**Reclaiming Our Sexuality 02**

Some of the deepest and most confusing damage caused by incest is to our sexuality. As it says in the SIA First Step Inventory Workbook:

In human beings, love and sex are interlinked. Both are powerful needs, second only to basic survival (food, clothing and shelter). Any need is a commodity. Incest taught us…that our bodies were commodities as well. The love that comes from a power higher than ourselves abhors incest and the message that incest sends to the victim. When sexual abuse occurs, love is denied. Sexual abuse is an assault which injures the victim's ability to accept love or to trust love. We may have been so hardened by the abuse that we felt we could "trade" our bodies for basic needs, i.e. , through prostituting ourselves. Or we may have learned to open ourselves to abuse in order to get or keep a job, find a roommate or spouse or obtain some kind of intimacy. We may have tried to "buy" love with sex. But, we did not know what love was. We confused love with sex and vice versa….

Incest intensifies and prematurely evokes sexual interest and issues, confusing adult sexual issues with childlike needs and issues. We can think we want sex more than anything else, that it is so important and urgent a need that we would steal, cheat, prostitute ourselves or hurt others to get it. This is distorted thinking. We first need, as adults, to learn self-love and self-respect. Others cannot give us that. Healthy sexual needs are met in healthy and loving ways. But if we hurt so badly and have such painful unresolved needs from childhood that have been suffused with sexual meaning, we feel that we must resort to unnatural and dangerous means to get those needs met.

On the other hand, we may have driven our sexuality deep down inside us in an attempt to deny our sexual being. Such repression cannot undo the sexual intensity of the drive itself nor the heightened sexualization of one's needs and fears. If we have repressed our sexuality and tried to "kill it" in ourselves, we will create different needs, just as strong , just as fearful, and we will be vulnerable to resorting to getting those needs met in dangerous ways as well….

If we are acting out in desperate ways of any kind, we are responding to desperate needs. We need to inventory not only the behaviors but the feelings and needs driving those behaviors….Knowing what our greatest needs are and accepting the love and nurturance of our Higher Power can help us to get our needs met in the most healthy and satisfying ways….

In this meeting we seek to create a safe space for survivors to explore their desires, fantasies, arousal responses, attractions and revulsions, and to share more openly, honestly, and in many cases more graphically than they might at a regular SIA meeting. For instance, many survivors find that the same behaviors that were perpetrated against them may seem to be the very ones that arouse them as adults. Yet until now they may not have felt they had a safe place to speak about such desires. We hope to make this such a place. Sharing honestly in this way can help us to cast out the unwanted learned behaviors taught to us by our perpetrators and allow for more wholesome, empowering, and authentic desires. Throughout this process, we implore members to go at their own pace and to trust the guidance of their inner selves and their Higher Power.