

# Deviations along the Road to Recovery

*From the original transcript of a workshop given at the first International GA Convention in the UK, in London in June 1985. Originally led by Iain Brown, MBE, Hon. Psychologist, General Services Board of GA, Senior Lecturer at Glasgow University and Chairman of the European Society for the Study of Gambling. He presented the workshop jointly with Tommy M.  
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This booklet is divided into four sections:

**Section 1: What is addiction?**

**Section 2: What is addiction for the gambler?**

**Section 3: What is addiction for the partner?**

**Section 4: What are some of the solutions?**

**Section 1: What is addiction?**

### **Some Characteristic Features of Compulsive Gambling and other Addictions.**

#### **Disregard of Adverse Consequences**

An addiction can be described as the continual choosing of short-term pleasure or short-term relief at the expense of long-term misery. The decision to gamble again, to relieve pressure to get that money *now* and be damned to the likelihood that more money will almost certainly be lost and have to be found later.

Thousands of little decisions disregarding adverse consequences like that, mount up to diminished freedom to make any different choice next time and eventually to the loss of wife, family, job, health, and peace of mind for the sake of short-term pleasure, or short-term relief.

### **Neglect of Responsibilities**

It is well-known that being engrossed in an addiction commonly leads to the most astonishing neglect of responsibilities in people who had formerly been among the most responsible. For example, the father of a twelve year old boy, who will leave the son whom he loves, crying and pleading at the door, telling him he is only going down the road for a packet of cigarettes, and then, just “pops in to the betting shop for one race,” but, forgetting him, and leaving him in lonely misery and fear for hours on end. Most people would think these addicts were cruel to the point of evil and yet they love those whom they hurt just the

same as other people do: it is just that the gambling urge is all-powerful.

## **Surrender of Values**

The need to keep up supplies, to find money with which to gamble, leads the addicted person into increasingly desperate situations, and then to desperate actions. The gambler begins by plundering his own savings and then those of his family, progressing to elaborate lies and deception to cover it up, stealing from those around him, moving on inevitably to more elaborate acts of fraud or to embezzlement on a larger scale, and in some instances finally into violent crime. He begins valuing honesty and detesting thieves, like most people. He certainly never dreamed when he started gambling heavily that one day he would find himself facing serious criminal charges. Bit by bit he has surrendered his moral and social values and the good in himself, as his addiction progresses and makes him more and more desperate and unscrupulous.

## **Increasing Tolerance**

More and more gambling is needed to achieve the same degree of short-term pleasure. The gambler who used to bet in tens of pounds now finds that hundreds of pounds are not enough to make him come alive.

## **Reinstatement**

Another curious feature of addiction is that long after the addict last gambled, drank, ate to excess, or whatever, if he has perhaps just one bet or one cigarette, then within weeks or even days he is right back to the same old gambling, or the same rate of consumption that he had when he was at the height of his troubles all those years before. The old pattern of behaviour has been reinstated.

## **The Most Important Thing in Life**

For the addicted person the central action of their addiction becomes more important than anything

else in their lives, more important than eating, sleeping or sexual satisfaction. All of life revolves around the addiction. The gambler will go without meals to chase his losses without a break and not notice that he hasn't slept for days when he feels he is on a winning streak. He will take the last pound out of his daughter's purse to make sure he gets a bet, knowing that she needs the money for a special event tomorrow and that she will know who has taken it. Until he has secured his supply nothing else matters.

So, the effect of compulsive gambling or other addictive activity will **Dominate Thinking, Feeling and Behaviour.**

### **Dominate Thinking**

Addicted people cannot think straight about things connected with their addiction. For example, a man used every morning to say to himself "Just for today I shall not gamble." This worked for quite a while. But gradually the words took on a new

meaning and each morning as he said it to himself, he thought, “Just for *today* I shall not gamble, but that does not say anything about tomorrow or the tomorrow after that.” Then there came a difficult morning when, in order to get himself not to gamble for that day, he had to begin to promise himself that, “Just for *today* I shall not gamble, but *some day* I will gamble again”. He managed very well in this way until another morning he couldn’t convince himself that he ever really *would* gamble, because he had been promising himself it for so long but had never made good his promise. So, to stop himself gambling again he really had to redeem his promise to himself that he would gamble again!

## **Dominate Feeling**

Addicted people’s feelings are determined by whether they can indulge in their favourite action again or not. Maybe a woman who has been gloomy and irritable for weeks appears suddenly cheerful and good-tempered and everyone thinks

that she is at last beginning to *turn the corner*. But days later, it turns out that she went straight away from the GA meeting where she had seemed so good-humoured and gambled again after weeks of abstinence. The reason for her good mood had been that she had at last made up her mind that she was going to gamble again, and she was not going to tell the meeting the real reason she was feeling so good, in case they tried to stop her. Whether she was going to, or not going to indulge in her favourite activity, dominated and determined her feelings.

## **Dominate Behaviour**

What a person does, or does not do, is often determined by their addiction. So, for example, a man will park on a double yellow line outside a betting shop and get a ticket day after day, because parking round the corner would interfere with his gambling. Or a woman will not visit her ailing mother, because there is no betting shop near her mother's home.

## **Section 2: What is addiction for the gambler?**

### **Some Hidden Advantages of Addictions.**

Even the most destructive of addictions have some hidden advantages for the addict. Most addictions help provide comfort by:

#### **Simplifying Decisions**

Having one, single most important thing in one's life, actually makes decision-making easier. Every situation has a *gambling angle* (i.e. is good for more money, or a chance to get away to gamble, or provides a way of dodging creditors or of putting up a more convincing story). So instead of having a complicated set of conflicting aims and interests to sort out and provide for as he goes along, the addict's decisions are often made easier for him. But when he stops, the opposite happens. Decisions suddenly become much more complicated without this single overriding factor.

They take much longer and he is much more often aware that they could be, or are, mistaken or miscalculated with respect to some important conflicting aim or value.

### **Coarsening or Hiding Feelings**

One's awareness of the finer differences between feelings are lessened in the middle of a gambling spree. Only the really strong, maybe brutal, feelings get through, so only they count. All other lesser, finer, gentler or more complex feelings don't count beside them. So eventually only the coarser feelings survive, perhaps at best, only a crude sentimentality. This has several long-term disadvantages, but for a while it can be a great advantage. It means that, in contrast to the feelings associated with gambling, you don't feel anything much even of your own feelings and certainly not anything of those of others. You can safely trample all over them and not even be aware of it, certainly without feeling any pain for them or guilt.

## **Maintaining Distance**

Being totally absorbed in an addiction and in all the problems which it generates in your life, has the effect of making sure that you have little or no time for close relationships. You cannot spend very much time with anyone, not with your wife or your children, nor with any close friends, because you are running around trying to juggle a whole empire of debts, or are preoccupied with studies of form, or of systems. This is very convenient if you fear real relationships; if allowing yourself to love someone is like giving hostages to fortune (i.e. placing oneself in a position in which misfortune may strike through the loss of what one values most); if allowing someone to love you is like being caught in a net; if you dare not let anyone get behind your smoothly presented false front of self-sufficiency or cheerful goodwill, into your painful mean minded, resentful inner self, or into your lonely and guilty isolation. A good going addiction protects you from ever having to face up to any of that.

## **Providing Ways of Threatening, Rebelling, Revenging**

Once the addiction is well established and recognised by others and the loved ones are made suitably anxious and upset by it, it becomes a weapon. Every quarrel can end in a bout of gambling or drinking, so naturally for a while the family seek to avoid quarrels: to the great advantage of the gambler or drinker. Every time the behaviour of a bullying or dominating partner becomes too much to bear, the means of rebellions (and temporary escape) lie at hand. Every time the gambler feels like punishing his family, these short-term triumphs of self-assertion, or of emotional blackmail, punishment or rebellion, are all really at his own long-term expense, as he invites the addiction to increase its power over him and digs himself deeper and deeper in.

## **Giving Meaning to Life**

Life seems empty and meaningless and there is no point to it. You feel that you are not in any way interesting to other people, because you are just indistinguishable from a million others who lead boring, uninteresting and pointless lives. A good addiction, with a few painful but certainly dramatic scenes can give plenty of meaning to life in a perverse way. Even long after the addiction is over, the fact that you have had it can still be the one central, most meaningful personal experience of your life.

Of course, no one is suggesting that any of these hidden advantages are the *real reason* anyone drinks, gambles, takes tranquillisers or drugs, drinks coffee, etc., etc., in an addictive way. The hidden advantages are merely a spin-off from the main action, small, incidental, opportunistic gains that are not important while the addiction is in full process. After the addiction has been overcome these minor, hidden, secondary gains often fall

away unnoticed, but, if they do not, then and only then, do they assume any importance in blocking the progress of recovery.

## **The Effect of Giving Up**

So, giving up the addiction can mean giving up the hidden advantages too, making life more complicated, and decisions more difficult, forcing us to attend to feelings we have not been aware of for a long time. Taking away the excuses we once had, to avoid other people getting close to us and taking away some of the meaning of our lives. Giving up also means beginning a new life which is the opposite of the grabbing of short-term pleasure and relief which went before. Instead, now we endure short-term misery for the sake of long-term happiness and, as time goes by, it begins to pay off more and more.

But, above all, giving up means creating a huge void, an enormous *gambling shaped gap*. What do we do with all the hours we used to spend

gambling, or thinking about gambling, or sorting out the bad effects of gambling? Life is suddenly relatively empty. No wonder that when people give up an addiction, be it drinking or smoking, drugs or gambling, they quite often experience it at first as a loss or kind of bereavement.

There is a story in the Bible about the casting out of a devil and about how, in a very short time, the empty space was filled by *seven* devils. What often happens is that the *gambling shaped gap* is filled by some new activity, which quickly becomes just as completely dominating as the addiction that it replaces. Within a month, the gambler who used to drink only moderately, has developed a problem with alcohol, or a drinker has become a very heavy gambler, or both have vastly increased their consumption of cigarettes, or of tea and coffee. Sometimes the *gambling shaped gap* is filled with work, so that the gambler is totally absorbed in two or three part-time jobs in addition to his regular work. The recovering addict has developed a new *cross addiction*.

## **Addictive Personality or Addictive Way of Life?**

Often when this cross addiction happens, people around shake their heads sadly and talk about an addictive personality or a *compulsive personality*. Psychologists disagree about whether there is, or there is not such a thing. I would like to suggest that on balance, it is likely that there is *not* an addictive or compulsive personality, because this would imply that it would be something that would be very difficult, and perhaps impossible, to change.

Most people would agree that when someone gives up a gambling addiction, they often dive headlong into, and get totally involved in, the next thing they take up. It is sometimes pointed out that since so much addiction seems to involve lying, cheating, deceiving, and callous or even criminal behaviour, then perhaps the two main features of the *addictive personality* are this total compulsive involvement and this tendency to behave in a self-

centred, callous, and generally immoral way. People with this personality are believed to have always been like that and will always continue to be. I don't believe it! There are compulsive people and there are some generally rather immoral people, but they are not usually the same people, who are both compulsive *and* immoral, and they are not necessarily (or even usually) addicted to anything.

I believe that the *compulsive personality* is the personality that results from being forced to live through the experience of an addiction, rather than the result of permanent features that existed before the addiction.

As people develop a really powerful addiction, they become more and more enslaved to their activity. It makes them more and more desperate, so that they say and do things that, before they became addicted, they would never have said. The gambler is driven on to more and more risky and elaborate lying, to stealing from those closer to

him, and perhaps from those more defenceless and needy, committing meaner or more desperate criminal acts.

The ordinary, *non addicted* person tends to have several (at least two or three) different areas of importance or focus of concern in his life (e.g. his work, his family, his friends), not one of which totally dominates and overrules all the rest. But, by contrast, as people develop a powerful addiction, their whole life comes to be dominated by one particular activity, as we have seen. This singleness of mind, this *monomania* that they have developed, is not a personality characteristic (it was never there in the first place), but a way of life with a single, concentrated focus, a *monoculture* or a *motivation monopoly*, which their addiction experience has inevitably forced them to acquire.

So, what we see is not an addictive personality. It is a way of life which is the *learned consequence* of an addictive experience, and this means that it *can* be changed, although for most it is a long and

difficult process. Individual personality characteristics may, however, make it more difficult. The recovering addict has to learn again to live with different areas in his life having equal or similar levels of importance, such as work, home and leisure. Until this is done the dangers remain high, not just of a return to the old addiction, but also of the growth of one of several new addictions. It is these *new growth* or *replacement* addictions that are the *Deviations Along the Road to Recovery*.

## **Some Deviations Along the Road to Recovery.**

### **1. Workaholism**

For gamblers this is a subtly attractive cross addiction or deviation along the road to recovery. Workaholism is a righteous kind of addiction. In working to excess, gamblers are seen to restore the family fortunes and make amends. So other people tend to accept it and approve of it even the partners and families of the workaholics themselves.

But, when working becomes addictive too, it maintains the worker's isolation and distance from family and loved ones. Whereas before he avoided relating meaningfully to them by gambling, now he easily manages to do the same thing with a lot less hassle and some people even commend him for it! He can avoid social occasions and go on hiding his lack of social skills and escape just as before, and he still has another single, monoculture focus of his life, which helps simplify decisions and leaves him safely cocooned in a narrow, restricted, little life space, confined to his impregnable fortress of virtue ("see all the hours I work on in misery for you"), and such a feeling of hair shirt misery that he feels he has more than earned the right to have a little flutter again.

## **2. Alcoholism**

Increased drinking when a person stops gambling is an obvious cross addiction. Sometimes the transition from gambling to alcohol happens dramatically within a fortnight. More common

than a straight swap of one addiction for another, are some classic interactions between drinking and gambling. The two I have found to be most common are, first, where drinking is used as the gateway to gambling, and, second, where one is used as a decoy to draw the enemy's attention away from the other.

Where drinking is used as a gateway to gambling, drink in itself is not much of a problem as gambling only takes place following drinking. The drinking has to go. Total abstinence from drinking is as necessary as abstinence from gambling. True, the gambler does not have a drinking problem, is not an alcoholic, but he does have a drink related problem (e.g. the man who got arrested for setting fire to the bookmaker's shop every time he got drunk). He needs to do something about his drinking just as much as any true alcoholic. The second most common interaction between drinking and gambling is where drinking is used as a decoy for gambling or *vice versa*. Here the gambler goes for help about his drinking and all

the attention of everyone is devoted to his drinking, which allows him to go on gambling heavily unnoticed (which is his real problem).

Of course, alcoholism has some of the same effects as gambling, the simple cycle of immediate pleasure at the expense of long-term misery is restored when a gambler turns to drinking. The new drinker can still manage to live something like his old narrow life, and so avoids facing other problems such as his lack of social skills. Above all he can maintain his isolation, avoid getting too close to his family, just as before.

### **3. Drugs, Legal and Illegal**

Our experience is that gamblers do not seem to use a lot of illegal drugs. Cannabis is too mild to be interesting to them; cocaine and crack are expensive so that if the gambler is going to spend that much money, he might as well gamble and enjoy himself in the way that he knows best. Some connection between gambling and the use of cheap

stimulants such as amphetamines is more likely, and seems to occur from time to time. Sometimes dealing in drugs is a source of gambling money and then there can be a cross addiction between gambling and stimulant drugs.

#### **4. Smoking**

Smoking is recognised as the most difficult addiction to get rid of. The problem is that the pleasure of inhalation is instant (nicotine hits the brain within about half a minute of intake into the lungs) and it is repeated so often that the habit becomes unusually strong. Also, in contrast to compulsive gambling and alcoholism, the pay off in pain, misery and ill health is remote and far away in the future. Smokers who give up have the highest relapse rate (next to eating addictions) and the greatest long-term failure rate. My advice would be: “If you still haven’t got over your gambling addiction, don’t try to give up smoking at the same time. It could prove very demoralising for you. But later when your gambling has

stabilised and you have not gambled for, say, two years, you should try, and will quite possibly succeed.”

## **5. Caffeinism (Tea and Coffee Drinking)**

Both of these are fairly quick-acting, stimulant drugs. They give you an immediate *lift* which is why we use them. Neither are at all serious addictions except for a small minority of people, but, if carried to excess, they can have some important effects that most people do not know about.

Like all addictions, they provide a form of short-term pleasure, almost pampering, a way of saying to the child inside yourself, “See I love you after all, even if nobody else does.” An American psychologist has described this as, “Giving yourself a stroke”. We all need strokes of this kind from time to time.

More seriously, if you drink more than seven large cups of average strength in a day, you begin to run risks of broken sleep patterns, restlessness and anxiety. The trouble is that, just like with any other addiction, too much caffeine makes you feel so bad with lack of sleep and *nerviness* that you think you need some more, and so on and so on. Clinical psychologists have been discovering that some cases of chronic anxiety are really only mostly the effect of caffeinism. Whenever the coffee drinking habit is broken, the anxiety goes down to acceptable levels.

## **6. Unfaithfulness**

All major addictions disrupt sexual relations. Many addictions disrupt sexual performance for purely psychological reasons. It usually happens in two stages.

First, the addiction weakens the relationship. Mistrust, anger, anxiety, indifference and neglect become the major currency of feelings and actions

between the two partners. Often these negative feelings persist unresolved for months or even years, and they make it more difficult, if not impossible, to win through to the positive joys which can go with sexual relations. It only takes one partner to feel the difficulties and the other usually becomes affected too.

The second stage comes when, against a background of weakened relationship, comes a perfectly normal, occasional *disaster night*. Every man and woman, even the most sexually athletic, has ups and downs in performance producing, at least once in a while, a not so good night, when things don't go as well as normal. In a good relationship this makes no difference and is tolerated with wry humour and all is well soon afterwards. But in a bad relationship, a single, outstandingly poor occurrence can easily lead to a string of the same kind of failures. This, in turn, leads to increasing anxiety over performance and so produces yet more disasters, until the couple have a sexual problem.

Most people, when they first come for help with a major addiction, have problems in their relationship of this kind. Most relationships come right again after it is clear that the addiction is under control. But it is a great mistake to try to rush into the full restoration of broken sexual relations after only a short period free of gambling, just because you feel so much better. Time is needed on both sides to restore the atmosphere of trust and security, which is the essential background for really joyful sexual relations.

Broken or patchy relationships make for damaged self-esteem and make one, or both partners, more vulnerable to the attractions of others. Even people who normally would avoid it carefully, often find themselves looking for reassurance and appreciation, or wanting to take revenge. They get into unfaithfulness to major and minor degrees for a host of emotional reasons. Some get into unfaithfulness just when they are happiest, even happiest with their partner, almost just by way of celebration.

An affair has obvious addictive qualities too. It lifts the spirits, fills the mental horizons, dominates the feelings and determines moods, produces a new dreamworld and provides a temporary means of escape. But, above all it is short-term pleasure replacing long-term misery. Undoubtedly, for some, affairs become addictive and one follows another as soon as possible because the period in between is so awful.

## **7. Eating**

Some of us turn to food as the great consolation. This is an addictive problem to which total abstinence is *not* an answer! Some food addicts even try that, with fasting and feasting. More common is *controlled eating*, with a whole world of expensive diets and conflicting advice. In my experience gamblers are not very prone to food addictions, but if they are, and you seem to have tried everything, remember a book called *Dieting Makes You Fat* which explains how unsuccessful attempts to diet actually cause you to eat more in

the long-run. Try the alternative cure which may well be the real one: more exercise. Exercise has been shown frequently to cut down your appetite, make you want to smoke and drink less, and improve your sleep pattern, all simultaneously.

## **8. Living Beyond Your Means**

Spending is well-known as a short-term pleasure which can lead to long-term misery and heavy spenders have many of the same addictive patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving, as other addicts. Spending can mean so many things to the spender but, above all, means *status*. *Big spender* equals *high roller*. But there are other meanings too. Spending on oneself may be like saying to a loveless child that you promise to love him or her. It helps keep the feelings of expansive omnipotence and power that used to go with some stages of gambling. While the spree is on, it successfully helps avoid the more complex problems of real life but eventually, of course, like

the gambler who always loses, so too, the bills always come home.

## **9. Dishonesty**

For many, especially for gamblers, but for some drinkers and unfaithful people too, lying becomes a natural way of life. Some even see it as an art form and take a pride in their more inspired efforts and success. Lying is an escape. It avoids reality and protects oneself and others from the truth. Some can lie so convincingly to themselves, as well as to others, that they lose sight of the truth altogether and end up in some bizarre play-act of a life, or in a state of hopeless confusion. Others work so hard at maintaining a complex web of lies to all, that they exhaust themselves before they have begun the real business of life. Lying can easily be seen as another instance of short-term gain for long-term loss. The recovering addict needs to make out a careful personal balance sheet. What are the gains of lying in this way? Avoiding trouble? Self-admiration? How long do these gains

last? What are the losses? Peace of mind? Trust of others? How long do these losses last?

## **10. Longings**

Longings can be about the past and about the future. The dreamworld of the compulsive gambler is about longings for the future and when gambling stops, these longings don't always just go away. They need to be looked straight in the eye and they will then often be found to be about material ways of getting something immaterial, about restoring self-respect and affection of others, about buying affection and love. The recovering addict can begin to find slower, but surer ways of obtaining these things. *Longings* are not the same as *cravings*, they are more like a longer-term feeling of deprivation, sadness or incompleteness.

Usually when people lose something or someone valuable, they suffer a sense of loss, they grieve, and they endure bereavement. If your addiction has been the very centre of your life and you are

left with that great, *gambling shaped gap* then, no matter how relieved and glad you are to be stopped at last, you will still, on occasions, suffer an experience of bereavement, often without recognising it for what it is, and usually without being allowed to talk to anyone about it, especially to anyone in GA.

The whole psychology of such a *hidden bereavement* is too deep and complex to go into here, but the most important things are: (1) To know that this state can exist even in the most determined and happy to be stopped addict, and to recognise it when you see it and (2) Not to be afraid to talk about it. Talking about it and facing up to what it really is that you feel is lost, is often less likely to lead you back to gambling than pretending the loss isn't there. Allow yourself to mourn a bit with those who can take it from you, and you may be able to recover more quickly.

## 11. Religion

Every marriage or long-term relationship is unique. So too, is the relationship a religious person feels exists with his religion. Some religions are also addictive in form. This can sometimes be seen most clearly when the very faith which *saved* the addict *takes him over*, so that it leads to total disregard for adverse consequences such as the loss of partner, family, or job and comes to dominate his or her thinking, feeling and behaving. Even more obviously, some of these forms of religious expression have all the hidden advantages of addictions in that they oversimplify everyday decisions, maintain distance from family and friends, provide ways of threatening, rebelling and revenging, certainly give meaning to life and can even coarsen feelings to something like a mixture of elation and crude sentimentality.

One saving grace of religion as an addiction is that it usually protects the addict against acquiring most other forms of cross addiction, except

perhaps the one described below as addiction to virtue and, if the recovering addict can free himself from a more addictive to a less addictive form, then the religious addiction will prove to have been a way of escaping from an addictive way of life altogether. In this sense religious addictions are sometimes *benign addictions* or *transition addictions*, as shall be discussed later.

## **12. Addictive Virtue**

In the Middle Ages were people who deliberately chose to live in cold and hunger and some even used to wear hair shirts and flog themselves. They were making a virtue out of suffering. The recovering addict learns that *short-term pleasure leads to long-term misery*, and so the opposite is the new virtue, *short-term misery* (i.e. abstinence, control, self-denial) *leads to long-term pleasure*. Every little self-denial and abstinence comes to give him a taste of the same glow of triumph and the same feeling of security that the first old major important abstinence did. So, like the miser, he

becomes addicted to not spending, addicted to being stricter than the next person.

This kind of addiction wrecks friendships and disturbs other sensitive and vulnerable people around for the sake of a lonely, virtuous ego trip or a fleeting feeling of special safety and security. It narrows and impoverishes life for the virtuous himself and for other people who may feel that they are obliged to imitate them if they are to attain true safety or greater status with the self-help group.

### **13. GA as an Addiction**

Is this possible? The short answer has to be *yes and no*. Many people who come to Gamblers Anonymous go through a period during which GA, the people and the meetings, becomes the most important thing in their lives. It dominates their thoughts, determines their mood and feelings, and certainly affects their behaviour. It totally fills that *gambling shaped gap* and allows them to maintain

an addictive way of life, with a focus on just one central activity with all the hidden pay offs that go with it, the simplifying of decisions, etc., and certainly maintaining distance from family and loved ones just as before.

But in other ways it is *not* the same as other addictions. First it is *not* short-term pleasure for long-term misery, rather the opposite, because often it tells the addict unpleasant truths that are short-term misery for long-term happiness.

GA addiction looks very like a *benign addiction*, like jogging and meditating, and perhaps some forms of workaholism. With benign addictions some of the main features of malignant addictions are there, for example, the dominance of the rest of life by a *monoculture*, the simplification of decisions, the withdrawal from social and family life, even the presence of tolerance and withdrawal symptoms! But the direct consequences of the activity are quite beneficial,

even when the activity is carried to considerable excess.

So, *addiction to GA* is not a true malignant addiction, and insofar as it can have addictive features, which it certainly can, it is more like a benign addiction.

### **Section 3: What is addiction for the partner?**

#### **Some Hidden Minor Compensations for the Partner in Remaining in a Relationship with Someone Compulsively Gambling.**

The very idea that there could be any, even minor, compensations whatsoever in remaining in a relationship with an addict, may well seem unlikely. It is similar to the idea that there could be some hidden advantages to the addict in maintaining an addictive way of life after the addiction is gone. And yet a long time ago, some psychoanalysts suggested that the main reason

some men and women drank to excess was that their partners, especially the wives, manipulated them into it because they got some secret satisfaction from their husbands drinking. Unfortunately, some clever but ignorant people have applied the same idea to the wives of gamblers, and no doubt other addictions too.

*It is absolutely crucially important to be clear that that is not what is being suggested here.* There is no doubt that, to the spouse, any major addiction, has been and still is, a disaster which they never sought, unwittingly or even *unconsciously*. But during the time that the spouse is forced to live with an addiction, they can often find minor compensations in what is still an overwhelmingly desperate, and totally unwanted life situation.

Just as the addict learns a pattern of hidden advantages, even while being destroyed, so too, the spouse also learns to find some minor consolations in a life which they would be glad to exchange for almost any other minor consolations

at all. Once it is thus clearly understood that the learned compensations are minor ones, we can see more clearly the importance of becoming fully aware of them, and to give them up when the appropriate time comes. No one is suggesting that they should be given up while the gambler is gambling. They may at that time be very necessary for survival.

Once the gambling seems to have gone they should fall away naturally, but if not, as the examples below illustrate, they may lead to bad and negative feelings by the spouse. Irrational fears or loss of these *benefits* may, consciously or unconsciously, create irrational behaviour that does nothing to assist, and may even actively harm the recovery of the addict, the spouse, or both.

## **1. Sympathy and Attention from Others**

Most spouses are so ashamed and guilty that they isolate themselves from all help. At some time, usually through Gam-Anon, they start to receive a

quantity and quality of sympathetic support and attention that they may have rarely, if ever, experienced in their lives before. However, as the addict recovers and receives increasing recognition from others of their efforts, the supplies of sympathy and attention to the spouse appear to be less urgent, and are reduced and often cut off altogether.

## **2. A Feeling of Being Really Needed**

Several times in the course of the downward career of the gambler, especially at times of crisis, the gambler may have flung themselves completely on the mercy of their partner. Many partners find this absolutely irresistible. They are sure in the knowledge that they are needed, as they have seldom ever been before, and perhaps as they have often longed to be. For someone who has never been allowed to feel sure of their value to others, this experience may have an overriding feeling of importance to it. Once the gambler starts to become less and less dependent on the partner as

he or she gets better, then the partner feels less and less sure that they are needed.

### **3. A Heroic Image of Oneself**

If the partner has coped rather well and against all odds; if they have won most of the battles themselves but at great cost and strain on their feelings and inner resources, then, once the gambler starts using the GA Recovery Programme and Fellowship for his or her recovery, the partner can sometimes then begin to come apart, even though they held it all together through all the bad times. Now some other group of people seems to have brought about the changes which the partner may know that they have fought and worked for, so hard, so cleverly, and so tenaciously and with such patience. There seems to be nothing left to fight for. Even the heroic battles may begin to look a foolish waste of time. So, the partner feels reduced in the eyes of themselves and of others, from a heroic figure to bystander at best.

#### **4. Moral Superiority; Always Being Right**

With the addict gambling all the time and lying, stealing or otherwise behaving outrageously, the partner can come to experience a sure feeling of being always right, of permanent overall moral superiority which can lead to secret or open contempt and a long-lasting inner dominance over the gambler. This belief is not broken even when the partner is temporarily the victim, is being beaten, or conned or stolen from. Once recovery is well begun that secure feeling of *always being right* is threatened; the recovery itself can seem a resounding moral achievement, and the addict no longer makes such self-humiliating blunders.

#### **5. Sole, Undisputed Control of the Family**

While the addict was wholly self-absorbed in the world of their addiction, the partner was often strenuously occupied in looking after the family, making all the paternal decisions on their own. They had freedom as a parent to act without

having to seek the agreement or the cooperation of anyone else. Now, when the recovery is under way, more decisions have to be shared, agreement may be hard to reach, and the ways things have been handled in the past when alone, may even be criticised.

## **6. Control of the Family Finances**

It is usually necessary for the partners of addicts to gain and keep control of the family finances. Once this control has been gained it is notoriously difficult ever to give it up. This control is his or her ultimate security and, especially with an activity like gambling which is hard to detect or to be sure is not continuing, it often takes a long time of apparent freedom from the addiction before the spouse is willing even to risk sharing it. But the reluctance of the spouse to share control again, often seems to the gambler clear evidence of continuing mistrust and can be seen as a disgrace and demotion from the traditional male role. If it is continued too long it can lead to such

embarrassment before peers and friends, and much resentment, that it can become the cause of a relapse in itself. If it is relinquished gradually and cautiously, and the recovering addict is seen to handle money responsibly, it can release the spouse too from his or her fears and confirm confidence, so laying the foundation of the spouse's further development.

## **7. Moral Right and Freedom for the Spouse to Do Whatever they Like**

It is easy to argue that the normal rules of scrupulousness, morality and decency ought not to apply to the victim of misuse or harm caused by the gambler. The suffering of the spouse can be seen as conferring the freedom to behave badly in return. Of course, many wronged spouses *do* behave badly in return anyway. Much is heard about the violence handed out by the addicts, but little about the violence undoubtedly handed out in some cases to the addicts by their families. But these spouses and adolescent children usually feel

remorse, or at least some shame afterwards, because they really do not like themselves as they do it.

The *bad behaviour* which is a hidden advantage is different from this because, in this case, the spouse really wants to do it anyway and, in a sense, jumps at the excuse of the addict's ill-treatment to throw away external, moral restraints, because *those who know the real situation will understand*. The partner takes the opportunity to be as unfaithful as they have always wanted to be, or takes upon themselves the undisputed right to hurt the gambler in return, and so vent deep long-standing hostilities and hatreds, often far beyond what is provoked by the real situation. Or, perhaps less obvious and spectacularly, they just opt completely out of any sexual relationship as they have always wanted to do, or take the opportunity to give up a particularly undesirable chore. In other words, the addiction gives the spouse the excuse to *do their own thing, go their own sweet way, or have a real go* at their partner, and to the

extent that the addict's recovery takes away that excuse, it is unwelcome. Probably most of the people who use this particular, secondary gain never appear at Gam-Anon, because the marriage did not survive, but wherever there is some element of this reaction by the spouse, it is obviously important for his or her own development and for the survival of the relationship, that the spouse should become fully aware of what is happening.

## **8. Maintenance of Distance**

During the period of addiction, the spouse may be taking advantage of the situation to maintain distance in the relationship that they want to keep regardless of the gambler's recovery.

## **9. Escape from Boring, Predictable Routine and from Meaninglessness during Recovery.**

Even though there is great relief once the gambling has stopped, the worst of the stress and strain are

no longer present, then, such are the contradictions of human nature, there can be some dissatisfaction with the present, smooth, relatively predictable routine. So, the spouse too may need to learn the benefits of recovery without being tempted to go back to the unbearably chaotic style of the addictive way of life.

### **Summary of the Effects of Removal of the Hidden Minor Benefits for the Spouse.**

All of the ways of coping which bring minor compensations are reasonable and normal ways of living through adversity. Many of them are essential to the survival of the spouse, when things are at their worst. None of them are clearly moral defects, character weaknesses or abnormal reactions in themselves. But when the addict changes behaviour and begins to move away from an addictive way of life, they are no longer so necessary, are no longer even appropriate and may, if they continue, eventually become obstacles

and difficulties in the way of the addict's (and therefore also of the spouse's) recovery.

The spouse can come to feel negatively about the addict's recovery. It is only occasionally that this is done quite consciously and deliberately. Unless the spouse realises that living with an addiction has made them become a person they would not otherwise have chosen to be, and unless they can learn how to overcome it, they too will remain permanently corrupted and soured by the experience.

## **Section 4: What are some of the solutions?**

### **Where Might Some Solutions Lie?**

There are, of course, no ready solutions. Every addict, and his or her spouse, has to search for them themselves and for each person the pattern of solutions might be a little different. But there are some places where, experience suggests, you

might be more likely to find your own personal solution.

## **Middle Term Tolerance for Transition Addictions**

A much better name than *benign addiction* for describing some degree of addiction to GA, if it occurs at all in an individual, is *transition addiction*, because it is an addiction which offers the possibility of change, of movement to some other state, to some place in life where there is no addiction and less possibility of any other addictions.

Such a *transition addiction* is fervently to be welcomed compared with the real, malignant addiction that is being moved away from. Similarly, it is quite possible that the Gam-Anon member may replace his, or her, former total domination of life by a single focus on their partner's addiction, with something like a benign addiction to Gam-Anon for a time.

Perhaps in some important sense many people will always stay addicted to GA or Gam-Anon as their transition addiction, and we should be glad that they do, because how else, without the kind of total dedication that approaches addiction, would some of the vital work of these two organisations get done? But we should help these, often key individuals, to keep under review the whole range of effects that their service is having on the completeness of their recovery. It may be much more in their interests that they move beyond keeping a single focus similar to their old addictive style of living, to a more diversified, multicentre life.

For many other individuals a lifelong connection with GA and with Gam-Anon will be the right solution for them, without it occupying such a central part in their lives. For many of these, gambling and living with gambling, has been their most important activity for almost all of their lives and just to go away and forget about it would involve a much greater loss of meaning in their

lives than to turn from poacher to gamekeeper and stay related to gambling, but in a vastly different way to before!

### **Learning a New Way of Life through Long-Term Diversification**

True recovery for many people will, however, mean that their lives, instead of being centred around one, single activity, a monoculture, become diversified into several different major activities of nearly equal importance, of which GA or Gam-Anon is only one. The aim must be to concentrate on the areas of life that, as an addict, they used to neglect. The ordinary, *non addicted* person tends to have several (at least two or three) different areas of importance or focus of concern in his life (e.g. his work, his family, his friends), no one of which totally dominates and overrules all the rest. As the recovering gambler puts more time and effort into each of these areas, it begins to pay off, and work, family, etc. become rewarding again. At first the effort and pain are often very great, but a

little success breeds more success. Sometimes the unlearning of an addictive way of life that has taken years to establish and the learning of a new *multicentre* life can be a long, difficult and painful process, and each addict is, to some extent, alone because each new life is unique. Other people, other gamblers, spouses, priests and ministers, perhaps even psychologists and psychiatrists, often the most unexpected ones, can be caring sharers, and sometimes wise guides in the process. The slogans could well be: *don't put all your eggs in one basket; diversify; don't be like a one product economy; don't try to do it alone; etc., etc.*

For many, then, until the diversification of interests, activities, and concerns takes place, they will still remain a little more at risk of a cross addiction or a deviation along the road to recovery than they need be, and their recovery will be less complete than it could be.

Even after a reasonable degree of diversification has been achieved, the maintenance of a *non*

*addictive* way of life can never be an easy or careless responsibility. Truly, *the price of freedom is eternal vigilance*.

## **Letting Go the Learned Pattern of Rewards in the Old, Addictive Way of Life**

If, even after a year or two without gambling, the diversification had not taken place, two things are possible. It is possible, either, that not enough intelligent effort has been put into learning the new *multicentre* way of life, or, that more help is needed to attain it. It is likely that one or more of the hidden advantages of the old, addictive way of life is standing in the way. So, means have to be found of identifying the block and giving it up too. Perhaps the questions should be asked: “what is it about the addictive way of life that I still want to cling to?; what is it that I most want to avoid?; intimacy?; the full range of my feelings?; social life?; meaninglessness?; giving up the moral high ground as a spouse?” Help should be sought to face up to them, perhaps together along with other

people both in GA and in the family. Perhaps Gam-Anon can help too because not all the blocks are necessarily on the side of the gambler. There is even a strong case which could be made for trying to face some of these problems in pairs, or even groups of couples, rather than separately in the GA room and in the Gam-Anon room.

Perhaps an ideal setting for beginning work on them is in small house groups of two or three or, less often, four couples, all of whom know each other well because they have already travelled some of the road in GA and Gam-Anon together. It would obviously help a great deal if all the members of the group should feel that they can work together with the other members of both sexes. In those groups people may help each other gently and gradually but firmly, to face up to possible hidden minor compensations of the addictive way of life that they are now leaving behind.

Once, with the help of others, addicts and spouses can identify some blocks and deviations along the road to recovery, strategies can be worked out for learning how to live without hidden advantages or, perhaps more importantly, to find the old, hidden satisfactions and securities in new, more open, more reliable and less destructive ways.

If this can be done, there is good reason to hope that the road to recovery will become straighter and wider.

*God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things  
I cannot change...  
Courage to change  
the things I can...  
and wisdom  
to know the difference.*

**GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS**

**[www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk)**