

Hand in Hand

Summer 1998 - VOLUME 7, NO. 2

A Publication of Recovering Couples Anonymous World Service Organization

Contact The RCA World Service Office

By Phone

(314) 830-2600

By Fax

(314) 830-2670

By E-Mail

RCAWSO@iname.com

Web Site

<http://www.recovering-couples.org>

Snail Mail

P.O. Box 11872, St. Louis, MO 63105

What's Happening At W.S.O.

by Fran D., secretary WSO Board of Trustees

The RCA board meeting was held in Los Angeles on April 18th and 19th. The board members present were Steve, Signe, Mike, Fran, Ron, Jennifer, Kenneth, Juneanne, Catherine, Kathleen and Judy. Guests were Scott and Nancy Lee.

WSO MANAGER'S REPORT

Judy and Bob F. are ironing out the details of working together on WSO projects. Judy has requested that her WSO hours be lessened by half after the 1998 convention. Thankfully, she currently receives volunteer help in the office as she needs it.

The following RCA mailings have been sent: . Hand in Hand with a letter and birthday envelopes to all RCA groups. . One hundred Information Packets. . Convention information. A mailing will also go out to all Group Contacts to update meeting information for a new roster. Bob F. is purchasing a non-profit mailing permit for RCA. All future bulk mailings will originate

from the Oakland, CA post office. Judy is researching postage meter companies since Pitney-Bowes, our current supplier, will double their rates next March. A Michigan RCA group sent WSO sample flyers they made for their group. Six new groups have registered and two groups have become inactive. There are now two meetings in Sweden and they've had an area RCA Convention. The cost of printing and mailing the Hand in Hand free to RCA members was discussed.

TREASURER'S REPORT

The 1997 and 1998 third quarter budgets were compared. The RCA big book reprint accounts for 100% of the most recent quarter's deficit. Convention income was 20% less than in the past and Seventh Tradition income continues to fall far short of the budgeted expectations. The treasurer will publish, alphabetically, actual group contributions in this Hand in Hand and include information about the Seventh Tradition. Groups not listed who believe they have contributed should contact the WSO. Once a year, after the convention, the treasurer will publish, in the Hand in Hand, annual contribution totals by group and a WSO income/expense sheet for the year. The total number of RCA groups not contributing will be reported at this time. The difficulty of raising enough money to continue WSO services was discussed. Next year, the RCA Twelve & Twelve and a new edition of the RCA big book will need to be printed which will entail a large, up-front expense. A convention questionnaire about RCA fund raising, including the cost of literature, was suggested. Some ideas for RCA fund raising included: . have a brainstorming session at the convention. . contact groups on a one-to-one basis, who are not contributing. . have board couples make a presentation at the convention sharing the struggle of trying to make WSO ends meet. . develop special targeted outreach programs.

VICE-CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Board discussed the results of a letter from the vice chair to all Regional Liaison Couples about cutting expenses. Recommendations received included:

Do board work by phone to cut down travel costs.

1. Ask each RCA group for an e-mail address to make contact easier and more cost effective.
2. Abolish Regional Liaison Couples for a Regional Intergroup with the Intergroups holding regional conventions.
3. Have a discussion of the Traditions at the convention.
4. Have the board consider doing a Fourth and Fifth Step to clear up issues from the past, perhaps at the convention.
5. Make a list of recommendations for next board to consider.
6. Create an Ombudsman Couple position to resolve issues with RCA couples.
7. Invite Regional Liaison Couples to board meetings in their area to generate more connection and interaction within the Fellowship.

The board discussed initiating one or more pilot Intergroups to see which model would work best. The vice-chair will put together, by the convention, a proposal of ideas supported by the

board to be discussed at a specific Regional Liaison Couple meeting. The WSO office will begin a master list of e-mail addresses for Group Contacts and Regional Liaison Couples. The vice-chair will work with the Convention Committee to have a "Roots of RCA" program to replace the "Founder's Address." The board, represented by Ron and Steve, will invite founding couples to be on a panel at the Minnesota convention. The board will ask the Convention Committee to schedule the "RCA Open Business Meeting" for Saturday at breakfast. Los Angeles was approved for the 2000 RCA Convention.

COMMUNICATIONS/WEB-SITE

The committee chair reported that there are two new members of the Web Site Committee and that the web master is looking into making the web site secure for credit card purchases.

RECOVERY

Authors of couple stories in the current RCA big book and future editions will be asked to write 100 words or less summaries so that an index of all stories may be developed for the web site. Some minor revisions to the Welcome Letter to new groups were approved. The committee chair plans to provide a nomination sheet for board service at the Minnesota convention.

LITERATURE

A new RCA literature order form is complete and the committee will review all current literature to determine if it might be condensed, combined or discontinued. The Vision 2000 Survey pamphlet will be printed by the convention, Safety Guideline and Model Contracts pamphlets are in progress and a subcommittee will be formed to develop an Issues Workbook. Selling RCA big books at local bookstores was discussed.

DIVERSITY

A "purpose statement" for this committee has been written. A Project Book to define a process of transition between boards is in development and a draft copy of the Diversity brochure was completed. The chairs identified four projects in progress: . RCA literature translations. . RCA brochure. . diversity presentation for annual conventions. . couple diversity outreach packet.

WHITE PAPER

An outline for a White Paper on outside speakers at RCA conventions was presented. The final draft will go out with this Hand in Hand. The purpose is to provide information for an open discussion at the 1998 Open Business Meeting so the board may be well informed about the group conscience when they vote on this issue. Any person, couple or RCA group that cannot come to the convention, but wants their opinion read at the Open Business Meeting, must have their written opinion to the WSO office by the Friday before the convention. During the discussion at the Open Business Meeting, speakers will be limited to two minutes per person, couple or group representative (including materials that are read). It is suggested that all participants prepare their presentations to fit this guideline.

The Chairman's Letter

by Steve A., chairperson WSO board of Trustees

Have I thanked you lately for giving me the honor of serving you? Well, thank you very much! This August, in Minneapolis, Signe and I will leave board service after nearly two years, so I want to share with you a bit of my own experience, thoughts and feelings.

When Signe and I stepped up to volunteer for board service at the Des Moines convention, we felt we were following the will of our Higher Power. We'd been in RCA for six years and served as meeting secretaries, treasurer, literature couple, speakers, and regional liaison couple. As part of our Third Step spiritual quest, we made a commitment to attend the RCA annual convention each year and had been to several before Des Moines.

Our main concern, that kept us from serving on the board, had been financial. Board members pay for their own travel expenses to attend board meetings four times each year and it took a leap of faith to make that commitment! But I would definitely do it again.

Some in our Fellowship cannot afford this expense. A goal of mine is to reduce the expense of board meetings so more couples here and abroad can participate in board service. Having said that I want to tell you that visiting RCA groups around the country has been very rewarding and has made the Fellowship real to me in ways I could only imagine before.

I personally want to thank the home groups in St. Louis, MO; St. Petersburg, FL; Seattle, WA; Newport, RI; Phoenix, AZ; and Santa Monica, CA for hosting board meetings and sharing their homes, families, experience, strength, hope, fun and delicious potluck dishes with us. Any time you are in a city with an open RCA meeting, remember, they are there for you - don't miss an opportunity to visit!

The mission of the RCA board and World Service Office is to do for the Fellowship what cannot be done at individual meetings... providing an office and staff to receive and respond to phone calls, letters and e-mail requesting information; developing, writing and providing literature to local RCA groups, including starter packets and a quarterly newsletter; keeping an updated record of meeting locations; providing the RCA web site; and a host of other benefits.

Some projects that we are currently working on include:

- Publishing a new edition of the RCA big book.
- Writing an RCA Twelve & Twelve .
- Writing many new pamphlets.
- Translating literature into languages other than English... we are expanding our Spanish language translations and an enthusiastic RCA Fellowship in Sweden is working on translations into Swedish.
- Maintaining our RCA web site on the internet is one of our most exciting jobs... thousands of couples have been able to read the steps, couples stories and other literature for the first time. More than a few meetings have started by finding us on the internet!

This vital work takes money, so one of our jobs on the board is fund raising. We ask all RCA groups to contribute what they can to support our outreach, establish and maintain meetings. We do all this work with one plus - that's right, one plus - paid staff position, our WSO office manager, Judy W. This year we've asked for help and Bob F. in Oakland has come aboard help out with special projects... he's the plus. Everything else, including editing this publication, is done by dedicated, talented, volunteer members of our Fellowship. If you feel interested in any of these areas and have been working the 12 Steps in RCA for at least a year, consider board service. Service is the lifeblood of our Fellowship. Signe and I have grown in our relationship through our board membership and by learning to work together in service to RCA. We have made friends around the country and feel we can be in touch with them just as we do with couples in our home group.

There is much to be done before this year's tenth anniversary convention in Minneapolis (7/31 - 8/2), so I will forget about 'retiring ' for a few more months!

Hope to see many of you at the convention to celebrate RCA and share our visions for the future.

Your trusted servant, Steve A.

A Hearty Welcome To New RCA Meetings

- Weavers RCA, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
- Bakersfield, CA
- New Orleans, LA
- La Mirada, California Home Meeting
- Eagan, MN Friday Night Meeting
- Rapid City, SD
- "Just Us Step Group" of Birch Run, MI
- The "Tandem Group" of Malmö, Sweden
- NE London & Essex RCA Group

Reflections, We Need Reflections !!!

by Fran

Have you and your partner ever written your own reflection? Maybe someone in your RCA group has shared one they wrote at your meeting. If so, or if you would like to write one, please do and then send all of the above to the World Service Office, at PO Box 11872, St. Louis, MO 63105. Or, e-mail WSO at RCAWSO@iname.com.

RCA is in the process of expanding our Reflections Booklet to a daily meditation book, like Alanon's One Day At A Time, and other similar books. We need your HELP!! We want reflections for each day of the year. So please, please forward any reflections you, or others you know, have written. We will compile them and begin the process of expanding our current booklet. Thanks, from the RCA WSO board of trustees.

Convention Update!

by Barry

Well here we are, a little less than three months from our tenth year as a Fellowship and getting ready to celebrate our eighth annual convention in Minneapolis (7/31, 8/1 & 8/2). Much work has already been done by your host committee but, to paraphrase Robert Frost, "there are many miles to go before we sleep." We are planning an exciting, growth-filled event with everyone in mind (for instance, we have a track of sessions geared to newcomers).

While many meetings, brainstorming sessions and thoughtful review of what's worked in the past have come together very nicely, we do need some help with the finishing touches. One area in which we need help is donations to the Silent Auction. Donation ideas: recovery books, framed art, homemade crafts, computer software, quilts, antiques, retreat weekends, bed & breakfast, vacation homes, tickets, business items or services (we are seeking the unusual, interesting & portable items). "Please ship to 'Celebrating Partnership '98' at 3850 Richfield Road, Minneapolis, MN 55410. You can also bring your item to the conference. Questions??? Please call Kate W. at (612) 922-5839. All proceeds will go to support WSO."

Another area we need some help in is presenters for workshops and panels. We have several openings on topics such as: Healthy Sexuality; Sharing Secrets (survivor issues, infidelity, deadly issues); Leaving our Baggage Behind; Parenting & Blended Families; Anger, Fair Fighting, Conflict Resolution; Keep it Simple (putting fun into your recovery); Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals and Straights Recovering Together. We're also looking for couples to share a panel discussion on "How Your Home Group Works." Call Rich W. (612-922-5839) by July 1 if you're interested in presenting. Save ten dollars by registering for the conference before the early bird registration price ends, June 15th. For a registration form, contact the RCA World Service Office at (314) 830-2600 or call the conference chair, Barry D. at (612) 928-8859.

We are very much looking forward to sharing our city with everyone!

Sweden's First RCA Convention, March 27-29, 1998

by Jan-Olof & Gunilla, Stockholm RCA Group, Sweden

After a series of miraculous God-directed happenings, we took part in Sweden's first RCA Convention. We attended our first RCA meeting while visiting Florida, but when we returned to Sweden, the only meeting in Stockholm was on Wednesday nights when Jan-Olof has other commitments. Then Jan-Olof went to another Fellowship's convention and ran into an old friend who said he felt incredible because he and his wife had started attending RCA meetings. Jan-Olof told him we had been to Florida and, by coincidence, met Glenn A. He and his partner took us to an RCA meeting and mentioned they knew a Swedish RCA couple, Hasse & Ninni, who we did not.

Then Jan-Olof's old friend said, "Guess who is sitting right behind you? Hasse & Ninni!" They had a leaflet about the RCA Convention with them that night! So we registered and jumped right in! When God speaks you have to listen, right??"

The RCA Convention was held at a beautiful old castle, built in 1833 north of Stockholm, where Hasse & Ninni warmly greeted us. After ten years in other Fellowships, we suddenly remembered what it was like to be a newcomer! After a 20 minutes chat, however, we felt right at home. Altogether, eight couples attended and most had been in other Fellowships for quite a few years. That, in itself, made us feel secure. There was a familiar order to the proceedings and the couples each had an ability to listen, patience, tolerance and respect — all things acquired over years in recovery. We felt that everyone was fully committed to their relationships, no matter what.

The convention program was very well planned with, we felt, exactly the right mix of meetings and time to get to know each other. We started with a delicious evening meal organized by Ann-Liz and Per. After that, a speakers meeting with the topics: How RCA in Sweden Started and Steps 1, 2, 3. Everyone welcomed us, we received the wooden newcomer chips and lots of hugs! By evening's end, it felt as if we had known everyone for weeks. This is what always happens when 12 Steppers get together, isn't it?

Saturday morning after breakfast, the meeting topic was The Newcomer with speakers Stefan & Anette. After lunch we discussed an exciting topic, Intimacy Versus Sex. We were amazed at the honesty and openness and learned many couples had similar problems. What a relief to find that out! When meeting time was running out, we still had two couples to go and we were last! I (Gunilla) began to feel anxious that I wouldn't get a chance to speak. But the meeting time was extended and I had my say. I didn't realize that I had that much "stuff" I wanted — and needed — to talk about!

After that, we all needed some fresh air so we went outside to play games on the castle grounds. Mats and Kenneth were game leaders and did a great job. We had a wonderful candelabra supper where everyone dressed up. The candles made us look 20 years younger so we felt beautiful all evening! The meeting topic that night, The Three Legs.

Sunday's only meeting was about Tradition Three and, interestingly, a lot also came up about jealousy. We then enjoyed a wonderful lunch ("How on earth had they managed all this?," we asked ourselves) and after that "countdown" where we got a big applause for three days in the RCA program!

We also read the hand-written greetings in the RCA blue book that we received as a gift from the First Florida Group. A warm feeling glowed in the whole group as we felt "hands across the water." The convention couples agreed we should write this article for Hand in Hand and make ourselves known to everyone in RCA. We also collected a good sum of hat moneys which, after deducting expenses, will be forwarded to the RCA World Service Organization. After thank you speeches, hugs (several times around) and a group photograph outside the castle, it was 4 p.m. and we parted ways.

It was a truly great and perfect weekend and we are full of admiration for the couples who organized all this and did it so well! The total cost for the whole weekend, including food (cooked by RCA members) and lodging was around \$60! Quite amazing, really!

We also got ourselves a sponsor couple — not bad going. We went home with a feeling of HOPE, JOY and GRATITUDE and are truly convinced that our relationship will only get better and better, if we work at it. And we will — after all, we are addicted to recovery!!!

RCA Treasurer's Report

by Kenneth K., treasurer WSO Board of Trustees

THIRD QUARTER 1998

At the end of the third quarter, expenses were exceeding income by \$1,755 or \$195/month. At this rate, RCA will end the year with a deficit of \$2,340. This would consume precious reserves, and in relative terms, this is equivalent to starting the next fiscal year with a 20% deficit. The cause for this trend could be due to income being below budget by about 3%, and below last year's third quarter actual income by about 6%. Correspondingly, expenses were above budget by 5% and above third quarter 1997 actual expenses by 16%.

The Seventh Tradition revenues continue to fall short of budget by about 20%, year to date. Average contribution per group is about \$16 per month. Another analysis shows that 40% of group contributions accounts for 81% of all revenues. This means that 60% of groups are contributing 20% of the revenue or \$5.00 each per month. There were 44 separate groups that have made Seventh Tradition contributions since the beginning of the current fiscal year. The board has built a budget for RCA based on an average contribution of about \$375 per year or \$31.25 per month per group. Contributions to the work of the World Service Organization are strictly voluntary. No contributions are too small and all are appreciated and needed regardless of size.

In the last issue of Hand in Hand a proposal was made to list, in this issue, the fiscal year contributions of every group to date. The board has chosen this vehicle to communicate with the membership and trust that this will create a better understanding between the board and the membership. Contributions from this source represents about 56% of all planned revenue. If you feel that our records don't match those of your group, please contact our World Service Office in St. Louis, MO at (314) 830-2600.

There continues to be a couple of ways to address this problem. Either we try to increase Seventh Tradition contributions or we have some additional special fund raiser events. Since the cost of the RCA big book and consulting expenses (office manager, etc.) account for 70% of our expenses, there does not appear to be a practical way to pare down either of these in a meaningful way.

The cost of publishing the big books (\$2,700) would account for almost 100 % of this deficit. The sales of Starter Packets were up 75% over last year and 23% over the budget forecast.

Year to Date 7/1/97 - 3/31/98 Seventh Tradition Revenues

- Ballard (Seattle) WA, Saturday RCA - \$20.00
- Beltsville, MD Saturday Night RCA - \$38.00
- Caring Couples of Des Moines, IA - \$684.20
- Caring Couples of Des Moines, IA/Tuesday - \$55.00
- Colorado Springs RCA - \$20.00
- Coram, New York RCA Group - \$33.00
- Crossroads Phoenix Thursday RCA - \$57.71
- Excelsior Minnesota Monday Night RCA - \$77.00
- Farmington Hills, MI - \$28.95
- First Connecticut RCA Group - \$15.00
- First Florida Group of RCA - \$426.25
- Houston Texas Sunday Night RCA - \$309.28
- Houston Wednesday Night RCA - \$232.34
- It Takes Two of St. Petersburg, FL - \$20.00
- La Morinda Sunday Night Step Meeting - \$87.15
- Las Vegas, Nevada RCA Group - \$31.80
- Livonia Michigan RCA - \$0.70
- Los Angeles, CA Sunday Home Meeting - \$247.00
- Los Angeles, CA 6 PM Share Meeting - \$202.85
- Madison, Wisconsin RCA - \$3.00
- Marin Sunday Book Study & Discussion Group - \$62.00
- Massachusetts/Rhode Island Sunday RCA - \$160.00
- Novi, Michigan RCA - \$15.00
- Oakland CA Sunday Night Meeting - \$300.00
- Oakland CA Friday Night - \$100.00
- "Our Time" RCA, Glen Ellyn, IL - \$ 40.00
- Pair-A-Normals Group of Flint, MI - \$25.00
- Palo Alto, CA Sunday RCA - \$239.00
- Philadelphia, PA Friday Night RCA - \$80.00
- Riverhead, New York Wednesday Night RCA - \$150.00
- Sacramento, California RCA - \$210.00
- San Diego Saturday RCA - \$140.00
- San Fernando Valley Sunday RCA Group - \$78.75
- Santa Cruz Friday Night RCA - \$307.15
- Seattle, Washington Sunday 5 PM RCA Meeting - \$186.25
- St. Louis, MO Sunday Evening RCA - \$400.00
- St. Louis, MO 4:30 PM RCA - \$51.00
- Stepping Together RCA of Rockville, MD - \$331.00
- Sunday United RCA of Indianola, IA - \$113.16
- Syracuse, NY Saturday Nite RCA Group - \$10.00
- The Monday Night Excelsior Group of RCA - \$80.00
- "Today, Tomorrow, Together," San Rafael - 30.00
- Tri-County Michigan RCA - \$85.00
- Tuesday Night Ravenna, Ohio RCA- \$55.00

OVERALL TOTAL - \$5,837.54

Seventh Tradition Donations 1/ 1/98 - 3/31/98 A Big RCA Thank You!

- Ballard (Seattle), WA Saturday RCA - \$10.00
- Caring Couples of Des Moines, Iowa - \$183.20
- Coram, New York RCA - \$33.00
- Farmington Hills, Michigan RCA - \$28.95
- First Florida Group of RCA - \$54.00
- Houston, Texas Sunday RCA - \$145.02
- Los Angeles Sunday Home RCA - \$175.00
- Los Angeles Share Meeting of RCA - \$128.00
- Madison, Wisconsin RCA - \$3.00
- Marin Sunday Book Study RCA (CA) - \$62.00
- Massachusetts / Rhode Island RCA - \$80.00
- Pair-A-Normals RCA of Flint, Michigan - \$25.00
- Riverhead, New York RCA - \$70.00
- Sacramento, California RCA - \$70.00
- San Diego, California Saturday RCA - \$50.00
- San Fernando Valley, California Sunday RCA - \$48.75
- Seattle, Washington Sunday RCA - \$46.25
- St. Louis, Missouri Sunday Evening RCA - \$200.00
- The Monday Night Excelsior, Minnesota RCA Group - \$57.00
- Tri-County Michigan RCA - \$30.00
- Tuesday Night Ravenna, Ohio RCA - \$15.00

In addition, 11 private donations from 9 individuals or couples were received since the last newsletter. Thank you.

Special Events

The following area special events were held since the last newsletter. All of these groups made a special donation to RCA WSO from those events. Des Moines, Iowa Holiday Silent Auction. North California Spring Retreat Los Angeles Tape Night

If you feel that the amount listed is incorrect for your group, or if your group is not listed and you feel it should be, please notify the office immediately and we will seek to correct the situation.

L.A. RCA Group Hosts Fund Raiser by Fran

This spring, the LA RCA Group hosted a potluck dinner, followed by a viewing of the John Bradshaw video in which RCA was featured. After the video, we had an RCA meeting and collected \$80 to contribute to WSO. Everyone had a grand time, it was a minimal amount of work for the host couple, Mike and Fran, and RCA can really use our support to continue our important program.

If you are interested in hosting a similar fund raiser, the video can be borrowed from the WSO office by calling Judy at (314)830-2600. Set a date and Just Do It!! We had a blast and the couples in our group truly benefited from the video as well as the Fellowship.

Monthly Themes

In the Vision 2000 survey, the Fellowship expressed a desire to receive information that would make meetings more interesting and inspiring as well as help in developing a perceived connection between local groups around the world. Out of these desires grew the idea for monthly themes. Local groups may decide to use these themes for meeting topics, meeting development aids and for fundraising. By doing so, they will become one of many groups worldwide focusing thought and energy on a single topic of value for recovering couples.

Here are the themes for the rest of the year:

- July - Humility
- August - Cooperation
- September - Forgiveness
- October - Awareness
- November - Gratitude
- December- Sharing Your Love

Humility

In Step Seven, we are instructed to “humbly ask God to remove our shortcomings.” How can a relationship be humble? In a state of humility?

Some say that humility is the opposite of pride: freedom from pride and arrogance. Yet, as we did our step work, we came to find out how low our sense of self-worth was and how low was our sense of the relationship’s worth. Probably, all that was holding things together was false pride. Another description of humility is that it is a condition of being willing and teachable. When we came wounded and beaten to RCA, we had, as individuals, tried our best to make the relationship right as we believed it should be. Most often, our individual efforts were focused on what we were trying to change in our partners. As we worked the steps, went to meetings and talked with our sponsor couple, an awareness began to emerge that we were each responsible for our own dysfunctional contribution to the relationship. As we looked at our own “stuff” and how it affected the relationship, we found there were things that we each needed to change. We also found ways we treated the relationship that we each needed to change.

Then the moment of willingness came. And then the moment of learning better behavior from the experience of others came. In that moment, our relationship was in a state of being humble. We knew our relationship for what it was—filled with many good things but also some things that really needed changing. We knew for the first time exactly who we were as a couple but also what we wanted our relationship to be. So now, rather than pride, we had a sense of confidence that we could learn what we needed to learn, change what needed to be changed and live a life filled with gifts of recovery that is part of what God intends for our lives together.

Cooperation

Many of the dysfunctional relationship characteristics we shared when we came to RCA showed how far from genuine cooperation we were. Being either totally enmeshed with or dependent on each other was perceived as being in love. In healthy relationships, we are comfortable with the reality that we may not always agree on everything. We know we may even have unresolvable differences. We may have different interests and enjoy different things as well as enjoy being together. We do this through loving cooperation.

Cooperation is how we can be together as a loving, functional couple while being two very different people. As our relationship gets stronger, we are apt to find ourselves experiencing our own uniqueness more than ever before. It is an odd paradox that as we give ourselves to our relationship, God and God's will for us, we become more true to ourselves and our true being. The commitment in relationship gives us the freedom to be who we really are.

All this requires that we are cooperative with each other. We are each other's best helper. We are each other's best friend and confidant. Because we know our partner better than any other human being, we have the best opportunity to help each other heal. While healing from old wounds and letting go of old ineffective belief systems, we work together making our relationship into that which God intends.

Before any pattern of ongoing cooperation can be established, we, as individuals, must learn and practice self-restraint. We know our partner so well that we know exactly when to go for the jugular. We must learn that baiting our partner or pushing their buttons is counter productive. It only weakens the relationship more. We must retrain ourselves to listen, to communicate appropriately and accept. With self-restraint and new healthy behaviors, true cooperation emerges. The result is intimacy beyond that which we have dreamed.

Forgiveness

Is there any force more powerful than true forgiveness? Forgiveness is the action of the choice called love. Forgiveness is the major activity of RCA's Step Nine. It is only through genuine forgiveness that we can start over, clean and fresh, in our relationships. We often blamed our partner and thought renewal would happen when our partner finally "saw the light;" or did things our way, but it would not.

With forgiveness being the action of love, it is necessary that it be all inclusive. When we withhold forgiveness, it always comes back to bite the holder, not the unforgiven. Some believe that unforgiven things are at the very core of spiritual, emotional and even physical illness. Resentments can make us sick.

Of all the amends that must be made in our RCA Step Nine, forgiveness is probably the most important. At the top of the list is our forgiveness of ourselves. When we can truly forgive ourselves, we can forgive others. By totally forgiving ourselves, our mate, and all others for all past mistakes, we start fresh. We start even more fresh than the day we met because the entire past is neutralized.

Having cleared the table of past issues, we can deal with life in the present moment. Without the past nagging us and with the future cleared of the wreckage of the past, we can live in the only time that counts — the present. The “Kingdom of God is at hand” means the Kingdom of God is here and now. When we are free from resentments we are living in Divine presence and are fully able to experience intimacy... the experience of being without past or future thoughts, being only in the experience of the moment with our partner.

The work of Steps Nine and Ten come before 11, the prayer and meditation step. Almost all world religions require that to experience God fully we must become as a “hollow reed” or emptied of all negativity, in a state of total forgiveness.