and anger, and your frustration tolerance, are sorely tested when Bridge Program staff tell you to wait and bear it. Yet you usually did not allow such ailments to prevent you getting to the bottle shop before closing time, keeping your appointment with your dealer, or lingering at the club.

(D) How is your body coping with your addiction? What physical problems has your addiction caused?



And then there is physical withdrawal to consider. You must never forget that. If you do, you may need to go through it again.

(E) Would you be more tempted to risk going through physical withdrawal again if it hadn't been so bad last time?

And now that you are in recovery, there are another set of issues about your physical health that you need to consider. Some of you spend time in the gym in order to get healthy, which is fine. Other *addicts* do so in order to look good for other people to notice. You may be seeking to impress others. You may mislead others *and yourselves* into believing that you feel as good about yourselves on the inside as you look on the outside.

Then there are the clothes you wear to hide your body or display your body and your image. Some of you may wear a particular type of clothes to fit into an image that may be unhealthy for you. Others of you may start taking a justifiable pride in the clothes you wear, because those clothes truly reflect the way you feel.

These are not easy issues to address. They require a lot of the spiritual concept called self-honesty. You are deluding yourself, if you make yourself look physically good to convince yourself and others that you are doing fine, *but you are doing no other work on yourself*. You may also be deluding others, which can reinforce your self-delusion if they compliment you on how much physically better you look.

(F) If you go to the gym or exercise, do you do so in moderation and for the right reasons? Are you trying to impress others or get healthy? Do you wear particular clothes to display your total health as a whole person or to hide your lack of it?

Your Body And Sex

An essential part of your physical nature is your sexuality. You are meant to feel good during adult consensual sexual activity. Spiritually and emotionally your sexual activity should be within a loving and intimate relationship. Otherwise your sexual urges can lead to another form of obsessive and compulsive behaviour.

Some people with an addiction abandoned recovery in pursuit of sexual satisfaction. Others of you mistook recovery for the ability to satisfy yourself and others through your sexual attractiveness and performance. Some of you abandoned yourself to pornography and prostitutes to achieve in fantasy what in reality would be impure, impersonal, impractical, improper and impossible. What is at issue in all these areas is not sexuality as such, but a realistic balance in sexual relations and activity.

Your sexual beliefs and behaviour may have badly affected your relations with the opposite sex, or with a particular person who was your life partner or whom you wanted to be. Your sexual beliefs and practices may even have prevented you from forming meaningful relationships in the first place.

“We may find that our sexual beliefs and behaviour have caused problems in our relationships. We may have settled for sex when we really wanted love. We may have used sex to get something we wanted or believed that, by having sex, we could extract a commitment from an unwilling partner. We ask ourselves [in Step 4] if our sexual behaviour has been based in selfishness or in love. We may have used sex to fill the spiritual void we felt inside. Some of us felt shame as a result of our sexual practices. After years of compulsively acting on our fears and misguided beliefs about sex, we want to be at peace with our own sexuality.”

(G) Have you used your sexuality appropriately in the past? Do you intend to in the future?

Children: Sex, Guilt And Shame

Two very different problems can emerge for children in connection with their sexuality. These problems reveal themselves years later, when these children grow into adults, resort to addictive behaviour, and then try to recover from that behaviour. The first problem concerns sexual abuse of children by adults. The second problem concerns sexual exploration and experimentation by children with other children. Let's take these one at a time.

Many victims of childhood sexual abuse by an adult carry with them into their own adulthood terrible guilt that they were in some way responsible for that abuse. Sometimes the abuser is the only one (by the child's perception) that gives the child any attention at all. The child can soon confuse the adult's attention and behaviour as some sort of "love". This is especially true if the adult abuser encourages the child with phrases like "our little secret" or "our special love".

What happens for these children is that, as they grow beyond the time of the sexual abuse by adults, they look *back* on that experience with *their adult code of morality* they developed *after* the experience. They develop a sense they are morally bad people because of the activity they were involved in as children. They get this moral guilt even though they had no choice; the child victim takes into adulthood inappropriate guilt. They make 'sense' of their experience by accepting that they must have been morally bad at the time of the experience.

What helps this guilt and distorted moral code along is shame. If children already have *too much* shame at the time of the abuse, then this excessive shame is likely to lead them to believe they are morally guilty for the experience in which they were victims.

This brings us to the second problem, where children involve themselves in sexual experimentation and exploration with other children. Here the experimentation and exploration, in itself, can be quite innocent. Once again, the problem emerges later, when these children become adults and apply a subsequently acquired moral code to their innocent behaviour and they feel false guilt. Once again excessive shame helps this process along.

The solution to these problems involves more than just reading these notes. If these problems apply to you, talk to your Case Worker.

‘Self-forgiveness’ is a word that sometimes comes up at this point, but we need to be careful here. Self-forgiveness implies that people have something to forgive themselves for. Sometimes they do need to do this. We suggest, however, that being sexually assaulted as children or childhood sexual exploration are not times when you need to forgive yourself. You have done nothing wrong. You have nothing to forgive yourself for. The only thing wrong is your false guilt

(H) Do any of these comments apply to you? What are you going to do about it?



Sex As 'Feel Good' Dependency

Now that you are in recovery, there is another danger with sexual activity and with your sexuality. We touched on it earlier. It is another example of the wider issue of switching addictions or dependencies. During early recovery some of you may become sexually attracted to another person, who is sexually attracted to you. If this happens, then the resulting "bliss" can blind you to the reality that you haven't sufficiently recovered yet. Also if the other person is an addict as well, or otherwise spiritually and emotionally immature, then the dangers increase greatly.

In these situations you convince yourself that you have beaten your addiction as you go off into the sunset and under the sheets. Alas, a new day soon dawns when you demand from your beloved more than they can give. What they gave is no longer enough. Hopefully, the parallel with other addictions is obvious. Disillusion sets in. The blissful illusion that was hiding reality disappears, and stark reality confronts you once again.

(I) Have you ever used sex as an emotional 'feel good'? Are you tempted to do so now?

Your Body, And The Things You Can And Can't Change

Some of you may convince yourselves you are ugly, or that some aspect of your body or appearance makes you unattractive to others. If you don't feel good about yourself anyway, then you may hook this bad feeling onto some part of yourself that you can't change. That way you don't have to courageously change the things that you can. People with an addiction who do this may be condemning themselves to return at some point to active addiction.

Here again we see the fundamental importance of the Serenity Prayer. What you need to do is serenely accept what you can't change, and courageously change what you can. Don't be tempted to focus all your frustration on what you can't change, so you don't have the emotional energy or spiritual motivation to change what you can.

The point is many of you were not meant by God to have the same physiques as some so-called ideal, such as you see in magazines or on TV. It is not in your genes. As human beings you are more than your body. If, for example, you decline social situations with the opposite sex because you fear others will not be attracted to you, then what you need to recognise are the thought processes underneath this fear. You can change those thought patterns. Change requires effort and hard work. You can avoid that by focussing on the aspect of your physical nature you cannot change.

There is another twist we need to consider. Some of you may have made yourselves physically unattractive so you don't have to risk intimacy with others. You put on too much weight, take off too much weight or wear unattractive clothes so others will avoid you. You 'succeed' in the sense that others do avoid you. Then you complain that it is the prejudice or attitude of others that is wrong, rather than anything within yourself. Once again you have avoided changing what you can.

(J) Are you too focussed on your physical nature to the exclusion of your other natures?

Your Physical Nature



Part B - Recovery: What Are You Going To Do About It?

This is one module where much of what needs to be said concerning the action you need to take has already been said in Part A. In coming to terms with your physical nature we hope you also come to terms with your previous misconceptions about that nature and your previous self-destructive practices. What you need to watch out for, however, is the illusion that physical recovery, in the sense of getting physically healthier, is the only recovery you need.

As you begin to feel physically well, you need to recognise that physical well-being is not necessarily the same as emotional and spiritual well-being. You still have work to do in those areas. This connects with our statement that people's physical nature tends to extend beyond their bodies to their physical view of the world. The danger for you lies in seeking to obtain emotional fulfilment through physically obtaining and controlling objects and even people outside of yourselves.

You may remember our statement at the start of Part A that in some ways your physical nature is the polar opposite of our spiritual nature. What most of you need to do with your physical nature is, in effect, become less physical or more spiritual in your view of the material world around you. Most of you, in addition, were too materialistic and insufficiently spiritual. You sought contentment through acquiring physical assets. Yet, once you got them, you lost interest in them and went seeking other physical assets. The result is you were never satisfied. You continued to convince yourself you would be content, when you had what you want.

As you become more spiritual, you will tend to get your satisfaction and contentment in actually wanting what you already have. You take time to smell the roses in your own garden rather than want to possess the roses in someone else's.

We can summarise this as; material people will be content when they have what they want. spiritual people are content when they want what they have.

Fundamentally, addiction began for you as physical dependence. Later it became a physical, mental and spiritual disease. As you now deal with your physical dependence on substances and activities, you need to reduce your dependence on the physical things you don't yet have but want. Instead, you need to get your 'haves' and 'wants' into balance.

Let's quote Matthew: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (6:21)

To summarise:

- As your pursuit of drugs, alcohol and gambling became your central concern, then your *physical relationship* with drugs, alcohol and gambling seized you totally.
- As your pursuit of money and material possessions became your central concern, then your *physical relationship* with money and material possessions seized you totally.
- As your pursuit of sexual activity and a partner became your central concern, then your *physical relationship* with sex and the partner seized you totally.

In all these cases, as they apply to you, your heart was only in the physical things and your physical relationships with those things.