

Preface

Introduction

Each day that we wake up clean affords us the opportunity to seek a life of connection—to ourselves, to our fellow NA members and other loved ones, to service, and to a power greater than ourselves. Captured within the 366 entries of this new work, *Spiritual Principle a Day*¹, are expressions of these connections we seek. At Narcotics Anonymous meetings, conventions, service activities, and in our day-to-day conversations with each other, we talk a lot about living by spiritual principles, sharing our experience—both directly and indirectly—of what that means and how we do it. Our overarching goal for this project is to create a book that will inspire NA members all over the world and provoke thoughts about the connection between spiritual principles and recovery from addiction. *Spiritual Principle a Day* is intended to provide us with practical applications regarding how we strive to live spiritually in recovery, facing life on its own terms, and how we support each other in doing so. The structure of each daily meditation—a quotation from NA literature, a brief reading, and an intention for the day—offers us as individuals, meetings, groups, and sponsorship networks a starting point for reflection, discussion, sharing, or however else we choose to proceed.

How *Spiritual Principle a Day* was developed

The idea for *Spiritual Principle a Day* came from us, from the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. The 2018 World Service Conference (WSC) approved a project plan for a new book to explore a spiritual principle on each day of the year. This move was based on information garnered from a 2017 survey that NA members from 37 countries across six continents completed. Our responses overwhelmingly indicated a desire to hear the voices of fellow members, to learn how others apply spiritual principles in their daily lives, and to read about how living by spiritual principles shapes our experience.

Once the mission to create this book was established by the Fellowship at the WSC, we had to determine: How do we develop a piece of literature that speaks to the range of spiritual principles that NA members practice—and to the range of *how* those spiritual principles are practiced in our daily lives?

Like all NA literature, this book was developed by NA members for NA members. In order to reflect the experiences of our ever-evolving, worldwide Fellowship, the development

¹ Please note that this is the working title, but—like everything—it's subject to change.

process included as many NA members as possible—as many and as diversely representative of our Fellowship as have elected to participate. Participants in the process were geographically, linguistically, and culturally diverse, as well as varied in terms of cleantime and spiritual practices.

The entries in this volume are derived from thousands of pieces of materials submitted by individual NA members, meetings, and groups, and from *Spiritual Principle a Day* workshops and activities all over the globe. A workgroup comprised of a diverse group of NA members was convened to deliver on the specifics of the Fellowship's requests for the new book, to select quotations from NA literature related to each spiritual principle, to read all of the submissions from members, and to identify the elements that would be woven together to create the fabric of this book. Writers, also NA members, were engaged to develop and creatively refine the entries, based on workgroup, World Board, and Fellowship review and input. Drafts of all entries, plus the list of spiritual principles included in this preface, were posted online so that individual members and groups could provide feedback on the direction of the work being conducted by the workgroup. The entire process, from conception to production, took more than four years.

These pages contain the results of this process. This is NA unity in action. The entries exemplify what spiritual principles mean to NA, giving practical, relatable reflections on how to apply them in our daily lives, both in and out of the rooms. Our Fellowship envisioned a well-rounded and broadly appealing book in which individual entries serve different functions—inspirational, educational, heartwarming, humorous, and *real*. This eclectic approach means that not all entries will resonate with everyone, but it ensures that all of us will see ourselves somewhere in this book. These are our stories, our experiences, our voices.

Applying *Spiritual Principle a Day* in our recovery

Based on the Fellowship's recommendations, we have structured *Spiritual Principle a Day* as a "daily meditation" book, similar to *Just for Today (JFT)*. Each page highlights a spiritual principle with a quotation from our body of NA literature. The excerpt is followed by a meditation on the principle and a reflection for the day.

What we do with these words on the page is entirely up to us. The choices are varied, perhaps as varied as we are. Sure, using the written intention at the end of each page to inspire our personal meditation practice is an option, but it's one of many.

Spiritual Principle a Day is a labor of love intended to meet each of us exactly where we are in the moment when we pick up the book. We can start a *Spiritual Principle a Day* meeting,

just like we've done for *Living Clean*, *JFT*, or *Guiding Principles*. We can use it to start or end our day with meditation practice, or writing, or prayer. We can use it to connect to our Higher Power in some way. We can share about it with sponsees to help broaden their (and our) understanding of how a particular spiritual principle is affecting our lives at any given moment. Want to focus on one spiritual principle for an entire week? Find it in the list below and get cracking!

acceptance	faith	intimacy	self-discipline
accountability	fidelity	joy	selflessness
anonymity	flexibility	kindness	self-support
authenticity	forgiveness	listening	serenity
autonomy	freedom	love	service
awareness	generosity	maturity	simplicity
balance	goodwill	open-	sincerity
caring	grace	mindedness	surrender
commitment	gratitude	optimism	thoughtfulness
communication	harmony	participation	tolerance
compassion	honesty	passion	trust
connectedness	honor	patience	unconditional
conscience	hope	perseverance	love
consistency	hospitality	powerlessness	understanding
cooperation	humility	practicality	unity
courage	humor	prudence	vigilance
creativity	imperfection	purpose	vulnerability
curiosity	inclusiveness	reliability	"We"
discernment	independence	resilience	willingness
discipline	individuality	respect	
empathy	integrity	responsibility	
encouragement	interdependence	self-acceptance	

However we choose to read this daily meditation book, we hope that each of us finds something in these pages that we identify with, empathize with, strive toward, and aspire to. We can all expect to learn a lot from each other as we find creative approaches to engage with *Spiritual Principle a Day*.

Balance, Entry #1 of 6

We need to strike a balance between being in denial of our feelings and letting them overwhelm us; we don’t want to go to either extreme (*NA Step Working Guides*, Step Ten, “Feeling versus Doing”).

“In recovery, it’s not our *feelings* that matter; it’s our *actions*.”

We hear some version of this NA bumper sticker in meetings pretty often. Doing the “right” thing, even when that action contradicts how we’re feeling, is certainly a shared value among many members. But, should we just leave feelings unexpressed—especially those that come with a lot of baggage, such as anger, fear, and shame? Nope. Consciously or not, we’ll eventually let those feelings seep out, weaponizing them against ourselves or others.

Striking a balance between suppressing our feelings and being emotionally overwhelmed doesn’t look the same on all recovering addicts. Many of us are emotional projectiles; anything will set us off, and anyone in our path will also feel the burn. For others, avoidance is our strategy: We’d rather deny, deny, deny.

In meetings, we also hear: “Feelings aren’t facts.” And while it’s true that we should take caution when letting our emotions drive our actions, we should not deny that *feelings are real*. They are also temporary, which is why other members may suggest we take a pause, breathe, scream into a pillow, and/or talk about how we’re feeling with another addict.

Seeking emotional balance is a practice, not a state of being we arrive and stay at. As with all aspects of recovery, there’s no perfect way to negotiate and monitor our practice of emotional balance. We aren’t self-programming robots that can curate a perfectly authentic set of emotions that don’t swing too far in any unreasonable direction. Lucky for us and those around us, we are clean, and we can lean on the tools of NA to help keep us from imploding or exploding.

*I will make a practice of expressing my very real feelings in a productive way
and not letting them force my actions.*

Balance, Entry #2 of 6

We remember to put our program first, and to respect our own limits. We strive every day to keep ourselves spiritually balanced (*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Conscious Contact”).

Addicts, in and out of recovery, are subject to thinking and acting in extremes. Many of us discover a need for personal limits by overdoing things. Even in recovery, sometimes too much of a good thing is just *too much*. One member shared, “I spent twelve hours volunteering in our convention’s merchandise room. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but it was every bit as stressful as my most hectic work days. Looking back, I realized that I had misunderstood what it meant to put my program first.”

The common advice to put our program first isn’t meant to shame us into giving and giving and giving some more. Maybe we take one shift in the merchandise room, hell, even two, but we certainly do not need to take on six shifts at the expense of our sanity. While service is a key component to our recovery, balance requires us to pay attention to so much more. Spiritual maintenance takes time and commitment.

Many of us develop routines that help keep us spiritually centered. They become the heart of our personal recovery and the wellspring for our spiritual balance. We commune with a Higher Power in whatever ways work for us. We “listen” by quieting our mind in meditation, by taking a motorcycle out on a winding road, or listening to newcomers at a chai shop before the meeting. We share our hopes and our pain with other members, a journal, or with the universe.

When we keep a balanced program at the center of our lives, we’re better equipped to navigate life on life’s terms. Practicing balance doesn’t mean that we’re spiritually attuned at all times; rather, it means that we notice when we’re out of tune, and we take action to correct our course.

I will listen to my body, mind, and spirit to establish my own limits and explore how I tune into spiritual balance in my recovery.

Balance, Entry #3 of 6

Each of us seeks our own balance that allows us to participate in the world without sacrificing our recovery or putting ourselves at risk (*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Bridging Two Worlds”).

Imagine life as a pie chart. The sections of this pie represent the different arenas of our lives. We have a portion for Narcotics Anonymous and sections for family, friends, work, our community, our interests, and a multitude of categories we could add to this list. While we often hear that recovery should be our priority, maybe even the biggest segment, there’s no prescribed ideal balance for how much time we dedicate to NA versus the world outside of NA.

While we were using, our addiction took up most of the pie, and everything else was a sliver. For a lot of us, when we’re new in the program, NA becomes the lion’s share of our chart. As newcomers, we tend to stick very close to the Fellowship, because it’s suggested by our sponsor and other members—and because NA is where we begin to find comfort and safety in being who we are.

But as we transform in recovery, our lives tend to fill up. Our pie chart diversifies! Even though our aim may be to sustain the same level of participation in meetings and Steps and service, there are only so many hours in a day—and space in our chart. As we seek to maintain balance in our busy lives, we may find ourselves obsessing about one area and neglecting others.

No matter what we have going on, we have to remember that our number one priority must be to stay clean, or we risk losing the rest of the pie as along with our cleantime.

We can seek the balance we need without worrying about perfecting it. We can learn how to assess when things are off-kilter, and a dose of the NA basics is needed. We can adapt as the demands of our lives keep shifting. We can enjoy a full life without posing unnecessary risks to our recovery.

How’s my pie chart sectioned these days? How am I balancing my NA program with my other responsibilities and pursuits?

Balance, Entry #4 of 6

So many things compete for our attention, and as addicts we have a tendency to think in extremes: all or nothing, right or wrong. Finding the balance is an ongoing negotiation (*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, opening section).

In recovery, when our lives get “bigger,” our already questionable attention span is pulled in many different directions. We have our NA life, and we balance it with work life, school life, home life, family life, sex life, and more. On top of that, we are now able to address the consequences of our using: improving our health, dealing with legal issues, making amends. And many of us are also pursuing other interests and goals that bring us joy. Through using the tools of the NA program, including prayer and meditation, we can maintain a manageable balance of all the above. We’re living by spiritual principles as much as humanly possible. We’re sincerely grateful more often than we aren’t.

What could possibly go wrong?

Sometimes it’s a truly life-altering event that will throw us off-balance. Or maybe we make a mistake we can’t run from, or we don’t achieve something we’ve worked hard for and feel we deserve. Other times, if it’s only that we spill a glass of water, we’ll want to smash the glass and drown ourselves in the water.

Seeking balance—both in terms of our inner life and how we spend our time—is an ongoing negotiation. Reacting in extremes to our mistakes or to what we can’t control will wear us out and make us vulnerable to our disease. Just because we’re clean and doing well doesn’t mean that life will consistently get better and better without fail. We can be vigilant, but we can’t prepare for everything. If we have our program as a base and a constant in our lives, we will have spiritual principles, relationships, and a Higher Power to lean on when life inevitably shows up.

Life is unpredictable and often chaotic. It’s the seeking of balance within the chaos that will help keep us clean and moving forward.

I can commit to pursuing balance among all areas of my life. But it’s just as vital to my recovery that I accept life’s chaos—without adding to it.

Balance, Entry #5 of 6

Sometimes we get confused and think that to live spiritually means that we are happy and get what we want, and that if we’re not happy or don’t get our way, something is out of balance. It would be nice if that were true, but recovery is not a fairy tale (*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Spirituality is Practical”).

For many of us, our lives get so much better so quickly in the early years that it's only natural to think we've found the key to happiness, unencumbered by life's difficulties. It's nice while it lasts, but ultimately, as one member puts it: "Life is more than killing time between meetings, and I eventually experienced hardships despite working a pretty good program." Life is not always fair—that's a fact. Sometimes we lose loved ones, homes, and relationships even when we're spiritually centered.

The results of day-to-day life are not always what we would have hoped for. Nevertheless, we learn how to walk through situations by living according to spiritual principles. If we don’t get the job we wanted, or a long-term relationship comes to an end, we hold on and stay clean. Our world may still be thrown out of balance from time to time, but as long as we stay clean, we can survive sadness, disappointment, and uncertainty and return to balance again and again. We experience the full range of human emotions and marvel at the strength of our spiritual foundation.

Life is in session, and we get to choose how we want to participate.

Today, I will not equate my program of recovery with the circumstances of life on life's terms. I will show up in my life even when things don't go my way and remind myself how much I have to be grateful for.

Balance, Entry #6 of 6

Emotional balance is one of the first results of meditation, and our experience bears this out (Basic Text, Step 11).

Life can be an emotional rollercoaster. Before we found recovery, we could exit the ride by getting high. With that option off the table—just for today—it’s up to us to find ways to handle life’s ups and downs, twists and turns. “If I’m going to ride this roller coaster called life,” a member shared, “I want to be one of those screaming, giggling fools in the front car. They are truly in the moment.”

We learn the usefulness of living in today in early recovery. One oldtimer put it bluntly: “If you’ve got one foot in the past, and one in the future, you’re pissing all over today.” Truly being in the *moment* is some next-level stuff, and few of us have regular access to an *actual* roller coaster to practice that mindset.

Fortunately, we have an Eleventh Step that encourages us to give prayer and meditation a try. Practicing some form of meditation can help us to let our feelings come and go like waves on the beach. Practice pays off, and it becomes easier to roll with the punches when we’re a little less attached to our emotions.

We learn to be fully feeling human beings and to be alright with that. More often than not, we can be attentive to our emotional lives and not want to check out. One member shared, “Finding even a minute or two to slow down and breathe can drastically improve my emotional well-being.” As we weave meditation into our recovery repertoire, emotional balance feels increasingly attainable.

I will remind myself that the balance I have experienced in my recovery is a result of my emotional well-being. I will sustain this state of being by meditating today.

Compassion, Entry #1 of 5

I have a deep compassion for the still-suffering addict, be it the addict who is sitting in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous, the addict who has yet to find the rooms, or especially the addict who left and has yet to find the way back again (Basic Text, “Second Chance”).

One of the most painful lessons we learn in recovery is that, no matter how much we want to help, we cannot recover for another addict. Close friends or partners sometimes relapse. Sponsees or other members we’ve tried to help may choose to get loaded. The same goes for members with significant cleantime whom we admire, and sometimes our sponsor (who’s just another addict like we are) will be suffering in the rooms and keeping it to themselves—and will end up using again. The pain we feel in these situations takes many forms: grief, anger, betrayal, confusion, fear for our own recovery.

But we also feel deep compassion for another addict’s pain. We try to let that compassion, rather than our pain, drive our actions.

NA members have different ideas about what compassion looks like. Some of us believe that if an addict is using and not coming to meetings, no contact should be made. Tough love. Others reach out to still-using addicts believing it’s absolutely necessary to maintain that connection.

In some meetings, an empty chair is set out to represent the still-suffering addict, and—as a sort of collective compassion—we pray that seat gets filled. The most important thing we can do is to stay clean ourselves so that when the time comes, we will be there for any addict who is seeking help. The power of living by example should never be underestimated. Whatever our opinions, we can all agree that addicts should always be welcomed back to meetings regardless of how many times they’ve relapsed, what they look or smell like, or what our history with them has been.

During the moment of silence at my next meeting, I’ll pray for a specific addict who’s suffering: I am here for you. I’m saving a chair for you.

Compassion, Entry #2 of 5

Our instinct is to meet disease with disease, but when we meet it with love and compassion instead, we create an opportunity for recovery (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition 1, “For Members”).

As uniformly harmonious as we may wish Narcotics Anonymous to be, there are times when another member behaves in ways that set our fury on fire. Someone may verbally tear us down or try to goad us into a physical altercation. Another member’s actions may place our meeting’s location in danger. Someone else may try to undermine a group decision, and when it doesn’t go their way, take to social media to denounce NA. And what about members who act in these ways, but never make amends for their behavior? *How dare they mess with our serenity?!*

Our first impulses will likely be to respond to another’s resentment, selfishness, or accusations—with our own. We can, however, cool our own fury—and consider its source. Meeting another’s disease with compassion means that we suspend judgment. We try to separate the person from their disease. Maybe they’re going through a rough time. Maybe we unintentionally disrespected them, and they can’t express their pain another way. Maybe they are afraid of being wrong and looking uncool in the face of controversy. Maybe they’re just misinformed. And maybe we’re more alike than we care to admit. (Bingo!) At the end of the day, we are all recovering as best that we can.

Having compassion for another doesn’t mean we ignore issues that arise. With unity as a priority, we end up practicing a lot more acceptance than our disease would otherwise have. We may not understand where someone is coming from, but we can recognize the feelings and relate. Ideally, our response will consider what’s best for the common good. ...And it’s better to kill someone with kindness than to actually kill them.

Next time someone freaks out on me or the group, I’ll test out meeting them with compassion instead of my ego. What’s best for the group is best for my recovery.

Compassion, Entry #3 of 5

We reach out where we can, and make an effort to increase our compassion for those who don't match our expectations or whose recovery doesn't look like our own (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition 3, “For Members”).

In a program where the only requirement for membership is the desire to stop using, it logically follows that there is a myriad of ways to work the program of Narcotics Anonymous. What doesn't necessarily follow that same logic is how we addicts in recovery can lose our patience—or have none to start with—for addicts whose program differs from our own. For a bunch of non-conformists, we can sure be rigid. We certainly can have plenty of opinions about what works and doesn't work: how and when we work steps, how we sponsor, what service looks like, to hug or not to hug, to medicate or not to medicate. These are the opinions of individual members, not NA's.

Our passion about these opinions comes from our passion for recovery. We know what is working for us and what we see work for others. Yet there are times when we'd do well to infuse that passion for our experience with compassion for others who don't “get it” the way we expect they should.

When we keep an open mind about the varied ways that members recover from addiction, we are honoring Tradition Three. When we become earnest in our desire to reach out to other members who are different from us, we are practicing compassion. If there's any logic here, that openness will make us more patient with newcomers, because we know that everyone walks a different path. Who knows? We might even learn something.

Translated literally from its Latin roots, compassion means “suffering together.” While some may take issue with “suffering” defining what we're doing together in NA, there's one thing that we *can* agree on: we are in this thing together.

I am passionate about what has worked for my own recovery, but I will try to remain open-minded toward others whose paths look different from mine. Today, I strive to release any expectations I have that they should recover the same way I do.”

Compassion, Entry #4 of 5

When we have compassion for ourselves, we give ourselves permission to be in the world, and that makes us much more useful to the world (*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Growing Pains”).

“I am my own worst enemy.”

We’ve heard some version of this sentiment from addicts with four days clean, four years, and four decades. “I’m judge, jury, and executioner for myself” is another version of the same sentiment. We struggle with feelings of worthlessness, self-pity, crippling fear. Our disease tells us that we are “not enough” or even that we’re unlovable. We remind ourselves of our considerable mistakes or obsess about minor ones. When these thoughts are most rampant, we tend to isolate ourselves from the world, protecting others from having to deal with us and protecting ourselves from having to deal with them. But we’ve also heard, “An addict’s mind is a dangerous neighborhood. You shouldn’t wander around it alone.”

Self-compassion is one remedy for self-obsession. What does that look like? It’s giving ourselves some slack. It’s acknowledging, at least for a moment, that we are doing the best we can. It’s channeling some of that kindness that we more freely extend to others toward ourselves. As we grow, we learn to redirect ourselves toward compassion when we go through difficult times, don’t meet our own standards, or feel unworthy of love. We can be gentle with ourselves—and get out of our own way.

Compassion allows us to move forward. We see our value more clearly and are able to exit the “bad neighborhood” of our minds more readily. Getting out of our heads gets us out in the world where we are useful to others. In fact, being of service to others is another key remedy to the mess in our minds.

It takes practice to stop berating ourselves for our struggles and missteps. Even with years of recovery, we aren’t always our most trusted ally, but with some compassion, we can switch from the enemy camp.

Today, I dare myself to look in the mirror and say: “Hey, you! You’re a good person. You may make mistakes, but you still have a lot to offer. So, crawl out from under your rock—and get out there and rock it!”

Compassion, Entry #5 of 5

When we see someone acting out on a defect that we have acted on ourselves, we feel compassionate rather than judgmental, for we know just exactly how much pain such behavior causes (*It Works*, “Step 6”).

We rarely forget the pain of using drugs and the havoc it caused. However, our memories can be a lot shorter about the pain and havoc we’ve caused ourselves and others by acting out in other ways. Being overly controlling in meetings and overly sensitive at work. Perfectionism. Keeping secrets. Getting in fights. That trifecta of lying-cheating-stealing. Defensiveness! Witnessing such conduct in our fellow recovering addicts—and the pain it causes—often makes us bonkers, but who are we really judging?

“You spot it, you got it,” a fellow wryly points out. Oh, right. It’s *us*.

Remembering this simple statement about how judging another is frequently rooted in discomfort with *our own* behavior hopefully will stop our negativity in its tracks and instead awaken our compassion. Being able to find compassion for others who are acting out in their defects, especially when we have those same flaws, demonstrates considerable growth. This is the intersection between humility and compassion. We know firsthand that such behavior is the result of pain, not just the cause of it. As we develop spiritually, we begin with forgiveness—for ourselves as well as for others—which gives way to empathy. We can then be more loving and accepting. We can be helpful. Whether it’s observing an addict on the street doing what addicts do to get another, a member relapsing over and over, or an oldtimer stomping out of a business meeting, we can draw on our own experience and find compassion.

Our journey of self-discovery deepens when we realize the reciprocity among having compassion for ourselves, receiving the compassion of others, and giving it away.

Next time I’m disturbed by another member’s actions, I’ll look inward. I will choose to show compassion for the still suffering addict because I was there once too—and will be again.

Goodwill, Entry #1 of 8

One of the purest expressions of goodwill in NA is our heartfelt desire for the newcomer to have freedom (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition 1, “For Members”).

In our first days of being clean (and for many of us a long time after), it’s difficult for us to accept the goodwill of addicts in the fellowship as *real*. We think, “Why in the hell are all these people so happy to see me, like they know me or something?” Some of us believe that these NA people are trying to manipulate us in some way. Otherwise, why would they be so welcoming? We remain on red alert to find a crack in their game, but the goodwill of other humans can be hard to resist, especially when we haven’t been offered it in a while. So, we keep coming back. Our journey toward freedom from active addiction begins.

In NA, we do what others have done to stay clean, and, thus, we are encouraged to welcome those newer than we are. “At first, I found this uncomfortable, because I didn’t feel genuine approaching people,” a member shared. “But as I became more aware of the value of what had been so freely given to me, my desire to help new people grew. I sincerely felt hope for them, and I was truly excited to see them when they came back. I didn’t think I was even capable of feeling like that.”

For many of us, that shift is nothing short of a miracle. This newfound heartfelt commitment to the wellbeing of other addicts represents freedom from the self-centeredness we’ve been trapped in for so long. We know the program is working when we realize that we have hope for others to succeed.

Whether or not I feel that goodwill deep in my heart today, I acknowledge that the hope for freedom—for others and myself—is there at least some of the time, and I am grateful for it.

Goodwill Entry #2 of 8

Like so many things in recovery, how we do the work is as important as the work we do (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition 11, opening essay).

Many of us have had the experience of encountering a newcomer at a meeting or working with a sponsee who just can’t seem to get this recovery thing. We have wished that we could just pour experience, strength, and hope into their minds and hearts, but we know that it simply doesn’t work that way.

By participating in the H&I and public relations service committees, many of us get a front-row seat to newcomers’ awakening when we present panels to local schools or bring H&I meetings to inmates. Initially, some students attend to get out of class and prisoners to get out of their cells. Regardless of the motivation, many can’t help but identify. We see the looks on their faces change from indifference and apathy to relief and understanding. The NA message has a way of penetrating through that tough exterior and getting right to the heart of the still-suffering addict. Sharing openly and honestly, from the heart, is the most attractive thing we have to offer.

If we were to run around like NA fanatics, exclaiming the “spoils of recovery” based on our specific gains and achievements, this would be a misrepresentation of the truth. The practice of goodwill comes when we exercise discretion and deliver a simple message: Narcotics Anonymous can work for anyone with a desire to stop using. When the message is clear, recovery can take root.

Today, I will be mindful of how I represent myself inside and outside of the rooms, knowing that my story is not the Narcotics Anonymous program.

Goodwill, Entry #3 of 8

When we practice living in harmony with our world, we become wiser about choosing our battles. We learn where we can use our energy to make a difference and where we need to let go (*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Awakening to Our Spirituality”).

Let’s start with an uncomfortable truth: We are judgmental because we are human. Human beings assess one another; we compare ourselves. We can be tribal and take sides. We come by this honestly; our survival once depended it! Add the self-centered nature of addiction to our humanness, and then throw in something we care passionately about (such as the Fellowship of NA)—and our judgment can become a weapon to control outcomes about NA-related issues that other members also care about.

We can, however, turn down the volume on our judgments. With the volume adjusted, we learn that we can approach people and situations without engaging our fight or flight instincts. Our first thoughts may still be judgmental, but recovery gives us options about our behavior. It’s our actions that matter most.

When we have some cleantime and service experience, it’s tempting to tell members, groups, and service committees what’s what. But having knowledge and wisdom doesn’t give us authority. Group conscience is always more powerful than individual conscience. Sometimes—to our great surprise—newer members don’t defer to those of us who have been around for a while.

Practicing the principle of goodwill with members doesn’t mean we stay silent. Our opinions matter. Exercising goodwill assures those opinions don’t matter more or less than anyone else’s. We listen to others, don’t force the outcome to meet our desires, allow others to make mistakes (yes, even the ones we made), and acknowledge that our fellow members want the same things as we do: to stay clean and to carry the message in the most effective way possible.

Goodwill invokes our primary purpose. It serves the greater good of NA, not our egos.

I’ll take a stance of goodwill toward others by sharing my experience, not dictating outcomes—and by demonstrating openness to the suggestions of others.

Goodwill Entry #4 of 8

When goodwill supports and motivates both the individual and the Fellowship, we are fully whole and wholly free (Basic Text, “Our Symbol”).

Before coming to NA, we were chiefly motivated by selfishness with a white-hot focus on finding ways and means to get more drugs. A desire to stop using brings us to the rooms; it may be desperate or minimal, inspired by a nudge from the judge, our parents, our conscience, or the consequences of continuing to use. We had little use for integrity when we got here. And goodwill? Never heard of it.

And yet, recovery is available to us all. We start learning to serve when we have precious little time clean. As our journey continues, service becomes a staple of our program. We come to understand the meaning of integrity as we serve with other recovering addicts. We learn about goodwill by watching their walk. We explore how integrity fits into our new lifestyle and begin to examine our motives on a deeper level.

Sometimes the driving force behind our initial interest in participating in a service committee or taking a commitment is motivated by our desire to look good or the need for the validation of others. We may be doing the right thing, but we may not be doing it for the right reason. It’s a start.

The seeds of goodwill are planted as we continue to serve. We greet newcomers at our home group, help fill literature orders at a local service committee, or attend the regional service committee for the first time as we develop our relationship with service. We continue showing up and find that *why* we stay committed is different than what brought us to that commitment in the first place. Freedom springs from the newfound passion when we find our niche in service. We discover fulfillment and gratification born from selfless service and grounded in goodwill.

The foundation of our program is rooted in goodwill. As we continue to give of our time and effort with more principled intentions, our understanding of generosity broadens, and our personal freedom grows proportionally.

Today, I will explore my motives before committing to a service position inside and outside of Narcotics Anonymous.

Goodwill, Entry #5 of 8

Good will is best exemplified in service; proper service is “Doing the right thing for the right reason” (Basic Text, “Our Symbol”).

When engaging in service in NA, we can get caught up in our reasons why we choose—or are chosen for—a particular commitment. How “pure” is our motivation? How involved is our ego?

A useful skill we have sometimes leads us to the “right thing.” Some of us are natural leaders or organizers, have a knack for relating to people, or are good with numbers or words. Our reason might be as simple as following the suggestion of our sponsor or another member. Sometimes we’re motivated to join a committee based on who else is involved in it—admiring the chairperson’s recovery, or wanting to spend more time with friends or someone we have a crush on.

There are more spiritually-oriented motivations, too. Perhaps these are even more “right.” It could be a sincere desire to give back. We’re looking for purpose. We want to demonstrate our love for NA or to broaden our minds and our spirits. Maybe we prayed for guidance and walked through the doors that opened up, finding ourselves with a new service commitment.

Maybe we just want to feel better about ourselves.

We cannot completely avoid ego. Feeling good about ourselves is not improper, nor is desiring *some* validation or approval from others. It’s natural and human to want to be seen positively by our peers, to want others to (re)gain trust in us.

We place our feet as firmly as possible onto the foundation of goodwill and let our primary purpose influence our choices. Striving for an ideal of doing proper service for the right reasons is noble. But we can’t wait until the angels sing and the stars are aligned. Now is the time.

I will be of service, regardless of my motives. Exercising goodwill is enough today.

Goodwill, Entry #6 of 8

By practicing open-mindedness, we nurture an attitude of goodwill toward others and become willing to serve with our common good in mind (*It Works*, Tradition Two, “Applying Spiritual Principles”).

Before we found recovery, we served our own selfish desires almost exclusively. We used kindness and generosity as tools to manipulate, nothing more. The idea of serving others didn’t even enter our thoughts when we were out there hustling. After we’re clean for a bit, we learn to take actions that open us up to the concept of giving our time and serving the common good.

We start by acting our way into a different way of thinking. That means showing up for commitments despite the self-sabotage that happens between our ears. Regardless of how long or challenging our days may be, we get to our homegroup to make coffee if that’s our commitment. We show up because it is the right thing to do, in spite of any momentary lack of willingness. In reflection, we practiced goodwill and served the common good of the meeting by following through.

As we continue taking action, often opposite our thoughts, we become a little gentler with ourselves and more accepting of our own humanity. We come to understand that our first impulse might lead us astray. We learn to take a breath and call on a Higher Power to support our practice of goodwill.

Open-mindedness helps us access this spirit of generosity and selflessness. We may not talk about goodwill a lot, but you can see it in our actions and those of our fellows. Others depended on us, so we responded by being dependable. The “we” of NA becomes more important than the “me” in our old way of thinking and behaving.

Today, I will clear away judgement of myself and others so that I may feed a change in my attitude towards generosity and service.

Goodwill, Entry #7 of 8

In fact, the pyramid that is in our symbol is made up of relationships: with self, society, service, and God. Rooted in a base of goodwill, these are the relationships that bring us to a point of freedom (*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Conscious Contact”).

“A pyramid? I thought the NA symbol was just a square inside a circle.”

There are certainly many of us who are well-acquainted with our symbol, who understand its meaning and its potential application to our recovery. We make sure that sponsees and other newer members are just as familiar with it as we are. There are probably far more of us in the Fellowship who are far less familiar. We see the depiction of the symbol and read the accompanying explanation when we first crack open the *Basic Text*. It looks like something from geometry class, so we glaze over it. But it’s important, right? Our predecessors placed it right after the Table of Contents, and it’s emblazoned on T-shirts and other NA memorabilia all over the world. Yet, for many of us, the symbol remains two-dimensional, just as it appears in print and also in the sense that because we haven’t given it much thought. On closer inspection, we can see that the diagram depicts something *three-dimensional*: A pyramid.

While a pyramid’s sides are vital to its strength and endurance, its weight and stability rise from the base. In our NA paradigm, that stability comes from goodwill. As the NA symbol depicts, goodwill is the foundation of all the relationships in our lives. Ideally, the Steps are meant to help us build a relationship with ourselves. The Traditions strengthen our involvement with society—other NA members, our loved ones, our work lives, and so on. The spiritual principles bring us closer to a Higher Power, and NA’s Twelve Concepts ignite and support our relationship to service. The circle that wraps around the base, the “Universal Program,” shows that there is room for all recovering addicts. Goodwill reinforces all this interconnectedness, and freedom is the resulting gift. Freedom is where the reinforcements have paid off, and the weight has been lifted.

We cannot have healthy relationships without the support of goodwill. And we cannot have freedom without the strength of our relationships.

How free am I today? If freedom seems too aspirational at the moment, what relationships can I work on to get closer to it?

Goodwill, Entry #8 of 8

It’s not selfish to know that having a purpose makes us feel better. If we are acting in goodwill—doing the right thing for the right reasons—we are sure to benefit (*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Principles, Practice, and Perspective”).

Long before we started using, many of us dreamt of what we might become when we grew up, and what direction life might take us in. In the process of sinking deeper into active addiction, our disease progressed, dampening any vision we may have had for ourselves in the future. We spent all of our time pursuing selfish desires to escape reality. The world became very small with each day planned around how and when we would get high.

Once we start living in recovery, we begin to see the big picture outside of ourselves. We experiment with pursuits that feed our spirit: acts of generosity, creativity, and community building. Searching for meaning and purpose in our lives becomes a part of our spiritual journey.

Discovering a sense of purpose can be pivotal in our recovery. We find meaning in helping others. We offer kindness and compassion and receive a sense of unparalleled joy and happiness in return. This reciprocal relationship is the essence of goodwill, feeding our spirit and the spirits of those we serve.

Being of service in Narcotics Anonymous and showing up with integrity can pave the road to a more optimistic sense of self. We start by engaging in esteemable acts like showing up for ourselves and others. We begin to feel better and enjoy a newfound sense of purpose. When we take a moment to look around the room, we are assured that this sense of purpose will sustain us throughout our lives.

*Today, I will develop my character by pursuing my purpose with a passion,
keeping integrity, and goodwill at the forefront of my actions.*

Grace, Entry #1 of 6

What we find is not that our Higher Power spares us the hardships of life, but that we receive the grace to get through them clean (*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Walking the Walk”).

When terrible things happen to us or people we love, especially those we deem to be innocent and undeserving of strife, our first reaction is often to try to make sense of it, to look for someone or something to blame. “How could this happen?” Such incidents—like a terminal diagnosis or losing a child, or less dire ones like getting fired from a job—can shake our faith in our Higher Power or the NA program. We may question, “Why am I bothering to stay clean and trying to live by all these spiritual principles if life is just going to end up causing me so much pain?”

No matter how much integrity we practice and how much love we have in our hearts—or how little—life will continue to show up. Instead of trying to reason our way through pain or out of a mess, we learn to ask our Higher Power, in whatever way makes sense for us, “How am I going to get through this clean?”

If we ask this question in earnest and listen for the answer, we will be able to find grace. Grace is an active force in our lives. It’s the gentle nudge that directs us toward the next right thing and gives us a reprieve from our addict thinking and reasoning. Grace allows us to find blessings in the hardships we endure—or, at the very least, to accept what’s happening to us and seek guidance. We know that others have gone through the same life events that we are experiencing and have stayed clean. That collective wisdom, the deep well of experience and resources available to us through our connection to NA, is grace.

The more we notice and acknowledge the presence of grace, the more grace we’ll experience.

Even in times of great distress, I will make an effort to be present enough to recognize and receive grace.

Grace, Entry #2 of 6

The people in our lives are the means by which we experience grace. We see the miracle of change in others, and they reflect our own changes back to us (*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, opening section).

The company we kept in active addiction was based on convenience and ulterior motives. We barely trusted anyone and relied on manipulation to get what we needed. It’s no wonder that many of our friendships were short-lived. Denial protected us from seeing the destruction we brought to our relationships.

When we concede that we are powerless over our addiction in Step One, we begin to see the benefits of being honest with ourselves. Emboldened, we begin practicing honesty in our new friendships in recovery.

In forming real friendships, we open the gateway to grace. Grace allows us to view our lives from multiple angles. We can mute the inner critic and appreciate that we possess some of the same qualities we admire in others. As one member noted, “You are or you want to be the people you surround yourself with.” Like the other members of our support circle, we strive to get a better perspective on life. Their reflection offers us a picture of who we are now and who we are becoming. Today, we are not alone.

As we continue to recover, we cultivate trusting relationships, strengthening our network of support. Key people in our lives can provide us with an honest reflection of our character. They allow us to experience grace by seeing ourselves through their eyes. Our ability to acknowledge our own progress and spiritual growth is evidence that we see the world and ourselves more clearly. We see ourselves as our peers see us, no more and no less.

I will make an effort to see myself more clearly today. I will surround myself with people whom I love and respect and look to them for an honest reflection of my progress.

Grace, Entry #3 of 6

When dancers move through space with intention and beauty, we say they are graceful. In the same way, when we move through our lives with intention and gratitude, we demonstrate grace; when we crash from one self-willed experience to another, creating damage and confusion, we are disgraceful (*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Awakenings”).

“Disgraceful?” That’s a bit harsh...But if we’re using dance as a metaphor for how we move about our lives, then all that crashing and thrashing will certainly result in injuries, and very likely several of the other dancers in the company (family, NA members, coworkers) will get hurt as well.

If we extend the metaphor further, the NA program is our choreography—Steps, how perfect! We dance all twelve seriously and in order, with intention and purpose. We attend meetings and do service (more choreography). We listen to and are moved by the music (our literature, the shares in meetings). We attend to rhythm, pace, and breath (spiritual principles) to stay on track. We are the artists, so each of us develops our own unique interpretation of the dance. We recovering addicts are always honing our craft, interpreting, trying to serve the higher purpose of staying clean, practicing principles, and guiding newer dancers through the Steps. Grace(fulness) works when we work it.

But who is the choreographer in this metaphor? Is it our Higher Power, our sponsor, our predecessors? Perhaps a combination of all three depending on the particular dance. It doesn’t matter who...as long as it isn’t our egos. When that takes over, and we worry about what the audience thinks of us, rather than focusing on the art of living clean, that’s when we crash and burn—and, yeah, then we get kind of disgraceful. That’s what got us in this darn dance company in the first place, isn’t it?

I may not always strike the right rhythm in recovery, but when my focus is more on serving a greater purpose than having things my own way, I still might fall—but will ultimately land on my feet. And now for a cat metaphor...

Grace, Entry #4 of 6

Spiritual awakening is a process. Maybe it is what the whole process is about. We nurture our awakening spirits and know that we are finally free to live in grace, integrity, and dignity (*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Creative Action of Spirit”).

When we were using drugs, our spirits slowly eroded as our disease progressed. We compromised our beliefs and screwed over anyone who got in the way of our self-serving plans. The journey from desperation to spiritual awakening is a long and storied path for each of us.

A pink cloud may protect us from the jagged edges of life on life’s terms for a time, but reality sets in sooner or later. Eventually, we will walk through the death of someone close to us or perhaps go through a painful divorce with years clean. We each deal with loss differently. Our initial response may be to avoid our feelings, instead seeking comfort in food or sex or gaming. With time, we learn to rely on a power greater than ourselves and our support group to navigate overwhelming feelings. When we let go and surrender to the process, our spirits are free to awaken.

Grace teaches us to let things unfold naturally and let go of the illusion of control. We’re less invested in outcomes, and we focus instead on aligning our will with the greater good. We open our minds to the possibilities and pay attention to opportunities as well as to closed doors. We live in the moment and enjoy the freedom that comes with grace.

I will let go of my expectations and enjoy the clarity of the moment. I will allow myself to be present for the evolution of my spiritual journey and revel in the grace of living just for today.

Grace, Entry #5 of 6

Each day, we are faced with new challenges. And each day, through working our program of recovery, we are given the grace to meet those challenges (*Just for Today*, May 27, “Meeting the day’s challenge”).

Life is beautiful—and we may experience immense joy and serenity and love and all that good stuff—but it ain’t easy. What addict will argue with that point? However, by getting and staying clean in NA, we develop the competence to deal with life on its own terms, meaning not only the immense life-changing events but also the daily challenges that arise in work, family, and relationships. Ideally, meeting those challenges involves acceptance of our limited power, the courage to act in spite of this, and surrendering to the result. We do this with the gift of grace.

For some of us, the challenge we experience with grace is its intangibility. We don’t really know what it is or where this gift is coming from. But maybe we don’t have to fully understand grace to receive it.

Many of us are reluctant to use “grace” in our everyday language about recovery. We may bristle at its religious undertones, given that it’s most often paired with “God,” as in “God’s grace.” What if we don’t conceive of our Higher Power as an almighty giver of gifts like grace or staying clean or life itself?

Members who hold more traditional conceptions of a Higher Power may find it easier to accept the gift of grace. The rest of us may hesitate, especially if we feel ill-equipped to define a gift we’re supposed to be getting and then complicate matters by obsessing about the source of this gift.

Perhaps we can look at NA itself as the source of the gift of grace, because it teaches us to surrender, be humble, and act with integrity. In essence, the program shows us how to live in accordance with our values. We can achieve a state of grace by striving to do just that.

Today, I will put grace into action by approaching life’s challenges with integrity and being grateful for the opportunity to do so. Even if I don’t fully understand the gift of grace, I will accept it anyway. What have I got to lose?

Grace, Entry #6 of 6

Anonymity opens us to grace (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Twelve, “Opening Meditation”).

Within the rooms of NA, anonymity provides an important bridge to gracious behavior. Anonymity allows us to see each other as equals and to identify our common bond. It stands in contrast to any prejudice or old belief that might interfere with practicing grace. When we view our fellow members as peers, no better or worse than ourselves, grace helps us extend equal access to recovery.

By setting aside the things that separate us, we can allow grace to shape our actions. We are free to look past our judgments of ourselves and others as anonymous addicts. The same holds true outside of the rooms of NA. We can practice grace whether in line at the market, on the job, or in passing. We accept that others face difficulties, just as we do, and many go through life without an opportunity to learn to live by spiritual principles. We assume that others are doing their best, even when their best is sometimes terrible.

As we integrate spiritual principles in all of our affairs, it’s easier to be gracious. We show up at work and do the right thing, regardless of who else may be having a bad day. We allow family members the space to be who they are. Having joined the human race, we recognize what grace brings to our humanity. We’re inspired to be gracious in our words and actions. When we invite grace to guide our actions, we’re inspired to treat others with decency and respect.

I will practice grace by treating others with kindness and respect, just as I would like to be treated.

Harmony, Entry #1 of 6

We can come to these relationships in a spirit of harmony and love, or from a place of suspicion and fear (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Twelve, “In Service”).

In any society, including Narcotics Anonymous, there’s a natural tension between addressing the common good and getting our individual needs met. That tension may be more pronounced in a society made up of addicts who are trying to stay clean. We each live at the center of our own worlds, each with our own intricate histories and our own collection of uniquely expressed character defects—and assets too, lest we forget. The delivery of our NA message of hope depends in part upon the relationships that we create, nurture, and sustain among us. This is an extraordinary and sublimely beautiful challenge.

Unity takes up this challenge for the common good of NA. This means we prioritize carrying the NA message over our individual desires and our personal opinions of other members. We commit to the conscious action of coming together for a common cause. We serve with members we dislike or have valid cause to distrust, as well as those we find appealing and trustworthy.

Harmony is the recognition and appreciation that there’s reverence and beauty in facing the challenges to unity. We *get* to practice unity, instead of we *have* to. Or we don’t practice it, and we run the risk of alienating our fellows. Harmony emerges when we practice unity despite our differences, and we do this with a sense of serenity and peacefulness. It’s the epitome of “we don’t have to like each other to work together, but we have to love each other.”

In service, conflicts will arise. Aggression and retreat are absolutely natural reactions in the face of conflict, but they don’t solve it. It takes *effort* to practice the principles of love, compassion, and understanding in harmony with unity, responsibility, and interdependence.

I will look for opportunities—especially in service work—where I can bring a spirit of harmony to my relationships. I get to do this. I get to.

Harmony, Entry #2 of 6

Together we seek our Higher Power’s will and the power to carry that out. We know what it feels like to be in harmony with that conscience (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Two, “For Members”).

There is a link between the conscious contact we seek as individuals and the collective conscience that may express itself in the decision-making processes of our groups, according to Tradition Two. When we’re spiritually fit, it’s easier to tune into group conscience. It turns out that seeking our Higher Power’s will for ourselves positions us to tap into the same for our NA groups.

We recover over time, not overnight. Likewise, our spiritual awakenings take time to unfold. In Step Two, we came to believe that a Higher Power could restore us to sanity. We made a decision in Step Three, a decision we recommit to by surrendering daily and working the rest of the Steps.

By the time we get to the Eleventh Step, most of us are ready to step up our spirituality game. We explore different ways to pray and meditate. We get in the groove of a daily routine that strengthens our conscious contact with a Higher Power. We notice the payoff: less noise between our ears, more harmony in our dealings with others.

As with so many aspects of our personal and spiritual growth, improving our conscious contact improves our ability to serve. Our egos get to be “right-sized.” It becomes less important that we are heard as individuals and more important that our voice harmonizes with those of our fellow members, our coworkers, even our families. We make an effort to sing from the same songbook, even when we’re not singing the same notes. In fact, singing in harmony means just that: we hit different notes, but they complement each other as the group’s voice emerges.

My participation in life and in service improves when I’m spiritually in tune. I will inventory my Eleventh Step routines and make any needed adjustments.

Harmony, Entry #3 of 6

Sanity is living in harmony with reality (*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “A Vision of Hope”).

“Get real.”

To addicts—even those of us with time clean—reality can be a dirty word. People telling us that our version of XYZ isn’t real, that we are in denial about XYZ, or, worst of all, that our feelings about XYZ don’t square with reality?! They might as well be telling us to go FXYZ ourselves!

When we are in active addiction, it is much easier to hold false beliefs about ourselves and the world around us. We don’t want to hear the truth, because we fear the truth will hurt us. In a sense, drugs keep us safe from having to deal with reality...until they don’t. When we get clean, that barrier is removed, and the Twelve Step process actively challenges us to discover, dismantle, and discard those beliefs that separate us from the truth of a situation and prevent us from being authentic and acting with integrity.

The ongoing struggle is in identifying which of our beliefs are not in harmony with reality. This process starts when we begin to trust that we might not have the most astute judgment about our choices. Our willingness to question the stories we tell ourselves often precedes our ability to see reality. We accept help from other recovering addicts as we navigate through the minefield of our alternate realities.

Our capacity to be in harmony with the world around us improves when our worldview widens and is shaped more by principles than by our disease. Reality becomes less distorted. The Serenity Prayer’s meaning becomes astoundingly clear.

After a period of numbness, reality often stings. But the truth will help us, not harm us.

What is an “XYZ” in my life that I currently can’t see clearly? Can I trust my own perspective about that issue? If I’m not sure, who in my life loves me enough to tell me to “get real”?

Harmony, Entry #4 of 6

When we practice living in harmony with our world, we become wiser about choosing our battles. We learn where we can use our energy to make a difference and where we need to let go (*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Awakening to Our Spirituality”).

Freedom of choice is a new concept for most of us in recovery. Recovery allows us to start to make healthy choices for ourselves and to consider the consequences of those choices for everyone involved. We begin to realize that we are not the center of the universe and strive to practice goodwill. Living in harmony with the world comes easily when our interactions with others are guided by mutual respect. We may be unaccustomed to disagreeing without being disagreeable, but we can see the benefits of this approach.

When we’re engaged with life, disagreements and conflicts come with the territory. In recovery, we learn to navigate confrontations differently than we had in the past. None of us gets clean to be a doormat, so we’ve got to learn to defend ourselves and fight for our passions in principled ways.

With practice, we become less impulsive in our actions and take time to decide where we want to spend our energy. One member described how he questions his own thought process: “Am I championing this cause as a matter of principle or pride? Is this my battle, or do I need to let go?” We learn from our mistakes and those of others, and consider the suggestions made by members of our support group more often. We grow to understand the preciousness of time. With only 24 hours in a day, we choose to navigate conflict in ways that preserve our dignity and foster harmony.

I will take a deep breath as I decide how to spend my time and energy. Today, I will choose responses that preserve my dignity and that of those around me.

Harmony, Entry #5 of 6

When our bodies, minds, and spirits are in harmony, our lives show the difference. We are able to live in balance (*Living Clean*, Chapter Three, “A Spiritual Journey”).

Addicts arrive in—or return to—NA with our lives in turmoil and out of balance. Our health is in the toilet. Mentally, we are all over the map. Spiritually, we are in a blackout.

Though we may not all be at the same degree of chaos, no one bounds happily through the door of their first NA meeting—or our first one after a relapse—feeling stable and whole. We stagger or slink or sidle in. We come to NA via prison or narrowly escaping it. We’re pushed in by family or rehab, or dragged in by an NA member we used to get high with—or stayed clean with. As we’ve heard members quip, “We are not well!”

Since our journeys in recovery most often begin with the elimination of substances, our health likely improves first. Our minds dip back into friendly territory, though the visits may not be as long as we’d like. Through attending meetings, working Steps, and building relationships with other members, we begin to awaken spiritually. Not all of us label it that way, or maybe we don’t have words for it, but something inside of us is shifting. Outside of us, our behavior is definitely shifting. By taking commitments, showing up for others, acting “right,” we stay clean.

Whether we believe this is the work of a loving Higher Power or we’re doing it because our sponsor told us to (because it’s “spiritual”), our inner chaos lessens, and our outward stability increases. The lights come on, and they aren’t so easily extinguished by the wind and rain that keep coming at us, because that’s life.

I will take stock today of how I am physically, mentally, and spiritually. What can I do to establish some balance and spark some harmony?

Harmony, Entry #6 of 6

We see ourselves as part of something greater, and seek to live in harmony with it. (*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Spirituality is Practical”).

The connection we share with other addicts in recovery is undeniable. We bond as we share about our difficult pasts and learn to laugh at ourselves. The common solution we’ve found in the Twelve Steps of NA keeps us grounded and growing. We need each other to stay clean. We lean into this truth in the beginning and through the rough patches that life brings. “Together, we can,” as the saying goes. That’s at the heart of the simplest, most profound conception of a power greater than ourselves.

Belonging to something greater than ourselves is sweet, and we want more. We see the wisdom—sometimes with 20/20 hindsight—of the common refrain: “If you want more out of this program, you’ve got to put more in.” We seek opportunities to share the freedom that we found in NA. We may pick up an extra slot on the phoneline or make a point of supporting a struggling group. These actions are symbolic of our commitment to “something greater.” They contribute to the harmony in the rooms and in our heads.

We’re motivated, at least in part, by the good feelings and good times that doing service makes possible. While some of us love doing H&I work, others may be better suited to serving on the activities committee or maintaining the website. Some of us simply want to do anything other than speak at a meeting, but we will do that, too, if we are asked. There are as many ways to carry the message as there are addicts in recovery. Each member has strengths that will contribute to the work of carrying the message. When we serve together, sharing recovery from the disease of addiction, we sustain our primary purpose. Living in harmony with others brings us freedom, but we can only keep it by giving it away.

I will contribute to the harmony in Narcotics Anonymous. I will help other addicts find their part in something greater, and I will enrich my own freedom by being of service.

Humility, Entry #1 of 7

It’s a tremendous struggle for most of us to stop relying on our own thinking and begin to ask for help, but when we do, we have begun to practice the principle of humility found in the Second Step (*The Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guides*, Step Two, “Spiritual Principles”).

Before recovery, pride, ego, and denial were essential to our survival. They allowed us to feign a fierce sense of independence. In our new way of life, these powerful defects of character can often lead to addicts suffering from “Super Hero Syndrome”—the belief that we can and must do everything on our own. This can be a very lonely place, separated from the God of our understanding and other addicts in recovery. It can be so easy for us to encourage our friends and sponsees to reach out to others for help, only to find ourselves stuck in our own self-centered thinking.

In the Second Step, we begin to build a belief system and come to understand that two of us together represents a power greater than any of us on our own. In our active addiction, many of us perceive asking for help as a form of weakness. But we learn to be vulnerable enough to ask for support and find strength in this surrender. For many of us, the sponsorship relationship is where we learn to trust someone and reach out when we are in need.

Something clicks into place when we realize that we are not giving up our independence or problem-solving abilities by simply asking others to be there for us. Whether it is a shoulder to cry on, experience with a commitment, or learning how to do our own laundry—we all need a little help sometimes. One addict shared, “As I practice humility and become open to the support of others, my relationships become increasingly authentic.”

When we can let go of the idea that “our way is the only way,” then we can find some comfort in knowing that we are not alone in this process. People can and will help us; all we have to do is ask.

Even though it can feel like an attempt to climb Mount Everest, I will continue to reach out and let another member help me to consider a perspective besides my own.

Humility, Entry #2 of 7

Understanding that we are not unique is a good indication of humility (*It Works*, Step Seven).

The disease of addiction turns us into masters of self-deception. A distorted view of the world might convince us that we’re smarter than the average addict. When we are new to Narcotics Anonymous, this outlook can keep us separate from everyone in the room and lead us right back out the door.

The pain of stubbornly holding onto our perceived uniqueness can keep us stuck in isolation. As one member found, “Eventually the pain was great enough, and it didn’t matter how different I thought I was from everyone else. I was an addict, and if I didn’t want to die, I had to start doing some work.”

Step Seven shows us that in surrendering the defect of denial, we can let go of arrogance and pride, creating room for humility and identification within the Fellowship. We can see our humility grow when we can sit in a meeting and *naturally* hear the similarities rather than our differences.

When we trust a loving Higher Power to remove our shortcomings, we begin to make space for our true selves and develop a sense of our place within an NA community. Regardless of how long we have clean, how old we were when we got here, or our career status—we remain teachable. The gift of humility allows us to learn how to ask for help and take suggestions.

Sometimes, even with years clean, we can convince ourselves that “our case is different” or “we are the exception.” Calling our sponsors, regularly attending meetings, and continuing to practice spiritual principles remind us that we share the bond of addiction, as well as a common solution in NA. Whether we think we are “nowhere near that bad” or “the most flawed person in the room,” we eventually find a place where we can be right-sized by continuing to work the Steps.

Today, I will be grateful for freedom from the sharp edges of my uniqueness and find opportunities to identify with our fellow addicts.

Humility, Entry #3 of 7

A hard lesson in humility reminds us that we never graduate. When we stop practicing the basics, we are in trouble (*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Getting Out of Our Own Way”).

In active addiction, we were convinced that we had all the answers. This arrogance kept us in the dark and might have killed us if we hadn’t found NA. As newcomers, desperation forces us to unlock the door to humility. At that threshold, we learn to ask for help and take suggestions.

The basics—meetings, sponsor, Steps, service, Higher Power, not picking up no matter what—are the same for all of us. Our literature offers abundant and simple advice for what we must do to get humble and stay clean. In meetings, we frequently hear members recount their version of: “I relapsed because I stopped doing the basics.” Our fellows continually tell us there’s no finish line in NA, no graduation. We believe all this. The stories we hear in the rooms are the evidence. So, we soldier on with the basics.

...Until life gets in the way. The good stuff: We’re housed, out of prison, making bank, got our kids back, in love. We graduate (from school!). Staying connected to NA becomes harder. Those basics are time-consuming, and time is scarce these days. The arrogance we banished creeps back in. We got this! We did the work! We can have one _____ [*insert substance of choice*!] ... *We are in trouble.*

How much trouble we get in depends on how willing we are to get back to the basics. We don’t have to destroy our lives and lose everything. We can become teachable again and rediscover our spiritual center. We can call a fellow addict, show up at our home group, say “what’s up” to our HP.

We’ve heard: “If I never leave the basics, I never have to get back to them.” It means more now.

Which of “the basics” are lacking in my program? What am I willing to do today to change that?

Humility, Entry #4 of 7

The practice of humility helps us be honest about our circumstances. We learn to live and give within the limits of our lives (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Seven, “For Members”).

In active addiction, we became masters of manipulation. We spun a web of lies so intricate that we began to believe our own nonsense. The admission that we were addicts may have been the first time we had been *truly* honest with ourselves in years. With this honesty comes an opportunity to take a look at our lives and where our antics led us.

For many of us, being at our lowest low, having lost everything but our lives, and feeling humiliated by our behavior inspires a modicum of honesty and humility. Others of us identify our spiritual and emotional desperation before we destroyed our relationships or lost our material possessions. In either case, an honest assessment leads us to practice humility as we accept that we’re no better and no worse than anyone else in the room.

As we stay clean, we get to know ourselves better through the process of working the Steps. Becoming familiar with our strengths and weaknesses in the Sixth Step gives us some perspective on what we have to offer the world and the Fellowship. And in Step Seven, we find new freedom in developing a humble and realistic view of ourselves and our resources.

Life has a way of nudging us back to a state of humility as new experiences challenge us over time. We learn to stay clean through life’s losses—divorce, bankruptcy, death. And we learn to stay humble even as we pursue an education, meet success in our careers, or establish healthy romantic relationships. We do our best to stay grounded in our program by remaining humble.

Practicing humility can help us learn how to monitor our emotional well-being and change course before we hit a breaking point. When we lose sight of our humility, we become more vulnerable to overextending ourselves, risking emotional or physical exhaustion. Over time, we learn our limits. Protecting pride and ego take a backseat to defending healthy boundaries. We begin to learn how to give within our means.

Today, I will maintain a realistic perspective of my circumstances and exercise discernment when offering to contribute or serve.

Humility, Entry #5 of 7

Being asked to lead, to serve, to accept responsibility, is a humbling experience for a recovering addict (*A Guide to Local Services in Narcotics Anonymous*, Fourth Concept).

While using, most of us were not asked to lead anything. When we did have such experiences, they were often opportunities for our ego-based character defects to feed like vampires on their victims’ blood. Our ravenous need for perfection and validation, our self-importance, competitiveness, and attention-seeking branded those situations. Others of us imploded with self-doubt. We couldn’t ask for help, didn’t feel we had anything to offer, or were too high to show up. Such experiences only made us more isolated and fearful, and even less willing to take on responsibilities, if anyone bothered to ask again.

When it comes to service, our one-two punch of low self-esteem and high self-importance follow us into the rooms. If we are asked to take out the rubbish, it requires asking someone, “Where to?” and even that can be hard for us. If we’re asked to lead a meeting, we need assurance that we don’t have to wow them with a *tour de force* or slay with our comic genius. All we have to do is show up and be honest. When we lack humility, everything is more complicated than it needs to be.

If we are willing, we’ll end up in service positions that suit our innate talents, some that we’ll grow into with support, and others that will expose our defects to the bone. Humility is the vehicle that allows us to accept responsibility without serving our ego. We can do something well without showing off, just as we can do something awkwardly, or even fail at it, with grace.

Next time I’m asked to serve, I’ll just do the task as well as possible. That’s what really matters.

Humility, Entry #6 of 7

We all go through times when we need help of one kind or another. Asking for help may be as principled and as difficult as anything we ever do (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Seven, “For Members”).

Moving into our first apartment clean, learning how to pay bills on time, going to a funeral or a wedding for the first time in recovery, asking someone to sit with us while the craving to pick up passes—life on life's terms presents us with opportunities to ask for help on a daily basis. Our old way of thinking—shaped by self-centeredness and denial—guards a myth that equates asking for help with weakness.

It takes a great deal of courage to push past the impulse to do all of this on our own. We cultivate humility as we surrender our excessive pride. We ask for and receive support from other members and find the courage to face new emotions and experiences. One member shared, “Today, I see that asking for help is our greatest source of strength.”

At times, life shows up and hits us square in the face. No matter how good a program we work, life can be an emotional rollercoaster. We all suffer losses. Success, at first so unfamiliar, can be challenging as well. And often we feel ill-equipped to handle life on life's terms alone. The good news is that we don't have to.

The hardest part of getting help may be asking for it. We don't feel worthy and may think of ourselves as a burden. We swallow our pride and turn to more experienced NA members for help. As awkward as that might be, our requests are typically met with graciousness. Having navigated many of life's obstacles clean, they're usually delighted to share their wisdom and offer support. The joys of helping another addict don't end when we attain X number of years.

Learning how to be self-supporting does not mean that life's challenges become a solo endeavor. By practicing humility, we learn what our limitations are, establish some healthy boundaries, and set out in new directions that develop our strengths.

Today, I will challenge my old ways of thinking by asking someone about their experience and opening myself up to their support.

Humility, Entry #7 of 7

Humility is most easily identified as an acceptance of who we truly are—neither worse nor better than we believed we were when we were using, just human (*The Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guides*, Step One, “Spiritual Principles”).

In early recovery, we often find ourselves going from unrealistic, grandiose self-perception to believing we are the worst person in history. It’s that familiar addict pendulum swing—from one extreme to the other (with an optional sound effect):

I’m a spiritual giant deserving of high praise—*WHOOSH!*—I’m a worthless piece of trash.

I’m the hottest person here—*WHOOSH!*—I’m repulsive and don’t deserve to live.

I’m the only parent who knows what she’s doing—*WHOOSH!*—I’m going to screw up my kid worse than my parents screwed me up.

Torchbearer of overblown self-importance—*WHOOSH!*—barren self-pity farm.

Hero—*WHOOSH!*—zero.

Getting clean and working the Twelve Steps of NA can slow our addict pendulum and greatly narrow the distance of its swing. The humility that ensues from working Steps will help us to find that serene sweet-spot somewhere in the middle. This place is where our true selves reside. Here lives reality.

Humility is like kryptonite to our self-indulgence, jealousy, and entitlement. It allows us to accept the beautiful muddle of our humanity, the truth of our perfectly imperfect selves, and our authentic place in the world. We can have reasonable expectations of ourselves and let others be who they are without our interference. We can find humor in our shortcomings and try to do better when criticized, instead of wanting to annihilate ourselves when we make a mistake.

Perhaps most crucially, we don’t boast about our spiritual growth, especially in comparison to other members, nor do we overindulge in denigrating who we “used to be” when we were using. We were human then, and we’re human now.

I will try to be mindful of where my pendulum is swinging today. Though I can accept where I am, I’ll still try to move toward the center, because that’s what’s real.

Imperfection, Entry #1 of 2

Beyond our addiction, we are human beings: members of society who have gifts and flaws like everyone else (*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Friendship”).

We are recovering addicts with the disease of addiction. This is not news.

We have pasts (do we ever!), the present (especially when we can be in it), and futures (hopefully). We have attractions, virtues, and abilities, and yet we have limitations, vices, and liabilities. We do good in the world—sometimes a lot of it. We also make mistakes—sometimes horrendous ones.

We’ve been shaped by our cultures, societies, and environments. We have religious beliefs or nonreligious ones. We have relationships, jobs, interests, causes, ailments... We have multiples of any and all of these. None of these elements completely defines us. Instead, they make us human.

As addicts, we tend to focus more on what’s *wrong* with us than what’s *right*. But we are no more flawed than other people, even non-addicts. We are not pathological, nor are we deserving of stigma because of our addiction.

Being an addict is only one aspect of our humanity. Through working the Twelve Steps, we learn that the story of our drug use isn’t as important as the one we create in our recovery. We have the opportunity to identify our gifts as well as our flaws, and we come to understand that our flaws do not negate those gifts.

We are all imperfect because we are human. Recovery won’t make us perfect, but it can certainly help us to embrace our humanity.

Today, my aim is to lead with my assets. I will honestly assess where I fall short and accept that I’m imperfect, like everybody else.

Imperfection, Entry #2 of 2

Accepting that we make mistakes and that they are not the end of the world or the end of a relationship is part of coming to terms with our own humanity (*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Friendship”).

Self-destruct mode is a common default setting for many addicts. When we screw up, we think, “maybe it’s just better if I don’t talk to them ever again.” This self-defeating mindset would have us avoid uncomfortable conversations at all costs. We come to learn that these awkward moments are rich opportunities for growth.

Step Ten gets us in the habit of examining our part in every situation. We see our liabilities but no longer believe that we are the sum-total of our mistakes. We learn to sustain relationships instead of blowing them up and walking away. We make amends when it’s warranted. We learn how to communicate directly, to know our limits, to listen, and to apologize.

We learn to be as forgiving with ourselves as we are with others. When we accept the humanity of those around us, by extension, we can grasp our own humanity. We start to treat ourselves with more compassion and embrace our imperfection. We find, as one member put it, that we are “broken in all the right places.” Being real and flawed and vulnerable and self-aware is attractive. We connect with others when we allow ourselves to be fully human.

I will be a better friend to myself today and clear out an obstacle that's interfering in one of my relationships.

Maturity, Entry #1 of 5

Doing the right thing when no one is looking is an act of service to what we believe in. Some of us call this integrity; the Sixth Step calls it character. Whatever we call it, this practice is the discipline that forms the basis of our growing maturity (*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Commitment”).

Integrity. Character. Discipline. Maturity. Not often were these words used in reference to us when we were in active addiction, except perhaps to note the lack thereof.

While many NA members completely reject being the center of attention, there are just as many of us who adore the spotlight or who, at the very least, undertake commitments to be acknowledged and praised. In the course of our recovery, we’ll have ample opportunity to dissect what motivates our choices. As a practical matter, we might simply concede that active addiction left us with many regrets. We were ashamed of many of our actions and inactions. In recovery, we have the opportunity to get things done—in NA, in our jobs and family life—because those things *need* to get done. Adhering to that sense of practicality and work ethic—rather than the attention-grabbing “Look at me!”—is a sign of maturity and integrity. It shows character and discipline, too. All of it.

And, sure, if we have a commitment that we do consistently, competently, and maybe with our own creative spin on it, our efforts may draw some positive attention. Accepting others’ gratitude is also a sign of maturity.

We don’t need to plan our service entirely around making sure no one is looking. That would be anonymity overkill. We don’t need overkill; we just need to do the right thing so we can stay clean and help others do the same.

Today, I’m deciding to let my contributions to the world speak for themselves. If they speak only to me, so be it. If others notice and express their appreciation, so be that!

Maturity, Entry #2 of 5

Facing uncomfortable situations and taking loving action is a demonstration of maturity and grace (*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Principles, Practice, and Perspective”).

Some of us took conflict avoidance to a new level. We didn’t just steer clear of confrontations; we adopted a general policy that uncomfortable situations are best avoided. We applied this rule in our personal lives, with our families, at work, and in the Fellowship. Given a chance, we avoided any circumstances that might be awkward. We made excuses and skirted around the very experiences that build bonds among humans. Embarrassed by our own unease, we dodged the friend who needed comforting, declined invitations to weddings, and switched meeting attendance following an embarrassing outburst.

When we resisted showing up for life, our social awkwardness left us feeling incapable of taking the simplest of loving actions. In active addiction, we may have convinced ourselves that we didn’t give a damn; our conduct was certainly consistent with this sentiment. Despite our every intention to remain aloof, we find ourselves learning to care as we begin to recover.

A desire to increase our level of engagement with the world may sneak up on us in time, or it might not. Some of us are loners by nature; it’s just how we’re wired. Finding comfort in solitude is a beautiful thing. Isolation is a different matter. When we need help but refuse to pick up the phone, we might be in trouble. We learn to identify when enjoying our own company gives way to isolation, and to take the actions necessary to stay safe and clean.

The Steps help us figure out who we are and who we’re not. Experience is a great teacher, boosting our confidence in simply being ourselves. Instead of avoiding awkward situations, we walk through them. We enjoy the payoff when we get to the other side. When we reflect on our actions, we can see our growth. We let go of our old ways of feigned indifference and find ways to be ourselves in the world. Our willingness to grow and to be ourselves in the world shows that we are evolving into a more mature version of ourselves.

I will reframe my outlook on my own discomfort and take on opportunities to practice maturity and grace.

Maturity, Entry #3 of 5

Emotional maturity is our reward for letting go of anger and resentment. (*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Principles, Practice, and Perspective”).

When *that cat* opens their mouth in our committee meeting, it can take everything in us not to attack them, mock them, shut them down using whatever tactic we can. We may want to bolt from the room because we see how this person—who may or may not have wronged us in some way—enjoys the respect of other members in the group. We want to expose them as a fraud and a hypocrite, but we don’t. We say nothing because we know that our personal feelings about another member should play no role in how, for instance, our area contributes to the region’s fellowship development efforts.

At other business meetings, we’ll have no problem keeping our mouths shut, because we’d much rather roll our eyes—and smugly watch the same two members battle it out like they *always* do over the finer points of coordinating an effective public relations campaign. In those situations, we have to stop ourselves from sharing the eye roll with everyone else in the room, revealing our displeasure with the proceedings. We’d love to break our silence by audibly groaning at how much time they are taking up. A member shared, “The second I start thinking about how I’m the only adult in the room, I know I’m not coming from a place of emotional maturity.”

With some practice, we can learn to check ourselves in situations where previously our inner demon would have burst out in full force and killed the proceedings. Similarly, our adolescent self that would snark, scoff, and snipe at members merely being themselves can be restrained.

Emotional maturity may not sound like a big enough reward for not acting out on our character defects—but doesn’t it make our lives so much more manageable? And peaceful? And isn’t that why we came here in the first place?

I will practice reining in my reactivity in situations where my personal feelings about other members serve no relevant purpose. Today, emotional maturity is a reasonable reward for those efforts.

Maturity, Entry #4 of 5

Maturity comes to us when we use spiritual principles rather than defects to deal with reality (*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Awakening Our Spirit”).

It took some pretty gnarly survival skills to deny our active addiction. Some of us coped by living a life of make-believe. Such fantasy thinking has a nasty habit of following us into recovery. It re-emerges when we’re unwilling to accept circumstances as they are, or resist taking personal responsibility for our part of any problem.

Clean and awake, resistance to the truth becomes painful. Through the process of working the Steps, we learn how to deal with day-to-day reality in a much less agonizing way. Instead of reaching into that bag of dirty tricks that got us through our using days, we begin to rely on spiritual principles to deal with life.

Growing pains are inevitable when we uncover the contents of that old, decrepit toolkit. Even before we learn to take our own inventory, a sponsor or close friend may plainly point out some of our less desirable behavior patterns in the moment. One member shared, “The truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off!” Appreciating the people who hold us accountable is a mark of our emerging emotional maturity. These are the friends who help us grow up in recovery.

We learn what makes us tick and what ticks us off. We come to know what defects call to us under which circumstances, and what spiritual principles we can practice instead. We develop a moral compass as we incorporate spiritual principles into our daily lives. Instead of responding to an upset boss or partner with defensiveness or anger, for example, we take a moment to consider the alternatives. When we respond thoughtfully, inviting spiritual principles—not impulse—to guide our behavior, we begin to feel like we are meeting reality like adults.

I will apply the spiritual opposites of my defects, today, recognizing the benefits that maturity offers.

Maturity, Entry #5

As we learn to show up without anger, resentment, or fear, we develop an emotional maturity that we might not have expected (*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Family”).

There’s a saying about addicts that makes sense to many of us: Our emotional maturity was halted at the age we were when we began using. Although this idea is by no means provable, it may be useful when we consider our tendencies to lash out, take everything personally, and worry about what others think of us—especially when we were using and first get clean. Even for those of us with time in recovery, our prehistoric brain still has its moments of *eat or be eaten*. We can react to situations, especially in family relationships, rather childishly at times, no matter how much time we have clean.

Science has volumes to say about how our brains and, thus, our behaviors have been affected by family relationships, abandonment and neglect, traumatic experiences, and drug use. Though Narcotics Anonymous doesn’t weigh in on scientific findings, many members seek help from practitioners who do. While “outside help” is absolutely critical for many of us, what NA offers us is a spiritual solution to amending our behavior: working the Twelve Steps.

Through stepwork, we identify our role in past conflicts in relationships and gain a better understanding of our tendencies to act out of self-centeredness. We examine what still provokes us today, causing us to act out in our current relationships with other recovering addicts, family members, and people outside of NA. No doubt, we have ample opportunities to amend our behavior. Perhaps most consequentially, we learn to focus on being of service to others as a strategy to stop our adolescent self-obsession in its tracks.

No matter what age we were when we first picked up, we’re all works in progress. If we stay, we can grow. We can grow *up*.

I am by no means a finished product, but today I will try to counteract my reactivity in relationships by coming from a place of openness, acceptance, and courage.