

NA Way of Life - Fellowship Work in Progress
Eighth Presentation Form 2011

First Edition 2012

The
N. A. Way
of Life

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Begun in 1991

NA Way of Life - Fellowship Work in Progress
Eighth Presentation Form 2011

First Presentation Form – 1999
Second Presentation Form – 2001
Third Presentation Form – 2002
Fourth Presentation Form – 2003
Fifth Presentation Form – 2006 Sixth Presentation Form – 2008
Seventh Presentation Form – 2010
Eighth Presentation Form - 2011
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Note: this is an ongoing effort and there will be some additions to the 2011 Form in the coming year. To help members keep track, the date of each issues here: April 29, 2011

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Our Pledge to the NA Fellowship

This material is the result of years of work and preparation. To reach a larger number of NA members, we have checked the spelling, grammar and paragraph order. Some sections will be much the same. Others have been greatly improved. There may be a 6th Presentation form or even a 7th as we write our way to an agreeable Final Form.*

The technical editing we have done will save time, so that you can now concentrate on the recovery and spiritual issues. Only members can perceive and share about these. This material is the most complete form so far, but crucial areas are missing - areas that you know more about than we do. All this has been done to allow a greater number of members to study, review and discuss the material. We need to find out what is missing, poorly stated or inappropriate. We will keep your input in files, and hold conferences to discuss how to include new material. We remain firm in our commitment to group conscience and group processing. We are hoping you will be moved to action and begin your own local NA Foundation Group meeting. An NA Foundation Group uses existing NA literature, carries the NA message of recovery, but it also reads and studies this book. The purpose is to clarify the subjects covered, include members experience and thoroughly process the material subject to finalization by some great number of members - we hope for at least ten thousand. This material is copyrighted and held in trust by those writing it, so that all may own but none may sell it. In its final form, it will be dedicated in gratitude to the NA program and held in trust for the Fellowship-at-large. A 'joint work' is a work prepared by two or more authors with the intention that their contributions will be merged into inseparable or interdependent parts of a unitary whole.

* Now we have an 8th Presentation Form in May 2011.

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This was the basic idea all along. All subsequent contributions were anonymous contributions freely given to help other addicts. May we always keep faith with those who have freely given. All NA members will be free to copy, produce and distribute this writing. No intrusion by outside forces will be allowed. The authors of this work will go to great lengths to protect the integrity and form of the NA Way of Life book as written and approved by the NA Fellowship-at-large in open, participatory conferences. When complete, the work will be placed in public domain.

No permission is extended to any outside enterprise or corporation. Outside forces are defined as those who see the work we are doing as commercially viable rather than a free expression of our experience, strength and hope. We do not charge for our Twelfth Step, nor do we allow others to do so. We trust a loving God to care for us, provide for us and protect us from the pressures of money, property and prestige. Production and distribution methods will be considered at a later stage of the work. As it nears completion, with a great many members from all over the world involved, we will finalize a method that will both make the material available and keep the price at a minimum. We don't want this book sold for profit, royalties or personal gain from ownership, production or distribution of the work. We do insist it remain as a work written by addicts, for addicts. To this end we are pledged. We don't need money or permission to do this work. Our Fellowship stresses our complete, creative freedom. We don't need outside guidance - God gives us plenty. What we need is you, as a willing NA member, to show your concern in positive ways by sending in your input and showing up at our conferences to help process all the input. Only members can do this well.

In Loving Service,
Foundation Group of N.A. September 22, 2005

PREFACE

This work is designed to produce written recovery materials for addicts seeking recovery in Narcotics Anonymous. Our efforts to originate and accumulate helpful material benefit everyone. All are welcome to support, participate, and engage in this effort. Write seriously or playfully, as the Spirit guides you. There is no telling what great goodness may emerge if our motives and our spirits are purely devoted to being instruments of a loving God. We write this for the good of others like us who have lost their way or never had a way to start with.

We are addicts who come from the dying times. We vividly recall when we believed that there was absolutely no hope, anywhere on earth, for people like us. No one else believed there was any hope either. We have created a life style and mind set which was given to us by a God of our understanding. We are still creating and enlarging the pathway that gives people like us choices that we never knew that we had before. Our newfound hope lets us live clean and grow spiritually. We have applied the Twelve Steps of NA to our lives and we live the results. We see the negative consequences of unhealthy selfishness and compromise. We prefer now to go our way in peace and to follow the Will of our Higher Power.

The main obstacle to writing recovery material is the fact that it must come from addicts. When considering written input, we go through an enormous amount of extra trouble to determine whether it is our disease talking or our recovery. Writing material to suit the needs of all NA members is nearly impossible for any individual to do. The fact that we have written even one book, our Basic Text, is a great miracle. A second is bound to be less difficult because now we know it can be done. We are free to approach any subject that needs consideration and discussion.

Whether it is about a helpful technique or an obstacle to recovery, we declare our right to write. Recovering addicts write about their lives and their recovery. This is the process of sorting out our lives and filling in the blanks. As in recovery, fear is the basic obstacle to the writing. It begins when we are afraid to tell the truth. Truth telling may seem an all occasion remedy, but that can be another illusion. There are frequent times when telling the truth will be mistaken for it's opposite by the unlearned listener or will overburden the more complacent members. These things take time - God's time.

We believe NA started to grow in the nineteen seventies because all members were encouraged to participate and add our voice to NA by writing the Basic Text. Reversing this, leaving people out of the writing process, diminishes NA as a whole. Incomplete processing can only embed errors in material that proports to be approved by the NA Fellowship. These errors are easily corrected if enough members are allowed to participate in the process. The extraordinary processing that went into the Basic Text in 1979 to 1982 is the origin of the enhancement of "approved" material. To mark written material as "approved" without such in depth processing is misrepresentation of the facts. Handling these things "professionally" is not necessarily superior, correct, or more efficient. "Professionally" means that either we don't care enough to do something on our own time, or that we can't, so we pay someone else to do it. However, in our case we care and we happen to be the only people in the world who know what we do to recover on a daily basis. Professionalism downplays the beauty and wonder of ordinary members writing recovery material. This betrays the Spirit of NA. The writings of clean addicts expressing their gratitude, concern for others and their commitment to improve themselves is valuable evidence that our way of life is real. Without it, whining, complaining, misrepresenting others and an endless rain of misinformation can create

the impression that where there is smoke there is fire. It is a smokescreen in which those still suffering often get lost and sometimes die.

Professionals can only mimic what works for us. We have to discover the answers and share them in writing. Since recovery is transmitted experience, not theory, it doesn't require the kind of talent that you have to pay for. Technical assistance should not take precedence over accuracy. Not all our truths are pleasant or convenient. The disease of addiction cannot afford to be honest. It cannot say, "Give me all your money, all your love life, your offspring and I'll give you a good feeling. True, it won't last long and it'll hurt a lot while you're dying, but for a few moments, you'll feel great." In recovery the disease may say, "Hold back, play it safe. Don't be too up front here. Wait for another time."

We want to be fearless and thorough in our recovery. If our disease gets away with minimizing or misdirection enough of the time to water down the truth, it will no longer have the power to help us addicts. The message will get lost among the background noises. This is how we are at risk of becoming weakened and divided among ourselves. This is a new effort to address our NA Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. Much has been learned through observation and discussion in recent years. Addicts who are grateful to Narcotics Anonymous write this material and we want our experience to be available to others as part of our Twelfth Step, carrying the message. That any addict can stop using, even for a time, is a miracle. That we can arrest the disease of addiction by total abstinence extends that miracle in time. We get the time back - we have a choice now and use this time as we will. Many reach the point where we make a conscious decision to align our will with the will of our Higher Power. We do this by learning principles that allow us to discard and replace many of our old ideas and ways of coping with life. This is a modern day testament to applied spirituality. Personality change in human beings requires great willingness, faith and courage.

Our way of life makes change possible. Many of the words we tend to use to describe this process may seem confusing. We try to describe accurately the feelings and new ideas that occur during the process to allow others to follow our path and to confirm in a sense what we are learning. All this requires learning, study, and evaluating new perspectives.

Among recovering addicts in Narcotics Anonymous, certain assumptions evolve. Some of these elements allow us to enter recovery and get along with clean addicts almost immediately. Some of the basics of recovery need to be re-examined, even by our long-term members. We should try to avoid the clichés that are employed by people outside the NA program in our writing of this book. We don't want to dull our recovery or our message of hope. Once we begin to experience relief, our pain seems like a bad dream. One of our problems in recovery is our appearance of normality. When we have stopped using, even for a short time, we can look so good that someone may offer us drugs to celebrate! This makes it hard for us to maintain the recovery practices that have worked for us. When we were new at recovery, our pain served as reminder. When we get a little better, we are apt to want to leave off some elements of our recovery. Social pressures set in immediately which may force us to resume our lives as if we were "normal." We addicts are anything but "normal."

We who write this book want only to stay true to the Spirit of NA that was so attractive to us when we got clean. This Spirit is not something that can be changed. Tampering with the basic idea of an NA by addicts, for addicts would only cause us to feel even more uncomfortable. We want to get "Back to Basics" and continue to carry our message of hope and new life to the addict who still suffers. Bureaucracy within the service structure violates the letter and Spirit of our 12 Traditions by

creating a management system. Political correctness replaces the truth of our experience. While our servants may be very determined and devoted, they cannot see to our needs. This is something we do for ourselves and our Fellows. This is not a whim or personal preference on our part. We were taught that we should welcome others to recovery the same way we were welcomed. The excitement and energy of being responsible for NA through the group conscience process is meant for the general membership.

NA is a spiritual Fellowship and not a business. Our efforts are directed at raising up our newest member to be able to live clean and free - not the aggrandizement of a few at expense of us all. While we expect and require good business practices within the confines of our conventions and clerical needs, this is not a license to make over NA into a management system under the control of any corporation or business enterprise. Our 12 Traditions contain specific warnings against this. "NA as such ought never be organized..."

The doctoring and slanted presentation of group conscience materials for the purpose of weakening the Fellowship control of its affairs betrays this important warning. Informed members constitute an enemy that cannot be driven away entirely. While wave after wave of new members are thankfully a fact of life in NA, information has a way of piling up. In our 'information age' of computers and internet access, it is only a matter of time before all the cards are laid out neatly on the table. Our needs and abilities can be viewed as ordinary, once they are no longer exaggerated by our addiction. Our own reactions to the world around us show us how we are different. Our distortions of reality, to which we adapted while in active addiction, continue along with us in recovery. These distortions and contradictions are part of what we call the "drug

induced fog.” For most practical purposes, this only means that our orientation is different from what is normal to non-addicts. As we recover, we can gain or regain the personal and social skills to work, cope with daily living, and function in an effective and agreeable manner. Our recovery process makes this possible and enhances these things over time. Our addiction is constantly working to divide us and trip us up to interrupt our recovery.

Certain fears remain embedded in us. We have had the experience of finding ourselves betrayed by our senses. We have sought pleasure and found pain. We have moralized and proved personally insufficient. We have crusaded for various causes only to find emptiness and a sense of time wasted. Our bodies registered ecstasy and we woke up in the gutter. Therefore, we are careful to guard against the search for, and acceptance of, momentary pleasure. Caution can be cool.

Our recovery writing is our attempt to share with others what we have found to be true in simple, direct terms, based on actual, personal experience. It is courageous because we attempt not only to make sense of our own recovery but also to make a sincere effort to help other addicts get clean and begin to grow again as human beings.

There are many forces against us in our efforts. Many institutions exist because our disease is so prevalent that it is hard to imagine a world without it. Our disease takes so many forms other than addiction to drugs. We are incredibly disabled by our addiction and even after finally seeking recovery in NA, our disease will take other forms: gambling, over-eating, obsession with work or social standing. The disability and degradation of our affliction may end us up totally worn out, beaten and

institutionalized. Experience in hospitals, jails, and treatment centers may confuse us. Total abstinence may seem simplistic to professionals with a bias towards dispensing drugs. NA is the last option for many, the last house on the block, so to speak. Recovery would be a heck of a lot of trouble for a non-addict to go through if they did not feel their life was at stake. We try to avoid being all things to all people. Non-addicts should seek help elsewhere and never be allowed to change our written program of recovery based on total abstinence. For most, NA is the only place in the world where total abstinence is available.

This can seem harsh or unscientific to those who require drugs of various types to live a normal life. We do not discourage or add to the problems of such people who are attracted to NA. We just know that our disease is so tricky that our minds and bodies will make up symptoms to get drugs. There is no use in arguing this point, Some people will never 'get' it. We have to stand up for our way of life if we are to have a way of life. It takes true commitment to move forward and do the right thing. Infighting, greed, and petty jealousy constantly rip away at our efforts. These elements take their toll. Those who criticize may devalue our freely given efforts. Recovery writing in NA is just another form of commitment to recovery. It is one in which the elements of greed, self-centeredness and pride must be eliminated. There is a saying that may apply here, "If a pickpocket meets a saint, he will see only pockets." Those who find a message of recovery in our meetings will surely experience some of the curiosity and wonder we share. Those who look for flaws will see only flaws. A successful piece of recovery writing enhances areas of personal growth and has the internal power to leap from the page into our loneliness, despair and pain. We have found success in these areas. Our writing has helped many shake off the feelings and mindset that leads to relapse. Our energy seems to come from our experience with the thinking that accompanies relapse. In

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relating our feelings, the reader may suddenly realize that others have turned back before using. Only sharing what we have experienced personally has the power and energy to do this.

There is a tendency among us addicts to look for the dark, hidden meaning in things and avoid the simple and obvious need we have to share. The lessons we learn may not become ours until we share them. Information can feel like power. We can forget that the learning we have found has a universal source that any sincere individual can access at any time. Our sharing is only a reminder of what we know to be true when we are in our right minds. The distrust that is a big part of our addiction seeks loopholes and exceptions to recovery principles. Personality flaws or shortcomings will seem more important to some than the good we do. If we fall into the trap of possessiveness, what we know becomes tainted with greed and a lust for personal power. We who do this work seek to become aware because we care. We learn that we can pass on important information to those who are in dying need of it. Often to counteract the negativity of our fear and disbelief, we have found that if we look at the brighter side, then the brighter side becomes more real to us. Our loving gratitude is abundant. Caring and sharing is our way. We stand ready, with God's help, to supply the needs, right the wrongs, and take on the responsibilities required to insure the continuance and growth of Narcotics Anonymous. NA is the miracle that any addict can get clean and stay clean by following a set of written principles: The NA Twelve Steps and the NA Twelve Traditions. Therefore, in all sincerity, we undertake this work that others may benefit. Possession of this work resides with the Spirit that makes us one in our gratitude and effort. No service body, board, or any group of people inside or outside NA should ever regard this work as their own legal possession. In the exhaustive process of doing this work in the traditional manner, all should be in order before the work is considered

finished. After completion, we will allow no further changes. If other points of concern arise, we will address them separately in other writings. We don't want to foster close-mindedness, yet we have learned that the tendency to personal preference is so strong in some of us that efforts towards change would begin to defeat our efforts if any opportunity existed. There will always be small groups of people who want to take over.

Truth has no copyright. We borrow from all fields anything that might help our people get clean, stay clean or help others. We expect others to borrow in turn from our experiences. Possessiveness would undermine our spiritual integrity and deny our faith in our Ultimate Authority. Our writing is an expression of our love. We pray to be willing, forthright and honest even in the face of greed, jealousy and fear. We grant permission for reprinting to members from within the Fellowship. Non-member individuals, groups, or organizations are forbidden to copy our materials or use our trademarks. Our literature belongs to our Fellowship and is a tangible form of our common welfare. Our method is simple: All of us own our literature, and none of us can sell our copyrights.

To change material after it has been subjected to the close scrutiny, study and seemingly endless discussion that only the NA Fellowship can conceive of is like touching up a masterpiece because you found a crooked line. It diminishes the quality of the material by substituting work that may seem nicer yet lack the core of inner strength our extreme processing creates. Critics should go to their own studio and paint their own picture. Being clean, helping others and living a better life on a daily basis has a value beyond what can be bought with money. If our writing does not have the ring of truth and love for those who suffer from our disease, it will be useless for purposes of recovery. It will get

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old after one reading and will not even touch us at the times we need it the most. Individuals are free to write and publish whatever they like within the law of the land. Our literature in NA must also be free. We want to pursue our recovery process without the constraints others would place on us. Some of us may become writers the same way others will find their places in the world.

Today, we want to give back some of what we received. Addicts coming to NA today should know that they are loved by people praying to be used as instruments to help them. Recovery is a wonderful thing and many of us feel that too much time has been wasted haggling over how to write literature in NA. We will do better to encourage addicts working individually or as groups and let the quality and usefulness of certain pieces become self-evident. Bureaucracy has a deadening effect on most processes involving spirituality. Bureaucracy must not bind the free Spirit that is NA. Bureaucracy is the enemy of self-help organizations.

At any given point in our recovery, the disease of addiction will seek to divide and destroy us if we allow it to take control. Newcomers don't understand this at all. They may not even believe they have a disease. They are clueless how it affects their thinking and relationships. Newcomers do not know the disease is deviously working in their very own minds against their every move towards recovery. Certainly they have no idea if or how it affects the Fellowship or such an endeavor as this book. The newcomer simply thinks they have a problem with drugs. Having had time to search our hearts for an answer on these issues, our spiritual guidance is this: that we have to keep the faith ourselves before we have anything to offer others. As long as we can tell the truth in a plain, simple and honest manner, the way will open to us.

Foundation Group of N.A. October 22, 2005

INTRODUCTION

Introductions explain how to utilize or benefit from a book, so we are at a curious juncture. To benefit from this book, we must first write it! We want to share our experience through writing for the Fellowship and make an important point: that it can be done and that we can do it. When we were writing the Basic Text, there were plenty of people who said it was impossible, can't be done, or at least not the way we had it planned. We may have seemed foolish, even a little crazy, to trust a bunch of addicts to write a book about their 'recovery.' In those days, there were many people who had little respect for us. We had to earn respect by being respectable. Writing our own literature let people know we were serious about our gratitude, serious about our recovery, and serious about our willingness to love and care for the newcomer. This is the first time the NA Way of Life has been in larger print. This results in a eight-hundred and fourteen page book, raising the cost a little but much more readable.

Most of you have benefitted from the Basic Text yet never expected to get to write anything helpful. Well, the plan for this book is to sponsor writing from the society of addicts recovering in NA. Chapter length pieces on any topic within the range of things we experience in recovery can be included in the book. In particular, there are many among us being dismayed that some energy is being exerted against the principle idea that our recovery is from 'just' drug addiction. The exciting thing about NA, for us, has always been the relief we have found from our addiction once we stopped using. Those of you who share this belief might find some fascinating material to add to our recovery process. Over-spending, gambling, sexual obsession and other compulsions have nothing to do with chemical addiction but trigger chemical changes in

our bodies. Our serious concern here is that our disease appears to mutate into other forms. Some of these forms may be as seemingly non injurious as watching too much TV and others that may be as totally devastating as any degree of drug' addiction. We must count ourselves as free to write about any of these things. A big part of our program is to constantly expand into new areas of living. We believe the very best should be available to those who choose to live the NA way of life. Consider yourself free to write for this book. If your writing is sincere and accurate, at least you will benefit to some degree. Your efforts may be a runaway best-photocopied, eternally underground recovery piece. It may become a booklet or a new chapter. Many of the chapter length pieces can be expanded into a book to help carry our message. This material is meant only to help addicts and is given freely. It should never be seen as mere property and no addict anywhere should ever be made to suffer by our efforts to help. Remember that one of the ways we have survived is by using our imagination and acting on hunches. This is one way God creatively works in our lives.

We wrote our Basic Text in the years between 1977 and 1982. As was our intention, we surrendered the material to the main World Service Conference that then moved the material into the safekeeping of our World Service Office. Almost right away, adversarial issues set the WSO at odds with the membership who had written the book. Without the Fellowship realizing it, the WSO began to set itself up as a publishing agency which is very different from a primary service center. We did not know that other 12 Step Fellowships, such as AA, did not mark up their literature to fund their service efforts. This kept their literature from becoming a way to make money for the General Service Office. We are ready to begin this new work. There is trouble with going through what used to be the approved channels with this work. The channels are no longer there in our NA service structure.

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An alternative route has been developed. We will open chapters experimentally and develop them as recovery themes. We will then have them work-shopped by various members throughout the Fellowship. We will distribute the various chapters informally and let the result be compiled into a final manuscript. We will only take into account the needs of the addicts seeking recovery based on the valid experience of our membership. We don't recommend using this anonymous effort to grind personal axes, yet your feelings are important. Remember to respect our reader. Share the way you would in a meeting and let the value of your sharing show itself. Like our personal recovery, the writing would take on its own colors and word choices. Some material might have an intellectual appeal. Other material might be rather raw and coarse. All would depend on its usefulness to perpetuate itself. May the God of your understanding be with us as we proceed to extend our written message of recovery.

Foundation Group of N.A.

September 22, 2005

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CHAPTER ONE

N.A. SOCIETY

The NA Society has existed since addicts first started to meet on a regular basis and live the 12 Steps within the spirit of the 12 Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous. Our members have always provided the personal services that characterize our Society. We find our ‘trusted servants’ from within this Society. Our trusted servants function in order to ensure that our needs as a Fellowship are met. While a primary precept of the NA Society is inclusion for all, individuals always retain the freedom to remove themselves. No one is forced to do anything. We carry the NA message of hope and recovery to all who seek it.

We have functioned in the service structure beginning in the 1950's, spreading in the early 1970's and exploding into large numbers in the 1980's. Some parts of the existing structure have worked well, while other areas have had major problems. No service structure can meet all of our needs. In the attempt to meet more of our needs we should understand and pass on that service is not only fulfilled in the formal sense, but in the informal sense as well. In addition, we do not have to agree on all issues in order to serve in our society.

As members of NA, we have the rights of membership. These rights include receiving accurate information from all members of our service structure and the right to question this information. We can attend all recovery meetings regardless of our personal beliefs, background, or how we choose to express our program. We can start a meeting. We have the right to carry the message of recovery according to our own conscience. These rights are not to be taken lightly. They are somewhat exceptional as organizations go because we do no testing and issue no certificates of membership. Whether we are formally voted into service

by a body of members or not, we can still be part of our service structure. Members who show up at fund-raisers are an example of this non-structural, informal support. Any activities that service committees undertake remain totally dependent on the support from the members of the Fellowship. As members of the NA Society we are involved in the voluntary service structure, never forgetting that we provide the energy and love that is needed to make this work. This is why we focus on serving the Fellowship, instead of members serving the service structure.

Since each of us contribute to, as well as draw from, our common resources, we each have a definite personal interest in the growth and continuation of NA. We create a collective and multifaceted approach to solutions that include structured and unstructured, formal and informal networks of members who seek, distribute and discuss information. Many times the informal and unstructured approaches can go far beyond what is possible within structured approaches. The results of these efforts often find a greater availability and increased usability of solutions within our Society. We work together to strengthen the ties that bind us.

This NA Society also provides us with non-structural and informal forums in which we can address ongoing interests, projects, and goals. We recognize that many of our members work programs that place great emphasis on personal service. Personal service is the time and attention we give one another on a daily basis. Phone calls, rides to meetings, email, anything we do to help other members. This contact is the essential service of NA. We could not exist as a Fellowship without it. Caring and sharing is actually the essence of our program beyond total abstinence. Personal service has always been the first and last level of service that gives all other service its meaning. Many of our members have fulfilled their commitments and continue to support the service

structure by their participation, study, and general discussions with others who love and are likewise committed to NA. Obviously, this is the only place that we can find the ongoing accumulation of knowledge and experience on recovery from the disease of addiction in Narcotics Anonymous. Many of our problems have come from reliance on members elected to positions of service who may or may not understand our Steps and Traditions well enough to serve effectively and lovingly. Like riding a motorcycle, many do well until they think they know what they are doing. This means the rider stops being careful and that results in a crash. Many members make the mistake of thinking they have recovery figured out and start self-willing right and left. Safe to say we all need to continue being careful.

The force that gives The NA Society its validity is generated by staying true to our spiritual integrity. We stay true to this integrity by following the letter and spirit of our 12 Traditions. Violations of our integrity diminish this life-giving force. Integrity allows us to take action and to be acted upon without a sense of violation. Morality and virtue simply mean living within spiritual principles so that the energy we develop will build our strength rather than steadily drain us. It does not always appear, however, that all of us live within the spiritual principles of our Society. Like one addict's sponsor told him; "I have a secret to tell you." The addict said what? "Don't tell anyone." Again the addict cried what? "There are sick people in those meetings." Some members use service for their own ego needs. They are willing to go to any lengths just to be right and feel superior. They can forget our need to communicate so we can all improve our understanding.

We involve ourselves in things that personally interest us. This tends to naturally create a foundation of dedicated members based on individual talent and interests. These members are increasingly experienced with

the systems which are used for the growth of our Fellowship as well as their individual preferences. Information flows along unusual paths within the Fellowship. We addicts have discovered ingenious ways to find out what is happening and will always discover what we need to know when we need to know it.

Those who attempt to operate in secret are only fooling themselves. Abe Lincoln said, "You can fool all the people some of the time, some of the people all the time but you cannot fool all the people all the time." Our road to self government has at times been rocky but ultimately, our members provide for their needs any way they can. When there are difficulties, we practice patience, humility and tolerance because right or wrong, we care for all our members. They have nowhere else to go. Time will always sort out the sincere from the insincere. The truth will always surface in its own right time.

Generally, when a group is focused on helping others, a positive activity or a new service, they are happy, enthusiastic, and spirited. When they turn inward and look for differences, they can turn sour and become plagued by infighting. A good balance between enthusiastic newcomers and members who have been around a while seems to be the best mix. In a spiritual Fellowship, the few do the work for the many. That's just the way it is. One possible explanation for this is that it only takes a few to get the job done. Many see service as another form of competition, or just plain hard work. There are those who get stuck because they don't want to appear as if they are stepping on other's toes. Other times, individuals may lack skills to know that flyers and announcements must be made in order to get support. If they fail to get the word out, no one shows up and they get discouraged. It is important to realize that even though we are clean, we are still human. Our good people may outnumber our disruptive people, but more often than not, they are not as

loud.

Naturally, there will always be the detractors who will appear to score victories at the expense of the Fellowship. Mis-matchers are always looking for exceptions and often bring out important details. Detractors can be disruptive members trying to shove their beliefs down everyone else's throats. They can be trusted servants abusing their trust, or they can simply be us, being our own imperfect selves! The beauty is that NA is a self-correcting program. Many of our members have felt emotional pain over some of the 'wrongs' they did in the name of service. These 'wrongs' can and do damage our faith in one of our most valuable resources: our loving and devoted 'trusted servants.' But one of our strengths is the ability to use our pain for gain. Pain can sometimes force us to reach deep inside and find the spiritual strength and guidance to continue. We find that when they keep coming back, disruptive members often become enlightened as to how their actions affect others and they correct themselves. Social ineptitude is a requirement for NA membership. Thankfully, we all get better when we work our 12 Steps!

Sadly, if members don't have a rhinoceros hide yet, they may be crushed to find any imperfection in the service structure. For them, it means that NA has failed to live up to their expectations, just as life always did before they got here. We keep relying on the Will of a loving God so that we may be of benefit to all addicts. To others, this may be a great opportunity for them to relapse. There disappointment turns to despair if they are not careful. We have come to understand that it is never the situation, never him, never her, never God; it is we who have to become different. We must change or surely we are signing ourselves up for a relapse at best or a life sentence of misery at worst.

The petty games, bureaucratic manipulations, and betrayal of trust by

negative members are actions that will become apparent and hopefully self-correcting over a period of time. The 'wrongs' are righted with the continual practice of gratitude, love, and dedication found in the spirit of our Society.

As Recovering members of the NA Society:

- 1) We work the Steps and practice their Principles for our personal growth.
- 2) We practice the Traditions and rely on a Higher Power for our common welfare.
- 3) We support the fellowship through sharing, giving comfort and service to our fellow addicts.

This is what keeps our spiritual integrity intact. When we experience the pain of betrayal, we continue working towards positive solutions. We gain strength from sharing and caring with like-minded members who have been through similar situations and have stayed clean and enthusiastic about N.A. for many years. This is why we say N.A. is the spiritual moment when two addicts realize they don't have to use today. This is followed up with another saying, "All else is not NA."

At times, our patience and restraint may be mistaken as a lack of resolution. We may appear as if we lack the energy needed to be effective. Many of us have found that by patiently keeping the faith and coming back, we create the space for the miracles of tomorrow. If we concede that the troubles described above come from ignorance of spiritual principles, the remedy must come from those of us who have learned to apply them. Creating the space for miracles and solutions is one of the main functions of our NA Society. We may be the only ones to see the Big Picture and by standing by our principles, we calmly wait

for the rest to catch up to our vision of truth.

Periods of rapid growth create the need for us to find balance. Members of the NA Fellowship must counterbalance overwhelmed service committees. Their policies and proclamations do not always reflect our Fellowship as a whole. We will most likely never find that perfect set of guidelines. When our service structure was formed, it was beneficial to model it after the existing Fellowship of AA. Our service structure was written and approved in the middle Seventies but it was based on a fellowship's guidelines that did not exactly fit us.

Nevertheless, we began the exciting and sometimes painful process of building the service structure in 1976. Today, we have the opportunity to look back and inventory what has worked and where we need improvement. It is the job of the Fellowship as a whole to envision and continually improve upon this structure.

Studying how our Society actually functions will reveal some useful answers. We encourage each other to fully examine our service structure and our NA Society. We need to learn how it works within its structured and the non-structured systems. This will increase our understanding and ability to serve others.

All too often, the emphasis is placed on rigid formalities. This can take the focus away from the needs of the addict seeking recovery. Strict adherence to formal structured service not only ignores common sense, but also lends itself to the development of open conflicts over loyalties, viewpoints, and levels of understanding. Group conscience requires informing and polling the membership about matters that affect them directly or affect NA as a whole. Proper service is giving members both sides of the issue and allowing them the ability to make an informed

group conscience, nothing more and nothing less.

Helping others becomes a next to impossible task when we fight among ourselves. Unity, within the NA Society with its principles of recovery, holds us together when all other bonds seem broken. Strange conflicts always emerge when egos override ideals and personal power overrides principle. The 'powerful' may appear to be heavy handed and close-minded in their apparent ignorance of what is really going on in NA. Surrendered seems to be ineffective and at times even illogical, yet things often times tend to work out for them.

The assortment of members in the N.A. Society includes volunteers, trusted servants, newcomers and old-timers alike. They are the driving force of N.A.'s spiritual principles, the members creating the space for the miracles of NA. They can be invisible to someone who has not yet learned how to practice our spiritual principles. Service, as an extension of our personal will portrays a different picture than does service as an extension of God's Will. God's Will is often invisible, working quietly and patiently in the background. God works through us, ALL OF US. God is the guiding force of our NA Society.

"Over the years," an oldtimer in our NA Society shared, "I've had to relearn a very basic truth about service. Service is not something that only takes place in our various committee meetings or through our offices. 'Service' is not a business and doesn't only take place in our 'business meetings.' Service happens whenever the NA message of recovery is made available to the still suffering addict. The most that our structure was intended to be was a tool that we as groups and individuals can use to better carry the message of recovery. We are not required nor do we have any obligation to use this tool. The service structure was never intended to be a 'governing body' of any type." While our

Traditions make this clear, you will still find those who miss the point. A perceived position of power is a tempting thing for a lonely, frightened person. It may be that our service structure is designed in ways to help our members 'get over themselves' in ways that could exist in no other way.

Service is 12 Stepping an addict on the telephone, making coffee for a group meeting and talking to a newcomer. It is also serving on a committee and holding an elected position. The joy of giving, inherent in spiritual service, can not be overlooked. If the joy is not there, something is wrong. Many newcomers are bewildered as to what this 'service' thing is, especially in rural areas where there is not a lot of formal structure. After our prayers for a loving Ultimate Authority to take care of our lives, we can become channels of our Higher Power consciously. It is not something that can be put into words. It is not a service to get elected and feel better than your fellow members. If you come across something they should know, your service is incomplete until you find a way to pass it on to them. Holding on to information for personal power is an abuse of trust, not a service.

Although each of us strive for excellence in service, whether formal or informal, and may exceed our own expectations at times, at other times we may fall short. We choose to not brush these problems under the carpet because when it happens to you, you need to know certain things to survive. When we look at things this way, we understand that the entire 'serving our fellow addict' effort is dependent upon keeping faith and respecting people's feelings. This way, they will respect our feelings as well. This understanding places some rather clear guidelines on what should happen within our Fellowship in service or in recovery meetings. Our experience indicates that whenever we stray from our spiritual integrity, we all suffer. This requires us to become adept at keeping our

egos in check and working with others, who sometimes have difficulty with ego, power and self-will. After all, creating the time and space for the NA miracle to happen is the whole point of the service structure.

We do not get sick overnight and it takes years to become the people we really want to be. It takes a lot of patience, tolerance and humility on the part of us all. This does not mean that we should accept unacceptable behavior, only that we must try to be understanding and not compromise our principles when confronting other's shortcomings. Sometimes our best efforts are misunderstood. Sometimes, we misunderstand the efforts of others. In any event, when people get out of hand in a recovery or service setting, we practice our spiritual principles by asking God to show us how to react in order to soften the harshness and disharmony.

Betrayal

Since NA is a healing society, we respect pain and alleviate suffering. It is understood that our members are sick and need help. This means we have built in safeguards not stated and not clearly known to protect both the giver and receiver of spiritual help. In these times, it is good to keep your own counsel and avoid taking sides. If one side tries to pressure you into negative action, remember the law of karma insures you will receive ten times what you send out. Before getting drawn into someone else's circle, we ask, "What was the result of fear-based action in my past?"

Coming from a disease of isolation, most of us are ill equipped to take care of ourselves when we find someone attacking us. The first instinct is to retaliate and attack in turn. This makes us reactionary to someone else's behavior and if that someone does not wish us well, it works to help them attack us. If we allow ourselves to slip into anger, we become

their pawn. We may fall all over ourselves trying to placate and meet the demands of the other without realizing that the early demands lead to more demands. When dealing with an adversary, this only fuels the fire. They will likely use our attempt to reconcile as some type of evidence that we were somehow in the wrong... positive motives and actions would go against their negativity.

It is better to hold actions and responses in reserve while praying and meditating. Often a simple way out will appear before us. Almost all addicts who are getting into the clean life will struggle and fall into these traps. Enough blind alleys and wasted time and energy will teach us the error of our ways. Futility is a fact of life. The recovery process will guide us past these pitfalls if we continue to focus on working the 12 Steps of NA.

Especially when we withhold negativity, our attacker will get even angrier. In their pain and anger, they will imagine we are only behaving well so we will look good. We should remember that their pain and anger is real and they will do us serious injury if they can. So, it is like dealing with a dangerous animal.

Fear creates patterns of attack and retaliation. One of the best tactics when betrayed is to simply withdraw contact. First ascertain that the threat is real by fact finding but then, don't feed into the negativity. Negativity cannot feed itself. It must labor to find positive energy from positive people. It cannot create anything worthwhile. Allowing oneself to be drawn into fear only results in the lessening of energy, and increased pain and confusion. While some care must be exercised in this, you will never be condemned for not attacking in return. If action must be taken, let it be of the firm and resolute sort, not giving a blow for a blow and so helping to initiate and maintain the violent struggle.

The study of karate provides good examples of this. Let the opponent attack you, step aside and perhaps give them a little push to help them along their way. By not allowing anger to enter in, the clear state of mind is preserved and actions need not damage the opponent beyond exhausting them and convincing them of their folly. Of course, they will not like this and seek to further vindicate themselves from responsibility for their actions as they continue to attack and cause damage.

A lesson from service is important here: we do not help others until they ask for that help because if we do, they will attack us as soon as they get on their feet. They will take the help as an insult. Until they ask for help you can contribute your presence only but maintain your own focus and spiritual center because being near them will be like being in a whirl pool and they will try to suck you into their reality. If necessary, tell them they must ask for help in words before you can help them.

We come to that which we place our minds on. If we are envious or jealous of others, we will never find peace or joy in what we already have. We will endlessly feel less than the other person and imagine that if we could somehow get what they had, we would be ok.

In the world of addicts, one reality we have to learn to face is betrayal. With a disease characterized by isolation, we learn that 'keep coming back' means we never fully recover and we always need to maintain our spiritual condition by healthy interaction with other clean addicts. Hiding our pain, pulling away, failing to seek our answers, attributing false motives to those who would help us are examples of ways we need help

There is an ancient text that tells the story of an old king with two sons. To maintain their territory and protect their farmers living on distant

borders, the king sends his eldest son, the heir to the throne, out with the kingdom's army to wage war against a hostile incursion. The task takes years. In the meantime, the old king dies and the second son becomes the pretender to the throne. It is only fitting that he attend to the royal functions and duties of ruling in the absence of his brother. But he becomes accustomed to the glory of rule and the trappings of kingship. Although the members of the court and the people know the eldest son is ruler, it is beyond their power to do anything to oppose the acting ruler.

The story begins when the distant war is ended successfully and order is restored. On returning to the central city, the eldest brother realizes he is going home to fight another war. It was different when he could fight an honest enemy intruding on the hereditary soil and committing atrocities. But this new war would be cousin against cousin, teacher against student: all relatives and all loved. He has his war chariot drawn up between the two armies and looking at the faces before and behind him, he collapses and asks God to take him and let these others go.

God responds by telling him that the eternal spirit in all these warriors will never die, cannot die in fact. Further, he tells him that even if death of the soul were possible, it would be better to die fighting and doing one's duty than to go out ignoble and be called a coward by those who understand little of loving a large mass of people. Thus ensues the ancient tale.

In the end, the brother raises his head and says that he understands now and will go forth to battle without hatred in his heart but only willingness to do that which God places before him. While some will know this tale, it is enough to consider the elements and think of where you fit into the story of your life. Are you doing your duty or invading the province of another.

Most addicts dissociate their feelings when cutting ties to friends and relatives. Addictive disease makes it necessary that we do this because on deeper levels we realize that if we are fully conscious we cannot cut these ties in good conscience. Our egos hold us in abeyance. So, we begin to fabricate a new reality – one that allows us to do what we want to do. We collect negative potentials and justifiers that make us feel empowered. We enjoy the heady feeling of personal power. It is like a drug to us: dulling our senses and mangling our lives all the while making false promises that will not be honored.

With addiction, we do ourselves in by ignoring our better instincts and inducing good feelings with drugs and substitutes. Without the drugs, we learn to manage our own moods and make our own peace with God and life. If we are clean and betray our own conscience it causes us to feel the ‘wrongness’ of our actions. This is good. But only if we curb our egotistical drives and seemingly justified bad behavior.

Misuse of law, betrayal of the basic tenets of human civilization and downright cruelty will eventually yield up to correction. Mankind has always struggled to come to terms with the dark side. There are those who will not rest until all such wrongs are righted.

Member shares from WCNA 31: "A member from the Fellowship in India consulted with me once in Hawaii asking what to do when negative people show and begin to put a cloud on everything. One thing I shared with him: 'Do not let someone's darkness block your light.' I think the most important thing we learn in recovery is to avoid taking on someone's problems as our own. This gives us more time to take care of our own real commitments and straighten out the wrinkles in our own life. One sure way to make the world a better place is to mind your own business."

As the desire and envy grow, a willingness to be underhanded grows with it. Soon, we will begin to make up reasons to justify our actions and once we cobble together enough lies and half truths to get going, we will begin our attack. As we gain momentum, we become that which we fear in the other person. While difficult, it may be possible to find some high ground in the situation and thereby avoid unwonted retaliation and defensive action that might cause harm or injury to the attacker. Usually they will wear themselves out in a little time and seek another target for their negativity.

Ignorance is dangerous because ignorant individuals experience failure and if someone knows better, they appear to be an enemy. By being in the know, the ignorant feel put upon and unfairly disadvantaged. The movement of knowledge takes time and many personal opinions and adjustments must be made along the way. This is what makes surrender and the desire for recovery so important to our membership.

The ignorant betray out of projection of their own pain and guilt. They cannot help this and those who make themselves available to help must be constantly on guard against projection and misinterpretation.

Finding and maintaining your spiritual connection or conscious contact is the best source of guidance you can get. Human beings are set up to respond to their inner being – indeed this is probably what really separates us from animals. Of course some animals have amazing abilities, and kindness is not unknown even among animals! If we allow ourselves to focus on an adversary, we may find our only visible options are to respond to the attack. By distancing ourselves, we may find many ways to make ourselves a less desirable target or a target more difficult to hit. Real love is the greatest revenge.

We get with our sponsors, discuss issues with our friends and read any

helpful literature. Our study of NA history tells us of the results of rushing off half cocked and ready to fire. We are not good at patience and tolerance. Giving people time to study and sort things out, we come to better conclusions - better for us all. This is where our common welfare comes from.

Selfless service is not done with any thought of reward or recompense. If there is recompense, credit or reward involved, it is selfish service. NA has long been a tremendous repository of positive energy coming from the gratitude of tens of thousands and then hundreds of thousands of recovering addicts.

Many ask, "What about unity when we're questioning the service structure and the motives of people in seeming power in NA?" Well, unity takes place when we, as individuals and groups, base our service on the same primary purpose and use the Twelve Traditions as our common map in so doing. This keeps us all headed in the same direction toward the same goal that unites us in purpose. It makes no difference whether we walk, drive a car or truck, fly or hitchhike. It is only important that we keep moving in the same direction and follow the rules 'of the road.' These rules are best embodied in our NA Twelve Traditions. We must travel together on this journey in order to get the message of hope for recovery to addicts who might die from this disease.

Remember, we created the existing service structure and all of its different components and have the freedom to choose whether or not to use it. We may choose not to use any of it or to use any part of it that we feel is helpful to us in achieving our 'primary purpose.' We may, at any time decide to create other tools for service, as long as they are not negative to NA as a whole, and we do not need anyone's permission to do so. We are limited only by our imagination and abilities. This is

where the importance of our NA Society is most visible. Each of us individually has our own gifts. Some of us write, while others enjoy organizing functions such as dances, picnics and fund-raisers. Some members relate well to those in jails and institutions while others enjoy working with the public. Some of us feel comfortable in accepting responsibility on a grand scale such as undertaking major projects while others feel more comfortable when they are chairing a meeting or just making coffee.

It is our responsibility as individual members of this Society to discover and use our gifts for the betterment of the Fellowship. Each member has his or her own unique position in our NA Society. We individually have our own aptitudes, gifts, and ability to meet responsibilities that we use in order to contribute to our 'primary purpose.' All we need to do is to free ourselves and each other so that we can follow the will of our Higher Power and remain united in our efforts through the spiritual principals of the Traditions. We need to remember that while there are many things we cannot do individually, together we can do everything. We just need to do our part. Our leaders need to remember that everyone is important and we each have an indispensable role in recovery. No one is expendable. We have seen the worst of us grow into positive contributing members. We have also seen the best of us go asunder. There is no point where the rules no longer apply to any of us. Our society is made up of individuals in various stages of recovery. By pulling together, practicing the principles, and working our Steps, we get to see the miracles of recovery and life unfolding in our NA Society. Like the ocean tides, we may seem to come and go - but we are always there.

CHAPTER TWO

DISEASE CONCEPT

Many of us arrive at our first NA meeting spiritually dead, emotionally crippled and in poor physical health. Overwhelmed by shame, guilt, self-hatred and the painful rewards of our self-centered lifestyle, we are relieved to find that we have a treatable disease. In NA, we have evolved a concept of the disease of addiction as arrived at by addicts recovering in NA. Our moral values, which we thought were long gone, can be revived by living in harmony with the principles found within the Twelve Steps and Traditions of NA.

One of the first and most important tools we are given in our struggle to overcome addiction is an understanding of the disease. A thorough grasp of this new-found reality has opened the door to recovery for countless addicts worldwide.

A phrase often quoted to newcomers is "we are not responsible for our disease but we are responsible for our recovery." This short statement aptly captures the essence of the disease concept. We are no longer victims of some mysterious or other-worldly force. Rather than remaining overwhelmed by negative emotion, we are given a set of simple guidelines that we can apply to begin a journey toward inner peace and over all recovery.

Clinging to any reservations we may have in accepting the fact that we have a disease called addiction is referred to as denial. Denial of our condition is nothing more than an invitation to further pain and confusion. Denial is the mind game that all addict play to avoid dealing with reality and the consequences of our using. Often times our life_styles have become quite bizarre, yet we remain convinced that

everything is normal. Denial is a mental operation of rationalization and justification used to shield us from the pain of our current situation, or the much deeper pains from our distant past.

NA offers a solution to those who stubbornly embrace denial and who doubt the fact that this disease is the source of our unmanageable lives. Newcomers are encouraged to write the first step of the NA program. When faced with the black and white evidence of our dilemma, it is difficult to deny the fact that this disease is controlling our actions, settings us up for failure time and time again, and spoiling any hope of a meaningful life.

Having accepted our disease, we must be careful to realize that our addiction can be easily transferred to other destructive behaviors. We may substitute the symptom of drug use, with other destructive habits such as going to extremes in the areas of compulsive spending, over-eating and sexual acting out.

New members are especially susceptible this form of denial. Many will use almost anything in an attempt to fill the void and emotional emptiness left as a result of giving up our primary symptom of drug usage. Although applying the steps, going to meetings and using a sponsor does not offer the immediate gratification found in our old addictive lifestyle, it does offer the long term solutions we truly seek.

We know that addiction is a three-part illness. It is physical, mental and spiritual. There is no greater advantage to the addict seeking recovery than learning the disease concept of addiction. This has enabled hundreds of thousands of NA members to recover. The more we understand the direct connection between our pain and our disease, the less likely we are to allow ourselves to drift back into the patterns that

precede relapse. We have to take care that symptoms of our disease such as; exerting power in powerless situations, credit taking, judgment of others, and reluctance to do our part do not gain control again. Pain does not cure our illness; it does however motivate us to seek solutions. The most solemn vows and the strongest will power offer only temporary solutions. In our experience, until an addict finds the sincere desire to stop using there is little hope for recovery. It is this desire that fuels our recovery. Without it, we are lost.

We have come to understand that we suffer from a disease called addiction. This disease tells us that we do not have a disease, and therefore our minds work against us. That is how it fools even the most intelligent people. If we cannot grasp the concept of addiction as an illness, as in a medical text book, we may think of it this way: The belief that this illness exists and is “treatable” will help us get results while denial of its existence will surely kill us. While we readily admitted to powerlessness over drugs in early recovery, most of us struggled with the concept of being powerless over our addiction. Our addiction exists with or without drugs. Even without drugs, the disease often shows up in compulsions such as; arrogance, gambling, compulsive spending, over_eating, lust and generally overdoing anything that makes us feel good.

Understanding that ours is not a moral problem usually comes as an enormous relief for those of us suffering from addiction's guilt and shame. Our new understanding lifts that heavy weight. Most of us thought we had a problem from which recovery was not possible. We do not know why we have this disease nor does it matter. What does matter is the solution for arresting its progression. We may pretend that everything is all right, but this pretense is only our denial at work. We understand from the beginning that NA does not offer a definitive

solution for all problems. We are just addicts who have a disease and have found a way to live clean and productive lives. Addiction promised us a lot, gave us a little and took away everything. Today we are able to stay clean and achieve ongoing recovery by living the NA way of life.

One path that some take to recover from their various symptoms of addiction is to attack each of them one-by-one. We may believe that we are powerless over “cocaine” or powerless over “sex” etc. Many 12 Step fellowships have appeared in the past sixty-five years using this exact methodology. We in Narcotics Anonymous have another approach. The First Step of NA says, "We admitted we were powerless over our addiction . . ." NA focuses not on what we used but on our addictive personalities that forced us to use and abuse many things. Addiction creates the emptiness inside us that drives us to seek contentment in all the wrong places. This step asks us to surrender our self-loathing, destructive thinking and our negative behaviors. Then what? Upon closer examination, we have found that every harmful behavior we have ever exhibited exists because we do not love ourselves enough. We may deny this, but look at what we do to ourselves.

Expressing love opens the door for us to obtain true freedom. We learn how to love by working the Steps and the Traditions. We learn to apply the spiritual principles embodied in twenty-four simple suggestions. It takes time, repeated effort and a willingness to learn what real love is all about. Many addicts have said that working with others seemed to be the only thing that could get them through particularly tough times in their recovery. When we show concern for another, we manage to divert attention from ourselves and our compulsions. We identify with the feelings that many addicts share because we have been there and done that. As we learned to care for our fellow addict in NA, so too we slowly learn to care for ourselves.

We used more drugs, more often, and substituted new drugs as our addiction progressed. Denial kept us blind to the fact that our lives were basically falling apart. Many of us covered our general failure by maintaining special skills or abilities. Our abilities diminished, and even the special skills we used to hide our addiction began to fail us. This strategy seemed to be “do an especially good job and that would keep others off our back”. It was just another game we played in order to continue to make our using seem successful.

We knew we were in conflict with the world. Making excuses, criticizing others, feeling inadequate, unworthy, guilty and fearful had become our existence. Negativity became a way of life for us. Because of this unhealthy spiritual condition, we tried to escape more and more. Our mental processes broke down and our thinking became obsessive. We thought that the answers to our problem were out there somewhere and if we could only get enough of one thing or another, we would be all right. This obsessive thinking that follows the process of spiritual disconnection generally ends with compulsive activity. This is a recurring and dangerous pattern. We have seen this pattern emerge in many ways, even after we got clean.

Addiction creates patterns of fears and defense mechanisms to help us cope with life. When we could no longer hide the fact that our addiction had taken over our lives, we faced total collapse. We have found that the only way out is through total surrender. In spite of all the denial, evasive actions and repeated attempts to use successfully, nothing seemed to work. We came to a place where recovery started sounding good, even though it meant we could not continue using. Of course, we knew there would have to be a few changes.

One addict shared: "Having this disease is not my fault. We do not know why we have this disease nor does it matter. What matters is the solution for arresting its progress. This baffling and fatal disease compromises our morality. What would a cancer patient do for a cure, not to die? Just about anything, correct? The problem lies in not knowing we have a disease to begin with. Just as any cancer patient can identify with any other cancer patient, but may not accept his or her disease, so we as addicts may identify with others in recovery but still refuse to accept that we too suffer from the disease of addiction.

Another addict shared: "I was unable to recognize my disease until I got into recovery. Today I am aware of its symptoms as they occur within me. Obsessive thinking and compulsive behavior characterizes my addiction. It follows a simple pattern; First a loss of spirituality occurs when I slow down on meeting attendance, stop prayer and meditating, and then I take back my will. Second I lapse into self-centeredness and self-pity. Resentments set in and my gratitude goes out the window. 3rd life becomes unmanageable because of this emotional relapse. 4th I use something to change the way I feel and to fix me. 5th I try to cover up the pain and avoid uncomfortable feelings through laughter, people pleasing, and solving everyone else's problems. Of course these screwed-up coping skills will differ for each of us.

As always, none of this works. Once more, I have to surrender my will and my life to a Power that can heal me. After a hard and honest look at myself, I take responsibility for my part in the recovery process. Only then, is meaningful progress made."

The disease of addiction is one of reaction. When something happens, the fear that grows from our self-centered thinking pushes us into reacting or over-reacting. We feel threatened at every turn so we try to

defend ourselves. When we feel attacked, we attack. Sometimes the attack happens only in our minds. We indulge in our resentments and fantasies of revenge so we can have or feel we have some kind of power in powerless situations. This is a common reaction but healthy recovering people tend not to dwell in this type of thinking for long. We interact positively with the people and events in our lives by sharing our feelings and then letting them go. We share, not to make others change but to free ourselves so we don't have to live with ill feelings.

We have learned to align our actions with our principles. This concept may seem foreign to us when we are just beginning to understand the depths of our addiction. We are just beginning to see what a mess our lives have become. Is it really possible for us to have and live by spiritual principles such as; honesty, open-mindedness, willingness, patience, tolerance, acceptance, love? We come to utilize these principles in all that we do and say. In time, they become as natural to us as breathing in and out. They become effortless.

Addiction is rooted in the spirit and we call this the self-centered part of our disease. It is more than simple selfishness. The self-centered aspect of our addiction results in our isolation, loneliness and alienation from our fellow man. It is "feeling alone in the midst of a crowd". We feel unloved in the bosom of our families, separated from our fellow human beings and even separated from our Higher Power. We have found ourselves in a pit of despair, feeling that we are truly unique in our misery. We think no one else can possibly understand how we feel because we believe no one else has ever felt this way before.

In this state of mind, we may think of ourselves as the very worst or hide the truth by thinking we are the very best. We fear letting others know who we really are because we often believe that we are unlovable. We

see every situation in the light of how it affects us. One addict summed it up succinctly; "It's all about me! Don't you know"? We are so insecure that we continually seek approval and acceptance from others, but seldom feel that we receive all that we so desperately need. Self_centeredness tells we are totally alone. This is a fearful state of mind and many of us have lived in it for years and years. After a time, we can't remember what it was like to live without these negative feelings.

As individuals, we deal with many spiritual and philosophical issues. We need to feed ourselves both mentally and spiritually. Many addicts have said, "Yes, I am powerless over drugs and they have made my life unmanageable, but I only came to NA to get physically clean, I will deal with the other problems in my life, on my own." Where other people can use, we cannot without devastating repercussions some where down the road. Where they can control what and how much they use, we have sadly learned that over the long haul, we cannot. We may get away with using "normally" for a while but eventually, like the Basic Text says "we didn't use drugs, they used us!" Where others can predict what will happen when they take even a small quantity of a drug, we cannot.

We have found that we could not stop by our own force of will. The fulfillment that our obsessive thinking promised never happened. No matter how much we got or did, we were never satisfied. Therefore, we have to practice total abstinence from all drugs, foods containing drugs, ice cream with liqueur, cold remedies with codeine, near beer beverages or anything else that could trigger active addiction. Our understanding has to improve and our personalities rebuilt to allow us to function successfully. We call this work spiritual because it affects our spirits.

We have tried dealing with life on sheer will power; buying things,

chasing social acceptability, over-eating, compulsive gambling, working, avoiding working, emotional swings, wallowing in self-pity, having sex, and any other ‘fixes’ our minds could come up with. In the end, we always ended up with the same spiritual void that our obsessive drug use could never fill. This is the same void that got us to N.A. in the first place. Eventually, our substitutes land us in the exact same places that the drugs did, not some times, but every time.

We give our thoughts power when we only plan “successful” outcomes to our many various schemes. We begin to fantasize that acting out on our desires must surely be able to fix us this time. We imagine all the intricate details needed to accomplish our goal. As we do so, we tend to justify all that is needed to get that which we know will cure all our ills. Now it seems next to impossible for us to turn back.

Some have said that, as addicts, we suffer from a love deficiency. We are truly lovers in distress. Our addiction uses our every action to reduce positive human contact, when that is what we crave so much. It would seem that we are deep down, hopeless romantics. We crave the feelings we get from that new relationship. We focus on the honeymoon period of a relationship, when our endorphins are cooking on high. Love is in the air and all is well with the world. For many of us, we chase that fantasy well past the point when there is anything healthy left in the relationship. Our addiction will convince us that putting up with anything is better than being alone.

We find ourselves faced with an addictive disorder looking for a way to express itself. No matter which symptom or substance we pursue, we appear as determined as any hungry predator that is closing in on its prey. Our drives toward these obsessions can be every bit as strong as our compulsions were to get high. We have found ourselves

manipulating, lying and stealing to achieve our ends. We are in the grip of our disease and we do not want to turn back. Consequently, we indulge ourselves to the point where we just can't do it any more. Finally, once again dissatisfied we surrender. Surrender doesn't mean we give up. Surrender merely means we are willing to try another way.

Members of the Fellowship of NA have experience in practicing total abstinence over drugs. Many have applied the principle of "not picking up the first one" to overcome other self-destructive behaviors that have made our lives unmanageable (e.g. smoking tobacco, gambling, stealing, lying, etc.). What can we do about those necessary things of life like food that our disease causes us to use in a destructive way? Are we destined to be helpless victims or is there hope for us in these areas too? For many of us, the compulsive symptoms other than drug use were non-existent or only secondary problems during our active addiction. It was not until the drugs left our lives that we latched onto these other issues. We had to face our obsessions with food, sex, over-spending, or other things as our desire to use drugs was lifted. Some of us, sadly enough, have not found long-term relief from these substitute aspect of our disease even after years in recovery.

On a positive note, we have found that once we see how much freedom we get from surrendering the use of drugs, we can get that same uplift from letting go of other things. Many of us have given our recoveries a boost after many years clean by surrendering something new; Cigarettes, sugar, caffeine etc... We find that staying clean has become easy and we need to challenge our recovery by doing something difficult. Some times we need to shake up our complacency by doing something difficult and challenging. Of course, we don't suggest this for newcomers who want to make every thing right in their first few weeks in N.A.

One of our greatest challenges is learning to stop compulsive behavior as it occurs. Identifying a non-chemical relapse is not always as cut and dried as it is with being clean. With drugs, either we used or we did not. Some times prescribed medication enters the picture. In those times, there are more shades of gray and the lines between abstinence and relapse can become blurred. Daily inventories coupled with regular prayer and meditation has proven invaluable for keeping our awareness heightened and our program on track. We keep in close contact with our sponsors by letting them know what our medical condition is and what has been prescribed for us by our physicians. Of course, we should always discuss any use of mood altering medication with our sponsors before filling any prescriptions or using over the counter medication that might contain alcohol etc.

Addictive overeaters cannot practice total abstinence. Anorexia or bulimia is not recovery from compulsive eating. The key to recovery is eating sensibly and moderately as a permanent lifestyle. We want to be able to eat to live, rather than live to eat. As one member said, "Recovery from overeating is much harder than when I stopped using because I still have to 'kiss the dragon' several times a day!" The same holds true for the compulsive spender. It is not our goal to turn from spendthrift to penny-pincher. We want to learn how to set up a reasonable budget and work within those parameters. What about the members who compulsively seek out sexual gratification or destructive relationships? A period of abstinence from sexual activity may be necessary for detoxing while we do a thorough inventory, work with our sponsor, develop personal boundaries and in some cases, seek additional help. While total abstinence from sex is possible, how many of us look forward to a lifetime of celibacy? Most of us have envisioned healthy and loving relationships as our goal.

Spiritual relapses frequently occur before we know it if we are not vigilant. If a spiritual relapse happens, forgiving ourselves for our mistakes and working the program "just for today" is even more crucial. Without this persistence, we could easily become discouraged and give up altogether. Never let yesterday's relapse be a reason to use today! At these times when we feel disheartened, many of us find comfort in revisiting the Third Step. We realize that our Higher Power is always present and can help us get through any situation. The road to recovery is long and will contain some potholes along the way. In time, we learn to be grateful for our non-chemical symptoms as well. They act as caution lights, warning us that there is something wrong which needs our immediate attention. Many of us have been down this path and have experienced the miracle of recovery from addiction. We cherish the freedom and inner peace that results from a surrender that is more than simple abstinence from the use of drugs. Recovery is the process of regaining the power to live. Everything we do in recovery increases positive human contact. This allows us to move up the scale to high-energy states of being that do not make us "loaded". We know the results if we use and that can be boring! The excitement is in living clean because we are never sure what will happen. We frequently find ourselves expecting similar situations to lead to old outcomes only to find differences that crop up and gradually ease away our fears. Total abstinence, the desire for recovery, nature, time and patience are the great healers.

One addict shared: "I believe that the use of barbiturates in my early life for seizures has created the possibility for me to be addicted to everything I come in contact with. The ability to stop using was only over when there was no more money, drugs or people to use. Using in the morning was the only way to 'kick start' this body of mine. My compulsion to live within my own paranoia was both gripping and

frightening. It was inconceivable to me that life would ever change. This lifestyle became tolerable. The others that used as I did seemed to be in the midst of all the social activity. Life would not have changed until I surrendered and accepted my problem. I worked because work was only a way to earn money for my addiction. I found it easy to be successful but eventually the disease of addiction took over and the job was expendable. The streets became the reality."

In recovery, we have found that our complicated disease boiled down to simple descriptions and simple facts. Powerlessness was one aspect. Denial of our problem was another telltale sign. Blaming others for our problems was a sign of our inability to take personal responsibility. Substitution was another sign, using anything and not being able to stop once we had started. Not being able to predict what would happen once we started using was another. One of the strangest things was the way our addiction forced us to use against our own will. We let down those we loved and those who loved us the most. Isolation resulted when we ran out of people. When we first notice that nervous and uncomfortable feeling, we can pause and become quiet. We can make a decision to turn the disease over to the God of our understanding. We choose peace of mind over discomfort. If we address these feelings when they first appear, we avoid the trap of insanity. As our mind searches for the quick fix, we must remind ourselves of the pain that easy solutions have brought us in the past. We play the tape all the way through to the end, not just stopping at the part where we get what we want. We admit the consequences of our actions and honestly ask ourselves if it is worth it. We consider the positive choices and give them preference to the negative ones.

What if we are obsessing on one of our destructive symptoms and have started the process of picking-up? Are we doomed to follow it through to

the bitter end? Remember that we never have to give-in to our disease. We can call someone or go to a meeting if one is available. We can pray to our Higher Power to give us the strength we need to stop the madness. Many of us identify our addiction as an allergic reaction like poison ivy or a bee sting. Some people are not bothered by a bee sting beyond a minor discomfort. It is commonly known that someone who has had little more than momentary pain from a bee sting can progress in his or her allergy without knowing it. One more bee sting and they can swell up like a balloon! Many addicts can relate to addiction as something like diabetes and meetings as the insulin. This basic picture grows into something more complete and at the same time, it keeps us coming back.

As we grow spiritually, the internal battle may grow larger. In some of us, our system seemed to adapt to the drugs as our tolerance increased. Sometimes that adaptation seems to reverse and we are more susceptible and only a little will get us high. Many of us tried to substitute to avoid the unpleasant side effects of withdrawal. As addiction began to re-establish itself in our lives, we lost our ability to be around everyday people. We found it harder and harder to play the game of life convincingly. What the world did not know about addiction damn near killed us.

Looking at life as a clean addict gives us a whole new picture. We know that people can kill with their good intentions as if we are nothing more than lab rats. They speak with great authority on subjects they cannot possibly understand. It is important to realize that they repeat the promises of a world that offers countless products to make us feel good. We addicts are responsible to seek reliable information in order to live clean. We see where our addiction created a fantastic pattern of fears and defense mechanisms to deal with the hallucinations that we thought happened when we were using.

Even those who help us may be extremely limited in other areas of their lives yet they are entirely competent when it comes to staying clean on a daily basis. Their admission of powerlessness helps us come to terms with our own.

Some external factors can initiate temporary relief but we know that continued relief depends on personal responsibility. Our desire for recovery guides us to the very things we need most. This usually begins with our commitment to stay clean. Positive change and a revolutionary attitude can destroy a loser's point of view. As our addiction progresses during recovery, we must grow spiritually to hold it in check. Transition from a shame-based concept to a hope-based concept of self is necessary. Hope and the possibility of positive change compete with our accustomed state of despair. We must rebuild our personalities in order to function successfully. Surrender is the foundation of recovery. It opens the door to help from sources outside of our experience. When we recognize where we were and where we are now, we give credit to God and call it grace. Only by attaining and maintaining a sense of powerlessness can we keep surrendering and admitting our need for help.

The disease concept opens doors and encourages us to risk energy and to try again. Without the validation of the disease concept, the sense of powerlessness may be overwhelming. What addict has not tried and tried again to stop using and change his way of life? We failed and fell into a spiral of low self-esteem, defeat, and acceptance of our condition as permanent. When addicts hear about the disease concept, eventually, they identify. When asked what addiction feels like, we struggle to define it in accurate terms. It may first appear as a nervous or anxious sensation. We have a general feeling of being uncomfortable. Something just does not seem quite right and our minds start searching for an

answer. With incredible speed we scan through our mental file cabinet for answers that have been stored away for just this situation. In a fraction of a second, we can usually focus on what we think will make us feel better. Sadly, this is only a temporary solution to our dilemma. The real solution is in taking personal responsibility for ourselves and our actions. We find a small amount of hope for a better way of life. We are relieved of the hopelessness of our addiction. The excitement of our hope attracts many newcomers.

Working the Steps relieves the symptoms. We learn that the disease of addiction is incurable, progressive and fatal if not arrested daily. The urge to live explains our continued interest and energy we put into maintaining our recovery. The answers that we share have proven themselves in the most important arena of all: our very lives. This is why it takes us years to fully understand the NA way of life. We spent a long time learning how not to live. We work the Program on a daily basis so we can continue to grow. We continue to monitor our feelings, thoughts and actions. This is the process of recovery. It is not an event, but a way of life.

People have painful living problems and suffer from the illusion that life's lessons aren't lessons but personal misfortunes that they deserved. They confuse this with their personal worth as human beings. As addicts, we base many of our feelings, reactions, and decisions on experiences that took place in the past or while we were loaded. We were in denial over the fact that all our perceptions of life were drug induced. We spent all our time with other addicts who told us that we were doing just fine. We automatically cut ourselves off from non_addicts who could point out our irrational thinking.

It is worth discussing this subject in some depth because in a short time,

addiction makes us forget our past. Non-addicts expect us to snap-out of the patterns of addictive thinking, acting and reacting by just putting down the drugs. They think that we can act as if nothing happened. After all, is that not what recovery is all about? No! It is not! Recovery is learning a new way to live. We do that by facing the past and healing, not by avoiding it.

The Program of Narcotics Anonymous teaches us that we have choices. By practicing spiritual principles we arrest insane patterns of self-indulgence and self-gratification. Knowing that “using is losing” is not enough, we must find a way to live differently. This is why we call it ‘working’ the Steps.

By working the steps we find that faith coupled with action brings change, hope replaces despair and faith in a power greater than ourselves empowers us to do greater things. We must repeatedly throw ourselves into contact with clean addicts in every conceivable situation. This is how we learn to go through situations without using. Once into recovery, many of us cannot explain exactly how we have stayed clean. Grace (undeserved favor) is how we got clean in the first place. It enhances our ability to act on faith and trust God to help us.

How many times have we struggled with our obsessive thinking and compulsive behaviors only to find ourselves having to surrender one more time? We have accepted our condition as permanent. Symptoms appeared to offer satisfaction only to leave us feeling cheated. We expected positive outcomes in our endeavors but they were never sufficient.

Total abstinence, a desire for spiritual growth, and practicing principles will relieve the pain of our addiction. The spirituality acquired by

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working the steps is necessary if we are to stay clean. We no longer use to change how we feel, we utilize the steps to heal our feelings. Spirituality has the power to do this. An addict believing in a higher power, responsive to his cries for help, is well on his way to recovery. Don't give up five minutes before the miracle; as long as there is life left in us, there is hope for recovery.

CHAPTER THREE

POWER GREATER THAN OURSELVES

God is in Narcotics Anonymous. Can we talk about it? Can we write about it? For many people talking about God can be a sensitive issue. NA works for people who don't believe in a supernatural being or are not sure about God. NA also works for people who are deeply religious in the conventional sense. Finally, God seems to work well for all those people whose belief system lies somewhere in between. We see God in the 12 Steps and the 12 Traditions of NA. In Step One we find ourselves powerless, we surrender. We admit that we cannot do anything about our problem on our own and we are asking for help. The addicts in that first meeting represent a Power greater than we are. We may get our first exposure to a God that expresses Himself through those addicts. Hope grows in Step Two as we go through the process of coming to believe that this Power greater than ourselves can heal us. In the Third Step, we decide to give our daily lives and our wills over to the care of this God of our understanding.

The faith developed in Step Three gives us the courage we need for Step Four. As we begin the Fifth Step, we invite God to be a part of the process. Step Six finds us prepared to have God remove various aspects of our self-centeredness. Through God's grace, we find willingness and ask God to relieve our shortcomings. God gives us the willingness to take responsibility for our past destruction. In Step Nine, we step out on the faith that God will not put us into a situation that we cannot handle. We pray for help. We move forward, forgive ourselves and offer forgiveness to any others that may have harmed us. The integrity inherent in Step Ten results from the power of God working in us through the previous Steps. We strive to ever expand our understanding and ongoing connection with God. We pray for knowledge of God's will

for us as well as the power that we need to carry it out. Having a spiritual awakening we continue to do God's will in our lives, giving love and service to everyone. We talk and write about God so that we might increase our understanding of the most far-reaching influence on our recovery and indeed our lives.

Some members have expressed concerns about the steps using 'He' and 'Him' in referring to God. The Tenth Tradition states "Narcotics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the NA name ought never be drawn into public controversy." In this spirit, NA as a fellowship does not have a definition of God; this is up to each of us. We do however follow the conventions of the English language, with some allowance to be sensitive and not alienate someone whose belief is uncertain or non_existent. A personal understanding of God can develop or expand by having open discussions with other NA members. Open_mindedness is an essential key to our recovery. While the world debates over the true definition of God, Narcotics Anonymous does not participate in any public controversy. If we try to identify God with one 'true' definition, our minds close to other possibilities. It is more important to find a higher power that works for you than a Higher Power that other people approve of. Loving, caring, greater than our addiction, and ourselves our Higher Power will do for us what we can't do for ourselves. Despite our individual understanding, members today feel that the God of our understanding as written in the steps should not be a controversial issue rather a mutual identification.

We don't try to convince or convert addicts seeking recovery in NA. We have found that any attempt to force feed religion or spiritual belief just pushes away even very sincere newcomers. We work instead on trying to help a person see where their using has caused their pain. Once this really sinks in, along with the powerlessness experienced and admitted

in Step One, the notion of getting some power into their lives takes on a very different meaning. It is getting something we need, not buying into a belief system that is a lie or done just to please another person.

People bring their childhood learning into their present with all its strengths and limitations. What we learned as children may have been confused or become confused with time. What ever we think our belief is, we want to check it out thoroughly. Our future life and happiness depend on it. Our belief has to work for us to recover. Our newly found open-mindedness teaches us that we can learn many things from many people. The important thing to know is that each member has the responsibility to find their own understanding of God. Many of us as newcomers found that with the help of our sponsor, we were able to find an image of God, with which we would be comfortable. Anything we can learn from books, people or prayer increases our existence and peace of mind. The more we learn the better. Almost all our pain came from not knowing enough or from believing things that weren't true. We can't afford to base our lives on lies and fantasy.

Many addicts dream about living a spiritual life but are doubtful that they can really achieve it, even with God's help. We discovered that when we set goals that seemed beyond our grasp and asked for God's help, we were lifted up and given the energy and direction to achieve our goals. The doorway to miracles opened. We built on each success, realizing that our experience is just as valid and meaningful as that of any other member. We wish that all addicts could find recovery, even one that expressed a reluctance to embrace a Higher Power. This is because many of us had little or no understanding of God when we first came to the Fellowship of NA. Others feared a Higher Power. Years spent not relating to or believing in a Power greater than ourselves made it difficult to achieve conscious contact with God. Suffering from extreme

spiritual indifference, we simply did not see God as a necessity for our recovery. Many of us regarded recovery only as a practical method to retrieve some of the things that we had lost. Being open_minded is important to making progress in our spiritual growth. For some of us struggling with the idea of God, it helped when we thought of a Higher Power as being like a deep underground spring, hidden from view but present nonetheless. The thirst for spiritual fulfillment may be quenched at many wells, all drawn from a common source. It is not necessary for all of us to drink from the same well - we just don't want our members dying from thirst. If there is any doubt that God exists, we need only to look outside and see the miracles of life. By listening to NA members and observing them staying clean, we see further evidence that something special is working miracles in our lives. Anyone who has attended even a few meetings has met someone who expressed a reluctance to embrace a higher power because of that fire and brimstone God from their childhood. An important aspect of believing in a God who is forgiving in nature is that it enables us to accept who we were, who we are and who we can become.

We may have once demanded that God administer justice to those that harmed us. Nevertheless, when we completed an inventory, detailing the exact nature of our wrongs, most of us realized that we would be far better off with a Higher Power who was both just and forgiving. Open-mindedness is important here. The higher power is like a deep underground mine hidden from view but present and felt nonetheless. No single key unlocks every door. Some of us came into Narcotics Anonymous wearing a religion like a mask, trying to avoid personal responsibility for our past and for our recovery. In time we learned that God would only do for us what God could do through us. It is during this realization that many change their understanding of God from a religious perception to a more spiritual relationship. It is only important to us that

you find the key that works for you. Only if you are successful in doing this will you find the power to recover.

Selfless service is an expression of our gratitude for the care of God. NA is a spiritual not religious program. NA doesn't endorse any particular system of faith or worship of a specific Supreme Being or God. Nor, does NA endorse specific rituals of worship. We understand spirituality as the vital principal alive in each of us. It's an inspiring and encouraging influence in our program and in our lives.

As we recover, we become aware that our lives are reflections of our relationship with God. Instead of trying to know all the answers about God, most of us have found it useful to concentrate our energy into seeking the knowledge of what God's will is for us, and trying to live our lives accordingly. We realize that we need beliefs in order to follow a spiritual path, but we also need to be open-minded enough to receive God's wisdom. We cannot afford to forget that we receive our freedom and well being from our Higher Power. Spirituality is not based on social acceptance, material wealth or physical appearance but rather on a personal and intimate relationship with the God of our understanding. Our lives are reflections of our relationship with God.

Sometimes we feel that our pain is so great that even our Higher Power cannot relieve it. If we believe in a God that cannot handle every aspect of our lives, we may find ourselves frozen in fear, waiting to react to the next crisis. We can't afford to base our lives on bad information and fantasy. Many of us tried to fix ourselves, only to learn that we needed outside help. It is important for us to realize that we are not recovering alone. We came to accept help from the spiritual principles as part of our recovery process. An understanding of a Higher Power begins to give us an understanding of our own worth. Our faith grows stronger as we

uncover the many ways God helps us when there is no one else we can turn to. Other members shared with us that God could be found anywhere, at any time. This Higher Power can be detected in home group members, in a Spiritual Being or anywhere in between. Many of us discover the ways God helped us when there was no one else there to take our side in things. It is often heard in NA meetings that a common prayer for newcomers is, "God, just help me to stay clean for today." Prayer after prayer, day after day, our proof that a Higher Power exists comes as we make it through those days clean. In time, we learn to use prayer and meditations not only to find comfort, but to actually guide us through our lives.

The feeling of being able to access help from a timeless, loving source lifts us and gives us the energy we need to live. Any belief in a loving God seems to work for us. While individual beliefs may vary in particulars, certain generalities hold true. Living the program is our attempt to become more God-centered and less self-centered. We have learned that God truly loves us and will never abandon us. Our feelings and perspective about these things changes with time. Don't be in too big a hurry. What a 'freeing feeling' it is to know that we no longer have to be in charge.

As we grow and mature in our recovery, we realize what those members meant when they talked about being "God-centered." It is an internal feeling that no matter what is going on around us, everything is going to be all right. It may begin during our prayer and meditation, but we can carry this spiritual connection with us throughout our day. If self-centeredness is truly the core of our disease, then God-centeredness is the core of our recovery. Writing our moral inventory, we rely on God's guidance for the courage to be fearless and the wisdom to know right from wrong. Sharing the exact nature of our wrongs, we trust God to see

us through the rough spots and we trust God to work through the other human being so that their role too, is a spiritual one. We practice the faith acquired in the previous Steps to help us become willing to have God remove our defects of character. We realize that we have been cared for all along and that our lives will be even more enriched when we let go of the defects that are holding us back.

The Seventh Step places God's role in direct conflict with our egos. As we humbly ask Him to remove our shortcomings, we are again saying, "We can't do this alone." Our disease may reel in rebellion, but we need only hold steady to our course. As we make a list of persons we had harmed, we try to look at each of them in the light of God's love. If we were expressing only unconditional love, how would we have treated each of them differently? Forgiveness is a spiritual principle. Whether we are asking to be forgiven or extending forgiveness, we can experience God's presence. We continue to allow God to be our guide by evaluating our actions and correcting our mistakes as they occur.

God plays an integral part in each of these steps, but so do we. Without our willingness, there will be very little spiritual progress. Being open to gaining or improving our belief is one thing anyone can do, even experimentally. The basic idea that help is available from an unseen source can help us get this spiritual connection. By whatever means, the luck and increased capacity to go forward in life without fear shows that some basic human need has been met. Ego-based thinking and living are one of the biggest enemies of the addict in recovery. Our egos tell us that no matter how much we have or hope for, it's not enough. All our character defects are manifestations of our egos. We need to set our egos aside and allow God to become the healing force responsible for our recovery.

One addict shares: "Ego creates the illusion that God is not with me. Sometimes I feel separated from God, and I feel alone. I realize that this separation is not possible. If God has pure love and cares for me, then it is impossible for God to be away from me - He just won't do it! This feeling of being disconnected is another way my disease tries to use on me in 'its primary purpose - my destruction.'"

We have often seen God working through other people. Many of us have been at meetings when it was easy to recognize God's presence in the rooms. The atmosphere of recovery was in the air. We shared what we needed to share and heard what we needed to hear. This is an example of God in action. While some may feel the necessity to be 'true to their faith' and find it uncomfortable to imagine that there may be several ways a person may gain access to God, many of us find this wonderful. How magnificent and loving of God to be endlessly available to all who seek, whatever path they may take.

Through working our steps, and applying our Traditions, our beliefs evolve. From the simplicity of a 'power greater than ourselves' to a Higher Power concept, we eventually come to a better understanding of 'God as we understand Him.' By having a "God of our understanding" members are free to conceive that "God" may be a man, woman, spirit, etc. or even a light bulb or doorknob. Some members will be offended with whatever we define as God, but this is one of our greatest freedoms in NA - to develop OUR own understanding of what God is. With this freedom, comes our right for a personal definition to change over as we grow in recovery. Many if not all of us had to be clean and in the meetings for some time to realize that the Steps lead us into the care of the God of our understanding. This very simple way of expressing the feeling we have towards our spiritual sources is very important to us. We do not turn our lives and wills over to the tyranny of God or the

dictatorship of God, just to the care.

Narcotics Anonymous Steps and other NA literature stress the importance of developing a reliance on the God of our understanding. Our Second Step assumes that we already believe in something when it says, "We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." Any belief in a loving God seems to work. While individual beliefs may differ, certain fundamental principles hold true. The foundation of our belief is that help is available. Being open to change is a belief we all share. By whatever means, the capacity to go forward in life without fear shows that our faith in a Higher Power is real.

Atheism

NA includes addicts who come from many backgrounds and who have a broad range of spiritual beliefs. Because of the special nature of our spirituality, we even include those who have no certain beliefs. Our goal in this chapter is to assure our members that our freedom to believe or disbelieve is real. What is an atheist? One definition of an atheist is: a person who does not believe there is a God. There are at least two types of atheists - Religious and Rational. Atheists live in the realm of the tangible world. The Religious Atheist observes a religious culture, which does not recognize any form of God. The Rational atheist also does not recognize any form of God. However, the Rational atheist does not necessarily identify a religious perspective as a reason for atheism. We may live and attend NA meetings in the Western Hemisphere or the Eastern Hemisphere which have totally diverse beliefs. We may be members of a scientific or intellectual culture or we may be members of any human culture or profession. Atheism is the right to believe a spiritual program of our choosing rather than a specific form or style.

We need to dissolve the stigma of atheism. An atheist in recovery lives by the spiritual principles of the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous. We embrace life. No matter where we live or what our background is, if we are addicts we do not have to choose between our religion and our recovery. We can have both.

One devoted NA atheist shares: "A theist, as opposed to an athiest, believes in a supernatural being or force. More than just acknowledging atheists in NA, many members respect and agree with us on many points. We atheists have trouble believing in the intangible. We need to hear, touch or taste to satisfy our feelings about surrender. Many of us can surrender to NA or the spirit of NA when we can't surrender to supernatural concepts in good faith. We can tangibly feel NA.

"We atheists, like other recovering addicts, exercise our absolute freedom to develop our spiritual beliefs without interference. When it comes to recovery, the NA atheist follows a purely spiritual path. While we do not pray to a supernatural being, most of us meditate on a daily basis. Often times, an NA atheist has an in-depth experience with meditation. Meditation helps us work the Twelve Steps where we find it impossible to use prayer. We accept the spiritual part of the disease of addiction: our total self-centeredness. The Step that guarantees this freedom is Step Three with the appearance of the phrase of our understanding. The idea behind these words is what makes the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous program spiritual and not religious. Atheists develop their belief around what works for them. This should not offend those members that believe in a God of their understanding. The recovery and life of an addict is at stake.

"There are many ways for the atheist to translate theistic phrases in the Twelve Steps into their spiritual equivalent. This gives personally relevant language to express the concepts of NA. Many of us debate using a sponsor who is not an atheist. We wonder if we should sponsor an addict who is not an atheist. Some of us wonder what we will say when we are asked to open or close a meeting? We celebrate our diversity, for it reminds us we all have different ways of working for the same thing. Some things cannot be easily said, yet they must be learned, loved and passed to others. When we say them, we say them imperfectly and hope we are understood. It is in the sharing that the healing and the growing can begin to take place. We know that the meaning of a Step is not in the words, it is behind them. So, we do not become overly attached to words over principles. Words carry us to principles like a boat carries us to harbor.

"Although atheists are a minority group within NA, they work the Twelve Steps, stay clean and grow spiritually. Their definitions may be different from that of other members. It is OK that they are not a majority. Together with all NA members, we celebrate the principles that allow us to carry our simple message to so many different types of addicts. Although we realize that we atheists are a minority group within NA, we know the danger of feeling unique. Most of us have experienced feeling left out because of our beliefs. Some theists in NA try to convert us to their belief. This presumption can kill us if we are not aware of our basic freedom to a belief that works for us. We overcome the feeling of being an outsider by sharing our belief with our fellow NA members. We try to be considerate of others and hope they will be considerate to us. Sometimes atheists are not respected by other members in NA. This cannot be helped in many cases. We try to maximize our

gratitude for those who show us love and understanding. We know we are not alone. There is a deeper language of the heart, which is often hidden by words. We speak this language. It is the path of the heart. We follow it to our true self, for there we will find others. No one is alone in NA."

It is interesting to consider how an atheist works their 12 Steps, particularly those that have reference to a loving God. Until now, the NA atheist has not had literature to read of a non_theistic nature. Atheists had to cope with theistic literature. This was not a new situation and we tried to understand. Now, like all members, we know we are free to follow a belief that works for us. Literature that can be embraced by the NA atheist is valid if it helps addicts. How can atheists work the Twelve Steps where a Step mentions - and seems to require - belief in God? The NA atheist works Steps Two, Three, Five, Six, Seven and Eleven, by using their minds to find a solution. While this may put the NA atheist to some trouble, the need for recovery and a new life is strong motivation.

Understanding Steps Two and Three from the viewpoint of an atheist, recovering in NA, may help serve as a guide to the other Steps. A person who is uncertain of their belief has to work to understand the Steps, even if they believe in a supernatural God. It may be of interest for people who believe in God to look at how others work their Steps. It is hoped that this open_mindedness will not be too offensive to someone with a strong belief in God. We all have to let down our guards a bit and look into the lives of others.

One atheist member shared on Step Two: We came to believe that the NA program could restore us to sanity. "Most atheists recognize early in recovery that we could stay clean in NA regardless of our beliefs. The NA Traditions guarantee atheist's membership based on our desire to

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stop using. We are not expected or required to endorse or adopt any creed or religion. We experienced the insanity of addiction in our lives and came to believe that the NA Program could restore us to sanity. As newer members, we carefully watched the recovering addicts who greeted us and freely shared their experiences in recovery. We could see and feel their spiritual awakening long before we understood it. Eventually, we developed trust in the NA program and the willingness to share openly with other members. Our belief that the NA program could restore us to sanity did not come naturally. We watched and listened at meetings until we came to believe. Many of us participated in group service, making coffee or cleaning up, until we were able to surrender to this step.

"After we came to believe, we took a look at Step Three: We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of the loving NA Fellowship. We learned in Step Two to trust the NA Program and Fellowship. This trust took time to develop, and may contribute to our belief that the NA program could restore us to sanity. Through sponsorship and listening in meetings, we learn that Step Three is an action Step. In Step Three, we make a decision, which represents a turning point in our lives. We now understand why an addict alone is in bad company. Our understanding of the NA message of recovery helps us in our daily lives. We see proof that NA works through the improvements in the quality of our lives. These experiences make it easier to turn our will and our lives over to the care of the NA fellowship. We no longer want to be alone.

"Often we are asked how we work Step Three if we are atheists. The answer is that we look to the spiritual or recovery principle behind the words and we practice it. We may find ourselves in a position to ask, 'What is the function of this Step in my recovery? What principle does it

emphasize? What are the possible mechanisms by which it works?' We attend many meetings and listen closely when addicts share their experiences with this Step. We may determine the function of Step Three as alleviating undue, unnecessary or unreasonable anxiety that is hindering positive action, so that we may do the next right thing. To us the principle involved may be willingness. The mechanism by which this occurs for those who believe in God is the decision that transforms them from one emotional or mental state to another. This decision to turn it over to the care of a personal God, conscious entity, supernatural being, or other unspecified loving force might be the mechanism by which this transformation occurs.

"With the renewed emotional or mental state, positive action or the next right thing is enacted by the addict. If a transforming experience occurs, that is to say, if the addict feels a measure of relief and perhaps even a sense that all will be well, but fails to take the action which originally generated the fear, that addict has not completed Step Three. Step Three is an action step. We know that the theist NA member lets go of fear and anxiety in this step and the atheists can do it too. It appears to be the letting go which results in relief. This is not necessarily the letting go to a deity. With repeated effort, a spiritual transformation begins for all addicts. This change occurs in the deepest levels of our being. As atheists, we simply ascribe these changes to our application of recovery principles rather than as evidence a supernatural force has been working in our lives. We too, act on our changed emotional or mental state and we do the next right thing. This is the second part of Step Three. We take positive action. Although we do not turn it over to a God of our understanding, many of us describe turning it over in ways which are non_theistic. Some atheists make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a spiritual concept we know from our non_theistic religion. Other atheists make a decision to turn our will and

our lives over to the care of Reasonable Action. Some atheists may make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of NA. A sense of connectedness with humanity results from the Third Step."

Belief

Belief is the key to effective prayer. It is impossible for us to quantify or qualify anything spiritual. We use so many things in our lives that we do not comprehend. We have faith in so many phenomena that are natural like electricity. Why is it we are unable to extend this faith to entities that are supernatural? Is it fear or ignorance? On the other hand, is it an unwillingness to change, to admit that we were wrong for so long, that a higher power exists in our lives? Does denial still abound? Belief in a Power greater than ourselves is developed through our own free will and cannot be taken from us without our cooperation. We have the freedom to believe as we choose. In fact, a suggestion in the Basic Text is that we choose a Power that is both loving and caring. We have suffered enough before coming to the program. Most of us do not need the added guilt of a punishing, unforgiving God. We have found that we, not others, have to find a Higher Power that works for us.

Those NA members who have surrendered to a power greater than themselves have an awesome weapon to fight the disease of addiction. Our disease is based in fear, the opposite of God's love. Our disease tells us we do not have enough, yet spiritual abundance is ours for the asking. Our disease pushes us to isolate and mistrust others, but with our lives in the care of God as we understand Him, we can move forward fearlessly knowing that there is no challenge that we have to face alone. God will move mountains, but we have to bring our shovels. Writing our moral inventory, we rely on God's guidance for the courage to be fearless and the wisdom to know right from wrong.

We are spiritual, moral beings. Our self_destructiveness is evidence of this. In the past, we felt badly about the way we were living and judged ourselves to be unworthy of good things in our lives. Our moral inventory process makes it possible to sort out what has happened to us. God will not make us write an inventory, nor will he make us share it with anyone else. Sharing the exact nature of our wrongs in our Fifth Step, we trust God to see us through the rough spots and to work through another human being. God can help us and ease our pain if we make the choice to do these things. We practice the faith acquired in the previous steps to help us become willing to have God remove our defects of character.

We realize that we have been cared for all along and that our lives will be even more enriched when we let go of these defects that are holding us back. He cannot make us willing to have our defects removed. He sometimes gives us opportunities to bring about the awareness of the pain that comes from acting out on our defects. When the pain gets great enough, we become willing to make the change. As we humbly ask Him to remove our shortcomings, we are again saying, "We can't do this alone." Our disease may rebel, but we need only to keep going. Asking God for guidance and expecting an immediate answer will not produce results, because God does not wear a wristwatch. God will not make our amends list for us. We have to sit down with pen, paper and willingness. As we make our list of persons we had harmed, we try to look at each of them in the light of God's love. If we were expressing only unconditional love, how would we have treated each of them differently? Forgiveness is a spiritual principle. Whether we are asking to be forgiven or extending forgiveness, we can experience God's presence. It is our responsibility to do the footwork of humbling ourselves to making the amends. We placed our faith in God to face these people.

We pray for the love, care and forgiveness that we need to make our amends. We need to know that God loves, cares for, and forgives so that we can love, care for, and forgive ourselves in our Fifth Step. Then the reaction from the ones we are making amends to is not as important. We continue to allow God to be our guide by evaluating our actions and correcting our mistakes as they occur. As we recover, we find that God's will for us is to learn and grow from these mistakes.

Once awareness occurs, action must follow or the un_manageability returns. Believing that God will deliver when we are ready becomes the old way of thinking. There seems to be a wide range of sledgehammers needed to breach our closed minds. We have certainly learned that God can and will deliver when we seek the power and knowledge of his will. Pursuit allows the appearance of God's will in our lives. We arrive at the next open door by doing the footwork. God's power arrives sometimes only by awareness of repetition and by amplification of His will for us. We have certainly learned that God can and will deliver when we seek the power and knowledge of His will.

Coming to terms with our disease, discovering a Higher Power we can trust with our lives, letting go of our defects and developing our ability to admit fault, we become much more than we were to begin with. Developing our character, growing spiritually and becoming a force for goodness in terms we can appreciate and understand make us spiritual beings. Aware of our humble origins, we make jokes about sainthood and becoming gurus. If we are really used as instruments of a loving, all_powerful God, how exactly would you put that into words? Perhaps that is the origin of our being called the Fellowship of the Spirit.

Many forms of belief exist when we contemplate what human beings believe in around the world and throughout time. Some cultures

reverence just the spirit. They scorn the fleshly concerns of the material world. Others concentrate on form and outward observance without emphasis on the spiritual state of mind and being. Surely the answer is somewhere in the middle. But to satisfy language, it is helpful to think of the spirit of caring and sharing that attracted most of us to the Fellowship in the first place. Much of our way of life amounts to catching a Spirit in our meetings. Something in the Spirit of our involvement with other members calms us. We feel free and this allows us to go to work becoming better people. We all start out with our imperfections and we all work towards something better. This is the Spirit we try to invoke when we are carrying our NA message. While surely all that we call The Fellowship and The Program started as a dream, there is a lot of evidence to indicate the power and force of our love. The great thing is that we all are an indispensable part of the miracle. NA just wouldn't be the same without you and you and you.

Prayer

While it is difficult to know who or what God is, most of us can identify with a variety of feelings such as loving, caring, comforting and forgiving, challenging and even painful when describing our conscious contact with our Higher Power. Prayer helps us do this. For many of us, this feeling of being cared for did not come to us the minute we walked into our first NA meeting. In fact, those members who come in with a lot of old baggage and predisposition about God often have the toughest time rethinking their belief. God can be found in many places. It is important to realize that recovery does not happen alone. We had to be able to accept help from a higher power before recovery could begin. Our knowledge of God grows. NA gives us the freedom to believe in

any higher power we choose as long as we realize we can not do it alone. Some members remark that there is a different conscious contact with their Higher Power through meditation than when they pray.

As one addict shared; "Prayer helps me to feel like I am talking to a loving parent who wants only the best for me. Meditation on the other hand puts me in touch with the presence and power of God. I would not want to trade one for the other and the Eleventh Step tells me that I need both."

When we say the Serenity Prayer, we are inviting God into our lives. We ask God to grant us the state of mind in which we accept that there is a reason for everything that happens in life. We begin to realize that everything is exactly as it should be just for today and that we are exactly where we are supposed to be. We can reach a point where we become able to align our will with God's will, releasing our regrets of the past and our fears of the future. We have faith that a loving God is caring for us right now. Continuing with the Serenity Prayer, we ask God for the courage to change the things we can. Many of us came into recovery drowning in fears. Courage is that quality that God can give us to walk through our fear and come out the other side. Fear is replaced with faith as our conscious contact improves. Last, we ask God to grant us wisdom, the wisdom to know the difference between what we can and cannot change. A result of improving our conscious contact with God is newly found wisdom. Not only do we acquire the wisdom to know what we can change and what we cannot, but we are able to apply the best ways to bring about change. We are able to learn from the mistakes of others as well as our own errors of the past. Through the guidance we receive while working our Eleventh Step, we find that most of our problems are reduced to a workable size and the solutions to them are readily available.

Meditation

There is no NA approved way to meditate only a suggestion that we do so. An example of meditation could be as simple as actively listening during meetings. If we are doing just one thing to the exclusion of everything else, we are allowing God to enter our thoughts and feelings. Meditation is the opposite of multi_tasking. It allows us to eliminate the complexity of life. If we are listening carefully, we can hear God through the sharing of others. Solutions to our problems become apparent. Meditation can be achieved by practicing any number of spiritual disciplines. We can use imaging techniques while listening to audiotapes, we can chant, we may practice breathing techniques or we can just become quiet. Meditation is the exploration of our inner world. Meditation enables us to envision and explore possible outcomes before we attempt to go through them in reality. In the stillness of meditation, we establish conscious contact with God.

Many NA members practice several forms of meditation in an effort to introduce variety into their spiritual journey. Others prefer a tried and true method that they have become accustomed to using. Regardless of how or where we practice meditation, some universal principles seem to be evident. Regular practice improves the quality of our conscious contact. Like physical exercise, spiritual exercise is most beneficial if performed on a habitual, continuous basis. The longer we stay at it, the better it gets. It is also important to avoid outside distractions and allow the mind to quiet it's self. Most forms of meditation encourage deep, even breathing as a way to stay relaxed. As we clear our minds of busy thoughts, become aware of our breathing and relax our bodies we focus on our Higher Power. Breathing changes the ph of our blood and this affects our minds. Oxygen replaces carbon monoxide. Before long, we enter a relaxed state that is like sleep, but one in which we are awake and

our senses are sharp and clear. We may visualize different people and situations with remarkable clarity. We may become aware of a loving force, present within us, so powerful that we experience an emotion of great joy and happiness. Perhaps our experience is one of a deep and abiding peace; serenity at its finest. Whatever our experience may be, conscious contact with the God of our understanding through the Eleventh Step helps us understand life and what is going on in the lives of people around us.

If we have a committee in our head, we must purge ourselves in the earlier steps (before Step Eleven) of the feeling of shame, remorse and guilt. Without the first ten Steps, we will naturally feel self_loathing, negative thinking, and feelings of impending doom. These come from disbelief, character defects and the inability to admit fault. We must gain a positive attitude and begin to allow only positive thoughts as the cravings leave us and the negative voices cease. We are now open to hear the quiet voice of the God within. We feel better about who we are. As we change and grow, make amends, forgive ourselves, and others, we eliminate many negative feelings. We may experience the pure energy of God and we feel open to receive. We have cleared the garbage to receive the gifts.

Because there are so many different disciplines and methods used to meditate, it would be impossible for us to list them all even if we were to try. Furthermore, an endorsement of any one of these disciplines would be a violation of our traditions. Consequently, NA members have been left with few choices in learning how to meditate. We could seek the informal advice of other members, search outside the fellowship for teachers who could help us, or begin a self-correcting program of our own. No matter how we choose to meditate, our goals, as defined in the Eleventh Step are the same, to improve our conscious contact with God,

as we understood Him. An analogy could be described as follows: A group of people wanted to travel to a destination a hundred miles away. Some walked, some rode bicycles, some drove cars, and some flew an airplane. The ones who flew argued that they got there faster. The ones who drove argued that they arrived sooner than everyone except the air travelers, but they had transportation after they arrived. The group who walked and rode bicycles argued that not only did they get where they wanted to go, they got some exercise along the way. Each method of travel had its advantages and each had its drawbacks. What is important to remember is that they could all take us where we want to go. So it is with meditation.

We must still our thoughts. Prayer is talking to God; meditation is listening to God's answer. The answer may not come immediately but if our minds are clear of worry and dread, we will hear the answer. Sometimes this answer will come through other people or just pop into our heads. We must be open in our minds and our hearts after surrendering our own ideas. If we stubbornly hold on to our outcome and direct the show, we run the risk of missing God's will for us. As we meditate we let thoughts pop into and leave our minds freely, we do not dwell on the thoughts but let them flow through so new ideas may enter. We must be calm and focus on our breathing in and out. Be mindless and still. This is our inner spirituality of feeling okay inside. We are calm in the midst of our storm. We focus on the Spirit within. We are still with our God-pureness and for once, we are at peace.

No one can tell us what God's specific will for us is. We can only find this for ourselves in prayer and meditation. God's will is for the best. No matter what happens there is always the opportunity for good to occur out of it. We need only look for the guidance to choose the right action. God's will is never for us to suffer. Our Higher Power does not test us. A

loving God does not send bad things to us. Because of our free will, the free will of others and even random events, unfortunate things may happen. The beauty of God's Will is that no matter what happens, good can come of it - if we remain open to His guidance. Things look differently when we are looking back on them.

Through the Eleventh Step process, we usually discover that God's will for us has something to do with giving unconditional love to others. After coming to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we were able to see that God is unlimited. Through the process of working steps, we discovered that God had been with us all along. A profound spiritual change occurred when we recognized that God cares for us and will help us in our daily lives. The most significant aspect of this change is that our fears have been replaced by faith.

As one addict shared, "Not realizing how close God was, I always looked for Him outside of myself. Through working the steps, God's presence was revealed to me. All my life, I carried a special feeling, never really knowing what it was. As I became more in touch with that special feeling, the desire to change grew stronger. I found that God lives within me. It is the same God who I came to understand through working the Steps."

Meditation can be the exploration of our inner world. A member showed up at a meeting shaken by a seminar that took him back to a childhood incident he had forgotten. The emotions triggered by the experience were painful for him. In processing all this emotion, he discovered that maybe he can use meditation to sit, envision, react, contemplate, and choose to change... or remain the same. Similarly, we can evaluate our reactions and explore possible futures, if we are clear enough spiritually. How efficient to be able to explore these things mentally and spiritually

rather than go through them in reality. Spiritual growth is the primary ways we make up for lost time and gain the inner strength and resources our addiction robbed from us. The more we allow God to be a part of our lives, the more we are fulfilled. Many of us spent years looking in vain for someone or something to fill our emptiness. We can allow the God of our understanding to flow in and fill this void. The more we attend to our inner spiritual needs, the less we seek outside gratification. With perseverance and hope, we continue down the road of change, seeking a better way to live. We learn how to get out of the way. Making good decisions becomes easier when our thinking is not clouded with old ideas and inaccurate information. The decision making process becomes easier when we open our minds to our sponsors, prayer, meditation, sharing at meetings and a loving God.

Spiritual Program

Narcotics Anonymous is a spiritual program. As our minds opened to an understanding of God, we found that we experienced spiritual growth on many different levels. We went from hopeless to hopeful. Witnessing the miracles of recovery happening around us, our faith grew. Faith inspires us to apply principles such as love, generosity and forgiveness to our everyday affairs. It also calms our fears and insecurities. We relied on the God of our understanding for courage and we trusted Him with our well_being. We resolved the fearful, ugly issues of the past through the limitless strength of a loving God. As our conscious contact grew, we found less conflict and more peace. We came to see a grand vision as God's will was revealed to us. Doing God's will for us becomes our personal mission in life. We were cared for and guided in our daily actions. Our will was aligned with God's. Old fears flowed away in a flood of unconditional love. We stand in the forefront of the Fellowship, practicing principles and making ourselves available for those yet to

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come. We overcome each new challenge as God provides us with more than we need. Grateful that we are never alone, we step forth to give service and love in all that we do.

We know that there is something loving, kind yet forceful and capable of giving us what we need. In this Spirit, we can do what used to be impossible: stay clean on a daily basis. Long after initial recovery, we are empowered to renew our recovery each day. Furthermore, we are able to carry our message of hope and recovery to other addicts. Each addict seeking recovery in NA is able, with only the support of a few other local members, to start a new recovery meeting. There are incredible pitfalls along the way that will occur if we fail to respect and apply the NA Twelve Traditions. Anytime we avoid or choose to ignore the principles behind the Traditions, we will fall short of our goals. Almost by definition, we will not be able to see the error of our ways until later as a result of our actions. Fortunately, amends can cancel out most of our mistakes. The biggest mistake is to forget that our health and recovery come from our surrender and openness to the Spirit of Recovery. When we forget that truth, we stop getting the help we need. A problem with our attitude can kill us. We have to ask for help to be open to get help.

Knowing about the Fellowship of the Spirit has helped some members see the deeper truths of anonymous recovery. We are all one in the Spirit and identification of this great fact frees us from the need to correct others. We can bide our time and avoid wasting time in useless worry. Time and a natural God-given sincerity will often take care of things. There is a great unity among our hearts to have so many members without anyone having to force them to conform. This is most fortunate because the nature of most addicts is such that they would immediately rebel. Addicts resist the beliefs of others being imposed on them. By

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trusting to the sincerity of their desire for recovery, all is made simple. This works for an incredible variety of people with all kinds of living problems. One thing we know, we are all blessed.

CHAPTER FOUR

SPIRITUALLY CLEAN

If we view the term “clean” as just freedom from active drug addiction, we may miss the whole concept of recovery. In NA we not only get physically clean from drugs but spiritually clean, emotionally clean, clean on the inside, clean in the way we deal with the world. Spirituality is an inside job and we need to heal our insides to be able to achieve true freedom.

How do we change those parts in us that have consistently functioned negatively into staying clean and growing spiritually?. Practicing honesty where we were once dishonest seems very awkward at first but it gets easier and easier over time. At some point it becomes the most natural thing to do, like breathing in and out.

These coping skills we learned while using, tend to show themselves as character defects once we are in recovery. Often surrendering these defects makes us feel like we have lost something. We may even experience a period of disorientation as we try living without them for the first time in our life. We have been living our lives based on these distorted visions and so we have become comfortable with them and they may not even appear painful or negative to us. We have to learn that changing things that are truly hurting will always be in our best interest.

One addict says; “In reality, there is no pain in change. There is no pain in growth. The pain comes in the resistance to the change or the resistance to the growth. Man’s two biggest fears are: 1. Fear of death and 2. Fear of change.”

We believe that without our “coping skills”, we will be nothing, that we are giving away that which makes us, “us.” We have been our defects for so long, many of us “know not who we are.” We are children of God. In fact by letting go of our defects we suffer no actual loss at all! We are only giving up those things that have kept us down for so long. We truly no longer need them to survive. When we let go of our old ways, it allows us to become who we have always been; Loving and caring human beings, at peace with ourselves and the world around us.

While using, we learned to stuff our feelings and deny that still quiet voice inside that most call our conscience. We may have been raised in families where wrong was right, and right was wrong, or even forced to raise ourselves by guessing at what life was all about. Through using, we may have nearly extinguished that light of a conscience deep within us. In recovery, we learn to pay attention to the feelings that tell us when something is wrong or when something is hurting us. Our job in recovery is to bring forth that still quiet voice called conscience and learn to align our life with it. In the 11th step, we seek to improve our conscious contact. Maybe it would serve us well to also think of this as “sought to improve our CONSCIENCE CONTACT.”

One addict said; This to shall pass, this to shall pass, no this to get's buried! We put an emotional band aid on it and we stuff it back down. The answer in recovery is “this to shall dissolve.” It's healed, it's gone. If we write an inventory it won't come up again because it is no longer an issue in our lives, unless we choose to make it one again.”

Our addiction may make us think that we are experiencing relief by avoiding our instincts, our conscience. In reality, whatever is hurting us just goes on to do more damage. It is quite healthy to experience pain

and discomfort, or just a general feeling of unease, when something is not right! It may not even be a big deal; it's just a feeling that something isn't okay. Our feelings become our green, yellow or even red flashing light indicators of life. While active, we used not over events but the feelings associated with those events. We used to avoid our feelings at all cost. In recovery they become the tools we use to build the life of our dreams.

Our addiction tells us that our character defects are just pleasant or whimsical likes or dislikes that lend color and variety to our personality. Our disease would have us believe that they are just quirky personal touches that may be a tad strange or mildly irritating but certainly not harmful to us or anyone around us. We tend to continue this delusion even as we are getting clean. Our disease tells us that those who complain about these irritating aspects of our personalities are not our friends.

If we have experienced more good results than negative behind these odd characteristics and are somewhat pleased with them, we ask the age old question; "Why do I have to change?" Why would we even consider it? However, if we are not happy, truly happy, we are probably in deep denial and will need to face these defects of character rather than stuff them just one more time. Have we have hurt, suffered and failed in our lives? Have we adapted ourselves successfully to a life of pain or loss and far too often felt beyond hope? It might just be time to revise the way we live. For many of us, our childhoods were miserable, and then our young adult hood turned about bad as well due to our disease or just an unstoppable inner desire to recreate the insane environments we had been trained to see as "normal". Are we prepared to ruin the rest of our lives trying to maintain a façade that never, ever got us where we wanted to go in life? Will the 2nd half or last portion of our lives be a disaster

too? Or have we had enough?

Often times, addicts think that if they are hurting they are doing something wrong, when in fact, they just might be doing it right. In recovery we say; “no pain no gain”. Pain can be the motivating factor to get us off our fat asses and move from the problem into the solution. Recovery is often a lot simpler then we make it out to be. If we live in the problem, the problem increases, if we live in the answer, the problem goes away. We need to ask ourselves often; Am I in the problem or am I in the solution?

We don't have the luxury of taking something to relieve our negative feelings. When we use, we interrupt the recovery process. It is far easier to stay clean then it is to get clean! We have found that there are no answers in dope, just more problems. We learn to deal with the things in our lives that are producing our pain and discomfort. Better living through chemistry never worked for us. Why should it now? We are all familiar with the line in our readings at meetings each night; “The sooner we accept our personal responsibilities, just that much faster do we become acceptable, responsible productive members of that society.”

One dictionary definition of clean is "no interior flaws visible." This is a clue that recovery is an “inside” job. We can spend years arguing with our sponsors, or other NA members, about the symptoms of our disease but if we treat our addiction by working the steps we will begin to notice that many of our symptoms tend to go away on there own. In recovery we heal the insides and that always shows positively on the outside. Why waist tons of time healing symptoms? If you heal the underlying disease, the symptoms often go away. This is one of the core concepts or benefits of the disease concept in Narcotics Anonymous; why treat multiple symptoms, if you can treat one disease and many of the

symptoms fade away on their own.

Pain and discomfort are signals that our conscience is working and the pain will not stop until the situation is corrected or we have buried the feelings back down. When we first get here we require extra help with admitting fault, gaining a belief system, and becoming self aware. Once these concepts become realities for us, we can begin to adjust to our newfound accurate perceptions. We begin to trust our instincts because they are right on the money.

We stay clean even when our "dis-ease" tells us we are failures, why don't we just go ahead and die! We survive all of the emotions that go along with personality change, even though at times we are sure we will not be able to make it through this whole ordeal of growing up. Many of us have felt such intense fear and pain that we cannot imagine our lives ever getting better.

We had been living at the animal level or subsistence level for so long that we could hardly grasp the concept of living a responsible, productive life. We could barely see ourselves living clean, let alone living in clean clothes. It was often beyond our belief system to see ourselves changing who we are on such a deep spiritual level. We gain a great advantage when we can begin to differentiate between who we were in active addiction and who we can truly become in recovery. When we first got here our view was so limited.

After we get clean from drugs, we can now begin to clean up in other ways. We remove those things that hold us back or make us feel dirty and unworthy. We have learned that it is okay to back out of a bad deal or situation. We learn that we have a choice today. Not only do we have a choice to use or not to use, recovery gives us choices in every

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area of our lives. For most of us, we were never taught that we had a choice when someone was mistreating or shaming us. Due to our low self esteem or feelings of unworthiness, we thought we had to sit there and take it. Because of our backgrounds, we may not realize that we're repeating past mistakes until the situation gets bad. As we work through the steps, we learn to recognize the actions and patterns that have brought us pain in the past. We get clarity that our actions in the past didn't work then, and most likely won't work now. So we put the brakes on and tried something different. This is the way we surrender old habits and form new healthy ones.

Today, by working the program, we learn that we have choices in every situation. We have the choice of leaving, or speaking up for ourselves and saying this is not okay. That doesn't make us quitters. We may not believe it yet but it is perfectly all right to say, "Wow, look at the time, I'm sorry but I have to go." We can detach with love. If our partners in the drama choose to go on without us, so be it. If they put us down or laugh at us later _ so what? We stayed clean, kept our dignity and our serenity. As sponsors, we need to teach our sponsees about personal integrity and dignity. It is vital that we share with them about how to set boundaries with others.

Recovery is not black and white; we learn that there can be gray areas. We can learn to disagree without being disagreeable. We learn that we can negotiate with people and stop being the doormats of life. With the appropriate level of open_mindedness, we can even think outside the box today. We may find solutions that no one else ever thought of. Learning to creatively cope with difficult life situations and come out clean on the other side is the true manifestation of our recovery.

The concept of being clean is not restricted to 'just not using.' Being

clean is a state of mind. It is a conscious choice. It is about keeping our spirits clean as well as not doing drugs in any form. When we have these two things in place, the rest follows naturally. Staying clean allows us to explore our new lives fully. Many of us have come to believe that cleansing our bodies, our environments, and our habit patterns will bring us to the new life we desire. We often have a fear of losing some part of us but we find that by surrendering these core beliefs, what remains is often far better than we could have ever dreamed possible on our own. Some have thought that getting clean will bring us back to who we were before we started using. We find the ongoing change, as a result of working the steps, we are becoming new. For some, clean is removing the accumulated dirt that is a natural part of living life. As we work steps 10, 11 and 12, we maintain our inner peace. It is important to recognize that we are only human and after living a dysfunctional life_style for years, we don't just take the ramp up to spiritual peace and bliss. Recovery is a process that happens over time, not over night.

One difficulty we face is that emotional relapses can undermine our willingness. The fear of having to do in depth step work again can make staying clean seem to be too difficult or down right impossible. We keep returning to the power of surrender we found in our initial recovery and we get results. If we find it hard to turn t,o that power, we talk about it at meetings and with our support group. One sure sign that we are heading toward relapse is being overly critical and uncharitable toward others who are hurting. When our H.A.L.T.S. (Acronym for "don't get to hungry, angry, lonely, tires or serious) **gets out of whack**, we tend to become hyper-critical. We have found that "hurting" people, hurt others! We have found that when we are spiritually centered, we are very accepting of others but when we are in emotional pain, we will nearly loose our minds when an old lady is in the five item line at the grocery stor has eight items in her basket! If we have lost compassion

for our fellows, it is a red light indicator that we are in need of inside work.

By working the steps, we find some of the spiritual things that we thought we had lost forever. Guiding principles begin to replace negative values; courage dispels cowardice, honesty replaces dishonesty and faith replaces fear. Self-improvement is possible if we are willing to give time, time and keep our spirit willing. If we want to know where God is, he's right on the other side of willingness. With God's help, we work the Twelve Steps and are restored.

We have an internal witness called conscience that keeps us on track. Our conscience is our memories of what worked and what hurt. We never lose these memories; however, we do forget where we put them at times. We may simply choose to ignore them, but as we all know, the truth will set you free. Of course, as we say in N.A., "The truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off!"

By discarding the ideas, habits, and ways that helped us get by in the past, we are open to re-examine ourselves and move in a new direction. When we have feelings or thoughts that disturb our peace of mind, we have several ways to deal with them effectively; we can write them down, talk about them with someone, listen to others which helps us to become open-minded, read recovery literature, pray and/or meditate, inventory the issue, make amends or set boundaries as need be, or take the simple approach of getting with our sponsors to share our pain and resolve the issue. We surrender, develop new beliefs, admit our faults and make amends. We often do this by seeking through prayer and meditation to receive the strength and guidance needed to move through our road blocks.

One of the objectives of learning and using spiritual principles is to minimize suffering both ours and others we come into contact with. Being clean allows us freedom from the horrors of addiction. We no longer have to do things that we do not like - for people we do not like - for reasons we do not agree with - for rewards that are meaningless, distasteful or dangerous to our safety and well-being. We still have to face life on life's terms so there will be things that we don't like to do, but for our recovery we may need to do them to stay clean. The difference between people pleasing and accepting responsibility is that one is for false gain and the other is for true gain.

Instead of having rough edges, many of us wore our character defects like protective spikes or thorns. Our anger or ugliness was used to keep others at a safe distance so they could not harm us. We may have been arrogant, self-righteous, demanding, belligerent or just stomped around life filled with entitlement. "Don't you know who I am?" we thought to ourselves. For many of us, we became so isolated that the loving human touch of others, outside of sexual acts, was unpleasant and often very painful. If you knew who we really were, you would have nothing to do with losers like us. As we get clean the spikes start to drop off. Through the love of the fellowship, we come to the point where we are able to be hugged by another person, without pulling away or feeling acquired about it.

In early recovery and even after many years clean, there will come times of blackness and despair. There are times in our recovery where God puts us in the desert, a spiritual desert for sure. There is no way out, no easy answer. We feel lost and abandoned by our Higher Power. One of our biggest problems is that we try to get out of the desert to quickly for it is in the desert that we experience our greatest growth. These are the trying times and we can rest assured that some wonderful things are

happening here and now. That God is doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves and most importantly we remember that “More will be revealed.”

We remember that life will get better if we continue to work the Steps. We know from our collective experience that it is okay to simply hang on to abstinence until a crisis passes and we regain the will to live. Then we hear the voice of hope from within. Our truths are altered, corrected, reworked or amended and reality appears to be getting better. Reality never changed, what changed was our attitude.

One of our early members who wrote the Tradition portion of our Basic Text used to say; “There is one thing more than anything else that will defeat us in our recovery... this is an attitude, an attitude! An Attitude! ... of indifference or intolerance toward spiritual principles!”

If the problem is a poor or incorrect understanding, we admit that where we maybe wrong and ask for further clarification. We can study recovery literature so that we can become better informed and get new insights into our current dilemma. If we determine that action is required, we take responsibility for our part and do what is needed of us to make it right. If the source of our difficulty is with another person, we start by discussing matters with our sponsor and friends or we go directly to the other person and put the problem out on the table by owning our part, or by owning that “we” have a problem with something they are doing. We are not telling them they have to stop or change, we merely are “owning” that we are having a problem with what they are doing. We do this to try to affect a change or negotiate a win/win scenario but far more importantly, we do it to free ourselves from the inner turmoil and anger we are living with over the situation. We get freedom from facing our fears, not from stuffing them. We get true

freedom not from avoiding confrontation but from facing it head on. Of course there are times when the person we are confronting maybe violent or insane and in such instances, professional help is surely warranted. As the Basic Text states; “We are not Doctors or Lawyers so when we have legal problems or medical problems, we consult a Physician or a Lawyer, and yes, we do call the Police today if need be. We are members of society and as such, we have the right to Police protection when dealing with unstable individuals.

We may need to make amends, or we may need to set boundaries. By going over it first with our sponsors we gain clarity on what our part is in the problem and where we can take personal responsibility. In this way, we learn to deal with life on life’s terms rather than suffer in resentments for dozens of years. Our disease tells us that we have handled a situation, when we have successfully stuffed it. In reality, all we have done is create other long term problems and avoided solving the issue at hand. We are still angry at someone or something that violated our space but all we have done is let the person get away with something and added to a life_time of victim_hood. We doubt that is what we truly want in life. For we know, by working the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous, we will become happy, joyous and free, not angry, resentful and full of fear.

A sponsor once told his sponsee; “Recovery only takes one thing... everything we got!” We have come to realize that freedom isn’t free. We need to work very hard for it. In fact we have to work harder for this than we have for anything we have ever done in our entire lives. The wonderful thing about this recovery journey is that all our work and hard effort actually pay off big time! The Basic Texts states that “We will come to know happiness, joy and freedom.” These are not idle promises; these are the truths that most members who have worked the

12 steps accept as reality on most days of their lives. We come to expect days of peace interrupted now and then by life's pains and discomfort. We know in our hearts that whatever comes down the road of life, we will soon get back to "happy, joyous and free" if we are willing to take the action needed to make it through these tough times without using.

One member shares in her talks; "I have come to understand, after a seven year relapse and 8 years back, that it is the basics that will keep us clean in times of trouble. The same basics that got us here, will keep us here. When my marriage of 10 years was on the rocks and my Mother was dying of cancer, I did not know what to do. I was beside myself and felt abandoned by my Higher_Power. Something inside kept telling me to just keep doing the basics that the program taught me in the very beginning of my recovery. Basics like; A meeting a day, calling your sponsor every day, working the steps, letting people know that you are hurting, asking for help. I kept my eye on recovery and eventually found out what it was all about. I lost a lot but it was meant to be, for if I had not let go of that dying marriage, I would never have found my true love. Don't stop 5 minutes before the miracle."

Even when no resolution seems possible, we can learn something from each experience that we come through clean. The source of our conflict often will originates from some place, event, or circumstance beyond our control; death of a loved one, loss of job, natural disaster etc. Some times, the best we can do is to sit quietly, review what happened. Once we are calm, we can decide what we would have preferred to have happened and maybe, if anything, what we can do about it now. We may have become distracted or overwhelmed by our troubles. We need to re-affirm our commitment to staying clean and push ourselves to resume the best course of action. We have learned that we really have

no choice but to live clean.

Our standards of life are changing when we notice that things that used to cause problems in our lives, those things that used to completely overwhelm and baffle us, now appear as minor inconveniences. Things that were problems and issues all our lives, no longer have any lasting affect. There are things that seemed impossible for us, have now become easy every day tasks, hardly worth giving a second thought to. We are growing when we can find a way to raise our spirits through practicing principles and helping others. We have learned, over time, to free ourselves from the chains of active addiction.

Many of us had little or no healthy role models growing up; we were left to fend for ourselves. Life was somewhat of a puzzle to us. In freedom from active addiction, we learn how to comprehend the enigma of life. With the help of our sponsors and the program, we penetrate the maze until it becomes a plain path to us.

To stay on the path of recovery, it helps to keep in mind that God is the one who works the miracles in our lives. If we start to believe that it is “we” that makes recovery happen, we would tend to feel and appear very powerful. This type of self-deception might tend to confuse others into believing that we have all the answers for them. We can not live clean without an increased recognition of and alignment with this truth.

The more we can do, the more we will do. Increased capacity means increased responsibility. This is important because many of us have tried to get the benefits of recovery without willingness to do our part later on. Freedom is not free. We need to be willing to do whatever it takes to maintain our freedom. Even the things that often times are a royal pain such as; Answering the phone at 3 in the morning to speak to

a using addict who is ready to surrender, sitting in long service meetings when we would rather be anywhere else, listening to long winded members with little recovery share their wellness with everyone... for 20 minutes straight! We have found that by raising our hands to be recognized by the Chair will help to end there long-winded words of wisdom. Most of us don't get to the pain, until we talk about other things for a while, so it is important not to cut someone off too soon. We cannot always tell when "too soon" is but we know for damn sure when "too long" is.

Many of us have found out what it is like to try to help someone who does not want help. There are those that simply will not allow us to help them, even though the come to N.A. looking for a way out. As we grow in recovery, we learn through empathy, when we can and cannot help another. This does not mean that we turn our back on any suffering addict willing to seek recovery, we become very clear on when and how much help to offer. The most vital thing any of us can do for any suffering addict is to get them to a meeting. It is at the meetings where the miracle happens. There are many out there who "want what we have". They want our time, our attention, our money, a ride, etc. But they do not want to get clean. We would serve ourselves and the fellowship best if we try to keep our focus on those that are truly willing. The one's, who will do the step assignments, take the suggestions without argument, etc. Yes, there will be those that question our advice and that is healthy but why waist countless hours with someone who just loves to argue for arguments sake, when that same time can be put to good use helping the willing members who truly want and desire change in their lives.

We have come to understand that the disease of addiction is the great persuader. Where there are some addicts who would not listen to

another human being, they must eventually listen to the pain of their active disease or surely they are doomed to suffer greatly. The pain of active addiction may be the very thing needed to break through their denial and bring willingness back into their lives. For some, no amount of discussion would ever move them an inch, but the pain of losses due to our using just might move them to truly seek recovery. As the Basic Text states; “When we become beaten we become willing.”

When does doing the right thing for the right reason turn from a simple practical way to avoid pain to the natural extension of a spiritual awakening? Just when does it become something automatic, done because we want to live a life free of pain, for the most part. We don’t know precisely when the magic happens, but if we work the steps in order, somewhere on this journey it has to happen. When despair turns to hope, we have clear evidence of this vital spiritual transformation. Is not hope, a re-evaluation of facts which allows us to see life in a wholly new and better light? Is not faith, this new evaluation of life focused on the brighter future to come?

Many of us were confused by religious standards. Organized religions may be fine but usually our perceptions twisted what worked spirituality for others into an unworkable pattern for ourselves. Many of us were agnostic when we got to NA. We found that we had come to a place of spiritual bankruptcy and totally disregarding any inner spiritual standards. We felt guilt and remorse for harming others and repeatedly disappointing ourselves. Often emptiness, despair and general disinterest in our future was how we dealt with the ongoing denial in our lives. The self_centeredness of our disease constantly told us to be fearful and wary of being judged. We were constantly on a vigil to make sure no one found out we really where.

As soon as we stay clean, even for a short time, we begin to see that our pain was caused by our deep seated inability to live up to spiritual standards. These were usually instilled in us at a very early age or in later life by some one we looked up to. These were standards that we did not even know we had lost. As we recover, we begin to get a true sense of who we are, rather than merely defining ourselves by the lives we led over the years. Since our lives were unmanageable, this was nothing more than another one of our clever rationalizations to free us from all the damage caused by our active addiction. “Yeah, man; We bad!” No, we were probably insanely self-centered. We have come to the deep realization that by living clean, we need not leave a path of destruction behind us, nor do we ever want to again.

Regardless of how we felt about any spiritual standards which might have been established in our childhood, escaping or attempting to eliminate those values may have been the origin of a path to our slow destruction. As our disease progressed, we often railed against imposed values. We could not see that disapproval of these same values was the inner force that was setting us up for most all the bad situations we found ourselves in. On some level, we knew right from wrong. This inherent knowledge is at a very deep level but it is often buried by our addiction, we hated who we were becoming and what we were doing. Only by changing, can we escape the terrible course we unknowingly had set ourselves up on.

The longer we are in recovery, the more we incorporate our new ways of living spiritually clean. When we walk the walk and not just talk the talk, we are set free to live in the here and now. As our Basic Text states; “We dreaded the past, were fearful of the future and we weren’t too thrilled about the present.” As we live spiritually clean the present no longer becomes a burden, for the most part it is a joy to be clean and

free. Instead of waking up with fearful negative thoughts or unnamed anxiety, more often than not, we wake up with a sense of excitement and purpose about our lives.

There is an inner peace in knowing that what appears difficult today will come much more easily over time if we work the program. Spiritual principles work where nothing else ever did. What we learn and practice regularly determines how much better it will get for us. Our basic belief is that we are better off clean. Spirituality enhances our ability to stay clean and greatly improves the quality of our lives. None of us are perfect and we will all have to decide what spiritual principles we are willing to live by. Living up to the new standards we set for ourselves will greatly aid in improving the quality of our lives. Naturally, much of this gets done automatically if we keep coming back and simply stay clean a day at a time. We are convinced that 'keep coming back' means personal growth – eventually.

We focus inward through prayer and meditation on a daily basis. Many of us keep a journal to see our growth. As we develop our own system of standards, we begin to see spiritual growth in the areas of; Love, compassion, empathy, tolerance and forgiveness. These may be some useful words to consider as spiritual standards we can live by. Naturally, you will want to add your own spiritual principles as you continue to grow in recovery.

We think... we project... therefore, we fear. When we first get here, our projections are just as flawed as the rest of our thought processes. When our minds are in full working order, we feel more assured of our plans for the future. It is probably best at first to stay close to those who understand addiction and put off projections into the future. We can run our ideas and thoughts by our Sponsors and get new insights on how to

live. N.A. members who have been clean for years instinctively know how to deal with life utilizing the steps. As newcomers, it is a completely foreign way to live.

Healthy planning allows us to provide, within reason, for what may happen and where we want to be headed with our lives. Projection insists it will happen, and we justify resentment if it does not. Very often we will try to punish ourselves and others for projections that never happen. We become angry and resentful if our so-called wants and needs are not met. A sponsor once told his sponsee; “sometimes your needs will not be met.” The sponsee was aghast! My needs won’t be met?

One of our major stumbling blocks seems to be the thought that life should be easy. By attempting to live life on these terms, we will always be set up when bad things happen. “Why is this happening to me?” we cry out. Just because we stopped doing stuff we weren’t supposed to be doing in the first place, does not mean that the world will treat us as saints. On the contrary, life will take little notice that we are clean, once the novelty wears off. The great truth that set us free was that “life is hard”. Once we understand that, we can let go of our victim mindset.

Spirituality and fear cannot occupy the same space. Spirituality replaces fear and fear can replace spirituality. Spiritual existence allows intimacy in our lives. Fear of others, their opinions, judgments and beliefs prevent us from being open. This makes it next to impossible to be intimate. Being spiritual allows us to be human. It allows us to make mistakes or to do the right thing for the right reasons.

Spiritual standards allow us to reconfigure our lives. We can compare our present standards with those that might give us more freedom and

joy. This is where we need the strength and guidance of our higher power. By working steps 4_9, we get a clear vision of where we don't want to go and also a new vision of where we truly want to be for the rest of our days.

As addicts, we lived in lonely desperation. Isolation was an often our way of life. Today, we hug. We enjoy the comfort and companionship that is marked by a warm loving, non-sexual hug. Even in countries where hugging is definitely out, N.A. has moved many members to say "hugs not drugs" and mean it. There are many ways of expressing appropriate affection that don't need to be as intimate as a hug but we have found that a warm loving hug can really help. Human touch is vital to human wellness. This has been well documented in infant nurseries all around the world. One of the reasons N.A. conventions are so much fun and so memorable is that in the course of a weekend, we may get over 100 hugs.

Why do we tend to settle for less, because it seems safer? It is something we are very familiar with. We may hurt; we may hurt a great deal. Our deep seated fear of rejection or abandonment may be at the route of our dilemma. We are sure that we will not pick up over these feelings, if we can maintain our connection with a power greater than ourselves. It may take time before we can face the fear and try again. When we are sick and tired of emotional pain, we will do it. We have learned that the miracle lies on the other side of willingness and that God did not bring us this far to drop us now.

Whatever our higher power has planned for us is far better than anything we could dream of under our own steam. Faith and trust is the basis of our spiritual beliefs. Without that basis, we have no spirituality in the sense of a power greater than ourselves. We can not make deals with

God to get our way when we have no real idea of what “our way” should be. Our self-centeredness will surely have us focus on what seems to feel good and that which would fix all our ills. Our Higher Power wants us to work toward the good things in our lives so we will truly appreciate them they arrive. There is a saying we know all too well; “easy come easy go.”

Almost any degree of spirituality seems a great blessing for us in the pain and defeat of initial recovery. We may find ourselves, in time, wondering how far to go with spiritual aims and spiritual commitments. Should our standards cripple us in competition with others in the work place? How can we sell when we are supposed to live a life of honesty? As spiritual people, how do we deal with worldly concerns? If we are truly searching and fearless, we will find ways to live within our own morals and ethics. Remember, we are searching for our own values and morals, not those dictated by anyone else. What works for us, may not work for others and visa versa. As we recover, over time, we find a natural balance to life. There are more than enough people out there who respect honest business people who will reward us with their loyalty and their business.

It may take a while for “the spiritual” to become as practical to us as we believe “the worldly” is. The same laws do not govern both. The spiritual tends to rule over the worldly. If you want something to happen on your outsides, get it to happen inside first. If we are not getting the results we want, it may help us to review our beliefs. We may wish to determine the defects within us that prevent our efforts from achieving fulfillment. Surrendering to our powerlessness and unmanageability will help us accept that our difficulty with learning new principles may be blocked by our own ego. We find that God opens the way, when we ask.

Finding out what we truly brings us joy - and building that into our daily lives _ is how most of us set spiritual standards for ourselves. Improving the way we think, will improve the way we feel. This is a valid goal in recovery. Many of us find ourselves unfulfilled and bored. We may look at spirituality as a matter of right and wrong instead of a process of becoming our best. We do better in recovery if we simplify ways to understand and work the program. We need to beware of snappy sayings that sound good but are impossible to live up to in real life. Are we talking the talk, or are we truly walking the walk. Those who walk the walk have no need to talk the talk, it shows on it's on.

If we do not consider our resources, we may be in danger of expending them. When we were using, our lives where driven by false fuel, we could go and go. In recovery, if we are not careful, we run the risk of running out of gas before arriving at our destination. We need to be mindful of just who we are and how old we may have become. It is wise to humbly see ourselves as normal people of our similar age and background. For many of us, we can no longer pretend that we are still teenagers and boogy the night away with no regards for the morning light which is right around the corner.

What is it that keeps us from giving our best? Why do addicts tend to settle for a safer "less"? From our experience, we can see how the fear of pain and the shame of failure kept us from giving more then a half-hearted try at life. We have learned that by walking through the fear, we come to realize that we can and do succeed in life. With each success, we increase our self-worth and self-esteem. Each time we walk through a fear, we come out the other side with a much deeper faith in our Higher Power, the program and our selves. Every time we walk through something and don't use over it, we gain new tools that we can use for the rest of our lives. Sadly, we have also come to know that if we use,

we loose. We learn nothing new and usually the problem has basically gotten worse, not better. With support, we are unafraid of trying harder. We are willing to risk giving our ‘best’ efforts in recover because we know that when we try, we get results. Sometimes the results are not what we expected or wished for but we have come to learn that what we get is usually good for us in the long run.

Stuff that we truly enjoy, agrees with us. It does not sicken us or make us feel bad. We may find that despite our progress in our recovery, we may occasionally lapse into our old behaviors. We may be surprised when we find ourselves acting out in these old destructive ways. Self-destructive thoughts, beliefs and actions may continue to operate in our lives even with years clean. What power should these sad entries in our personal journals have over us today? Not much, if we can learn from them and move on. We shut them off through working the Steps. We have learned that in time, we do let go of the past and move into the present. Life is what happens in the here and now; neither in the past, nor in the future, but just for today.

Power, the ability to define or change reality, is directly related to our spiritual growth. This is at the center of what is meant by “powerlessness”. The ways we exerted energy to supply our addictive needs are those ways that desperately need changing. They were generally based on fear, intimidation, deceit and dishonesty. For some, we exerted so-called power via people-pleasing or just being cute. This helped us get away with stuff a while longer. “Oh it’s just him”, they would say and smile knowingly. For others, we bullied our way through life, intimidating anyone who got in our way. If we could not intimidate, then we sank back into passive aggression and just growled at life, all the time!

We can moderate, eliminate and/or replace these old habits and patterns with new healthy ones; ways that will move us to a life of fun, peace and a lot less hassle. We find that we face the same moment of surrender over and over again; we discover the power of surrender works where nothing else will. When we stop struggling, we find that what we truly want comes to us seemingly of itself. There really is magic in “good orderly direction”. The world tends to take care of itself, if we can but learn to keep our damn hands off it. Diseased self-will has always led to a slow painful dead-end existence.

When we say “we have learned to love” in NA, we do not mean low energy, no effort love. Nor are we speaking of sensual, erotic love. The true giving of love often takes a lot of time and effort on our part. Love is nothing more than giving another person our time and attention for as long as they need it. This is not about letting someone drain us of all our time and energy but truly caring for another human being in pain. When we care for a fellow addict it means we give them our attention right here and right now. This is the love that most of us never got enough of all our lives, nor we could feel and accept the love our fellows where trying desperately to give to us.

As we move toward living with spiritual principles, our successes encourage us to try more. We can and do set new higher goals and standards. We build on our successes as we becoming more and more comfortable to tackle the next new challenge in life. Over time, we instill a track record of a lot more wins then losses. This helps us to build strong self-esteem. We finally begin seeing ourselves as winners. This is when recovery is truly a part of our lives and not just something we are working towards. One member shared; “My sponsor told me to repeat over and over again ‘I am a good person, I am worth good things happening to me.’ This sounded so untrue at first. When I got here it

was after ruining my family, my business and anything decent in my life. I would never feel ‘good’, or so I thought. Over time, I began to have the most basic success in N.A., I stayed clean for ninety days! Then one year, then three years... I had been helping addicts all over and helping N.A. to grow... I knew in my heart that I had become that which I thought I never would, ‘a good person’. The real truth was that I was a good person all along; I just did not know it, or feel it all my life. N.A. taught me that simple truth; I am a good person and I am worth good things happening to me.

We have come from being isolated loners to relying on others and our Higher Power for strength. A large part of our strength is in learning it is okay to ask for help. We now have an ever growing support system. For many of us, this group of loving fellows surrounds the world! We know we can face whatever life throws at us with the knowledge that a loving God and the fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous have our backs.

Maintaining a healthy state of mind and body is important. We find it leads to a better life. Having things is great unless the things begin to possess us. Can these outward symbols satisfy our inner needs? We may never achieve ongoing satisfaction by having money or emotional security vested in another person. We want to become clear as to what is real and important and what is unreal and inconsequential. We can think we are winning a war with life as we accumulate stuff. Sadly, we often find ourselves unreasonably attached to the things we craved for. Spiritual growth on a daily basis helps to keep us free. We can enjoy our stuff but not be too attached to it. We have come to know that at the end of our life we will not feel loss cause we did not get enough “stuff” but that we wish we could have spent more quality time with those we love.

Reflecting on doing the will of our Higher Power, rather than our own

will, is a daily habit we can strive towards. We discover the power that faith instills in us when life comes our way, as it always does. Our redirected lives put us on a different course. What lies ahead for us is totally different from what we had left behind. We discover our new lives in the process of giving away what was so freely given to us. Our new attitudes and behaviors are the sustaining changes that keep us from falling back into old useless patterns. The unconditional love we give and accept among our fellow members takes us out of our self-preoccupation. We have learned that if all else fails, pray for a newcomer. When we help them, we discover or re-discover what we need to be happy and effective.

How many of us have found ourselves reveling in the spiritual growth we have attained through NA, only to have our disease blind sides us with self-doubt? One minute we can be happy and content with our concept of recovery and our grasp of the spiritual principles we are applying to our lives. The next minute we feel all of that flying away from us when we ask ourselves, "Is this truly what I believe?" Our disease lies in wait looking for those moments of self-doubt or slips of faith. The addict mind runs with these negative thoughts and the spirit within shines less bright. We accept that there are times when we may have doubts about who we are or what we should be doing with our lives.

Living in the moment keeps us spiritually centered. If we surrender on a daily basis, life is good. We can always stop in the midst of our confused thinking and ask ourselves, "Is this the way my Higher Power would have me think, act, or believe?" Believing that God's will for us is true freedom and happiness, are we truly following that path by living in doubt and fear? We can put our lives and thinking back into perspective when we remind ourselves just who we are. We are addicts and always

will be.

We accept that we can't do it alone. There are some times when even loving, caring people can not help us cope. By trusting our inner desire for recovery, we find something that had been buried in the rubble of our addiction: a spirit! This spirit just may be the reason we are alive today. We think of all the times we should have been dead or in jail for a long time. What kept us alive through so many bad situations? We can easily and naturally access our Higher Power by simply asking for guidance in our lives. We call that conscious contact. Gaining conscious contact and maintaining it is the biggest part of what grants us our new life of freedom. We can not get it through our own power. Once we learn to rely on a Higher Power, our lives are filled with miracles.

Through the Twelve Steps of NA, we come to live by the grace of a loving and caring God. We begin to get in touch with that inner light of our recovery. By taking a posture of love and humility, by asking for knowledge of God's will and the power to carry it out, by meditating and listening for an answer, we are touched and our inner light burns brighter and brighter. It becomes a beacon rather than a mere flicker. This light grows brighter with each surrender.

We may need to turn loose of control when faced with life's pains and troubles; we may have a child struck down by a life-threatening illness; our spouse may become disabled; our mother might have a heart attack; or all of this could happen at once. As our conscious contact becomes ever more solid, we find true peace in the messages we are sent. As we surrender more and more of ourselves - others see our faith become visible. Our actions speak much louder than our words ever could.

We find that what we put out determines the quality of our life. If we

give out loving concern - that is what we will get back. Communication is not only what we transmit but also what we are capable of receiving. What we say and hear is a blueprint or layout of our personal condition. It is a reflection of what we are experiencing inside. If we are more open to “good things,” that’s what we will get and if we feel unworthy or unwilling to let “good things” in to our lives, we won’t.

One way to live clean is by ignoring the negativity. This is not being ignorant; it is a strategy to live in the positive. If we live in the problem, the problem gets bigger. If we live in the answer, the problem goes away. We have learned by focusing on the solution rather than the problem, or by not jumping into another’s negative games, that we tend to get results and live a calmer life. Isn’t that what we always wanted; to live a peaceful life? Of course there are times when we cannot avoid conflict with negative people but we can limit the amount of time we are willing to give to them or to the situation. We don’t need to wallow in it with the other person just to make them happy. Misery loves company, so the old expression says. A simple solution to get out of any heated discussion is to look at your watch and say; “I hate it but I have to go.”

Our Tenth Step gives us a constant reminder to focus on self-improvement. One of the first blessings we receive in recovery is a new viewpoint. When we have made mistakes, we were able to correct ourselves and make amends to those we have wronged without letting the problems grow into massive concerns. Our wrongs no longer supply us with anything we need. They only cause us problems and embarrassment in our newly awakened lives. By regularly going over what we do and how we do it, we make steady inroads on the type of behavior that used to typify us as addicts. The willingness to act, behave, and think in new ways is crucial to our recovery. We could not remain as we were and expect to live a life of contentment, service and joy. By

admitting fault and making amends promptly, we keep the mistake or error from running its course and causing even more trouble.

Our Eleventh Step takes us further into the world of spiritual reality as we accumulate real spiritual experiences that can guide us past the self-centered activities that use to fill up all our time and energy. We can explore thoughts and feelings in ways that used to sound like science fiction. We can aspire to and attain the spiritual fitness which appeared reserved only for those ‘much better’ than us. Prayer often opens a hole in reality to let our dreams come through. It certainly opens our hearts to accept the dreams if and when they show up in our lives. As we practice the 11th step, we gain true open-mindedness. We learn not to block out the good possibilities with the bad. We have come to understand what we thought was the very worst that could happen to us, just might be the very best. We learn not to stop five minutes before the miracle and we truly know in our heart of hearts that more will be revealed in God’s time not ours.

Meditation serves the place of prayer for many members. If we are atheist, we can picture our friends in N.A. and let their happy faces fill our thoughts. Meditation allows us to take a walk with the God inside us. Or, we can take a spiritual excursion while conscious and wakeful. Meditation may come to refer to a whole new range of experiences instead of sitting with our eyes closed and our legs crossed. It may mean that we stop to smell the roses, have deep feelings of joy when we see a rainbow or a beautiful sunset, feel moments of peace or those times when we are truly present to see the miracle of recovery unfolding in our lives and the lives of those we touch. It never ceases to amaze us when we are in the wrong place or on the wrong road and we just happen to come across a suffering soul who we are able to help. It is in these moments of coincidence that we are reminded that we are truly in

harmony with our Higher Power and that we are right where we are supposed to be at that moment in time.

The Twelfth Step takes us from our internal struggle into the world of application. We actively apply the principles we have been using in our personal recovery to all areas of our life. Just as our world shrank in active addiction, so our world expands in recovery. We each get a steady flow of new ideas to absorb, situations to deal with and demands to satisfy.

We can not avoid painful experiences entirely. They are part of life. We can however get better at dealing with them. Ours is a savage disease of selfish pleasure. It betrays us by seduction and by promising pleasure while basically delivering nothing but pain. Just by knowing this, we have a chance. The Basic Text states; “recovery is an ongoing process of awareness, surrender and growth.” Knowing there is a problem is 90 pct of the solution. How can we fix something we don’t know is wrong? Also, how can we get trapped by something we can see coming a mile away? This is how we help others in N.A. and it goes something like this... “Been there, done that, wrote about it, shared it with my sponsor and God, owned it, made amends for it, changed the way I live so it never happens again... do you think I just might be able to see when you’re about to step in it?”

We identify with those who admit their need for help and are willing to do something about it. Carrying our message gives us a clear direction where we had none probably for the very first time. It gives us meaning and purpose in our lives.

When the idea of a loving God ignites our desire for spiritual knowledge it causes a chain reaction of recovery. Recovery and spiritual growth

begin to achieve a life changing energy. The parts we do not care about split away, leaving free of our pointless go-no-where behaviors.

The gravity of everyday worries will exert a drag on our spirituality; we keep contact with the eternal flow of things so we do not become overly burdened by isolated events. We learn to look at the big picture of life. While we do not ignore the urgent problems or difficult people we must deal with, we have come to learn that there are other “healthy” forces in our lives that will keep us from getting grounded to a halt.

As we become a part of life, we begin to automatically fit in with what is happening around us. If there are other good people around, we will become known and recognized as a positive force, especially if we happen to be in a negative setting. As we begin to grow into mature consciousness, we realize this is what we were hungry for all along, respect and friendship. Our disease robs us of people, just as it robbed us of peace of mind.

Deep inside most of us yearned for intimacy with others but we were too guarded to let another human being in for fear of being shamed, blamed or rejected.

One addict said; “I use N.A. like a band aid for my feelings so I could walk through the ones that used to keep me frozen. I used this band aid to keep me emotionally safe until, over time, I was healed of them. I would never have survived the insanity I created from growing up in a dreadful childhood. I feared everything and everybody. But N.A. taught me that I could put recovery over my fears and walk through them to the new freedom I eventually found. Today I am dying of cancer but I have no fear for I know that all my old N.A. friends who have passed before me are

waiting for me in heaven so I can be a newcomer again and sit at their sides and listen to them share their wisdom with me forever. That is truly my idea of heaven.”

As we reinforce this new life and expand the positive connections we have with other people, we pass through a series of growing experiences. Some may be painful, some joyous. Most addicts are blessed with an ability to see what someone else should be doing. We learn to allow others go through their growth experiences and need not fix everyone who comes into our path. That way lies madness.

As we grow in recovery, we may even be right more often than not but who says it is our job to fix others. It is our job to be an example to others. We learn to wait until someone asks for help before jumping in with both feet as we have done in the past. When someone comes to us for help, they are a lot more open to receive it than someone we try to push solutions on who may not be ready to hear a damn thing anyone tells them. With recovery, we come to intuitively know when the right time is and when it is wiser to let them feel their pain until the right time comes along for them. Pain is a power greater than ourselves that can and does often restore us to sanity.

If we are sincerely asking for help, answers will come. Maybe not in the form we would expect from the person we would like, but they will come. There will usually be those who have gone before us, on the path we need to travel, who will help us. Our growing spiritual awareness will rescue us many more times than not. We begin to use our minds to do “our part” well and focus on what needs to be changed in us rather than in others. We become less critical of others, as we learned to be less critical with ourselves. This is the true process of the Steps, self-acceptance. As the Basic Text states; we forgive others, possibly we are

forgiven and finally we learn to forgive ourselves. The recovery process leads us from being hopelessly despondent and rebellious to a state of positive, spirited wakefulness. From bondage and despair, we emerge into freedom and hope.

Our spirituality is born of acceptance of God's will for us and our growth is proportionate to our willingness to live this life based on spiritual principles. Today, we are free to go our way for we begin to truly see what our way is. We are living the life we only dreamed about when we first got to N.A. Recovery is a reality and we are finding that not only do dreams come true in recovery, lives are forever healed. Once we find ourselves it is so undesirable to ever go back to the hell we once knew. One member put it this way; "I was sitting in a meeting many years ago when the speaker, one of those two year wonders who thought he knew it all, said; 'Recovery is to take you back to where you were before you started shooting drugs!' As I listened to this guy all I could think about was....'If, I was taken back to where I was before I started shooting drugs.... I WOULD START SHOOTING DRUGS!' I knew I was an addict long before I ever picked up a needle. I was so lost, drugs were my only solution for living inside my own head. Why on earth would I ever want to go back to the misery and insanity of no program of recovery and the painful life of not even knowing what the problem was, let alone what the true solution was? Trust me when I say, 'I am a satisfied customer of Narcotics Anonymous.'"

Much of the Narcotics Anonymous program has the effect of countering our negativity. This is why we feel badly when we miss meetings. Let's face it, we had nearly two or three dozen years or more of dysfunctional thinking, we are not going to completely heal that in just a few short years. As one member put it so well; "Every now and then I break out acting naturally, even with twenty-five years clean. The recovery part

for me is that I instinctively know how to give myself a break and let it go by saying, "Oh well!" I make amends, own my part or make things right and move on."

Our inventories give us a chance to re-examine our boundaries and in some cases remove barriers that no longer have function or purpose in our lives. We can go more places and do more things clean than we ever could while using. Loaded, we could only keep our attention focused on subjects that basically had to do with; you guessed it, our next usage.

Addiction can create strange taboos that may no longer apply to us in our new lives. The taboos we are bringing into the area of discussion here are unrealistic boundaries set in active addiction. "I can't talk to my boss about the raise I was promised" may have the vague air of a taboo. To be open and above board with our boss may bring us 'bad luck.' While timing can be important, we should not wait to ask for that raise forever. We, as addicts in recovery, have to review the rules we lived our lives by out on the streets and as we do, we will probably find they don't work too well in the real world. Hell, most of them did not work all that well out in the mix. One addict put it so well when he said; "I took the code of the streets and traded it in for the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions and my life got better."

Taboos, by definition, are ways we avoid certain things without thought or choice. They come from a fundamental social wisdom so deep, we do not even talk about them. This does not mean that taboos are always right. Usually, they are based on emotional issues that at some past time became unusually important either through a powerful leader or a disaster. Fortunately, the similarity to other defective phases of our lives carries through here and we can work through them. We can talk, at least with home group members or sponsors, about anything that may

be bothering us. We keep in mind that very private matters may want to be reserved for discussions with our sponsor alone. We learn not to blurt out something hurtful to those who may be suffering as badly as we are.

Certain dysfunctions in families are treated as if discussion of that family member's sick behavior is taboo. "We don't put our dirty laundry out in the streets" one addict was always told when questioning his father's drinking. Another was chastised for wanting to speak about how her Uncle who had molested her as a child. We may need to line up support before crossing some of these lines.

Sponsors can help us decide if dealing with the denial of others head on is the right answer for us. We might just be complicating the issue if no one is capable of hearing what we are trying to say. We may cause more harm to others and leave an even bigger scar by picking at an old scab rather than leaving it to heal. This is often a very tricky situation, dealing with long held family secrets. START HERE Those who have held them for many years have built up very strong walls of denial, even to the point of not remembering the incidents at all. They may have convinced themselves that it wasn't all that bad and it was so many years ago, why dig up the past? Sadly, if we get no resolution by confronting others on past behaviors, we will tend to spend the rest of our lives feeling resentful. Once more we feel abandoned and deceived. We may get so lost in what others did to us that we have become blind to what may have done to them in our long held resentments. We do not excuse abuse done to us when we were unsuspecting children. Our focus is finding a way to heal the past and move on. It is vital that we do not let something keep bothering us without working our program to find relief.

There may be other good events from the past we need to enlarge on in our memories. Perhaps there was a special moment when we were happy years ago in our childhood or as teenagers. Maybe someone was kind or respectful to us. This memory is associated with feeling real, counting for something and being a vital part of life. Our mistake may be to seek to replicate the past and miss out on the present. When we do this, nothing in our present reality is good enough for us. Life will never have that meaning like when we met the love of our life and later lost to our active addiction. When we got that wonderful job that we always dreamed of but then it too faded along with everything else we lost while using. Recovery is about feeling our losses and healing from them. We do this through Step work as we face the past for what it truly was and face the feelings of loss that we tried so desperately to bury with drugs. They are just feelings, they cannot hurt us now in simple recollection. One person put it so well; "Hell I lived through it, I guess feeling it one more time won't kill me." If our recovery depends on it, we will do it. We need to face the past and move on. Putting closure on the past frees us in the present. For most of us, our past is just a fantasy that we built up as more than it truly was. Often times, once we face our past or go back there in our memory and imagine speaking to someone present at the time, we may hear something completely different. The memory we had been telling ourselves all these years was designed to cover up what really happened..

We need to be dealing with the reality right that is in front of us. Do we want to be chained to a period of recalled happiness forever, bound by fears that the present just isn't enough? That it will never be what it used to be. We just might find ourselves missing out on life today by yearning for some long dead past that we can never recreate, no matter how hard we try. Can we not learn to enjoy life once more on a daily basis and build up our capacity to accept new good things into our lives?

The joy of being clean is to be un-hung-up. We can let go of the past and walk in the present, free.

What got us to recovery? Our spirit! What is our spirit? Is it that part of us that has the instinct and will to survive and prosper? Our disease wants to destroy that part of us at all cost. The re-awakening of our spirit through recovery can be exciting, inspiring, and frightening all at the same time. It wants to live; it wants to prosper; it wants to grow - but how does this happen? Our addiction is a wall that prevents us from having conscious contact with the God of our choosing. Instead of contact, we chose the total self-indulgence of our addiction. Getting spiritually clean, we step beyond this wall. At first we may only be able to peak over the tippy top. As time goes by, we take the wall down step by step and brick by brick.

Realizing we have a choice about using or recovering from the disease of addiction is often our first and fundamental spiritual awakening. Sometimes this is taken for granted. It is only in retrospect that this startling realization becomes tangible. Most all of us did not know that we had a choice not to use. We thought we had to.

Our experience has shown us that our Steps, prayer and meditation, and sharing with each other allows us to grow. Sometimes this growth is painful. Letting go of the only way we knew of living can be terrifying and often painful. For some, we were so sick of our old ways that we had no problem letting them go for the new life that recovery afforded us.

Fear of the unknown and blind faith, now there are two things that don't go together very well. Of course, we must go through the fear of change as it is the best and quickest way we know to let our spirit get in tune

with the spirit we call God. Learning to handle basic living lets us move beyond some of the simplistic problem areas that once overwhelmed us. By solving the basic problems, we graduate to other more emotionally charged issues. Over time we learn that if we can walk through small fears, then we can make it through bigger and scarier ones too.

Stagnation is the beginning of regression into old patterns of thinking. Plato said, "I think, therefore I am." In other words, we are what we think. The common joke among addicts is, "I think, therefore I am confused." So, if we are not vigilantly seeking spiritual progress, we set ourselves adrift. Old character defects resurface and rear their ugly heads.

The vitality that comes from handling ordinary reality day by day is essential for spiritual growth. We need repeated successes to keep us spiritually alive. Reality gives us chances to practice spiritual principles. Sometimes we will fall short in making what we feel are 'correct' choices. We come to learn that 'failure' is a spiritual lesson that can hopefully direct our behavior toward the positive. At the end of our drug use, we were forced to find a new way of life because all our attempts to control our using had failed us. That moment of choice was vital. We knew without a doubt that the drugs were killing us.

Other lessons we learn in recovery are not quite as important as life and death yet they all build on each other to move us toward the life we truly desire. The term 'learning to live' implies we will experience some short term failures as well as long term successes. When we become aware of better spiritual living arrangements and do not wish to regress, a new way of life becomes a much more attractive alternative. As our daily living choices improve, new adjustments and goals will change. We will seek out new horizons and new possibilities. Things that were only

dreams before now become reality: we start relationships, buy houses, maintain jobs, get involved in civic activities, etc. This new reality is ours to have. We no longer have to live in the woods, in our parent's basements or under bridges at the mercy of the elements.

We learn to read the spiritual road signs; those events in our lives that shape who we are, what we are and more importantly, where we are going.

Speaking for many of us, an addict shares, "Lately, I've found one of the keys to freeing myself spiritually, is to take the next logical step. I do the next right thing, telling myself that God has already taken care of me. This helps me to overcome whatever reservations I might use to inhibit myself. This willingness to 'just do it' instills in me a sense of accomplishment and helps open my eyes to more of the life I have been seeking through the Steps.

"In the past, I've allowed procrastination to shut me down. Good positive action, no matter how minor it may seem, leads to a heightened awareness. As I do my part and allow others to share what works for them, more is revealed. If I take baby steps in the direction I need to go, I will get there, often sooner than I imagine."

We may come to a place in our recovery where we realize everything that has happened to us has had a purpose. Nothing has been wasted. The seemingly random occurrences were all parts of a pattern we could not see while we were in the midst of it all. Knowing that may just help us surrender and continue to do our part even when all looks hopeless to us. Once we admit we are powerless over our addiction; that our lives are unmanageable, we have nothing left to lose. By accepting our

powerlessness, many of us come to realize that all good comes from our Higher Power. Some see spirituality as a mighty river and recovery as that which allows them to become part of the flowing waters. We may truly see that life is all part of one big river and all rivers eventually lead to the ocean. In other words, there is only one spirit and it is in all of us, not just in some of us. We don't have to find something that has always been inside of us, we merely need to clear away the wreckage to rediscover what we lost.

Why would we want to seek phony, unsatisfying substitutes for the "real thing?" It is when we let go, that we can begin a true spiritual path to freedom. This is the freedom to make healthy choices with the tools provided in the Steps. By letting go, we are afforded the ability to find a Higher Power that can work for us. Isn't that what is most important, a God that works in our lives? If your past beliefs did not work for you then let them go and find ones that do. Recovery in N.A. allows us the freedom to create a loving Higher Power of our own understanding, not one of someone else's understanding, but one of our own! Our ideas about God before the Second Step never got us anywhere but feeling guilty, ashamed and confused.

The process of recovery holds the keys to all the things we have been missing. The trick is that there is no trick! We pay the price needed to live life on life's terms and in doing so, we earn the degree or we eventually find the job, or we become the kind of man that attracts the kind of woman we always dreamed. Or we become the kind of woman that brings an honest loving man into our lives instead of the same old self-centered creeps. Whatever we want, we can have it clean by doing the footwork necessary to get it. Spiritual principles work in the real world.

We have all progressed towards goals only to find, at some point, our way was blocked. This is when we are forced to back off and reconsider things. Is this the right path for us or are we trying to force something that just ain't going to happen no matter how hard we try. It might be that we need to do more footwork before the log jam is cleared and the path is opened. Sometimes we give up just when a little more effort would have done the trick. On other occasions, God is closing this door because there is a much better one at the other end of the hall. If we would just stop banging and banging on this door, we might be able to turn around and see the other one which is wide open just waiting for us to march right on through!

We spend time considering our belief, finding out from other people how they approach spirituality. All prayers and meditations lead us out of the darkness and into the light. Before we got clean, most of us had some rather strange notions of what a spiritual life consisted of. With the reality of our personal experiences of NA recovery, a spiritual life comes to maturity. Many of the things we sought in the outer world turned out to be available only in the inner world. Peace of mind is a condition of spiritual sufficiency, not worldly plenty. The quest for wisdom is always a slow and painful process. We can always change our lives by changing our minds. Our possibilities are only limited by our spiritual condition.

We find that whether we are mad, glad or sad, we can see that the sources for these feelings generally come from our unhealed past. Inventory is how we catch ourselves before we make the next big mistake. A dumb man never learns from his mistakes, a smart man learns from his, while a wise man learns from the mistakes of others. This is our eventual goal; to stop repeating the same mistakes expecting different results and become open-minded enough to learn from the mistakes of others.

The goal of the spiritual life is to be comfortable in life, most of the time. To be spiritually centered is to have the ability to face life on life's terms. We learn who to seek out and who to avoid, what to say and what to do. We intuitively know when to hold back and when it is wiser to find another way. Our lives become calm, effective, attentive, and sensitive, without much effort on our part. Through reforming our habits, backed them up by our inclination to do the best we can, we have grown up. We become the mature individuals we always yearned to be. When life knocks you on your ass, it is a great comfort to be able to quickly find your way back to the things that are most important to us!.

The ability to enjoy things of the world without being enslaved by them is a huge freedom that comes with living by spiritual principles. To remain faithful and constant to those you love and care about without falling into the boredom of a deadening routine has become second nature for many of us. The deep inner knowing that we have true purpose and meaning in life and that we have been of good to the world is one of the real treasures of living a spiritual life. This is the peace of mind and body we seek in our quest for spiritual growth. Before we came to N.A. we felt ashamed of who we had become. We were a burden or an embarrassment to our families and society at large. Today we are honestly proud of who we are, the loving, caring, honest person we have become. The stillness inside allows us to be one with our Higher Power. Perfection is an un-achievable goal whereas spirituality gives us a real life where our outsides match our insides.

CHAPTER FIVE **PERSONALITY CHANGE**

It says in the Basic Text, "A normal person is someone with one personality or less." This humor best illustrates how we, as addicts, have several different 'personas.' We are one person at home, another at work and yet another at play. We utilize each persona to deal with various situations in our lives. Some call this 'changing hats.' What we seek in NA is a change in our basic personality to get clean and stay clean. By practicing the principles of recovery, we learn to be our true self all the time. As we recover, we drop our numerous disguises for a chance to become the person God intended us to be all along. This happens over time, as our insides slowly begin to match up with our outsides. Today, what you see is what you get.

We came to NA as fractured, broken, and self-centered creatures; self-gratification was our sole purpose in life. For most of us, ego and fear ruled our thinking. We justified the most outrageous behaviors; dishonesty, self-seeking, self-destruction, childishness, you name it. This was how we showed up at our very first meeting. If someone had told us just how messed up we truly were at that first meeting we may not have stuck around to find out about recovery. Thank God for denial, it can sometimes be a good thing. After attending several meetings, we came to realize that by working the steps, change was truly possible. It is, if we really want to change and are willing to work the Twelve Steps of NA.

Thankfully we progress over a period of time through the 12 Step process to become the healthy whole persons we want to be. This profound change is an evolutionary process that begins as we work the steps and learn new principles. Personality change is the process that

allows us as individuals to establish a new relationship with life. This process begins as we learn to live the Steps and to apply the Traditions in every area of our lives.

We have found that our biggest problem was our extreme self-centeredness. Not surprisingly, selflessness is one of the most useful character assets that we learn in the program. Unless we make a conscious choice to live in the solution - our personalities tend to stagnate. By helping others in the form of service work, sponsorship and the giving of unconditional love, we move from self-centeredness to selflessness.

We may find ourselves reverting to our old coping mechanism, our character defects, since we have had them for so long. This process of returning to old useless patterns is especially visible in our behavior during and following highly stressful situations. Our accustomed way of doing things is the old diseased way. The new way may seem uncomfortable at first but by repeating the new actions we slowly become adjusted to this new way of living.

Recovery behavior is new to us and so we must practice it constantly until it becomes the norm. One day we wake to realize that living with spiritual principle is no longer something we have to work at, it is just the way we live our lives. Over time, it is normal for us to live by the spiritual principles embodied in the Steps. We won't have to think about it. It becomes automatic to admit fault when we do something that harms others, rather than tell a lie to cover our tracks. It feels unhealthy to take from others, even money someone drops on the floor by mistake. We simply pick it up and stop the person to let them know they dropped something. Often times, we scratch our heads in amazement once the incident is over and say to ourselves, "Was that me who just handed that

free money back to the person who dropped it?” This is clear evidence of the personality change that comes as a direct result of working the Twelve Steps.

Recovery allows us to recognize that change is a normal part of life. It encourages us to utilize the tools of recovery in order to get through these difficult times. When we begin to experience life on life’s terms, we experience a full range of emotions from joy to sadness and even at times horror. We feel threatened by change. It is often hard to simply relax and trust that situations which force us to modify our personality are often times for the best. One member shared that she thanked her Higher Power during these times; “Thank you God for taking me to a higher plateau!” We begin to learn that the top of one mountain is often times the bottom of the next one. We have also come to see that God will put people in our lives who can share with us what worked for them, as they moved along similar hills and valleys in recovery.

We wonder, "Which comes first, my behavior or my thinking?" We wasted a lot of time in this debate before we even started the process of recovery. We find that there is no generic formula that will work the same for everyone but if you wish to change your thinking, first change your behavior.

As one sponsor said to his sponsee; “It’s your thinking that’s messed up.” His sponsee replied; “How much of it?” The sponsor answered “We usually start with “all of it!”

It’s the actions we tell you to take that will change your thinking, never the other way around. We act our way into right thinking, we don’t think our way into right acting. In NA we learn to “act as if”. This does not mean we use our street-wise skills and pretend to be someone we are

not. It means we act like an honest person and we start to become an honest person. We act like a responsible member of society and over time we become one. It gets easier to match up our actions with our intentions.

One of the beliefs held by some of us was that getting over on others was crucial to our survival. We thought that there was a limited amount of cookies in the cookie jar. It is a theory of lack instead of a theory of abundance. We believed that if we got ours, someone did not get there's. Because of our twisted beliefs and fears, we thought when someone was successful, we weren't getting ours! We gave that kind of thinking energy with our misguided beliefs. In the past we have separated ourselves with erroneous, ego-based and self-created illusions. We have a fear-based disease, always acting out of fear instead of love. The insanity of this logic is that those things we feared losing, were never ours to begin with. Often times this type of thought pattern may show up in negative behaviors such as; stealing, lying, adultery, abuse or malicious gossip.

The defect of entitlement has us believing that we deserve more than others just because; because we had it rougher than most while growing up, cause our Mom loved our little brother or sister better, cause we where the oldest, cause we where the youngest, cause our family had money, cause our family had no money...and on and on and on. There is usually some deep seated core belief that we are holding onto that tells us why the world should be treating us better than everyone else. GET OVER IT! We are not so special that we deserve special treatment in this lifetime. For most of us, if we got what we truly deserve, we would be locked up for life without parole. Why on earth should addicts who took from everyone either financially or emotionally or both should deserve special preferential treatment in life? This can be a big part of

what keeps us lonely.

We must learn to be honest to begin any personality change. Many of us came into Narcotics Anonymous with a reputation for taking things that did not belong to us. You know, “a thief”. We have justified our behaviors so often and well that we probably stopped feeling guilty about this behavior a long time ago. We discovered early in the recovery process that if we where ever going to stop using, we would have to change our behaviors. We suddenly notice that we no longer put things in our pockets or purses that did not belong to us. We began to realize that change is truly happening. We go to meetings and share that we are trying to be more honest. We notice that others are practicing honesty in all of their affairs and they seem to get a lot of benefits in their lives from honesty.

We write about our dishonest behaviors as we do our inventories. This helps us get a true objective assessment of our lives. We start to see a vision of life without these defects. We choose to practice changing this defect, to the best of our ability, by a commitment to practice honesty in all our affairs. This may seem overwhelming to many of us who lied for no reason at all. If we take baby steps in the direction we want to go, we will get there. You can try being honest in just one area where you used to get over on somebody all the time. If we can free ourselves just once, in one place and with one person, we find that we can simply repeat that action again and again in other areas of our lives. Try keeping your hands in your pockets when you go into a store you used to steal things from. It’s pretty hard to steal when your hands are stuffed in your pockets and you have agreed with yourself not to take them out except to pick up the item you need, or to pay for your purchase at the check out counter.

Some of us may break rules as a way of striking back at authority figures. There is often a “get even” mentality here. Or we may simply wish to exercise power in situations where we felt we had none in the past. Since we did not seem to fit in anywhere in this world, we could always fit in with the misfits. We had a profound need to belong. The radicals and rebels never seemed to have a lot of requirements for membership... and if they did, we surely fit them all. The biggest draw for addicts to living on the outside of society was that there were little or no responsibilities, something we had neither the ability nor desire for. Radical lifestyles are a perfect match for using addicts who do not want to be responsible. After years of living on the edge of society, we became very accustomed to it.

We seemed to be angry a lot of the time which was perfectly acceptable in this new social order we found. We often fed on each others negativity. We where angry and we needed something to justify it. It wasn't until we read the lines in the Basic Text; “We no longer need to stand up for non-existent virtues”, that we began to see that our whole life was a sham. Deep down inside, we didn't know what the hell we stood for, if we stood for anything at all?

We hold onto old resentments and fears to keep us apart from society. Having been on the outside for so long, it takes time and willingness to become a part of. Being clean changes everything. As we start viewing the world from a new perspective, we begin to see that living on the edge just doesn't work. We no longer have to fear, run, hide and do the extraordinary things that we did in our active addiction just to get by each day. We can step free of our old habits and attitudes. It takes time for the new ideas to take root and replace our old behavior; but it is worth doing, as we are the first ones to benefit from it all. If there wasn't a big payoff for staying clean, none of us would have stuck around for so

long. The payoff is peace, serenity, purpose and meaning to life; a life truly worth living rather than avoiding.

Just by surrendering using we no longer have to worry about where the dope is hidden, where we are going to get that next fix?, what lie did we tell and to whom, to cover our latest run etc. We no longer have to be afraid when a police car passes us because we are not doing anything illegal. Fear doesn't go away over night, old habits die hard. We do not have to fear folks that we owe money to. A great deal of paranoia melts away when we surrender to recovery and are living clean. What a gift to be able to walk the streets with our heads held high, free of guilt and shame.

As our personality changes by living the program, we find that we become part of something much bigger than ourselves. Our basis of identification slowly shifts from being a loner to being a member. The NA Program, meetings and the members of the Fellowship, give us a new security and a feeling of belonging that we never had before. We are a part of something much greater than ourselves, a part of a group that is doing a lot of good for a lot of people all around the world. We begin to feel proud to be a part of something so special. This is the feeling of belonging that we searched for all our lives and never quite found. The wonderful thing about NA is that you don't have to "try" to be a part of this group, WE WANT YOU AND WE NEED YOU! Your dues have already been paid in full when you walk through the door at your very first meeting. Welcome home.

Two opposite extremes that we often found ourselves in while using where: excitement, and boredom. If we get tired of the same old things, that is boredom. On the other end of the spectrum, as addicts we often craved excitement most of all. Today there are many healthy ways to

have excitement in our lives. We have the excitement of watching a newcomer pick up a white chip at the convention. You can feel the overpowering love and excitement as the room applauds raucously and yells “keep coming back!” Of course, we need to be vigilant when we feel excited or exceptionally good because there may be an element of danger present. One danger is that a great high is often followed by a low. Being aware of this keeps us from becoming obsessed with the thought that “the good times” are gone forever. It’s just part of the roller coaster ride that we call life. The highs and the lows shall pass. As recovery progresses, the highs are not so high but the lows are not so low. All feelings eventually pass good ones as well as bad.

When excesses happen, we realize that we have a need for change. Getting back to basics like regular meeting attendance, calling our sponsor and working the steps will help us to get back on level ground. We choose to live a more humble life today as it is a safe comfortable place to be. The middle road is fine with us. We come to value serenity as our highest ideal. We often still crave the rush of excitement with its subsequent dips into depression and loneliness. We have found that choosing this new way of life based in humility is a lot less painful.

We felt unique and alone and not part of the rest of the world. We were positive that no one understood us or even cared. After we came into recovery, many of us found that we had been living a life of total isolation. It seemed to us that using had become the only way to cope but thankfully recovery gave us other choices. In recovery, we found that we did fit in “somewhere” and that “somewhere” was in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous. We have a saying; “Square pegs do fit into round holes” just look at our service symbol and you will quickly recognize that it is not just a diamond in a circle; it also represents a square peg fitting neatly inside a round hole. Perhaps this becomes

possible when our ego gets small enough to fit.

Many believe that we where not meant to fit out there, we where made to fit just right in here. Isn't it amazing how a Higher Power could take all the drug addicted misfits in the world and have us fit perfectly together in one fellowship, with the power to heal others? It is nothing short of awesome beyond belief. Together we have the power to heal but alone we where completely and utterly powerless.

The people in NA told us that we were important, that we were 'a part of'. By surrendering, we never have to be alone again. We felt hopeless in active addiction but in recovery we observe people around us who are getting better. We hear them share their experience, strength and hope and we start to believe that we to can change. This belief helps us get the courage to put our hopes into action. We are often able to face the things that were impossible to face on our own. This is what we mean by "I can't but together we can." This is the magic of the self-help movements.

Often the hardest thing to do is ask for help. Just by having another member's support, knowing that we are not alone, makes difficult situations a lot easier to handle. There is no weakness in asking for help, just the opposite is true. There is a great strength in knowing our limitations; this is a great change for us. Today we know that our power comes from the strength we gain from being a part of something greater than ourselves.

Addiction limits the choices of how we live. In the end, using is monotonous and repetitious. Once the thrill wears off, we find ourselves forced to get high against our wills over and over and over again. We meet our needs unconsciously as we do whatever it takes to get that next

high we so desperately crave. Whatever excitement may come from getting over one more time or getting away with something one more time is quickly canceled by the ongoing pain of our addiction and the next case of withdrawal. Our pretense at happiness begins to wear thin and can no longer cover our true misery. All those things we have lost due to our using keep quietly nagging at our souls; the wife that left us, the business we had lost, the son or daughter that was taken away from us, or the miscarriage, the child we lost due to being loaded during our pregnancy, or just the hurt look on our parents, or partners face as we failed them one more time... These untreated and unhealed issues that we stuffed down with more using will continue to keep us stuck with little or no hope of ever getting better if we don't get clean. If our inner most feelings are that of a loser or a bad person then we will act in ways that reinforce that belief in our lives.

One method that our disease uses against us in recovery is denial of what it used to be like. Denial causes us to forget the pain of active addiction and leads us to believe all those lies we used to use to justify getting high. We may glamorize our using instead of getting on with our program and working the Steps. One way newcomers help us is by giving us clear reminders of how helpless and agonizing life can be while trapped in active addiction. Our concern for helping them get clean and stay clean gives us an excellent opportunity to follow our own advice and best wishes.

Most of our attempts to control things while using were futile and frustrating. We have made the decision to allow a loving God to care for us today. We can now entrust the situations and the people in our lives to the care of that Higher Power. We change from being manipulating and controlling people who have to have their fingers in every pie to someone who is willing to seek guidance and act on the suggestions that

we receive. We no longer need to know all the answers for everyone when we didn't really have a clue about how to run our own lives. We have come to understand who is really in charge here and it isn't us. What a great relief to be able to let go of the fantasy that we have to manage both ourselves and the entire world we come into contact with each day, wow! Surrender sets us free, possibly for the first time in our lives.

Addiction is a disease made up of deception and lies. We have hidden behind a mask for many years but in NA we discover who we really are. In the past we hid the truth, even from ourselves. We lied and created false images. We lied about certain things so long that we believe the story was the truth! We thought that others would reject or scorn us if they really knew us so we built ourselves up to be bigger than who we really were. In recovery, we gain the courage to be honest. We found that recovery principles are much more effective for getting us what we want out of life than our old addictive strategies ever did. We throw out the code of the streets and replace it with the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions and our lives get a whole lot better!

The truth will set you free as the old saying goes. We are free to not have to remember the lies we told and which ones we told to which person at which time. Restoration to sanity means we are restored to peace of mind for the most part. It is pretty hard to be at peace when you are busy covering up falsehoods all the time, day in and day out. In recovery, what you see is what you get. Our insides match up with our outsides so we have no need to cover anything up or be who we are not. Today we are surrounded by people who accept us for who we are not in spite of who we are. We can stop trying to act as if we are someone else. Humbly we come to rely on a loving God to help us become who we are truly supposed to be, happy, joyous and free.

We caused a great deal of harm during our active addiction. Often we were unwilling or incapable of being accountable for the damage we did. We were tormented by painful regrets over things we did or where done to us by others. In recovery, by accepting responsibility for our past actions, we are freed to live in the here and now. Most of us held grudges or resented certain people and/or institutions for years and years. We focused on what they did to us with little or no regard about what we did to them. We never looked at the fact that we probably set ourselves up to be hurt in the first place. As the Basic Text states; “Through our inability to accept personal responsibility, we where actually creating our own problems. We seem to be incapable of facing life on its own terms.”

Recovery can’t happen if we cling to our old ideas and behaviors. As our thought patterns begin to change, so do our habits, actions and reactions. We used to try things and fail but today, we try and succeed. Sometimes we feel our old negative feelings and think that we are not getting anywhere with this recovery stuff. When faced with an old task that we used to fail at repeatedly, we can tell ourselves, “it’s different, I am clean and it’s different”. Bigger changes take time but we are not discouraged because progress is slow but it is also steady and visible. As a wise friend used to say “God’s mill grinds real slow but it grinds real fine.”

If we judge ourselves by others we tend to fall short but if we judge ourselves by our own progress on this journey we always tend to see some true progress. Were where you 30 days ago, 6 months ago, a year or five years past. Any honest assessment reveals we are much better off clean. We can usually see growth over time if we keep the focus on ourselves.

We start with the primary change, not using and then we gain

momentum from there. In the past, we had a fear of change but today we can welcome it, knowing that most change is for the good, even though it may not look like that right at this moment. Sometimes it is good to think about being a Private in the military. There are many things in the military that are on a need-to-know basis and we don't need to know right now. More will be revealed if we just trust the process and do the next right thing in our lives. As the literature says; "don't stop 5 minutes before the miracle!"

The spiritual principle of forgiveness is vital to any deep meaningful personality change. As our recovery changes for the better, we add forgiveness to our list of character assets. Forgiveness is vital if we are to stay clean and have any long lasting peace in our lives. As the Basic Text says; "We forgive others, possible we are forgiven and eventually we learn to forgive ourselves." This is the true measure of real recovery from the disease of addiction, self-acceptance on a deep level.

We learn to forgive others and can even ask for forgiveness from others when appropriate. This doesn't mean we run around town telling everyone how "sorry" we are. Newcomers want to do three Steps; 1, 9 and 12... I surrender, I'm sorry, I'll help you! We need to become healthy, take inventory and seriously change who we are at a deep level before we go trying to heal every relationship in our lives with the same old bullshit that we used to use to get over and manipulate others with. Our apology will be taken as a lot less genuine if we are the same old people preaching the same old lines with little or no effort on our parts to live in a way that it never happens again. The process of the steps teaches us:

1. What it is we really did wrong, the exact nature?
2. How to live in a way that it never happens again? That is what

true amends means, not “I’m sorry.”

In active addiction we were unreliable, undependable and unpredictable. We have learned consistency of thought and action in recovery. We now live with integrity. We revive hopes and dreams that we thought had been lost forever due to our addiction. We find that each day is a new beginning. A loving God has instilled in us the knowledge of our true potential as well as the power to achieve it. We have become a force for good in the world and we are now able to be of service to others in all of our endeavors. What a change this is from the way we once were! Where we were once isolated and alone today we love and can feel loved.

When we feel the desire for change, determining the type of change that we need is half the battle. It helps to realize that needs consist of two types of things:

1. Actions that we are doing and want to stop but can’t and
2. New skills or actions that we want or need but seem difficult or impossible to acquire.

We may feel that we are incapable of doing anything different in either or. Still, with the support of our sponsors and our fellowship, we come to learn and do things that completely and utterly baffled us when we tried them alone.

“I can’t but we can.” Together we have experienced success in recovery countless times, over and over again. We maybe overwhelmed at all the new skills we learn in recovery! These skills may be as simple as balancing a check book or as daunting as parenting a child. Remember, most members of NA that came here before you got to NA where just as lost and confused about how to manage life as you may feel right now.

Even those passionate profound NA speakers you hear at the conventions for the most part where bottom of the barrel; hope to die dope fiends with little or no life skills when they first walked through the doors of Narcotics Anonymous. If they can stay clean and achieve that much humility, character and grace, so can you!

Our desires for change may first appear while we are writing our Fourth Step inventory. We learn to ask the God of our understanding to remove these revealed defects. "Higher Power, please help us change for the better." We ask God to close old doors and open new ones. We have found great power in doing this. We come to understand that God plants seeds of solutions all around us if we can learn to be still, really listen and notice them. The disease of addiction talks loud and rational but God talks quietly and suggestively. God says things like; "you might not want to do that." But do we listen, or not? That is the question. Do we heed that still quiet voice that we are slowly beginning to hear or do we say, "No, I've got this covered but thanks."

We can think of personality change sort of like ordering from a menu at a fabulous restaurant. We can do this as we finally have the power of choice in our lives. We did not give ourselves permission to make choices before coming to NA. We were too locked into those old "getting and using and finding ways and means to get more" choices we thought we had made all on our own. We did not realize that those choices had already been made for us by our addiction and in fact we had no choice but to follow the lead of our diseased thinking wherever it told us to go and whatever it told us to do to get more drugs.

In the early stages of recovery our old concepts of life had us believing that we wanted it all. Of course, after settling into our new life, we find that we only truly want and need but a few things; to be clean, have a

few close friends, some healthy meetings and a God of our understanding. We have come to understand that if we have that, all else will come to us at just the right time for us to be able to handle it. This is true freedom, not so much wanting what we don't have but becoming more and more satisfied with what do have. In one form or another, we have all prayed; "God help me want what I have."

We have learned the principle of unity: that we are all connected to one another rather than separate. Love connects us and we demonstrate this love when we place 'our common welfare first' or surrender our will to a loving God. We come to understand that when one of us rises to a higher level whether emotional, spiritual, financial, physical, or mental that we are each slightly better off. We realize today that when we feel that someone seems to be doing better than we are in a specific area it doesn't mean they are taking from us. They merely light the pathway to success for us. They teach us by the example of their actions and their positive results. As we learn from them and apply what we learn, we experience success. We then become an example to others. As the program says; "We keep what we have only by giving it away." As we give to others, we gain so much more for ourselves. Love is the only thing you can give away that brings you more in return. The more you give the more you get.

Imagine if we drew a road map of our life and saw a place in the mountains where we wanted to go. We would need to consider whether our transmission could take the hills - if not, we should get some work done before undertaking the journey. If we want to cross the ocean or go on an adventure in the tropics we would have different considerations for those types of journeys. We must evaluate, upgrade or replace our equipment before beginning any such trek. To attempt to do otherwise could result in great difficulties. So to in recovery, an honest comparison

of where we are in life and where we wish to go will allow us to begin to move in directions of our own choosing. If our way seems blocked, we bring it up at a meeting. We may need to give it some time before we give up as one of God's answers might be "wait" or "not yet". We may wish to get with a more experienced member who can help us change into a person who can climb that mountain which may seem impossible for us to tackle at the present.

We have gained belief that our Higher Power along with the 12 Steps of Narcotics Anonymous can help us restructure our life. We each have a picture of the world inside of us which defines our relationship to everything in our universe. We gain power, through recovery, to change this picture, or inner reality as we come to terms with our powerlessness. For example; if we are unhappy in our work, we can either become a cheerful worker or change our job. We no longer need to suffer for years at jobs or with people we don't even like. We come to learn that we have a choice today. That life is not a sentence to be endured but a series of choices to be made and re-made. This is how we mold our life into one worth living.

Through working a program of recovery, our clearing vision lets us see that things we do are merely reactions learned during active addiction or defense mechanisms from childhood which never really worked all that well. We have learned that we can add traits which are useful or subtract anything from our personality that we find to be useless to our recovery and ongoing growth.

One portion of our personalities is how we react to and behave in life's many situations. The mental aspect is how our thinking guides our decision making as well as the actions taken. The emotional or spiritual side is how we feel before, during and after making decisions and taking

the actions chosen. Some of these changes can be extremely difficult. We may have fear to risk the pain of failure. Despite our apprehensions, we move forward with courage to change the things we can.

When someone comes to us with life changes, we try not to give advice on any of these matters; we merely offer encouragement. We share what worked for us with anyone who asks. The point is that we have found a way out of our addiction by walking through the maze of recovery. We who are on the other side are more than happy to lend a helping hand to those who wish to follow our path. Someone did the same for us in our early travels. Those who helped us have asked only that we help others in return.

As we continue to make healthier decisions and pay for what we want, our feelings about ourselves begin to change. We feel increased self-esteem because we have one less thing about which we feel ashamed. We learn consideration and respect for others because we are no longer acting out on the self-centered defect of stealing from them. We recognize that the rewards of integrity, esteem and a guilt free conscience outweigh the temporary relief that the old behaviors could bring. Although our personal program for living is faulty when we arrive, the NA program gives us a set of spiritual principles that really work. Over the years, these principles have withstood the personal tests of hundreds of thousands of addicts. And they still work just fine.

First time situations are the hardest for us to deal with because our minds quickly revert to the old way of thinking. It becomes a debate in our head over recovery on one hand and addiction or manipulation on the other. Both are so powerful that it's easy to lose sight of self in this debate. Before we came to NA, we never even had a chance because we never saw anything but our diseased way of thinking, which of course

we thought was normal. Once we surrender to the program, we start to see that our way, for the most part, was insane! We lived lives based on manipulation and control in one form or another. We were so busy acting like who we thought you wanted us to be, that we completely missed life as it passed us by.

In facing something new, we learn to visualize the alternatives. It is much wiser to think it all the way through than to blindly go through life with a “what ever” attitude. We learn that we can think it through when it comes to a desire to use. If we stop at the euphoric buzz, we may be very tempted to pick up again and start the endless cycle all over again. In recovery we see it all the way through to the next morning when we are withdrawing or all the way to jail, institutions, insanity and worse. We can also do that same type healthy projecting when it comes to life’s choices. We don’t try to manipulate the outcome of situations today nor wish things to be the way we desire but we can look at what it might be like to move to another city, take a new job and so on. What are the good things about the choice and also what could be the problems if we take that new direction. We can fold a piece of paper down the middle from top to bottom and right out the positives on one side and the negatives on the other. Some times simple math will quickly tell us if this is good or not so good for us, for our recovery and for our growth.

With the loving support of other people, we can stick our heads up a little and look around. The people in the meetings are our safety net. We get ideas that we can try from what they share because we relate to almost everyone in one way shape or form. Sometimes what we share in an effort to help someone else may actually help us just as much. We share in meetings long enough until we can hear ourselves, one sponsor told his sponsee. This is a good reason for letting some people ramble on when they share in the meeting. For many of us it takes sharing about

nothing for a while, till we come to the real something that is truly bothering us.

Believe it or not, most situations do not require immediate action. We have to learn to go slowly, remembering that we are only human. This takes practice as most of us are used to instant cures and instant fixes to all our life problems; Take a pill or smoke something and all our problems appeared to simply vanish! Of course, when we got high to solve the problem of our refrigerator breaking down, we woke up to find that we had sold it for more drugs, problem solved.

Today we more quickly see the difference between our own thoughts and those of our disease. Through the Program of Narcotics Anonymous, we have learned that there is always more than one solution to a problem. We come to understand that the disease of addiction talks loud and rational, it makes a lot of sense, especially speaking to us in our own voice. God talks quietly and suggestively; "You might not want to do that?" Instead of trying to resolve everything on our own, we ask for help whether it is from our Higher Power or another recovering addict. Sometimes just finding a 'safe place' is all that we need to do to be able to slow down and see the problem for what it is. We turned mole hills into mountains and often can't see the forest for the trees.

We need to identify our obstacles before we rid ourselves of them. This is why we work the steps. It is the simplest and easiest way to get to the real route of those things that stop us from being who we were meant to be, happy, joyous and free. As the old saying goes; we have met the enemy and they is us! From the beginning, we see that our present circumstances are the result of our reactions to the past experiences of our lives. Our past rules our present more then we can ever imagine. Working an honest fourth step will free us from the bondage of our past.

Once we take a good hard look at how we have been over compensating all our lives, we have the opportunity to change and free ourselves once and for all. We were broke, busted and disgusted. We had no power to change who we where. This is the magic of the 12 step program of Narcotics Anonymous. It is a simple way to change us from being the totally self-centered beings that crept into the rooms of NA who had no hope, to people with the ability to become all they dreamed of being.

Our addiction distracts us from reality by causing us to become preoccupied with craving for sensations. It takes time to work the Steps and find ways to effect real changes. It is sometimes very difficult for us to see the connection between our actions and results when new to recovery. In recovery we learned that if we changed what we do, the results would now be different. What a concept, you mean if I do things differently; my life will change for the better? Yes! Sometimes if we just cease our ineffective behaviors for a while and give recovery a chance, magical stuff starts happening. It's like the guy who goes to the Doctor and says; "Doc, it hurts when I do this?" Doc says; "Well don't do that!"

When life seems to trip us up and we fall on our faces, we now have people in our lives that will pick us up and help us dust ourselves off. We may need this reassurance before we really start thinking about and undertaking changes in our lives. We slowly begin to make the connection between our disease and our pain, and in time, we will become more confident in dealing with blockages. Gradually, we change and our lives become different. Most of us have developed the perspective that our lives are better even when we are in the middle of difficulties. As one member said, even when it's wrong it's right. This means that we trust the process and believe that even though times may seem difficult right now, there will be an answer let it be.

We practice doing the next right thing until it becomes automatic and then we practice some more. Soon we notice a difference in the way that others treat us as we change from broken-down, using addicts into trustworthy human beings. This is what we have always wanted and we are freed to become the people that God intended us to be. One member shared, all I wanted was respect! I wanted to shoot heroin and have respect. Respect comes when we walk with integrity every day then it comes naturally to us because we have earned it.

Old habit patterns are the gravity that cements us in our old ways and drags us down. Recovery is more than mere abstinence: it is searching for our very best, that which is deep down inside of us and being brave enough to let that goodness emerge. Goodness becomes our motivating force. The willingness to question old beliefs that did not work well enough to keep us clean is a good way to move toward this goal and away from our diseased thinking and behaviors.

Practicing principles can be a little like flying a hang-glider or bunji-jumping especially when we are not used to it. They can be exhilarating and heart stopping at the same time. If you have never felt these feelings, you might be holding yourself back from the adventure that we call recovery. Do not miss out! Changes for the better may make recovery uncomfortable at times - yet positive changes are thrilling. It is daring and risky to try to do new things. The leap of faith that we take when we admit that our life is unmanageable and the vulnerability that we feel is what we are talking about here. Letting God take care of our life and will can be at times terrifying to the selfish and frightened newcomer or it can be the calming force that changes our lives for the better. It just may be that which finally brings us to the peace we always sought but never quite found.

Personal character and integrity are two of the main benefits that we get from positive changes. Those who follow this path have unlimited opportunities to build and rebuild their character. What kind of character could we build while in active addiction? Today, we can build our character on a firm foundation with the tools of recovery and the Fellowship. Integrity is when our insides match up with our outsides. What you see is what you get. Fitting in with other people and doing our part is an ongoing expression of humility. Humility, that is the foundation of our recovery, it is strong and powerful. Today we can relax and enjoy the warmth we share with others for we are at peace with ourselves and the world around us.

We will experience many firsts on this journey. Such as the first time that a loved one challenges us and we can respond with appropriately with love instead of hostility. Or the first time that someone confronts us with an error we made and we can tell the truth instead of blaming, denying or lying. How about the first time that we have the opportunity at real responsibility and we act responsibly? Each time we do it differently, it is another reminder that recovery is possible for us, that change is possible and that we no longer have to live the lies others have told us for years. Once a junky always a junky, once a failure, always a failure! The lie is dead, we know longer have to be trapped by our self-defeating patterns. We are set free. We may need to tell ourselves over and over again; “it’s different, I am clean, it’s different I am in recovery today.” This maybe all we need to get past the old defeatist voices in our heads or messages that have come repeatedly from others who may not have had our best interest at heart.

If we find our pathway blocked, it may be helpful to re-examine our ideas. Open discussion with our sponsor or other trusted member may help us find the source of resistance. The resistance maybe from outside

or it may be internal. Sometimes we may need to take a chance. If so, we must be willing to be wrong. Someone once said; “I was told to make a choice then learn from it, even if it is wrong.”

Sometimes we just get stuck. We may have already waited for some time without seeing any good reason to change. We may want to get with other members to do a reality check. It may be that we are avoiding something that is scary or threatening. Looking closely enough at the past will help us recognize the future in time to change it. We need not fear the future as we have built up a pretty good track record for making it through difficult or challenging times in our recovery, right? When our thoughts drift back to where we were and how we ended up here, we realize just how much we have changed. Our views, beliefs and value systems have all undergone radical alterations and we survived it all in spite of our disease telling us we can't make it. Sometimes we just have to tell our disease; “Thanks for sharing” and get on with our lives.

Before coming to NA, life was just something that we were passing through. Days, months and years passed by in a blink as they all tended to look the same. Life was colorless monotonous and boring. Today, we work the Steps and practice spiritual principles in all our affairs. We can easily see how much better our lives are. Today recovery keeps us busy but we may soon find that we have more time than ever before. What looked impossible for us when we first got here is just something we do in the first few hours of awakening each day, and then we do 10 times that in the course of the rest of our day. Yes our lives are full today but we have so much more capacity so the fullness fits just fine.

We learn how to uplift ourselves. Simple affirmations can raise our spirits from the negative to the positive. The “Just For Today” reminds us; “Just for today I will get a better perspective on my life.” Being in a

positive mind set helps us change our personality. Some of us may read and study complex ways to raise our spirits. Do whatever you need to do to get results. We can start with something simple; "I am a good person I am worth good things happening to me!" If it is more faith we need, we can try; "Whatever's going on in my life, God has it already taken care of."

Even after being clean for a long time, we have found that we still have problems and we still get moody.

One addict shared: "I remember having a couple of days clean and calling my sponsor. I told him that everything was a mess; my life was screwed up, work sucked, and nothing made any sense. He picked me up and we went for a ride and talked. After I listed all the struggles and problems in my life, he just looked at me and asked; 'did you use?' 'No', I said. 'So what's the problem?' he asked. He explained that if we don't pickup then we have a chance to face any problem. It has taken awhile, but I finally understand what he meant. If I stay clean, I will always have the opportunity to do better.

"When I got out of the car he told me to "stay out of the way" and then he drove off. Huh? I just stood there wondering what he meant. Today, I try my best to do just that - stay out of the way of my recovery. Through this practice, I have learned that ninety percent of the problems which plague my life are of my own creation. Life is not always a bed of roses, but today I can make choices. I can be part of the problem or part of the solution. Today, I choose the latter." If you live in the problem the problem gets bigger and if you live in the answer, the problem goes away. I need to always ask myself, "am I in the problem or am in the solution?"

If I am in the problem then I better get into the solution as fast as I can.

A sponsee was complaining to his sponsor about feeling guilty for his past deeds. The sponsor suggested; “Why don’t you grant yourself your own anonymity?” The sponsee said; “what do you mean?” “Well, you let go of what you know about other members and treat them as equals regardless of what they might have done in the past right? Well, you need to do the same for yourself if you are ever going to recover. In other words, give yourself the same break as you would give to any other NA member or NA newcomer.” Anonymity removes the labels that bind us to the limitations of our past. Anonymity allows us to step out of those former self-imposed boundaries and move into the light.

A compliment maybe appropriate when we exhibit our new healthy behaviors but we may still feel we don’t deserve the approval. We have to relax performing our old habits in order to begin the process of change. This is one reason why addicts are embarrassed when they begin change and attract compliments; we may still feel a need to hold onto our old negative sense of self.

While using, many labels were assigned to us, a lot of them where not very flattering. We do not let the labels follow us into our recovery. This is the first part of getting off the hook from our old negative self-image. Many times, it seems we are stuck with labels that follow us into our new life whether they still apply or not. It helps to remember that we have all had our share of living problems. All of us are capable of going further downhill unless we found a way out. We followed the instructions of the Steps in order to better ourselves and our lives.

Words conjure up mental pictures that trigger emotional reactions for us.

The awareness of this chain of events helps us solve many emotional crises. We look at what is bothering us and determine when the distress began. In recovery, we begin to learn that most of our problems are ones of perception. We perceive the world is either evil and out to get us or healthy and safe. For some this may take a lot of step work and repeated acts of faith before we begin to see the world as a safe place. We need to decide if the picture that we see adds value to our life. If not, we change it. We slowly strip away our old negative belief systems as we learn to trust others and trust ourselves. Today we see that most folks in this world are good honest hard working people with a lot of love in their hearts. We no longer hang with the negative crowd because we know that their negativity can easily rub off on us. We no longer wish to dwell in that house as we have seen the sunshine and the light.

In terms of recovery, no addict is better or worse than another. This may be hard to see when you set a crack addict alongside a pot smoker, a drunk, and a junky but it is true. Each of us has suffered and will get worse if we continue to use. Each of us begins recovery when we stop using, even for one day. In that, we are all equal.

For most all of us, things seem to be more difficult once the drugs are gone. As the Text says; "We have different rates of sickness and different rates of recovery." Therefore, we must be careful not to label others' abilities and efforts just because they are not on our time schedule of recovery. Sometimes we seem to simply grow from one level of ignorance to another and our perception is that we aren't getting anywhere fast. While on the other hand, we think we got it all figured out, that we believe that our most recent advance is the final level of all possible improvement. That is when we begin to understand that once we think we know it all; we have just truly begun real recovery. One sponsor told his sponsee; "I will tell you the one thing that got you into

the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous and it's the one thing, that if it doesn't change it will keep you from getting everything that God has intended for his trusted servants... that is, when you know that you know, you will never know. When you begin to understand that you don't understand, then you will have understanding and when you quit trying to understand, then you'll enjoy yourself!" The sponsee told his sponsor, "You know, I have been listening to you for weeks and do not understand a word you're saying..." His sponsor cut in and said; "And that's it and don't you ever forget it! The sponsee tells his sponsor; "hell, you're crazy!" His sponsor replied; "I know!"

Until we are ready to change, we can withstand any sort of pressure, coercion, terrorism or personal discomfort. Everybody has the right to stay the same. Flexing our emotional muscles a little by saying "yes" or "thank you" is how we start. We try toughening up if that is a change of behavior we need. We look for different reactions from people when we say, "I am sorry" or "It won't happen again, and we actually mean it." We practice these things until they become normal to us. Sometimes, we may want to adjust our energy levels up or down. It is our freedom to change and our responsibility to adjust to living clean. The fact that some people experience lasting change for the better is the great miracle that we practice and we study in NA.

We have found that the happier we feel, the easier it is to adapt to recovery. So to, the more we recover, the happier we tend to become. Fear resides at the edge of our safety zone and we expand our existence by pushing fear back and enlarging our safe area. Our chances of ongoing recovery are greater if we start with the basics. Eventually we come to find that by doing the simple things that are suggested to us, we recover to become happy, healthy whole human beings.

When does a Policeman become a Policeman? One day he is a student in the academy, the next he is a cop. The policeman becomes a Policeman when he puts on the uniform! We have the right to live in new roles today like the roll of a recovering addict rather than a using one; the roll of a healthy parent or a healthy partner where we used to play the roll of a victim or the family scapegoat. Once we take on the roll of a recovering addict, it seems unnatural for us to hang out in bars. It seems natural to go to meetings regularly. Recovering addicts don't keep phone numbers of old connections. Recovering addicts don't hang out at the corner. We begin to change from a loser to a winner when we can see ourselves as an addict in recovery. This same process holds true for each asset or defect. We have the ability, once we clear our minds through step work, to see ourselves as living free of our defects and basking in the light of our assets.

Freedom requires a great deal more than just an understanding of the parts that make up a person. We come to understand that the whole is far greater than the sum of its parts and we will become a lot more than we could ever have imagined possible. As the Basic Text says; "If we had written a description of the life we thought we would gain in recovery, we would have been cheating ourselves." This maybe the understatement of all time. For many of us, we have seen our lives go from the mundane to the magnificent. Our world was from our house to the connection and back. With the aid of the internet and our worldwide recovery family, today our world is the whole world!

We know when we are happy and when we are sad. When our spirits are high, everything seems possible. When our spirits are down, nothing seems worthwhile. We can see the results of changes in spirit although at times it is like we are trying to make sense out of shadows on the wall. At other times our growth is very obvious to us. We feel mature and

capable where we used to feel lost and scared. This gives us encouragement and faith to carve out a new life for ourselves in recovery.

We can use NA slogans to teach ourselves how to achieve a positive outlook on life. We integrate these slogans into our consciousness and they become part of our belief system. When we first came to NA, the slogans seemed like empty words. "Keep coming back," "If nothing changes, nothing changes", "In God's time not mine," "Let go and let God," "Keep it simple" and so on. We come to an understanding of the HALTS - "Don't get too Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired or too Serious." Today, all of these slogans have great importance in our lives. They are some of the tools that shape our new personalities.

Narcotics Anonymous has truly changed our lives. While we were changing we often could not see any progress as all we felt was confused. Other NA members allowed us to be ourselves and accepted us as we were. They would say confusing stuff like; "You're right where you're supposed to be." Although we may not have had a clue where that was supposed to be, we felt better as we hung onto their acceptance and their reassurances. We simply followed their suggestions until we finally understood what they meant. We were supposed to be anxious, we were supposed to be unsure. That is why the experienced members kept saying "you're right where you're supposed to be." Being in the middle of change is often times an anxiety producing place. Thank God it doesn't last all that long. As we go through those lonely times, they become much more tolerable to bear because we have our own proof that the un-comfortability we feel is for a good reason and not that something bad is about to happen to us. A wise member once said; "Nothing really, really bad or really, really good lasts really, really long.

Sometimes we must forgive before we can truly show love. Forgiveness is the catalyst that cleans our minds and allows us to begin any day anew. It frees us from the disabling weight of fear, resentment, grief, or anger and it allows us to see all the good that surrounds us. If we want to feel more love, we express more love through acts of kindness and generosity.

We think positive and optimistic thoughts in our daily encounters with others. Every thought is a prayer so we must be careful of what we ask. We pray with a clear mind and an open heart to obtain the knowledge of God's will and the power to carry that out. If our mind generates thoughts of love, our behavior will comply, and our spirit will soar. What we have learned in recovery is beyond amazing for we have discovered that miracles occur daily if we are simply willing to stop and recognize them for what they are.

The God of our understanding leads us along the pathway toward fulfillment. We follow this path to the simple best of our ability. This journey brings us peace of mind and continuous growth. Our actions begin to inspire others and our gladness at being of service to others inspires us to do even more. Our willingness expands in directions once unknown to us. Once we begin this journey, there are no limits to personal growth. There is no ceiling, only sky in every direction.

Clean time and consistent effort allows healthy changes to become part of our new personalities. By the time we get to this step, we are living the NA Way every day. We become living examples of the principles that we practice. This maybe why the 12th step is written in the past tense, "having had" which denotes something already happened to us by the time we get to this step. We walk the walk and talk the talk for real. We no longer need to fake it till we make it because we have made it.

NA Way of Life - Fellowship Work in Progress
Eighth Presentation Form 2011

From the loneliness and isolation of addiction we have come to a place where living by spiritual principles is as normal as breathing in and out. We do recover.

CHAPTER SIX

RECOVERY PROCESS

Many of us arrived in NA filled with fear. We felt alone and unique. We were desperate and had been unable to find a solution on our own. We had been in a battle for our lives. We had fought to maintain our habit and struggled to hold on to some semblance of normalcy. We began to desire change even when we knew it was impossible. It could have been the threat of jail, loss of a job, disintegration of our family, an attempted suicide or witnessing the death of another addict that gave birth to this desire. We felt that we could not live this way anymore. At some point, we looked at ourselves and could not believe what we had become. We were no longer a complete person rather an empty shell of our former selves. We were heartsick and ashamed and we looked for a better way. While our using experiences differ, our common denominator is that the process of recovery is the same for all of us. This is all the more remarkable because our drugs of choice are different, our backgrounds are different, our educational levels and work skills are different, but recovery remains the same. The same Twelve Steps of NA work for us all. Take away all the drugs and you still have the addict! Substitution keeps us off balance. Surrendering to the truth, no matter how painful, is the basic building block of our recovery.

When we show up to claim our lost lives, we get them back but they are probably in need of repair. Recovery is about changing, so we listen and become willing to try out suggestions. If we don't work the program, the program does not work. As we grow in recovery, we regain our ability to see clearly by degrees. There are several ways to look at a person's existence. For years now, the members of Twelve Step programs have known we were sick in the areas of sex, security and society. In time, we realize that these relate to lust, greed and pride and also relate to our

personal state, stature and status. Our state of being, our stature of holdings and our standing within society seem like so many words until we realize they are the very things we will sell our souls for - or get loaded over.

Living clean was a whole new concept to us. It took time, effort and a sincere desire to adapt ourselves to the many changes. Some members disagree with specifying that our desire be a 'sincere desire' or an 'honest desire' thinking it meant something critical or judgmental. On the other hand perhaps it was meant that only sincere desire results in recovery, the proof is in the pudding.. However you read it, sincerity may only mean "without wax" from the root word in Latin. If you got clean and stayed clean, your desire was honest. This is no game or war of words. For addicts desperate enough to seek recovery in NA, it is life or death. And addicts have died for some pretty silly reasons.

When we reach our individual point of desperation, we open ourselves up to the Program of NA. We will have many choices in the discovery and identification process. As we pursue the willingness to be a part of this process, we gain new insights. When we are face-to-face with our addictive desires, a commitment to spiritual principles can re-establish our faith. We shall face many traps at all stages of recovery but spiritual principles will bring us rewards beyond our imagination. We rediscover God present and helpful in everything we do. There is a saying, "The further away you are from God, the more God seems to be our greatest enemy. The closer you get to God, the more you realize God was your only true friend all along."

In recovery, we learn to rely on our Higher Power and NA members who are practicing the NA way of life. We don't do this all at once; we begin with surrender and admission of our need for help in Step One. It all

comes from admitting we are powerless over our addiction and that our lives have become unmanageable. We may not know entirely what this means, but when we make the admission, we notice immediate and growing relief from our obsessions. We need the experience, love and understanding of other clean addicts to begin to practice this program daily. We must study the spiritual principles of Narcotics Anonymous and learn how to apply those principles in our lives. We must find a Higher Power - whether it is an ideal or a supernatural being makes no difference. Many atheists and agnostics are among our members. As long as we believe - it will work for us. Find something to believe in that is loving and cares about your well being. When we first came to NA and stopped using drugs, we found that we needed our fellow members in much the same way that a newborn needs its mother. This is a matter of survival! The only difference between the infant and us is that we don't outgrow this need.

"Today, I understand the nature of my disease in a much different light than when I first came through the doors looking for a way to "get off drugs." As long as simply 'not getting loaded' was the foundation of my recovery, my disease then had hundreds of options remaining to keep me sick.

"I couldn't grasp the idea that a person who wasn't loaded could still be in active addiction through acting on the obsessive and compulsive nature of this disease in other areas of their lives. I thought that clean time equaled recovery - period! Today, I understand completely that recovery cannot exist without abstinence. However, it took a while for me to understand that I was not in recovery simply because I was no longer doing dope.

"Recovery is possible only when we work the Steps. It starts with

the willingness to let go of my old ideas. As long as I see drugs as the problem, I remain in that old addictive pattern of blaming someone or something outside of myself for how I act and how I feel. From that viewpoint, it seems natural to continue using things outside of me as the solution to those problems. This way of thinking is at the root of addiction and I must surrender if I am to have a chance at true recovery."

This period of our recovery often precedes a spiritual awakening. While we know on an intellectual level how the Steps work, we probably have not experienced the miracle at a deeper level yet. We may find ourselves having a jaded view toward newcomers and people who relapse repeatedly. We find ourselves talking to them about recovery yet we may not really expect them to stay clean. Some of us have gotten clean just to 'show' someone! Some of us view structural service as an arena to debate our points of view and provide us with stimulating mental exercise. Some try to interpret the Traditions and past policies much like a judge reviewing law before rendering a verdict. We may continue this way until someone points out that the Traditions, like the Steps, are not laws that can be broken, but spiritual principles meant to guide us when we don't know what to do. They are our goals for spiritual growth.

We battle to understand that we have the right to self-inspection. We don't fight each other or outsiders, we find our own disease. Our disease can convince us that spending time finding a belief that works for us, doing an inventory, or making amends is the ultimate selfishness. We have the right to relax our fear of others and we experience our progress emotionally. Hey, recovery is great! We begin to experience curiosity, openness and positive expectations daily. Fear after fear bites the dust. The healing that we feel on the inside allows us to become more open to others. The objective of ongoing recovery is to keep the growth process

alive and happening daily.

Practicing principles is the best way to achieve ongoing recovery. When someone complains that they feel like they are not growing in recovery, one of us must remind them that it is their choices that make up their lives. It may be that they have slacked off on some aspect of their spiritual maintenance but may never think to look for it unless guided by someone who cares. If you believe God is in everyone, maybe that means it is God in the other person who helps you. When we each get back to what is important to us, we see colorful and vivid images instead of the usual bland, gray world. We can not always hit our own 'reset button' and we soon learn that our need for one another is very real. Clean addicts are the ultimate weapon in our fight to get a second life. Through them, we see the world with new eyes. Doors open to us. Solutions and fresh ideas spring into our minds. What worked for others may work for us.

In NA, we are learning to change 'who we are' on the inside so we can live better on the outside. Like active addiction, recovery develops its own momentum. Coming face to face with oneself has never been easy and searching for the truth is even harder. It begins with a simple acknowledgment that we have a disease and we need help. If we have the benefits of accepting the disease concept and have done a complete First Step, we find it easier to recognize when our disease pops up no matter how much time we have in recovery. As individuals, we may have many pet theories about the disease concept but our combined experience is available the atmosphere of recovery to be found in an NA meeting. If we find ourselves depressed for no apparent reason, we need to re-evaluate our lives. It is a good time to stop, look and listen! Asking for help is a good way to start and is the best way to keep getting help. With this help, we may see that we have a resentment against someone

who has harmed us but we do not want to cause harm in return. Our disease makes it hard to ask for help because it would rather keep us angry and confused. We give up, show up, sit down, but most importantly, we do not pick up. Our basic choice in any situation is either freedom or bondage. It is only available if we can see the choice is ours.

We had searched high and low for the ultimate meaning of life in the belief that it would give us the elusive feelings of control or understanding. We were convinced that finding that elusive prize would allow us to settle down, take root, and break our self-destructive patterns. This is the mind's way of trying to re-assert itself and control our lives through personal power. We never took the time nor gave ourselves a chance to heal. There is more to learn on this path of recovery. Of course there is. Mentally, we grow from one level up to the next level but it takes spirituality to go beyond. Most often, we have to slow down, not speed up, to get with the Program.

We find ourselves in crises yet may not realize that we create them! Some of us have become accident prone to justify getting and taking medication. We may fight with people for no good reason and experience that familiar hung-over sensation even without using drugs. Where we based our lives on lies, we experienced pain and destruction. Our perceptions have to match up to reality to work in the real world. When we use truth to guide our lives, we find joy and freedom. Once we understand this concept, we can apply it in all areas of our lives. The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are the keys to living free from our addiction. In Narcotics Anonymous, miracles happen when we know what we need to do and find the strength to do it. It doesn't matter whether our natural response is to 'rage' outwardly or 'stuff it' inwardly, we must learn to manage without using drugs. This is part of what we

call having a choice. We claim the right to determine our reactions to people, places and things that used to control us. This is why spiritual growth is so important to our recovery.

When we finally surrendered to our addiction and worked the First Step, we fully expected the world to come crashing down around us. The First Step tells us that if we continue to remain alone - we will suffer from the horrors of addiction: degradation, dereliction, insanity and death. We have run for so long that we thought our anonymity shielded us from destruction. When we admitted that we could not manage our lives, we see some opportunities for change. We begin to see change as a solution that is spiritual in nature and will allow us to live happier lives. Some of us will not get through this period clean. Those addicts who relapse often have a hard time coming back and staying clean. Remorse over what they have thrown away causes them to dwell in the past and abandon the present. The addicts who make it back are the ones who can humble themselves, return to the basics and start living their lives anew. It is difficult, but it is better than the alternatives. Addicts, who have put together some time after such a relapse, tell us they realize that their recovery is something they can never take for granted. The relapse process begins whenever we chose to practice the reverse of the recovery process. If we do not go to meetings, read the literature, and spend time with recovering addicts - we have begun negotiating the relapse process. The more we continue to leave off the things that work, the more certain we can be of the outcome. Relapse will occur.

The thoughts of using come to many of us frequently during early recovery. These thoughts can seem so real that we can almost taste the stuff. Some addicts even fantasize themselves right out of the rooms. We must accept that using thoughts are common to us and realize that we are not alone or unique when we experience them. It is quite normal for such

thoughts to come especially during emotional crises. Some say that the time to worry would be when this did not happen. Arguments, the death of a loved one, losing a job, separation or divorce are some of the more recognizable situations that seem to trigger these thoughts. Many members share that sometimes they have these thoughts simply because they heard a familiar song on the radio, a blizzard hit town, or they ran into an old friend. We may find ourselves on dangerous ground because we find that our reservations actually increased our desire to use. Many have relapsed not realizing that this selective fantasizing is what took them out.

Even if we do not use, we can still give our addiction power. Becoming obsessed with multiple relationships, gambling, food, work, perfectionism, adrenaline addiction, danger highs, stealing, road rage, abuse, manipulating others, lying, or buying things to make us feel better robs us of our strength. We must face the truth. If we do not surrender and renew our commitment to recovery, we will be lost. The disease of addiction rules through fear and deception. We become convinced that we are alone and that the only answers lie in escape, manipulation and control. Giving up the burden of our secrets is essential to ongoing recovery. Looking within, we find many unfamiliar emotions. We must feel and work through these emotions, we have to grieve and rejoice or cry and laugh. Working the Steps, we write about the situation, how we feel, how things came to be, what it looks like and how we would like to see it resolved. It may take quite some time before we feel 'back to normal.' Maintaining close ties with our sponsor and home group during this phase of recovery is invaluable. We find support among our fellow addicts. Taking care to be good to ourselves, we accept where we are right now and love ourselves for who we are. We get to the other side of the situation and find that we have grown from the experience.

Sometimes, we felt like we were emotional spastics when we arrived in NA. We were unable to concentrate and often had sudden and severe mood swings. Our episodes of using were disrupting our living pattern and the disease was preventing any personal achievement through the distraction of using. We have learned that false pride and an over-inflated self-image is precious, especially if we have nothing else. It seemed that while others were building up their lives, we were in a destructive mode and repeatedly attempted to destroy our life. We try to evade uncomfortable emotions by denying their existence. However, when avoiding these emotions, we are not facing our fears. This is like bandaging a wound without cleansing it. The problem will only fester and come back, forcing us to deal with it later. Instead, we observe how our newly found courage transforms itself into trust. We find the ability to share things with others that were impossible in the past. The fear of others knowing us for who we are has left us. This principle of trust is evident in our meetings. We observe people taking risks and sharing things that are pleasurable as well as painful.

Often NA members face challenges that can shake them to their very core, especially if there are other life changes going on such as career changes, geographical relocations, health problems, divorce, death or marriage. Many addicts experience emotional extremes during these times. Some recovering addicts have said that life's problems and feelings seem worse than when they were using drugs, but they stay clean regardless of how bad it gets. For some, issues from the past such as sexual or physical abuse, pent_up rage or growing up in a negative environment come to the surface. It is common to feel off-balance even when we are working hard at our recovery. We hear others share their pain as well as embarrassing truths about themselves. A part of us cringes as we realize that they are sharing our secrets. A part of us waits for others in the group to condemn and ridicule these secrets. When this

fails to happen, it helps us trust the group with our feelings. As we experience the love that other NA members show us, we experience the filling of that inner void. We feel the emotions that others go through to get clean and stay clean and this gives us the courage that we need on top of our desire for recovery. Sometimes the feelings that others share can remind us of what we will go through if we drop away from the program of recovery and return to active addiction. This is usually when many of us get a sponsor and actually begin working the Twelve Steps on a deeper level. We have tasted the fruits of recovery and we want more.

A woman in the program lost her young son in a tragic accident. She told of experiencing hurt at the hands of addicts who meant well, but lacked the tact and compassion to help. "Within two weeks after his death someone said, 'You have suffered with this long enough, it's time you work the Steps and turn it over.'"

"When they told me that, I felt like they were saying that I should just forget my son and move on. Well, I can't do that! I was working Steps, just to face each day and not go over the edge of insanity because I was hurting so badly. I'm sure God will heal me in time, but how long it takes is between God and I."

The addicts giving advice probably meant to help her. They were sharing things that they knew worked and may not have gotten to the sensitivity part. Nonetheless, an injury occurred because of someone's ignorance and insensitivity. We may be blind to the distress of others because sometimes empathy is painful. As hard as it is to watch someone suffer, we have found that a kind word and a warm hug are more healing than the best-intentioned advice. We often discover during these difficult times that we exhibited a greater measure of faith than we knew we had.

We have been living Step Three in our lives. Our faith told us that eventually the bad feelings would pass and they had. Some of us may be dealing with years of repressed hurt and anger. Many say that the courage we use to face these feelings is the same courage that we find when it is time to do a Fourth Step. We hang on knowing that the God of our understanding will carry us through. The care of a loving God takes the sting out of the emotional pain.

At its best, the Narcotics Anonymous Fellowship is like a loving family. A bond exists between the members of the fellowship that is similar to the relationship between siblings. This bond develops out of our need for others who have found recovery from the disease of addiction by living the NA way of life. When we discover how many people care about us, we can begin to open ourselves up to their help. In this way, our lives expand and we grow spiritually. We are part of the miracle of recovery. We fear placing trust and faith in other people and usually with good reason. When we trust that God is working, not only in our life but in the lives of others as well, we begin to relax. We need to remember that when we seek help from others, we are not depending on them to meet our needs. They help us overcome our old behavior by sharing what worked for them. The difference is that we are no longer asking anyone for anything that we can do for ourselves. Addiction allowed and even encouraged us to drift into a pattern of excessive personal obsession. The more we used - the more we resented anything and anyone that demanded to be in front of the drugs. The resulting loneliness and desperation were driving forces when we sought help. Many of us relapse, not even realizing that one of the major obstacles to recovery are the lies that we tell ourselves and actually believe. After coming to Narcotics Anonymous, we learn that honesty, open-mindedness and willingness are indispensable to recovery. We all nod our heads in agreement when this discussion takes place in meetings. Upon closer

examination, we may find that we still have a life based on lies. We still use these lies to justify and rationalize our sick behavior patterns.

All people have a tendency to surround themselves with like-thinking people. This confirms their opinions whether true or false. Addicts are more susceptible to this behavior. The disease of addiction causes us to defend or justify our position when we hear key words, phrases or anything that makes us feel uncertain about our beliefs. This results in isolation. We continue on this course unless an obstacle such as pain deflects us or unless a force greater than we are draws us in another direction. We must learn to tolerate imperfection whether it is in others or ourselves. If we continue to isolate ourselves from recovery, the results can be dramatic and even lethal. In recovery, we relax, become a part of and check out all the possibilities.

Today, we have a solution to this problem - it is called 'thinking things all the way through.' This means that instead of trying to force the thought out of our minds, we continue with the fantasy and make sure to include the pain and despair that comes with using. We remind ourselves of our frantic struggles for money, loss of friends, withdrawal, trouble with the law and major health problems. When we force ourselves to think things through, we can see both sides of reality and we increase our desire to stop using. Many of us find that these using thoughts came less often after we began practicing this new tool of recovery. As we confront our reservations, our mind begins to comprehend that we do not want to use under any circumstances. Events that once triggered obsessive behavior only cause a passing thought today. God gives us the power to recover the NA way.

Others have learned how to address today's problems, thereby eliminating tomorrow's catastrophes. These NA members have a solid

foundation in the Twelve Steps, a sponsor and a home group from which they continually draw strength and experience. They have an active reliance on a loving God. Good times and bad times happen in recovery as they did in our active addiction. The difference is that we have the ability to make the most of our good fortunes today. Furthermore, we learn to work through tough situations without making them worse. Our job as recovering NA members is to remember that we have this ability and to use it daily. This new surrender to the Steps can often instill a lasting feeling of well being within us. We now recognize, that no matter what happens, we can stop the insanity by humbling ourselves and letting the God of our understanding guide us through troubled times.

Once the obsession to use leaves us and our lives stabilize, many of us get involved in activities outside the Fellowship. Some of us seek to increase our conscious contact with God through religion or other spiritual practices. We spend more time with our families. We may become active in community volunteer work, elections, government, social responsibilities, scouting, parent organizations, coaching sports teams, etc. Some members say, because of their recovery, they have taken up hobbies for the first time. Things that we have turned into a series of increasing difficulties reduce in size as recovery progresses. Surrendering to the reality of our addiction provides us a way to escape that addiction. All these activities are positive outlets and necessary to forming a well-rounded life. Unfortunately, we have seen many members disappear from the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous while in the pursuit of money, property and prestige.

Others may ‘float out the door on a cloud of religious zeal.’ Instead of allowing their involvement in outside interests to complement their recovery, many thought it could replace it. Removed from direct contact with other addicts, it is often easy to fool ourselves into thinking that

we're in control of our lives. We may even tell ourselves, "Sure, NA saved my life and helped me in the beginning but now I'm ready to live a normal life. I just don't have time for the things I used to do."

One addict shared: "For seven or eight years I was actively involved in Narcotics Anonymous. As time went on, I became interested in doing more outside the program. With the skills I'd learned through countless service positions and committees, I discovered that 'normal' people wanted me involved with their projects too. Before long, I was active in local politics, participating in charity fund raisers, and sitting on several not-for-profit boards - all at the same time. It was service burnout all over again!

"Besides my volunteer activities, I had picked up a couple of hobbies that turned into a part-time business. I was also trying to stay fit by working out at a gym regularly. With all this new responsibility, I just didn't make time to go to meetings or call my sponsor anymore. I didn't 'quit' NA, I just never made it to meetings. I wasn't too concerned though, after all, I was still clean and had an impressive resume of good deeds I was doing. The longer I stayed away, the harder it was to return.

"After two years of sporadic meeting attendance, some situations arose that got me coming back regularly. Upon my return, I discovered that I had regressed in my recovery much more than I had thought. I was more judgmental toward others. I had redefined my standards for honesty and other spiritual values. Where I once felt at ease, knowing I was in God's care, I had begun to feel threatened by other people or situations. The irony is that these changes were so subtle that I didn't recognize them until I became

an active member again.

"Now more than two years have passed. I realize that active involvement with steps, sponsor and a home group has to be a lifetime commitment. I still have outside interests and activities, but they don't take priority over my recovery anymore. While I can probably lead a normal life, I will never be normal. I will always be an addict. The required treatment for my progressive, terminal disease is participation in Narcotics Anonymous."

Many members wander off and stop going to meetings. They might receive visits or telephone calls and give assurances that everything is all right because they are not using. Their emotional and spiritual needs seem to be met within the family setting, a church or some other group of people. This might have worked for a while but the rest of us in the program need to know what they learned that helps them. They may need us, even if they avoid us. They take their program with them as they grow and explore their new lives. The problem is that they tend to forget to come back and share with us what they found useful to them. In NA, we specialize in sharing information on recovery from the disease of addiction. Of those who drift away, very few say that their lives are better without NA, even if they did stay clean. Occasionally we may encounter one of our absent members. They tell us that they are doing well; but many times, after some conversation, the old familiar feelings of loneliness, disconnection and isolation come out. Many of those we talk to relate a sense of aimlessness and a feeling of not being useful. Grateful indeed is the addict who makes it back from a walkabout or a relapse.

They realize Narcotics Anonymous provides us with a sense of community, a higher purpose for living and a proven spiritual path.

Others face hardships in recovery, but never leave the program. Fear, hopelessness and despair can seem to overtake us. This is all stuff we have to deal with clean. While these troublesome times may seem like our darkest hour, they can often be catalysts for growth.

No matter how much clean time we have, or what our specific problem is - we always begin with the principle of surrender. Surrendering to the truth is still the basic building block of our recovery. By reaching out to NA members who care about us, we can ease our pain and confusion. Through prayer and trusting the God of our understanding, we find new strength and wisdom. Inventory is a valuable tool we use often. It helps us see things as they really are. Our path, once dark, is now illuminated. Most of us come through these experiences more humble, more grateful and more peaceful than we would have ever imagined. Recovery begins with surrender. We no longer feel the need to continue proving that our beliefs are correct. We surrender our fixed ideas and belief systems to the God of our understanding. We have the choice between love and fear. If we are vigilant with honesty, open-mindedness and willingness, we soon find that God is moving us in a new direction. We might hesitate when letting go of old practices because there is a certain comfort and security in familiar pain. God will supply the direction and courage we need for change. It would be cruel and not very loving of God to bring us this far to let us down. We begin to find and embrace a new lifestyle that is based on God's will for us.

Denial, discovery, curiosity, recognition and identification are stages that we go through in discovering that we suffer from a disease. Sometimes we fight this discovery. Taking a closer look at how we think and respond to situations gives us a new perspective. This insight teaches us new ways to approach whatever might confront us. From this perspective, we work outward and see how addiction came to touch

every part of our lives. As we grow in recovery, we observe constantly in order to change our lives. Some of us came to meetings in our early recovery because we were afraid of what would happen to us if we did not. Eventually we kept coming back because the recovery itself was so attractive. We notice when others become stable in recovery. What we have learned is reinforced when we actually witness it working for others. Before long, we believe that we too can get better. Our hope grows into faith and our commitment to stay clean gets stronger. We come to meetings today because we want to. We like the feelings that we get from sharing and listening to other addicts. We are able to form deep, impressive, and lasting memories that assist us in readjusting our viewpoints and actions.

If we do not take something into our bodies, we will not have to deal with it later. The similarities between food and other forms of consumption are endless. If something makes us sick, we stop eating it. If we are sick, we examine what we have been eating. If we discover something has been making us sick, we give ourselves permission to stop eating it. When something like this comes up and we have trouble stopping, we work all Twelve Steps on the subject, including helping others if we want ongoing relief.

As we acquire time and experience in recovery, we find that our reliance on the God of our understanding grows. Some of our older members talk about being in a constant state of prayer – in other words, living the program in all that they do. These members appear as though nothing on earth could shake their serenity. Impossible as it may seem that deep and abiding peace is within the grasp of every one of us. Most of us have had these spiritual moments when we felt completely in the care of our Higher Power. These feelings often follow an act of surrender, such as taking a Fifth, Seventh, or Ninth Step. This inner peace may only last a

few minutes or a few days but it is not easily forgotten once experienced. Much of our work in recovery is an effort to return to and maintain that state of mind. Each time we choose God's will over self-will, self-will; we are moving closer to a state of serenity. Each time we help someone else and expect nothing in return, we add joy to our lives. Each time we do a good deed without telling anyone about it, we learn humility and find peace. Each time we sit alone and look within for our Higher Power's guidance, we gain wisdom and power. Each time we face our fears and do what is right, in spite of the consequences, we gain courage. When we give love to others and ourselves, we find ourselves loved in return. The recovery process teaches us how to practice these principles in all our affairs, 'our thoughts, our deeds and our actions.' The longer we stay at it, the better it gets.

We must learn that mastering our feelings, thoughts, and emotions is not copping out, denying personal responsibility or living in someone else's expectations. We learn that we are becoming ourselves when we focus on our mind, spirit, and our personal likes and dislikes. We begin to experience the peace and definition that comes with this process. Reality begins to develop for us, this time as a friend and ally, not an adversary. Our fear of this process held us in limbo, perpetually bound, weakened and it prevented our healthy growth. Once we believe that others do care about us, we can open ourselves up to their help. Many of us were afraid for a long time, always hiding from reality, but today we have courage. This is how our lives expand and we experience spiritual growth. We found that when we stop running, the world stops chasing us. We thought that the world hated us and was in pursuit to hurt us. Active addiction would not allow us to see that those who cared for us loved and missed us.

Today, we can look at life's events and ourselves realistically. Through

effort and application, we find God's Will revealed to us moment by moment. We stop placing expectations on other people and situations and practice acceptance instead. We realize that everything that happens to us, both good and bad, is only another lesson in living. Each morning we begin our day by asking God for knowledge of His will for us and for the power to carry it out. We know that the God of our understanding is in charge. Our lives are better and things are good. We asked for guidance and now we act on that guidance.

Therefore, we have fewer crises. Each night we end our day by expressing gratitude for all that we have experienced. By working with others, we keep our perspective of the Program fresh and invigorating. We feel connected to the world and celebrate the joy of living. We are grateful for every moment because we are alive, we are clean and we are free.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TRUST

Learning to trust is an ability that does not develop overnight. We have learned to trust from relationships with our personal self, our Higher Power, our sponsor and other clean addicts in NA. As our faith in a power greater than ourselves increases so does our ability to trust. We work the Steps with our sponsor and we have gained trust and faith in them as human beings willing to help us and not judge us. Having established a relationship with a Higher Power and a sponsor helps us to begin having a relationship with ourselves. We eventually trust God enough to turn over our wills and our lives to divine care. This decision, along with our surrender and new belief, opens many doors for us.

When we trust our feelings and actions, we then learn to trust others but choosing trustworthy individuals may still be a problem for some time. We have to learn discretion in choosing trustworthy individuals. As we surrender, we learn to trust. Unconditional love is experienced when an NA member helps us, expecting nothing in return. We do not trust just anyone, especially our old playmates. NA members prove themselves trustworthy as we get to know them. There is a special bond which forms as our identification with others like ourselves becomes complete. We have to learn not to betray them along with learning not to betray ourselves. Of course, as self-destruction and isolation characterize our disease, we have to grow more trustworthy through working the steps. We come to trust God as our understanding grows. So, much of our mistrust is based in fear of the unknown. As we learn, we grow in all areas. No part is separate from the whole. We learn how changing a part of the whole makes a difference to the whole thing.

Many of us did not trust others simply because we did not trust

ourselves. We could never tell for sure what we would do! Our addiction prostituted our wills, desires and values. We lose what we abuse. There are several levels of trust. We earn trust, gain trust and sometimes expect trust. For us an addict, feeling worthy of trust comes from living with spiritual principles. All of the spiritual principles of NA are equally important. People respond to us in a more positive manner today. We check our personal motives in our conscience in order to determine whether we are living in recovery or addiction. Are we open to the problem or the solution? While some learn trust from a sponsor and others close to us in the Fellowship of NA, we all receive guidance and instruction from someone. We share and grow in the process. Listening to others share in meetings opens us up to new experience and when the things we learn work, our capacity to trust increases.

We wonder what happens to our secrets when another member gets loaded. Will they lash out and try to cause us problems? Usually not is the answer. Not because of any virtue, it is just that active addiction makes planning hard. We forget how our isolation and insanity makes us unpredictable. Do not let your imagination control what you think or act upon. Certainly defensive moves can trigger unwanted effects, so don't draw attention to yourself. For some reason, we are also poor predictors of what other people will do. Our ultimate faith and trust must be with a power greater than ourselves. We trust that a loving God will work things out, just like when we were new and at our lowest point. .

Trust has to do with the commitment of being true to one another. Our need for help is intense because growth in recovery moves us into areas of life where we lack personal experience and self-confidence. Often we try to live by what we saw on TV or heard from another person instead of talking with our sponsors or other members. This is where some of our mistakes come from. We have to stay close to someone, either a

sponsor or friend, who can help us if we have trouble or are prone to make mistakes. Three answers will come up frequently when we don't know what to do: honesty, open-mindedness and the willingness to try. These spiritual principles tell us what to do in all kinds of situations where we feel threatened and want to be dishonest, narrow-minded and don't really even want to try! The important thing is that we keep trying and asking for help until we begin to succeed. We will succeed if we keep trying, in almost every case. This means that even when we think we have failed, we should keep trying. This is where spiritual courage is necessary. Just believing God will take care of us makes a change for the better right away.

"If at first we don't succeed, we try, try and try again." We check with our sponsor and friends to find out if we are getting off-track. It may be that we just need to give it a little more time. Trust is the key to doing many of these things. Unless our belief system includes the idea that a loving, all powerful God is looking out for our well being, letting our guard down may seem foolish. When we replace our defect of fearfully hiding the truth with a dependence on the Spirit, we can expect some changes.

Many addicts tend to barter minimal good behavior with their 'enablers' to get their approval and support. Sometimes we use 'strategic disability' and pretend to need help. There will always be opportunities for us to manipulate people but as we grow in conscience, we notice how this makes us feel. This guilt game takes over our life. Manipulating others causes us to feel guilt. This guilt makes it hard for us to find someone who comes across as trustworthy. Many, if not all, of us played variations of this game during active addiction. It is the habitual dishonesty that causes many of the problems. Principles eventually replace this manipulation. Then, we can go forward in life without

harming others. We still get what we need, we just earn it instead of taking it from others. The games we played in active addiction taught us not to trust people. When we are sneaky, the whole world seems corrupt. So, we have to learn to trust again. How can we reach tomorrow's blessings if we are stuck in yesterday's games?

For many of us, learning to trust started by sharing with a few select members and then only small bits at a time. One of the most important of these few select members was a sponsor. The more we share and let our guards down, the more we found that other addicts understood and could relate to us. The more we are willing to share, the more a part of NA we feel and our trust grows proportionately. Another aspect of trust is to trust the NA way of life as well as our Higher Power's Will for us. Things may not always go the way we want because God can say no or show us another way. Life seems to go better when we can trust God's Will for us and we just show up to do our part. Sometimes we learn a lot about trust by taking a service position in our home group. Simple things like emptying ashtrays, making coffee, and setting up for a meeting help us get off to a good start. Being able to share our feelings without having to keep our guards up helps the old life drop away and makes room for the new!

From living a non-caring and non-feeling life to having someone tell us, "Yeah, that happened to me also," or "I love you and it's going to be OK", is quite a change. One of the great advantages in our newfound freedom is the ability to experience intimacy with others. We were people who used to manipulate others but we can grow into someone who is trustworthy. It is 'risky business' to trust others but it is certainly better than never trusting again. Trust is an accurate indicator of our renewed health and recovery. We have to trust ourselves before we can trust someone else. We may want to take a simple look now and then to

make sure the response we are getting matches up with the signals that we put out. We owe it to ourselves to evaluate the situation honestly. Honesty works because it eliminates confusion and if there is a price, we pay it. By doing this, we learn not to take things we don't want to pay for.

Some of us deliberately study our facial expressions and body language for this purpose. We have picked up habits, traits, or mannerisms that are offensive to other people and they protected our isolation in active addiction. We are mostly unaware of these habits. Self-examination turns up some things we can do without! Distance making behavior is a real factor we need to acknowledge. At some point of time in recovery when we want more people in our lives, we can change the way we do things. Feeling forced to play the role of 'victim or victimizer' is an example of this. We become trustworthy and we grow in our ability to trust others. We can find many more choices today. We are freer. Going to extremes eats up a lot of our energy and gives us very little comfort or clarity. When we stop depending on crises to keep others from getting too close to us, we experience changes for the better. We have more time and money to do what we want.

Our common welfare depends on our capacity and willingness to love and support one another. We are never alone. We get scared and may do stupid things yet we learn to make amends and look for ways to get over our pain and distrust. Trust is a tool for living. Without this tool, we will not be able to interact with other people in healthy ways. The all-or-nothing approach to living hinders personal progress. We don't have to trust people who are not trustworthy. We don't have to place our recovery in jeopardy in order to demonstrate trust. Do not hang out with people who are still using or relapsing. Let someone else help them. We all need people that are on our side and will not betray us, no matter

what. Scarred is a word that looks like scared. Our scars are pictures drawn in our flesh and on our souls by the pain that we have survived. The scars on our emotional self are visible in our actions and reactions to others. It is a sad fact that the pain of an unusually hellish moment will stay with us until we 'face it.' It causes us to use 'pain avoidance' to prevent a situation that would, at best, be difficult to duplicate even if we tried. Realistically, we can process what happened and what we need to stay away from to avoid this type of repetition. We get on with our lives, rather than feeling permanently crippled by our past pain. We may even be aware that some of our avoidance is foolish but just act out of instinct until we can think things through. Well, this is your clean time, go ahead and think things through so you can live better.

Trust is required if we are to participate in the processes of healthy living. We have rediscovered long dead dreams in the 'springtime' of recovery that only the clean know about. We trust those with whom we share. Addiction is dream death. We need humane support in order to let our issues surface. We can then haul them into full view. The aspects of our mental and spiritual existence that were drowning in active addiction can flourish in the light of recovery.

Personal service goes far beyond helping us learn how to stay clean. It revives the things we wanted to do when we grew up but did not get a chance to develop because our addiction intervened and sucked up all of our energy. Recovery is actually a 'coming out' of our spiritual nature. When we discover something spiritually important to us, we have to share it or express it in some way with someone who will affirm the reality of our experience. Otherwise, we might stay where we are at and find it impossible to do more than stir the kettle of character traits without having the ability to throw out spoilage and add some new stuff. Personal service is the acknowledgment of our spirituality starting with our first surrender and going forward with us into this new life. Others

give us their personal service until we learn how to do it for others.

We acknowledge the real person in another human being. We recognize a little of ourselves in them and a little of them in us. We know that this inner person could not control what happened when they were loaded - they were powerless. We have to be able to separate what we did while using from who we are in order to regain hope and trust for ourselves. The major trouble generally goes away almost as soon as we stop using but the refinement of recovery takes a lifetime.

From this point, recovery becomes straightforward and sensible. Why we use and how we lose the obsession may seem to be mysterious but recovery shows and speaks for itself. Our inner being surfaces more frequently and once free it begins to dominate our thinking and behavior. Our fellow recovering addicts accept in us what they have learned to accept in themselves. We know that we are different people clean and that the laws, which we were up against while we were loaded, are no longer a problem. It is humorous to watch someone who was a burglar in active addiction complain about someone else stealing their toothpaste. They get so indignant!

Life on the surface can be much different than it seems. As our ability to come out and share our real self with others increases, we expand the circle of friends with whom we can exchange trust safely. We see exactly how we replenish or deplete our own resources. Helping others helps us. We find that we often find ourselves helping others with exactly the things that caused us problems in the past. Trust is what we need to support us in our effort to obtain a personality change. We need others who have no ulterior motives to provide the references that we need so that we can tell fact from fantasy - the real from the unreal. Learning to trust others is simply part of the process of learning to trust

ourselves.

Many times getting clean leaves us feeling wounded and it takes time for these wounds to heal. In the meantime, we must trust something so why not the Program of Narcotics Anonymous. Since it worked for so many addicts that came before us, we know that it can work for us. In the beginning, we heard that we have to share to stay clean and we trust this even if we share out of a sense of desperation. We fear that we may return to our old way of life. Nonetheless, we begin to trust the things that we were told when we were newcomers enough to try them. Our trust increases after we stay clean for a while. This is partially due to placing a degree of blind trust in a Higher Power long before we became convinced that the Program would work for us. This foxhole desperation can grow into conscious contact with a Higher Power of our choosing.

Gossip

The 'disease is between our ears.' This is a powerful phrase for pointing out and reminding each of us that our spiritual condition is our responsibility. It is one thing no one can do for us. Gossip is a damaging social action. It differs from 'group consciousness' in that it plays up someone's difficulty, error or vulnerability in a negative way. In the recovery context, it can also be like a person who is sick, showing he or she is running a fever because their skin is hot. The "temperature" is a sign they are sick. It can affect our Fifth Tradition in recovery meetings. If a new person hears gossip about others, how long will it take them to become the topic, especially if they have some awful experience to share? It goes against anonymity. A program that specializes in taking in some of the world's sickest people also takes in some of the world's most sickening people. We tend to persuade others to take our side or viewpoint in things. We need healthy support. An insightful member can

hear someone gossiping and get with the person to help them process what they are hearing. This has to be done with care.

One member shares, "One time a newcomer was going over a group problem with me. The group was very upset about a particular member talking out of turn, being slightly disruptive and so forth. I assumed the problem was that he didn't know yet about certain things having to do with the background of the individual he was so offended by. I mentioned that our disease runs in families and that the facial features of the person seemed very like some pictures I had seen recently of persons who were born of parents who were in active alcohol addiction. The slightly distorted features, reduced mental functions, etc. The point of my story is that I might have done better leaving well enough alone. The kid who had been complaining felt so badly about attacking someone disabled like that, he may never have come back. This is one of those rotten little lessons that never come again close enough to recognize and do better. Mentioning it here may be the only time I get to communicate it.

"So, a lot of times for me, I try to look inside, beyond the surfaces, for what is really going on. One of the things I got from the Dune books by Frank Herbert was the idea that the health of a society can be judged by how it treats its dissenters. For me the idea became that a healthy society doesn't need to retaliate against dissension because it is secure in its foundation and doesn't have to react out of fear."

In a society of recovering addicts, we will always have those who challenge and oppose. It is part of the deal. Sometimes they will be right and we will be unable to hear them in time to do any good. But

hopefully by surrendering and being open, we will do better. One of the things about this work that I love very much and feel very devoted to, is the way we can reveal - through time - where we are really coming from.

Group consciousness functions by exchanging information and everyone gets to do this. The difference between group conscience and gossip is that group conscience is concerned with helping someone. Gossip only hurts. It causes distrust in others and rebounds on the gossip as well. We get back what we put out. Like a super, global family, we pray for wisdom to flow from a loving God centered mental and spiritual state out from the people who have it, through the people who need it, to reach the people who have never thought of it - for the good of us all.

Much of it comes down to processing things that come up in our daily lives. Something that is considered known, may have been gotten wrong but is so specific that the error means nothing for a considerable time until an occasion to apply it comes along and it fails to work. We need to be able to constantly listen and review what we think we know to catch flaws before they do harm. It usually costs nothing to give someone the benefit of the doubt. It hurts so badly when others expect only bad things of us. It feels really good to know others will back us up, even when we make mistakes. It helps us do better. Some of the things we hear have to be mixed with a 'grain of salt' to keep us from jumping to conclusions that may be erroneous or unfair. Judging others on our own experience can really create a lot of problems. Suppose we hear about a love affair. If we are happy in a relationship, we may have a somewhat tolerant, love and let love attitude. If we are frustrated and miserable, someone doing what we secretly want to do can arouse all the wrath of an Old Testament prophet. Recovering drug addicts are wondrously quixotic in this regard.

A former member of the World Service Board of Trustees shared, "At one of the world conventions I got to attend, a married woman was caught in bed with a man. Both were young and good looking. The woman was accusing the man of rape. Before it had gone too far, the person who came in on the lovers 'in the act' told me that the woman was on top and nothing visible was holding her in place. She didn't seem like someone being forced. Now the small circle of us recovering addicts who were informed on all this and in something of a position to make a call as to whether it be taken seriously or not were a little protective and bloodthirsty. What kind of animal would assault one of our sweet, sexy, attractive and outgoing little ladies! It was a trip. After the lady shared her impressions of what she had observed, I let out enough to eliminate the legal threats and let the people deal with their foolishness in a more contained manner. I always wished I had been able to console and make sure the guy was ok. In retrospect, it seems he was more likely the one who was 'taken in' by the situation and his main defect was in not being able to say 'no' to a beautiful woman who was open to his attentions. I hope they both are still clean.

"While there can be no doubt that the damaging effects of irresponsible gossip will continue to exist, there is one more thing to consider: life is different in recovery. I had a member on my couch for a while. He was from the Miami Fellowship and very hotheaded. But he was also very street wise. One time I was sharing my inability to understand what the hell was going on in a particular situation and he cocked his head and looked at me. He liked me and seemed to look up to me in many ways. He said, 'Don't you get it? Dope fiends cover their games with clouds of confusion.' Since that moment, much has become clear to me."

There is a widespread belief that we get back what we give out, so gaining trust is largely a matter of giving trust by being trustworthy. If others suspect our motives, don't know us or have been burnt by us in the past, we just might as well accept it. After all, if someone steals our TV, do we let them stay on the couch? Like everything else, we will get more trust when we can handle more trust. God doesn't burden us with opportunities to get into more trouble. Like many other things, when we don't need it, we can have it. When we don't need to be watched, the attention of others will be redirected to those who do. Trust and trustworthiness are one measure of personal growth.

CHAPTER EIGHT

LEARNING TO LIVE

"Key for Life"

"Having lost all my possessions (cars, houses, clothes, etc.) not to mention friends, personal relationships and family ties, to the disease of addiction, I remember a key ring I once had with many keys on it. It seemed at one time, I had a key for everything.

"And I recalled a night, many years ago, that I stood at my door, completely wasted, fumbling for the key to open that door. And the next morning, looking out my window and wondering why my car was not parked where it should be. 'Where is my car?'

"Well, today I know those things can be replaced. And I have one key, today, that can unlock and open anything or any door I choose. This key is my recovery and it is my 'Just for Today' key ring."

Narcotics Anonymous recovery is a way of living. We find that the best instructions for living our new way of life is in the NA Twelve Steps. These Steps allow us to halt the progress of our disease and resume our individual growth. The directions for sharing this new way of life are found in the Twelve Traditions. The Traditions protect the safety and security of the Fellowship as a whole. They have the power to guide us away from or around known problem areas. The Twelve Principles of NA are hope, surrender, acceptance, honesty, open-mindedness, willingness, faith, tolerance, patience, humility, unconditional love, caring and sharing. The Principles bring together the Steps and Traditions and show us what to do in situations we have not experienced

before successfully. These elements form the foundation for growth and change.

Other things that help us grow are working with a sponsor, sharing with other addicts, developing our faith, reading our literature and attending NA meetings. Our experience shows that 'learning to live' is a process requiring daily effort and lifelong practice.

As we adapt to the NA way of life, we are changed. Before we can begin rebuilding our lives, we need to get several things in order. We have admitted the information and knowledge that we based our lives on is faulty. Otherwise, why would we need help? If we rush ahead blindly, we are just going to hurt more. We will be rushing ahead with all our fearful limitations and misinformation limiting the success we should enjoy upon entering this new world. That is why we gain immediately from our surrender. We stop doing things and that means we stop doing things wrong. This is what brings immediate relief. We may not be doing many things right, but they don't punish you for being imperfect!

Following the Twelve Step process allows us to get a Higher Power to help us take our inventory and remove defective character traits that may have worked in desperation, but have no place in our new lives. It is important to get this straight from the very start. If we are addicts of a type that finds recovery in NA, we will surely die without help. Graveyards are filled with addicts who could have benefitted from NA. Stubbornness and close mindedness will limit the quantity as well as the quality of our existence. This is no game. There comes a time when we have to stand still and hurt until the pain stops or at least subsides a little, so that we can find out where we belong. The processes of life will move us along and we will have the company of other recovering addicts to help us.

We learn to reach out to others right from the start. This is not because you have so much to offer, as it is a way for you to learn the program. Your desire for recovery is enough of a basis to qualify you to help others. Dumb luck and the Grace of a Loving God will assist you. If you are new to recovery and you are close to an NA member now, it may help if you tell that person you really want help. Ask them to tell you the truth and not to worry about hurting your feelings. Because we are in recovery, we have to be careful about offering help when someone does not ask for it. We have learned that this runs some newcomers off by intruding on their space, so most of us are careful not to be too forward, allowing them to grow at their own pace. Asking for help is not only socially acceptable in NA but also highly recommended. When helping others, we let them warm to us rather than breaking into their life is the idea. Yet many members want a strong hand to guide them. They will let you know. When it comes to getting help, you need to know others will wait for you to ask for help.

We use the NA Steps, Traditions, Principles, literature, members, meetings and the power of prayer to begin with. There was a time, not too long ago, when addicts like us died because no one really understood what was wrong with them or offered them a sure path to recovery. Due to the loving dedication of all the clean addicts who have gone ahead of us in recovery, this is no longer true. Their availability makes the case plain. We do not have to do it alone. It is hard for us to open up to others. Yet, by doing this, we can discover at least one or two who completely understand everything we have to say.

"Welcome home. Welcome to the first day of the rest of your life." These are the words that one addict uses to greet a newcomer in First Step meetings. This sentiment can set the tone of loving acceptance, the same acceptance shown to us when we were newcomers at our first

meeting. It also means we can make a new start each day clean. Carrying our message begins with a welcome. We can see and identify the pain that comes from active addiction and leads us into a real desire for recovery. Simply taking time with someone as others took time with us, we welcome our new people into our way of life. We explain that NA is not a cult and that if some members try to push their personal ideas on them, not to get too upset with them. Our Program, as such, is a collection of what works for addicts in recovery and nothing else. Where written materials accord with what addicts do to stay clean, grow spiritually and help others, they prove useful. We do not have good literature and bad literature. It helps addicts or it does not. Writing can only approximate the wonders our members perform and experience in a day's time. So our personal, friendly welcome is the way we pass on what another NA member gave us.

We gladly render service, meet our obligations, and can accept or solve our troubles with God's help. We know that it does not matter whether at home or in the world, we are all partners in a common effort. We understand that in God's sight, all human beings are important. Our daily lives give us proof that love freely given brings a full return. We are no longer isolated and alone in self-constructed prisons, nor do we feel like square pegs in round holes. We receive assurance that we fit and belong in God's scheme of things. These are the permanent and legitimate satisfactions of living. True ambition is not what we thought it was. True ambition is the deep desire to live usefully and walk humbly under the Grace of God.

What happens just after we stop using is so confusing and chaotic that without the friendship and help of other addicts, most of us would have fallen back into active addiction. After all, addicts use. Our long sought after peace of mind may seem like a tantalizing taste of freedom that

cannot possibly be real. As we grow in recovery, we transmit our experience to anyone that needs it. It becomes our own in transmission. Giving hope and encouragement to others helps us get hope and encouragement. When we experience what it feels like to help others expecting nothing in return, it is easier for us to accept the help we need for ourselves.

While there is much to be said for 'just not using'; we have many other things that have to be done. We are looking for ways to support ourselves and others in recovery. We come first. It means so much to us that efforts were made on our behalf long before we sought help in NA. This could only have come from a deep and abiding love. 'Intention' seems to be an important ingredient in this deep love. It is like a song. Intention correctly implies that we do it by choice and with love. Focusing on this love builds a tension within us that can do great things. When we do things of our own free will, we add the strength of our experience to our message.

We may have sat at a meeting and groaned inwardly when addicts from a treatment center walked in with a newcomer for a First Step meeting. We may feel tired of the basics. We may sit there wishing for something more 'on our level.' What could be a greater leveling than sharing with a newcomer? It brings all our recovery resources to bear against the disease of addiction personified in an addict seeking recovery! What better way to show ourselves where we truly stand with our commitment to recovery? By making ourselves available, we will find ourselves getting close enough to someone to do some good. They will expect to see us at a meeting and feel let down if we are not there. At some point, we may want to take some responsibility for this and let ourselves become bonded to the person. It is a choice. Once we have made the decision, we can see into the needs the other person may have and can

pray to be used as an instrument. We can check with others, pray, use our imagination and do all sorts of things to help the person if only they are asking for our help. We have found that trying to force help on an unwilling recipient is like pouring water into a jug while the stopper is still in place. The stopper is the ego and it up to each member to open themselves to recovery.

Settling down and adjusting to life without using has to happen first. Only after we see ourselves as addicts and relate our pain to using do we have a chance at lasting recovery. Replacing our habits that were born in fear and desperation takes time. We obtain freedom in one area of our life yet we see our addiction controlling another. As we discover each area of loss and deal with it, our minds begin to clear and our appetite for freedom increases. One benefit of surrender that we experience in working the First Step is that we are not personally responsible for everything 'wrong' in the world! We chop our problems down to a workable size and thus begin to see some progress. We have chased an answer that appeared to be at some distant, unattainable point; therefore, we have to relearn to focus in today just like children. This takes the burden of 'our expected future' off our backs. The future, as we have come to expect it, is not going to happen to us as long as we are clean and practicing spiritual principles. It cannot happen because everything is different for us when we begin the internal process we call recovery. Changing the world might take forever but we can easily and quickly get results by changing ourselves. Personal responsibility means changing things within ourselves.

Personality change describes the process that allows us to develop a new relationship with life. Without a conscious choice combined with daily effort, our personalities will stay the same. This is especially visible when we are going through great stress and difficulty. Recovery allows

us to set our mind on this process of change and eventually engage enough of our personal resources to get results. Usually, we have to have people we trust encouraging us to go a little further and to try a little harder in order for results to happen. We most often react in horror and feel threatened when change starts happening. In the past, change has been a threat. It is hard to relax and trust that changes are for the best.

In active addiction, many of us used character defects as a shield against attack. This was our 'survival kit.' We seldom told the truth because we lived in an illusion created and maintained by our lies. Fear and distrust motivated us to build walls to protect us from emotional or physical harm, only to discover that these walls had become our prisons. We used anger and intimidation to keep people away. The bikers used a tire iron and the lawyers used a fountain pen: it all comes to the same thing, our fear of people approaching us. We feared that if they got too close they would see through the games we were playing to the hollow inside. We wanted what we wanted, when we wanted it. We had little patience with anything or anyone who stood in the way of our self-gratification. Recovery means becoming God-centered instead of self-centered.

After coming to NA and beginning the recovery process, we find that some of the tools in our old 'survival kits' were more harmful than helpful. Put away that tire iron and hold out an open hand while letting someone know you need help. Put that checkbook back in your vest, you can't buy the love and acceptance we have to offer. Recovering addicts shared with us that we had to find a new way to live. They told us to practice honesty, 'no matter what', and in time telling the truth would feel natural. They told us so they themselves could hear it. In time, we tell others and hear it ourselves! We all want freedom from the bondage of addiction. We want to have choices, to be able to move in many directions, and to feel full of energy and spirit.

We must take the time we need to regain our personal sensibilities. Next, we start to identify with people in meetings. We read NA literature and find that we relate to the stories of those gone before. We realize that we are not alone and that we do belong. We then establish a framework of understanding and supportive friends and begin to rebuild ourselves through the power of the Twelve Steps. We know that our disease is always chasing us and we realize that we are the 'master of our own demise'. The reason that 'surrender' must be complete and a belief in a Higher Power must be revolutionary is that without them the gravity of the way we were will draw us back into the insanity.

Many of us have experienced initial confusion. We may have misused our newfound opportunities by seeking ways to regain the sense of personal power. Our self-centeredness takes our natural desires for sex, security and fellowship and twists them into negative qualities such as lust, greed, pride and extreme dependence. For recovery to occur, we have to learn to tolerate increased responsibility with gratitude and humility and those who forget this responsibility, risk returning to active addiction. Surrendering, taking an inventory, praying and meditating give us ways to live life. We visualize our goals and honestly assess the obstacles in our way. If we are willing to face the consequences of our choices then we can aspire to all our dreams in recovery. All of those goals are out there in front of us somewhere. Much of recovery is serendipity. Good things come to us when we stop trying to make things happen.

Today, we have a purpose for living. We do not allow money, power, property or prestige to divert us from that purpose. To do so would negate our surrender. Today, we have become self-supporting and we contribute our fair share in all areas of life. We carry our own weight and are no longer a burden on family and society. We gladly give our

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time, talents and resources to help others wherever and whenever we can. Our disease has isolated us. It has prevented us from living life to the fullest. Recovery is not only regaining things that we lost in active addiction but also restoring our dreams. One of our greatest discoveries is nothing more than the ability to see a blessing for what it is. We accept goodness into our lives and act for the betterment of those around us.

It may have taken a crisis to make us reach out for help in the first place and it may take more pain to keep us aware of the need for growth and change. Many NA members think that our chains are a natural part of us because they have been with us for so long. Our defects have been interwoven into our lives. Real honest love is what we need. It is 'for love' that we care for others and reach out of our own loneliness. We have protection from harm in our vulnerability by the courage we have gained from the program of NA. Those who lack a working relationship with a loving Higher Power may disagree with us. The strength and conviction of some of our statements may put them off but we still need to communicate our feelings and beliefs with others. We have found something unexpected in recovery, and that something has re-ignited the fire of life within us.

Instead of envisioning painful encounters, we now see ourselves getting jobs and conducting ourselves in a responsible manner. We can rehearse what we will say and what it will feel like to say it. Many times, these scenes play out exactly as we have envisioned them. It slowly dawns on us that things as simple as this are what spirituality means. We could have died for lack of what is commonplace in the lives of non-addicts and were totally unaware of this fact while in active addiction. Nonetheless, that is how this disease works. It isolates us from people who care for us and would do all within their power to help us. In the

same way, it separates us from our 'good opinion' of ourselves. The things that we did while influenced by drugs could make a fallen angel blush. We learn to judge ourselves anew. When we find ourselves lacking, we make up the difference with the help of fellow addicts.

We avoid situations that could make us feel even worse about ourselves because that is how we have survived active addiction. Any positive experience or reward could trigger the self-destructiveness of this disease. A little more shame or guilt and we might not have survived. We always lose sight of the fact that in the end, we only fool ourselves. After all the cons have been run, the deals done, and the scams pulled, we ask ourselves, "Are we happy? Are we pleased? Do we feel good about ourselves and about the lives that we live?" If we answer in the negative, we work the program with more vigor for greater happiness and fulfillment. Freedom from active addiction, the ability to make choices, the flexibility to move in many directions, and feeling full of energy and spirit, is what most of us want.

As we adapt to the life of attending meetings and having contact with clean addicts, we recognize changes in the content of our thoughts. We take what we hear in meetings and study how to use it in our situations. We plan how we will handle certain situations before they come up. We try the things that appear to work for others. At this crucial stage of recovery, we reach out for help to deal with the things that have been bothering us for years. If we are honest in our desire to change, someone will come forward with an answer or we will stumble across it in a book we read. Sometimes this answer will come several times before we actually hear it.

When we pray or meditate, we open ourselves up inside for extra help like this. God answers all of our prayers. "No!" is sometimes the answer.

"Wait!" can also be the answer. Then, we may waste time theorizing over whether the help would have come if we had not opened ourselves up spiritually. The point is that today we can recognize and accept God's help.

Many of us are pleased to find the world opening up for us. It is a world rich with help and support that we could not obtain before. Sometimes we get impatient about the time this takes. Therefore, we must remember that results come in God's time, not ours. We are grateful that the change comes at all.

As addicts, we live an all-or-nothing existence. We are creatures of extremes. It is all too common to see someone overextend themselves in service work, burn out, and then withdraw from service altogether. One example would be that we used to ignore our families while using yet we continue to ignore them in recovery. It does not seem to make any difference whether we were gone and using or we are gone to meetings, we are still gone. We may smother them with our controlling love and attention in a misguided attempt at making amends and then feel hurt and rejected if they exert independence. Another example is that we used to not show up for work for days at a time and now we will not even take a day off. We swing from irresponsibility to feeling responsible for the whole world. We then turn around and quit our job just because it is just 'too much.' Achieving both inner and outer balance is an elusive prize of recovery. We swing like a pendulum from one extreme to the other and hope to find that middle ground where peace and serenity reside. Eventually, we will find that peace and serenity. It comes along when we reach the point that we sincerely ask for restoration to sanity. When we take an inventory, do other step work, share at meetings and work with our sponsor, we get on a course that most accurately reflects the vision of the life that we want for ourselves. Recovery gives us a

chance to slow down and finally get it right for a change.

We have every right to aspire to all the good things of life. Perhaps for the first time after many years, we express love and kindness to others when we first meet rather than waiting to see if they deserve our friendship. As we gain self-acceptance, we lose the reasons that we hide behind our self-made walls of paranoia and fear. We begin to like ourselves and then we learn to love ourselves. We express our gratitude by serving others. Today, we intuitively know that we are cared for and are no longer alone.

As one addict shared: "I learn how to live from watching how other addicts live their lives. The Steps help me to identify and achieve my dreams. The birth of my dreams often comes from seeing someone else exhibiting the qualities that I want. I ask questions and observe what they do to keep these spiritual gifts so prevalent in their lives. The answers have never been hard to discover. The people who feel the most love usually give the most love. People who seem the most humble are usually the most grateful. People who are peaceful pray and meditate for that peace. Generous people gain the most from their giving.

"I am learning to live by taking what I experience by 'working the Steps' and putting it into practice wherever I go. If I want more love, I express love. If I want inner peace, I pray to be peaceful and serene. If I want more gratitude, I try to help someone else and be thankful that I can. It seems that doing the 'little things' that people told me to do when I first got clean are just as important today as they were then."

Imagine how it would be if we had to fight with everybody and

everything because of our anger. That would be a lot of fighting. How different this is from the old days when all we knew was to 'fight with or flee from' those who disagreed with us. We learn to stand our ground for the principles that we believe in while allowing others to do the same. We are calm and relaxed because we are not afraid to learn something new. We have also generally done our homework and don't often feel personally threatened by what someone may have to say.

Surrender leaves us free to fight when there is no alternative. Suppose we could not inventory our assets and liabilities. How would we approach our life? We would always seek more. We would have no way of satisfying our actual needs. Sound familiar? Suppose we had no way to reach God through prayer. Suppose we could not recognize or accept the spiritual answers that come to us. We would be 'on our own' and in active addiction again!

There are five steps to peace: denial, anger, bargaining, acceptance and peace. The acronym "d-a-b-a-p" should become a word in our language to describe this process. This information may help us get on with recovery. In response to someone who is stuck in anger, we may suggest bargains. If asked, we may suggest getting angry with someone who is stuck in denial to help him or her get going again. It is important to remember that life is a process of change and growth, only 'dead things' stop growing. We engage the forces of life when we throw aside the labels that our addiction placed on us and begin the selective process. We can finally take steps to free ourselves from the limitations imposed on us by our disease and reflect our true preferences. We can become the human beings that we have been inside all along.

Sometimes, we give the impression that we like to preach. We have sat in meetings listening and sharing that we are often repeating from rote

things we have heard or read in the literature. When we're doing better, such things can become issues to work on as self-improvement. In active addiction, we believed that someone loving us and going out of his or her way to help us created a debt that we could not pay. In recovery, we learn that this demonstrates the principle of 'giving back'. The only way we can maintain this gift of recovery is to continue to give it away. When we give it away and find we feel relieved, we get new insight into the feelings of those who helped us. Helping another is all we must do to repay our 'debt' to those who helped us. If you feel that recovery is getting stale, look again. Ask yourself, "Am I still giving it away?" It may be God's way of reminding you that you need to concentrate more on honesty, open-mindedness or willingness. Almost without exception, we will find that by putting something else first, our recovery and peace of mind have suffered. The next time someone calls asking for help, we start the conversation by thanking them for calling.

Sponsorship is an essential element in working the NA program. The only way to learn and apply the principles of recovery is from a person who has worked them. We call that someone a sponsor. It is important to find and use a sponsor as soon as possible. We may come to rely heavily upon them. In time, we too may become sponsors and grow from the opportunity to return the love and attention that was freely given. After acquiring some clean time, we recognize the rewards that come from living by principles. We see that healing is happening in our lives and that it is a direct result of working the Twelve Steps. We come to realize that because these principles help us deal with our addiction to drugs that they will also help us in all areas of our lives.

Fear and guilt may have been great motivators in our active addiction and early recovery. Fear and guilt keep us from doing what we can today. Both limit our lives in ways that we may have thought were

blessings. In time, however, we will want to be free of these two defects just as we will want to be free of the cast after a broken bone has healed. It would be far more troublesome than helpful to keep them or the cast. We would again limit our lives needlessly. Feeling needless fear or unearned guilt creates limitations that steal freedom.

An indispensable tool for living clean is gratitude. This positive emotion is markedly lacking in addicts but we can learn gratitude by practicing it. Generally, if we are not grateful for what we have today, we most likely will not appreciate what we receive tomorrow. Most of us learned gratitude by patient practice after we come to the viewpoint that it is necessary for our self-improvement. Narcotics Anonymous gives us the opportunity to regain the things that we lost in active addiction and to reach goals that we never dreamed were possible before. When we experience conscious thankfulness, we feel as if we have added a new dimension to our existence.

Every time that we act on faith, we change the world for the better. This miraculous power helps counteract the feelings of worthlessness and despair that this disease gives us. When we begin to substitute actions that make us feel good, we find that we are doing better in the world than we may have thought. Our experiences benefit us even when they do not seem positive. This is especially true when we find ourselves in the midst of tragedy. We can often learn as much from knowing how something does not work as from how it does. We must learn to think clearly before we can take effective actions. Obviously, we must draw correct conclusions about what happened and be honest about how we want to change ourselves in order to experience better results.

A vital part of learning to live clean is the acceptance of our personal responsibility to our recovery and society. We look forward to

contributing our fair share. We apply the principles that we learn in NA, whether within the Fellowship, with our families, in our professions, or with other organizations. "Exactly what is my fair share?' we might ask?" It is simply doing 'what we can do' today. 'Doing well' makes us feel better about ourselves so why would we miss this good feeling by shirking the responsibility?

In our meetings, we learn that the most precious gift we have to give is our loving attention. We listen actively with all our senses and try to establish empathy with other NA members. We apply what we learned at meetings and give this same level of attention to our families, friends and co-workers. The concept of 'our common welfare should come first' extends to our families, neighborhoods and communities. We surrender our egos into the larger group conscience by trusting that a loving God will speak through us all.

In this, our Twelfth Step work, we begin to participate consciously in the miracle of NA. It is the recovery process come full circle. We have gotten enough to begin to give back. We know well the spiritual law that says we will receive at least three times as much as we give. Whenever we stop having stuff come our way, we have stopped giving in some essential way. Actually, we may unconsciously begin to deny ourselves. It will do no good to receive more if we are full already. We have to let go some to make room for more. We may have been coming to meetings for a long time. Gradually we watched ourselves grow from being a taker to a giver. We remember to give and grow so that others may grow to give. This was the nourishment offered to us when we began our journey.

Life gets better as we practice unconditional acceptance with others. We simply give our love unconditionally. Unconditional simply means

without expectation. One thing that can give us great difficulty is finding out that we may have unknowingly placed expectations on other addicts. We may find that if someone relapses, we had the expectation that they would stay clean. We may even tell ourselves that they just did not want to stay clean and seem to forget that they suffer from the disease of addiction. We must remember, "There but for the Grace of God and the blessing of recovery, go I." We must be careful not to use this disappointment to justify isolating. We obtain freedom when we learn to make our own decisions and try not to hurt anyone in the process.

In the past, making compromises may have been difficult. Today we can compromise our actions without compromising our values. Recovery teaches us that we can disagree with others without being disagreeable. Most of us have witnessed two or more addicts arguing passionately over an issue. The conversation was animated and the atmosphere of recovery seemed in jeopardy. Somehow, the right answer became apparent to everyone. We have such a feeling of accomplishment when working through differences by 'listening to' rather than 'bullying' one another. Only minutes later, those addicts who were once arguing so forcefully are hugging, sitting together and planning what to do next. As long as we show love and respect for one another, we will always find an answer that will work for all.

As we learn to live, we discover that we are not alone. We are not independent from one another because a power greater than we are connects us. We believe that things can get better and so our hope grows into faith. We realize that if we continue on this path, we have no need to be concerned for our welfare. Faith gives the courage to examine who we are, what we have done and who we would like to become. We trust ourselves enough to share what we find in this process with someone else. We become more willing to change with the perspective that we

'receive' when we share our regrets, resentments, wrongs, assets, hopes and dreams. We begin to become responsible and accountable for our past and start trying to repair our relationships. Only after we have forgiven ourselves and the people who may have harmed us, will the way forward open up for us. Knowing the next right thing to do is a big part of daily recovery. Our resentments bind us to the past and can replicate the problem again and again. When we pray and meditate daily, we discover God's will for us as well as the power to carry it out. Self-worth grows when we are of service in all areas of our lives. Amazingly, we find that the more love we give, the more love we have.

When a loved one dies or narrowly escapes death, we realize that life goes on with or without our permission. We can turn our lives around at this point if we are aware of the message of hope that is Narcotics Anonymous. This discovery may make us want to be a part of life again. Clean, we realize that we might as well stop fighting and start figuring out how to be happy. We have the right to remove any obstacles that we find and get on with our lives. There are simply too many help services available to go without. If only we are open to receiving help, these individuals, professionals and agencies can help us. This goes for friends and family members as well as the public and community organizations. Many of us could not conceive of a life without the use of drugs. We believed that if we did not have drugs in our lives our lives would be boring and incomplete. It has been heard many times in our meetings, "If I listed all the things I expected to achieve in my first year of recovery I would have short-changed myself." We quickly learn that the life of a using addict is no life at all. It is saturated with pain and unfulfilled dreams. Hope remains hidden in the fog of our denial. As newcomers, we were filled with questions. How can these meetings change my life? What do I do now that I'm not using? More experienced NA members may have smiled that knowing smile and encouraged us to just 'keep

coming back.' It was too difficult for many of us to conceive this new way of life at the early stages of our recovery. By not using and going to meetings before we believed that NA would work for us, we learned a lesson in faith.

This is what being a part of life is all about. Our addiction keeps us isolated and miserable. It destroys our lives by creating real and imaginary barriers to our happiness. Many of us feel that we have no right to happiness by the time we arrive in NA. One addict shared: "I used to discuss friendship with my mother, sometimes complaining about certain friends. My mother turned to me one day and said, 'You've got to be a friend to have a friend.' I often think of this remark when I consider the balance between giving and receiving. Sometimes I'm tempted to sit home and watch TV instead of going to a meeting, thinking, 'There's nothing I'm going to get at that meeting anyway.' What I need to remind myself is that maybe I need to go to that meeting because there is somebody I need to give something to instead of looking for someone to get something from."

Words are symbols of reality and as such have the power to heal, wound or kill. Some words have been off limits to us for some time and we need to make friends with them again. We must remind ourselves of our right and responsibility to do this. We have quite a story to share; most of us have histories that are far more dramatic and intriguing than a motion picture. In active addiction, we lived secret lives and did not want others to know what we had become. We came to believe our own lies and blocked out the truth, even after we got clean. Because so much of what happened to us is deep inside, it may be a while before the full stories come out. One of the miracles that we experience in Narcotics Anonymous is helping one another to get a new grip on reality. Only recovering addicts understand the courage that it takes to walk back

from our own destruction one step at a time. NA has been described as an archway. As we enter into recovery through this arch, we find many paths before us that we can take. We find spiritual principles that can guide us on our journey. We find that our hopes and dreams can be fulfilled. What were once only fantasies have now become our reality. Life is no longer filled with pain and despair. Joy and hope are the replacement. Happiness and gratitude have replaced sadness and depression. Satisfaction replaces lust. We are no longer bound by our addiction or chained by our fears. The Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous welcomes us to life. It is a life beyond our wildest dreams.

We grow from near total collapse and surrender to being able to do certain things. We learn that the principle of 'powerlessness' works for us all the way. We discover you do not need to be powerful to get things done. Power trips just wear us down. Developing our own conscious contact with a Higher Power works for us.

With all the resources of a Loving God on our side, we can now take inventory, get our Higher Power's help releasing character defects and make amends for past wrongs and wrongs as they occur. Our relationships change within our families. We find new friends who are willing to share their lives with us. Co-workers see us as assets and sources of support instead of competition or unreliable. We branch out into recreational activity, a social life and some degree of civic involvement. The self-help movement is in itself a big part of all three. We find God's plan for us through working our Steps. When we sit alone, our feeling of aloneness takes a new direction, we experience contentment.

Human beings exist in terms of consciousness. Many of our actions are unconscious. We have to learn to think clearly before we can act without

regret. It may be that surrender, prayer and meditation are how we deal with the subconscious portion of life and give us an edge as we become better at applying these tools. We are learning how to appreciate and enjoy life. Many of us anticipate trying new things. Whether it is doing something simple or complex, we learn that getting together with other addicts, outside of the group meetings, can be a very enjoyable experience. We give ourselves permission to have fun in healthy ways, both inside and outside the Fellowship. We know that laughter is both spiritual and healing. The more we learn to laugh and enjoy ourselves, the better we feel. While we take our recovery very seriously, we try not to take ourselves too seriously.

We recognize our diversities, but we cannot allow our differences to divide us. We have learned to mind our own business and to pursue our purpose undeterred by outside issues. Recovery brings out our real skills and abilities and lessens our need for self-promotion. Principles come to our aid and disarm personality conflicts before we act out. We see others as equals and a part of our extended family. Changed, renewed and revitalized, we continue to let go of fear and live in love. Learning, ever learning, we live!

CHAPTER NINE

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Since our lives and recovery depend up our interaction with other people, ‘personal responsibility’ is one of the greatest lessons that we have learned in recovery. The old joke goes, "The three requirements of life are: food, shelter and someone to blame it on." Before coming to the Program of Narcotics Anonymous, we blamed others in countless ways for all of our misfortunes, problems and limitations. In doing this, we backed ourselves further and further into a tight corner that allowed less and less freedom. Through all of our pain and dissatisfaction, we could do little to help ourselves. It was all up to these other people - or so we thought. This was our disease manifesting itself to the extreme. Before coming to the Program, most of us felt accustomed to repeatedly hearing from others about the many ways in which we were irresponsible. It became almost a matter of psychological survival for us to block out the constant criticism.

Of course, there was never any real doubt that ‘responsibility’ was a characteristic that we were short of. Responsibility is just the difference between knowing about something and doing something to make it better. Our disease robs us of this ability. The lack of personal responsibility in our daily lives still gives most of us problems. On the other hand, when we fulfill personal responsibilities, we feel good about ourselves. And we like to feel good. Even after time in recovery, some of us find ourselves trapped by these old attitudes and beliefs. We discover that these attitudes and beliefs hinder the process of change and we know that we must change in order to recover. We seek solutions within the Fellowship and with the assistance of our sponsor; we begin to work the Steps.

It is easy to become confused about the differences between negative self-will and accepting personal responsibility. Learning to distinguish between the two is a giant step in practicing the Program. In recovery, we learn that we can regain some control over our actions. In early recovery, we need to stay clean and learn a new way to live. Many of us have gotten sidetracked by establishing and working towards goals beyond staying clean and the results have not been pleasant. Finding a new job, entering a university or moving across town may distract or prevent us from entering this new way of living life! If we get recovery, we can enjoy all the good things of life! If we lose recovery, we lose it all. One of the differences between 'clean time' and recovery is that with recovery, we develop the ability and willingness to assume responsibility for our thoughts, actions and attitudes. The things that we allow to surface and constantly dwell on in our minds are what receive all of our energy. With enough energy behind them, our thoughts become tangible things and begin to have force in the world. Safe to say, all things man-made come from thought. It becomes a part of our personal responsibility to choose whether we will be a positive or negative force.

Our actions define our personalities to the world and our choices can rebound to us as pleasure or pain. Attitudes are the way we look at things. Attitudes are the basis that we use to form our strategies for dealing with reality and other people. An attitude is a group of potential choices. As we change, these attitudes change. If we see something wrong within our thoughts or actions, it is our responsibility to correct the faulty perception or wrongdoing. This is one way that God assists us in the constant improvement of our surroundings and ourselves. "Houses can only make a town, it takes citizens to make a city", reminds us that if there's nothing living inside, we are just a shell. Some of us are still tender from the scars of active addiction and hold back from general involvement in society as a whole. As we grow in recovery, we will find

ourselves taking on responsibilities before we know it. A gradual disassembly of our lives resulted as our disease progressed. We reverse this process in recovery and re-integrate into general society. Many of us have to develop restraints that we never felt like we needed before. Some of us have to develop their ability to assert themselves personally.

One damaging aspect of our disease makes us feel pain and sadness over things we can not help. It also causes us to feel nothing over those things that we might be able to affect for the better. Both are distortions. We need to focus some energy into getting our thinking straight in this area. We learn to redevelop our attitudes. A good attitude allows us to feel grateful that we do what we can. We no longer feel guilty about things we can not control. Attitudes are like sails on a ship that are set to catch the winds that can power them. If our sails are set for the distant port, every moment brings us closer. If our sails are set for trouble, it is hard to go anywhere else.

Our personal responsibility does not go on forever. Our disease tells us that we have power beyond the tip of our nose. We need to remember that the universe is for God to deal with. Many times, we have heard, "Through our inability to accept personal responsibility we were actually creating our own problems." Many responsibilities are as simple as paying bills such as telephone, gas and electric but 'personal responsibility' goes much further than that. Personal responsibility in recovery means the process of using the tools of the Fellowship in all areas of our lives. We must do this in our home groups, with our sponsors, in service work, and in our personal recovery as well as at work, in school, in church, with our families, and with our partners in life. It involves honest sharing. We create our own problems when we do not share what is going on with us. Sharing as if everything is okay when we are hurting inside perpetuates a fraud on the listener who cares

about us because they expect to hear the truth from us. This is how we create our own problems. "I'll show them," became the battle cry of our self-pity. Self-pity is a game that we can only win by being a loser! This is how we extinguish the light in our soul without even picking up the drugs. We recover by being able to reach out when the walls are closing in on us.

Part of our disease tells us to avoid taking responsibility for our own lives. We have become quite adept at avoiding personal responsibility by blaming others for our wrongdoings. This keeps the focus of our attention away from accountability for our actions. We have learned to be angry and resentful of others so it seems quite normal when we immediately seek someone to blame and resent. This is just one more way that our disease keeps us from growing and changing. "Look what they did to me," became our war cry.

What we need to do through working the Twelve Steps is to recognize how we blamed others and to identify exactly how we fostered our resentments. We need to set personal goals for our behavior and our reactions. We need to take a realistic look at a problem by asking ourselves, "What are my goals in this situation and how do I need to act with these goals in mind?" What should I do to be part of the solution and not remain part of the problem? We find our perception of reality changes with this newfound attitude. We become assets in the solution of our own problems.

Personal responsibility also includes not blaming others for the outcomes of our decisions. Making good decisions will encourage us to keep trying. Poor decisions make us cautious and we all need more courage. One thing that most of us have found helpful in finding a loving God in our Second Step is realizing that God does not require us to

suffer before helping us. When we have failed to admit our powerlessness or promptly admit our wrongs, God forgives us. A loving God would not trick us.

Personal responsibility also means we should be cautious of mindlessly following others and failing to listen to the voice within us. We do not want to be 'dead right' like the driver who ran a red light just because the car in front of him made it through. Every rule has its exception and it is our responsibility to distinguish between what is truly important and what is not. When we assign priority to attending to the things that we really care about in our lives, we receive strength.

An addict shared: "When I first got clean, I thought that a sponsor was someone to tell me what to do. I realize today that I only wanted someone to blame if things didn't work out. My disease has tried to blame God, you, my home group, my sponsor, my husband, my family and even service work for all my problems. I changed sponsors about a year ago and recently had a conversation with her about how it seemed that the everyday occurrences that used to become situations sometimes don't even cause me to pause and think about them.

"Today, through the principles of NA, I have goals and ideals to focus on and am not so easily distracted. Recovery is wonderful! Thank you, Narcotics Anonymous for saving my life and allowing me so many opportunities to give back."

Feelings of being a genuine, caring, responsive and non-defective person allow us to know ourselves as we are today. Working the Steps is the process that gives us the ability and willingness to respond to others. In the course of working Step One, we recognize our disease for what it is

and its effect on our lives. After working Step Two, we develop the belief that restoration to sanity is possible for us as well. Personal responsibility begins to become clearer after working Step Three. When we make a decision to turn our lives and will over to the care of God, as we understand Him, we are freed to look at who we are. We begin to see that we are human beings after all.

We are not 'the disease' that we suffer from, nor are we 'God.' We discover what the rules are for us and strive to become ready to have God remove our defects of character and shortcomings. With the worry over these in the care of God and out of our way, we respond to life in the moment. We no longer have to live in resentment, anger and fear because we are freed from the pain of contradiction in our lives. The pathway to being the people we want to be is clear because we have a loving God working in our lives today. Knowing our disease, developing a relationship with God, and coming to know ourselves are a few of the miracles of recovery.

After working the First Step, most of us experience a sense of humility and relief that we are not in control of our addiction. This knowledge allows us to stop beating ourselves up over the things that our disease made us do. There are however, some things that we do have control over, namely our attitudes and actions. Responsibility and autonomy go hand in hand, we can no longer do whatever we want to with no accountability. The more responsible we become, the less often others have the right or need to correct us. Actually, we may find ourselves in positions that generate harmony and order instead of disunity and chaos for the first times in our lives. We find out exactly how our lives intertwine with the lives of others and theirs with ours. Each part ultimately affects all others and a frayed edge will destroy the whole cloth if not mended.

We have all heard that one bad apple will spoil the bushel but not if we take inventory and have it removed. We have all faced the dilemma of our disease asking, "How do I judge myself for having a disease?" and "Is it not a mistake to imply that we have some control over our addiction?" The main difference after we get clean may be the feelings that we have about ourselves when we're having a rough day or a genuine crisis. We need to develop our ability to distinguish feelings that may have been indistinct in active addiction, i.e. we were always upset about something. Our advantage in recovery is increased control in the areas of our lives where we can see the quickest results by doing something for ourselves. When we have the need to enlist the support of others, we will get results more quickly and better by our willingness to take personal responsibility. Demanding accountability from ourselves, to ourselves, helps ensure our personal dedication to recovery. Sometimes, the ability to stop and care for ourselves is enough. At other times, helping another human being is within our ability.

One addict shared: "Although my preference or habit is to live inside my head, I often find myself able to do things I hadn't thought possible. The greatest temptation is to withdraw into a fantasy and watch, seemingly helpless, while my situations dissolve and opportunities fade. To reach out and perform daily tasks or take a chance by doing the best I know how, seems to be as difficult as picking up the phone when I am hurting. The strength to be productive today comes from knowing what is productive for me. I find this knowledge through honest sharing of my daily life with my sponsor and other NA family members.

"All my life I sought a purpose. I now have a purpose: doing the next right thing. The strength I gain from performing the task at hand rather than living in tomorrow or yesterday has a snowball

effect today. It allows me to take still more positive steps. I don't know what God has planned for me on a grand scale, meaning what am I going to do with my life, but surprisingly, life isn't lived on a grand scale. It's lived today."

Most of us agree that it is God working through us and making the miracles. Our responsibility then is to allow our ego-based personalities to step aside and let God work through us. We learn to pray that this will happen, especially when someone has asked for help. There is a special feeling of gratitude from being able to take care of our personal responsibilities. It feels good to be adequate where we used to fall short. Recovery must continue in spite of circumstances, environment or atmosphere. If we are self-admitted addicts in the sense of the First Step of NA, our lives depend on our recovery. It is more comfortable and preferable to have the support of the fellowship, family, friends, employers, society, government, and pets, etc. However, if we falter in recovery - it is our life, not theirs, that is sacrificed. One of the requirements of our process is building character and conviction through coping with adversity. Gratefully, the joy of recovery also comes through other addicts and loved ones who have helped us.

In claiming our God-given right to personal responsibility and freedom of choice, we reap the reward of knowing that we can grow regardless of circumstances because this is God's will. Immediate gratification has proven an empty promise, although it does occur. When we take a longer period of time to focus on a goal, we seem to be better prepared to accept the goal when it is attained.

The Steps guide us in changing until our inner reality matches up with life around us. Things work out better if we adjust our attitudes to match reality. By a simple process of evaluation, we can respond personally.

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We work ourselves back into the fabric of life by doing what we can, when we can. We no longer strive to be the person we should be or even the person we could be, but to be the person we are.

Personal responsibility was an alien concept to most of us before we came to NA. Many of us had gone through life believing that we were victims. This belief allowed us to justify our behavior and insulated us from our feelings of guilt and remorse. Taking the victim role gave us feelings of self-righteous anger and led us to believe that we were entitled to behave the way we did. Retaliation was a common theme of our unacceptable behavior. Personal responsibility is a duty we have to ourselves as well as the Fellowship. Responsibility requires action, both spiritual and physical. Maintaining recovery is our first responsibility. Daily maintenance evaluates our response to responsibility and we can see progress. The gifts that come from our new image of being responsible are a direct result of our meeting the needs of our fundamental obligations.

In the past, we ignored our responsibilities and this only caused our problems to build up and overflow into all areas of our life. It made our using and behavior irresponsible. Today, we learn to assume responsibility before the effects of irresponsibility become self_evident. Responsible effort is a tool that we use repeatedly in our recovery. As with other concepts of recovery, when we practice personal responsibility we become personally responsible for our lives and recovery.

CHAPTER TEN

EMOTIONAL PAIN

All addicts have familiarity with pain. Whether it is emotional, physical, social, intellectual, mental, or spiritual pain, there is no form of pain that we do not come to know on intimate terms. We shake when we recall past pain and are in absolute terror over future pain. We hate pain so much, that when we learn that we are creating our pain, it is hard to believe. It seems crazy that we would actually do things knowingly that predictably result in extreme agony.

For us, it takes a special form of courage to continue our efforts toward improvement after the initial terrors have passed. We would rather forget it and put it out of our minds. We got used to awful pressures in our addictive addiction. Recovery requires us to become more sensitive to the signals from the world around us. If we are used to people yelling when they want something, we may have to learn to listen to someone who seems to be whispering. We learn to re-evaluate our impressions of the world around us. By doing this, we realize a major portion of the freedom that we seek.

In active addiction, we developed a ritualistic, unconscious and reactionary style of living. Often, we didn't do things until we had to. Our addiction tells us that we have to look good, cover up our feelings, deny fault, and never accept responsibility even in trivial matters. These life styles hardly seem 'liberated.' Such freedom has a price: honesty. We have to get honest if we are going to be free. One of the problems that many of us face in early recovery happens when we begin to deal with life on life's terms. Emotional honesty takes courage and courage takes hope.

After a few months - or years - clean, we begin to run out of problems. We don't know what to do. People may call us 'crisis Queen' or label us a habitual worrier. We find ourselves sharing about something that feels like an immediate crisis but is still months in the future. Upon closer examination, we find that the problem may not even be possible. Confused, we wonder what have we been doing? We call this 'borrowing problems from the future', despair on the time plan.

An addict shared: "I remember the day when I first became aware of the fact that I really didn't have any major problems. It was weird because my disease quickly told me that I needed to keep inventing crises to share in meetings. After all, you're only here to hear about 'my problems.' At least that's what I heard out of one of the readings and it took me a long time to share about this in meetings. I finally, after a peaceful week, shared that it had been wonderful. You would have thought that I had dropped a bomb and killed everyone. The response was 'dead silence' but I felt better because I had loosened addiction's stranglehold just enough to catch my breath."

Sometimes, we need to think through what actually happened and compare it to the version that we have in our mind. Our confused feelings can lie to us or distort what are really seeing or hearing. This is especially helpful to know when we feel like we are getting resentments towards someone. We no longer need to over react to hearsay. In other words, we need to look at the facts rather than letting our emotions cloud our judgment. Otherwise, we may say and do things that we can not take back. Prayer, meditation and close contact with clean addicts help us find our way. As we grow in recovery, we learn to think through what is really happening as it happens. One mark of our growth is the ability to tolerate 'real emotional pain.' We know all too well that the chemical

buffers are no longer an option. Our emotions tell us to do things and this is good if what they tell us is true. If someone we love and care about is suffering, we should feel some pain and healthy concern. It is part of caring and motivates us to help.

If current circumstances stimulate our strong disapproval, we feel somewhat angry. If we have enjoyed successes, we have every right to feel good. If we feel overwhelming ecstasy, complete despair or unfocused hatred, it is a clear indication that our emotions have taken control of us. We must remember that addiction is planning our next usage. Intense 'good' or 'bad' feelings are a danger sign. We make a special effort to share with those we have come to know in recovery. We can take hope from the fact that we will settle down after a while. Our body may not know we are clean yet!

Being clean does not mean that we will not have to face some major tragedies. The sudden death of a loved one, the illness of a family member or a close friend can bring up strong emotions of concern. This is a part of loving someone. Feelings are healthy. They register what is happening in the world around us or the world within us. If they are inaccurate, we may start doing things that have nothing to do with reality. Our disease tells us that we are wrong to feel so strongly and makes us misinterpret and label these feelings as unworthy or defective rather than the mark of a caring, healthy human being. At some point, we must allow ourselves the right to grieve. We are not made of stone and our reactionary pain at the apparent unfairness of life gets to us sometimes. Maybe God does have a master plan for everything. Maybe there is an afterlife. Still, we are unable to see how some things are right or justified. We may not know where God is going with this. Maybe we wake up somewhere, maybe there is nothing. Staying true to our recovery is most important here!

We find ourselves reviewing our belief as our need for assurance increases. Making a written list of the things that are going right for us might help to counterbalance the feelings of distress or hostility. Avoiding confrontations may be the correct action in one situation and in another very similar case, confrontation may be the only way to resolve things. We find ourselves hiding our pain under the assumption that others do not really care. Our disease tells us that even if they did care, they could not possibly have workable answers for our problems. This is one way that the disease works to reassert itself into our lives and it happens whether we stay clean or not. It seems that our awareness grows in recovery to include these previously invisible areas. Our demand for personal honesty grows.

As addicts, we may ignore the good things in our life and focus entirely on a painful event. We become obsessed with the negative to the exclusion of all the goodness in our life. We then justify proceeding as if any hope of betterment is foolish. At this point, our disease will make us do something dumb to cover up how much we care. Pain is the common denominator amongst addicts. Going about our business and keeping to our meetings can help us get through a tough time when a major upset occurs. We have to keep thinking, "What should I be doing right now?" We persevere and try to manage as much of this as we can. If we have taken time off from work, eventually we have to return to our jobs and resume our life. If we take too long, we may create other problems that do not have to happen.

If we do an honest examination of exactly what we are giving, we are better able to evaluate the results we are getting. Recognizing pain as merely an indicator that something needs correction, we get results. Before we act, we pray. If we want dignity, peace and creative action, we can have it. We can go, see, and do like never before. We can also

choose to remain stuck in our ruts and make believe we are trapped and without choices. We tend to run from and avoid problems as our addiction progresses. In recovery, we tend to find ourselves in more agreeable surroundings and our need to be agreeable increases proportionally. We see where we were creating problems that were invisible to us before. Recovery teaches us that we choose our reality. We never hung around long enough to see this; we changed our surroundings before it got too bad. We may cry out when someone harms us but later we see where we put ourselves in harm's way. We learn not to ask for trouble. We begin to pay attention to the stages that make up having a happy life. We work diligently to root out contradictions from our thinking, speech and actions. We learn to focus on the good things in life, allowing them to become more important than the negativity has been. We spend time doing charitable works and we no longer feel complacent about the pain and suffering in the world.

We make ourselves part of the solution. Just as we crossed an invisible line as our disease progressed, we will cross another invisible line towards recovery. When we have gone as far with recovery as we went with our disease, our progress really takes off. We become more caring, nurturing, and competent. We are slower to anger and quicker to help. Humor becomes a habit. Those of us who regress into personal self_obsession are like prisoners trapped inside a wall. We climb, reach the top of the wall and fall back into enslavement again. We must continue to remind ourselves of the ways to deal with our feelings today. We can step out, look around and establish directions. This disease can be beat but it does not want us to know.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

LONELINESS AND REACHING OUT

"I loved drugs!", an addict stated. Someone else says, "The drugs were my best and only friend!" For many of us, the drugs were the objects of our love. We wonder, "What will replace them?" Many of us have tried sex, work, and other obsessive-compulsive behaviors as replacements. These substitutes were as sick to us as the original relationship we sought to replace, the one between the drugs and ourselves. We learned in recovery that the relationship we need to work on is the one with a Higher Power.

Whenever we forget that this relationship is primary in the healing process, loneliness and confusion reign. If we are not feeling close to our Higher Power, we cannot feel close to other people. Emotional or physical isolation follows when we feel this lack of closeness. The solution is 'working the Steps.' We admit that we are powerless over our disease. As we recognize it in our lives, the resulting un-manageability and insanity become easily recognizable. We believe that sanity will return. We know that part of that sanity is a healthy interaction with others. We can make a decision today. We take positive action, like making a phone call, going to a meeting, and honestly sharing our feelings and our recovery. Commitment to taking positive steps with courage and trust help us. When we have faith that what worked for others will work for us, miracles happen.

As these recovery steps proceed, our fear and sense of vulnerability subsides. Doing the right thing sometimes feels risky or sure to fail. We learn to do the next right thing in spite of the fact that the fear is still present. Before long, we will recognize loneliness as a gentle nudging.

It reminds us of our source of strength, the loving Fellowship of recovering addicts. It is the family known as Narcotics Anonymous. When we expose ourselves and discover love, acceptance, and understanding exactly as we are, we embrace our own humanity. Thus begins the journey of self-discovery. Not knowing and trusting ourselves caused much of our pain. We gain the knowledge that we are human because of interaction with other human beings.

We came to meetings and mustered all the willingness we could find to follow suggestions. Addicts who knew better pierced our armor of survival. Because they did this, we learned to take our armor off for ourselves. We are out of the war zone. They taught us what to do, how to share, how to live, and how to get along with others. They gave us all that they had to give. Eventually, we accepted their love and support and in time, we learned to give love back. For our willingness, we received truth, love, and compassion. We fought the fear in ourselves long enough to taste the freedom that was offered. There is not enough room inside of us for spiritual principles and the disease of addiction to co-exist. One or the other must dominate. We have learned that what determines the balance of power is free choice. We gradually change our actions to free ourselves. Everything we do in recovery is oriented towards changing and getting out of our self-obsession. Trust, honesty, and acceptance are all positive principles as well as learned behavior. We need to learn how to apply these principles. More importantly, we receive the knowledge that we won't die from trying! Rather, we may die from lack of trying!

We experience freedom from loneliness and in time it only returns occasionally. Trusting others, ourselves, a Higher Power, and the NA Program all involve a learning process. Sometimes life's events take us away from our sponsor, our home group, and our NA friends. Even with

years clean, we can still feel like we are starting over in a new home. Other times we can move and feel quite at home in totally new surroundings. This Fellowship is quite a support system and is always available, no matter where life takes us. Sometimes during these life changes, the old fears return and grab us by the throat and pin us down again. We may continue to go to meetings and yet be unwilling to take the risks involved in starting new relationships. If we remain unwilling for too long, we will become lonely and miserable again. We fear pain therefore, we cover ourselves in that armor again. We learn from painful experience that hiding from pain causes more pain. Feeling lonely in meetings leads to mortal terror unless we let others into our lives. When we reach out for help, we will get it. The disease is always trying to herd us off to slaughter. Recovery provides us with all that we need. The choice is ours!

In recovery, we practice the strategy of surrender daily. Passively attending meetings may lead us to trust a coffeepot. The experience of reading or even sharing a little gives us a little more trust. We feel the positive force or energy in meetings and gatherings, before and after. Most of us believe that a loving and intelligent force is behind these feelings. We feel connected to the force and try to keep ourselves close to the comfort that it provides. Even after we become 'experienced' in surrendering to the Fellowship and a loving God, intimacy with others can seem threatening. Intimacy with those who understand us best is the only antidote for our guilt and shame. We seek solutions to loneliness by first asking another addict to sponsor us. As we work the Steps, we feel restored to humanity and sanity. We have no permanent solutions only daily reprieves. We have no way of resolving the churning, emotional, and internal conflicts that keep us on the run. Until we admit to another person the exact nature of what we want to change about ourselves, there is no relief in sight. The concept that we can change ourselves is new to

us. Belief in the possibility often comes only after we see miraculous changes in other recovering addicts. This hope leads us to believe that we can change too.

An addict shared: "I drank alone. I did drugs alone. My closest friends and family members didn't know I had a problem. I didn't even know that I had a problem. Then one terrible, yet wonderful day, I bottomed out totally.

"It's easy to be with recovering addicts full of love, hope, and understanding in a room that is filled with spirituality to the point that you can feel the electricity in the air. That I still feel alone in my own head is a weird feeling. Still paranoid, I feel depraved and loathe myself. I have learned in NA through healthy thinking, that no matter whether mentally ill or just sick and alone in my own head, it's by choice. This is true every single day and in every single situation.

"How many times have I heard someone tell my story or express my thoughts when they shared how utterly disgusted and alone they felt? Why is it that we must reach this point of total desperation before we can reach out? Recovery allows us to make this admission before going that far.

"Reaching out is also reaching back. I let someone trust me even when I don't trust myself, yet. I allow someone to love and accept me, when I don't love myself or accept myself. Reaching out and reaching back is only a 'good deed' or a phone call away. Loneliness is only a footstep away, in the wrong direction. The journey begins in my mind with the decision to move towards you or away from you. In recovery, I no longer want to be alone yet I

have difficulty in being close. You hug me when I don't want hugs and I hug you when you don't want hugs.

"I have learned the new word called sharing. It destroys loneliness. God blesses us all. I don't want to be alone anymore. I've shed tears for you because I understand and you've shed tears for me for the same reason. How dare you break down my walls of defense by loving and caring for me? These walls are the foundation of my disease. These walls begin to crumble when you teach me to love and care for you and myself, the stranger within and beside me. We have so much in common but are afraid to admit it."

Fear tricks us into believing that there is safety and security in isolation. Fear tells us that if we avoid other people, we are saving ourselves from unforeseeable yet predictable injury and harm. The reality is that we choose loneliness because of our fear. We choose to be alone and then we feel dejected and rejected because we are alone. "Take away the drugs and we're lonely," stated one addict. We crave sameness and predictability. Our self-centered thinking tells us that we can not fit in and that even if we could, it would not be worth the effort. Fearful and isolated, we believed that using provided us with a means of changing how we felt. We fear the results that come from practicing honesty, connecting with, and sharing with others. Fear of rejection can easily extinguish the initial spark of desire to risk intimacy. We may believe that we are unique in the physical, mental, and spiritual deterioration that the disease brought to our lives. Shameful and fearful of exposing these aspects of our experience to others, we do not realize yet that they are characteristics of addiction, not us. The loneliness, isolation, and degradation of active addiction are abundant and readily available if we choose them. There's not a specific place or situation that insures that we won't feel lonely. We feel trapped in self-obsession, encased in armor,

surrounded by others, and alone in despair even in the midst of our family and friends. Many of us choose to suffer the familiar self-abuse and isolate rather than open ourselves up to others. Our disease uses the fear of rejection as well as acceptance from other people to keep us isolated. Trusting people was not a realistic option for many of us when we first got clean. Years of 'living the lie' left us with only one way of seeing life through disease-tinted lenses. Our spiritual condition far more than our physical location affects the feelings of loneliness.

One addict shared: "It didn't take long for loneliness to creep into my life after I came to NA. I had put down the dope and then I had to stay away from everybody from my past. I knew that this was the only way that I could ever get a life. It took some time to establish new relationships in the Fellowship and there was a lot of loneliness in between."

Loneliness sometimes begins with the subtle feeling of boredom and discomfort. Next, we focus on what is lacking in our lives, instead of on what we have. We then tell ourselves that we probably don't deserve the love of others because no one could love us anyway. Wallowing in the depths of our self-pity, we then find it easy to justify our escape through isolation and compulsive behaviors. In the span of a few short moments, we can find ourselves going from feeling a little bored into a full-blown self-destructive mindset. This is how insidious our disease can be! We must remain vigilant!

The Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous teach us how we can stop our diseased thinking and turn our situations around. We first recognize what we are doing and admit powerlessness over our diseased reactions to the situation. Next, we find hope that we can get better and surrender our self-centered thinking to the God of our understanding. If we need to

write down our thoughts, we do. Then we call someone or go to a meeting and talk about how we're feeling. We admit the exact nature of our wrongs. Usually, our behaviors harm us the most but we may harm others as well. After we honestly look at the scope and magnitude of our diseased thinking, we become willing to change at a much deeper level than we anticipated. With humility, we ask God for help. We try to repair the damage done to anyone that we may have harmed, including ourselves. We forgive anyone that we think harmed us.

Finally, we apply love to the situation. As recovering addicts in Narcotics Anonymous, we not only have more love today than when using, we have more love than most of the people we know. We need not expect rejection or fear injuring others as we practice the principles of forgiveness and making amends. We've gained the freedom to feel human again. We are 'a part of' because we can now right any wrongs that we make along the way. 'We' is truly one of the miracles of NA!

One addict shared: "Through staying clean and working the Steps, I have learned to reach out to deal with my loneliness when the need arises. The problem seems to be in the level of true intimacy I have with other people, even those that I consider to be the closest to me. When I am feeling pain or fear, it becomes easier because I am more aware of the need for relief and strength.

"Lies, acts of violence, emotional abuse, and physical neglect destroyed the security of my world when I was a small child. This left me to learn how to survive the best way that I could. I was once told that there was nothing wrong with me, I just thought there was. Through working the Fourth Step, I was able to examine and expose these destructive patterns of survival. By dealing with those patterns in the succeeding Steps, I found that I could change

and I could overcome difficult obstacles to my recovery."

In Narcotics Anonymous, we learn to expect that we will lose most of what was once familiar to us. After we use some of the suggestions introduced to us, we find that our hiding place is gone. We left our best friend behind - the one in the bags and the bottles. Soon we experience something that has always been there but seems new, loneliness. At first, we're so unaware that we don't even understand what emotions we are feeling. We are afraid of feeling anything. Everything both inside and outside of us seems confusing. At times, we think that this new way of life will kill us. Inside we're dying but pride, fear, and our disease prevents us from interacting with others. We're used to being alone whether around people or not. The only difference is that we had the drugs to cover it up in the past.

One addict's experience strength and hope: "For thirty years, I hurt others and myself and I got good at it. I went to extremes. By hurting others, I allowed others to hurt me. Why can't I forget the pain? My misery loves company. It's a game that we can't forget or stop. It's the game of 'I hurt' so I must strike out to hurt first. To kill my pain, I used drugs. I don't forget how much I was hurt and because I've been hurt, I know how to hurt. Since I hurt a lot, I don't care who I hurt.

"For thirty years, I didn't care who, what, or where I hurt. Self-will runs riot! My only friend was any drug that would alter my mood. After thirty years of having no real friends, I don't know how to be a friend. I feel caught in a trap, alone, hurt, doomed, and isolated. The small yet negative support group that I did have was dying from drugs.

"I'm scared. Fear is a hell of a motivator. I'm desperate and I have to do something. My ass is on fire. I came to the rooms of NA highly motivated. I am desperate. It took time for me to realize that many different things had to come into play.

"After coming to the rooms of NA for four years, a dozen relapses, and ass-whippings, I had to take suggestions because I have a desire to stop using and find a new way of life. Getting a sponsor, making meetings, accepting a power greater than I am, working the Steps, and listening are some of the things that I do today. Moreover, with the help of NA, I have learned to accept the problem. I surrender, have faith in a power greater than I am, and think the situation through. Then I can draw a line between what is right and what is wrong. I live through the situation and if it works, I can do it again! Within this process, I learned how to be a friend to myself, therefore, I can be a friend to somebody else."

Realizing that life is actually what we really want, we accept that the only way to achieve this is by learning to be a friend. We begin by being a friend to ourselves and not picking-up to hide our loneliness any longer. We find ourselves at meetings, instead of going to other places where we no longer belong. Sitting there, we identify ourselves as addicts and hope that a little of what these other people have just might rub off on us. Most of us lost sight of our need for people and believed that we were unable to communicate with others. Unable to accept ourselves, we found ourselves wondering why anyone else would want us around. Our disease does its best work in our heads and when we feel alone it can be difficult to get through it. We tell ourselves that nobody wants to hear anything that we have to say. We fear opening up to others because we think we are such a mess that if we talk about how we feel, others will certainly know it too. Rather than deal with the anticipated

rejection, we taught ourselves ways of keeping people at a distance. It all seemed to come so naturally to us. This disease says, "Anyone who is the least bit nice must have something wrong with them. They only are nice because they are supposed to be." Our pride says, "Stand on your own, you don't need anybody. You didn't come here to be somebody's friend. You're just here to get clean."

Dealing with people may be a new concept for us when we are new to recovery. How do we learn to do this? Certainly not alone, we tried that one. In Narcotics Anonymous, we have a chance to lose the desire to use and lose our old patterns of thinking as well. Loneliness is a state of mind. We go about the business of living. NA is not just about stopping our drug use. It is about caring, loving, and understanding. We all have the same problems. In our groups, we learn to open up and begin to understand other people. We learn to help, care for, and trust others. We can do this, even though we locked our problems deep inside because we thought that nobody cared.

One addict shared: "I drew on drugs to release my mind from my problems or to get the courage to say something to someone. I felt that I was the only person who didn't know how to deal with hurt, being alone, being sad, or happy. Not knowing how to deal with these feelings, I push anyone away who cares for me. I couldn't open up with people that I just couldn't trust. This is mainly because I didn't know how. Because of this, I was always by myself. I was alone and I was lonesome and scared.

"Through NA, I have learned to deal with my addiction and problems. I learned there are people with whom I can open up. People who really care about me! In return, I have grown to care for anyone who needs to talk to someone. I feel for them whatever

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their problem may be. Because of NA, there has been a great change in my life. I have friends, real friends. I'm not alone now, no matter what time of day or night. Through NA, I can say aloud that I'm scared, hurt, or lonely and that I feel for you. Without the use of drugs today, I love others as well as myself. Today I live life, one on one, one day at a time."

We look around us and notice other lonely people. We make a point of reaching out and helping them know we care about what happens with them. This pro-active role identifies us as someone who is approachable and friendly. Before long, people are calling us on the phone. They are actually happy when they see us. This approach and these results continue together.

CHAPTER TWELVE

GETTING OVER ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Getting over abuse and neglect in recovery used to be pushed aside as an outside issue. It is not playing doctor to talk about healing these important issues. We all have them to some degree. It is more properly caring and sharing our recovery. Abuse is all too often a misunderstood, denied and neglected topic in recovery. Some of us do not want to bring it up while others make it the focus of their lives. As addicts, we have all suffered abuse in one way or another. Any event, action or feeling that helped to chip away at our self-esteem, faith, or trust in others is abuse. Part of the disease of addiction is our lack of perspective and balance. When approaching this topic, we need to take special care in trying to find a middle ground. Some reactions to physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect may include incest, domestic violence and symptoms of trauma. These different and varied reactions develop to avoid the pain of abuse and are the secondary phase of the problem. As addicts in recovery, we want to be able to enter a phase of healing as soon as possible. We seek to do this before our disease begins to set up house and makes us believe these horrors are what we deserve. This process began when we were little kids and did not know it was different in other families.

The ability to deal effectively with abuse issues will come in time. Part of your recovery will deal with abuse. Although surrendering, believing in our sanity, and allowing God to care for us will give us time to realize our assets and liabilities, we need to take special care here. Many of us remind ourselves that God will not give us more than we can handle. An aspect of our personality that is not defective and does not need to change immediately is the one that is keeping us from the repetition of a painful experience. We may need to deal with our past pain before the

aspect ceases to have a function and becomes a defect. As we begin to feel and remember things that have happened to us, we often feel overwhelmed. Most times, we are not ready to do this right away so we do not need to push ourselves. Everything will come when we are ready to cope. We learn the tools to deal with these issues from other addicts who have been through similar experiences.

Sometimes, we may find these issues coming up for us and we continue to deny their value, therefore, the pain continues to eat us from the inside out. Often we have to hit a bottom in this before we can bring ourselves up to a point of admitting that we need to deal with this issue. We must continue to follow the program, no matter what.

One addict shared: "Abandonment reaches down to the depths of my soul. The pain it created tormented me for years. When I was being told that I was stupid, ugly, and not worth loving, I couldn't understand why they hugged me, kissed me, and told me to have sweet dreams. I was very confused.

"Then while the sexual abuse happened, I was too afraid to tell my parents because I didn't want to feel 'thrown away' again. So to me it was safer to stay in that familiar pain rather than risk my parents throwing me out like an old doll."

Too often, our fear of trusting others keeps us in denial. If we didn't learn to trust as children, we must learn to trust ourselves and others now. We need other people to do this. We do this the same way that we learn about any other subject - we open our minds. We allow ourselves to get curious. We collect information and ask questions of anyone who might have our answers. We set up a learning experience. We keep trying out new things until we find something that works for us.

Sometimes, our painful experiences are rooted in family problems. Problems occur in all families regardless of the culture, income level or social status. Many times, we have thought that if we could just separate ourselves from our families, we would be okay. We are still sick inside. Circumstances that we experienced in childhood have resurfaced in marriage and other adult relationships. We may find ourselves attracted to abusive partners simply because that is the role that we learned growing up. We will remain in the cycle of abuse after getting in recovery if we do not take action to change it.

The cycle of violence repeats itself until broken. The original violence can be in the form of physical, sexual, emotional, or mental abuse as well as a combination of these. The violent reactions come out primarily as power and control issues. Many addicts, whether using or clean, fall into this pattern. This behavior is familiar to them because they were controlled or abused in their past. This disease tells us that we need to find someone to take care of us so that we do not have to be responsible. When we do not take responsibility for ourselves, we give others power and control over us. We have the choice. We do not have to be the victim anymore. This is another form of dependency and we learn that it does not matter whether it is on drugs or on people. We need to grow up and become independent. We must teach people how to treat us appropriately. People will treat you the way that you allow them to treat you.

Unconsciously, we maintain our pain by seeking out destructive relationships and situations. Sometimes we can not see the abuse going on because we are so accustomed to it in our lives. Our walls of denial are so high because we are our own worst critics. We fear and distrust ourselves and we think that others would be even more critical of us than we are of ourselves. Our negative self-image makes us think we can not

change and that we are failures. If our parents, relatives or teachers were very critical of us, they reinforced some negative feelings in us towards ourselves. Because of our continuing cycle of pain in reaction to mental, physical and sexual abuse, we still suffer. These memories trigger common feelings and fears that are at the root of our disease: denial, anger, fear, guilt, shame, betrayal, low self-esteem, uniqueness and lack of acceptance.

One addict shared: "I was a victim of sexual abuse as a young child and learned to play the victim role to get what I wanted. As life went on, a lack of trust reminds me of the fact that I should not allow anyone to use or exploit me.

"The hopelessness that I feel because of being on the outside looking in is hard on my partner. How can I as a victim pass on my experience, strength and hope and show you that you can live through it and grow?

"Recognizing our denial is a step in the right direction. I see the reality of the issue and the emotions it brings up. I work through the pain and see the insanity that I exposed myself to because of the pain. I believe that there can be a healing process, that there is hope!"

One important thing that we come to realize in recovery is that no one can abuse us unless we choose to allow it. Once we become conscious of our own patterns and personalities, we recognize when we are creating a situation. We assert ourselves and act to end the situation before it starts. With each healthy choice and action that we make for ourselves, we get that much stronger and accepting. When we see that we can do this, our sense of self-worth grows. We become closer with God and we share

more with others. We realize the importance of the Twelve Steps. We continue on the pathway of recovery with confidence.

Our disease does not want us to examine things clearly and encourages us to hide in the safety of blame. When we open-up, share, begin to sort through what happened and begin to forgive and accept, we disable our disease and break the cycle of guilt and shame. Step Two, gaining a belief in a loving Higher Power, is very important here.

THREAD OF GUILT

To maintain our diet of accustomed pain, we may begin to abuse ourselves later in life. Our low self-esteem decreases to the point where we allow the abuse to continue because we feel unworthy of anything different. This is a sick form of validation or attention-seeking behavior. We came to believe that if we didn't punish ourselves or justify our punishments, that it might mean our parents punished us unjustly. Somehow, the child within would rather suffer the 'safe' pain of abuse than the 'great' fear of abandonment that the feeling of hatred or indifference from a parent would mean.

Another addict shared: "This is such a very tough emotional and painful issue for me. I am fortunate that I did not remember the sexual abuse until I was eight months into recovery. There are so many emotions. I have anger at my abusers and myself. I feel betrayed because the grown ups who were supposed to protect me did not believe or protect me. I have shame at being a victim. I experience guilt over allowing the abusers to abuse me. I feel dirty because I was a four year old 'whore.' I have low self-esteem because I feel like I am dirty and not good for any man. I even have a fear of facing and dealing with it in order to get past it and

get on with my recovery.

"Since then, I have had to face it. It is everywhere. How can I run from it? Do I have to face it now? What did I do to deserve this? These questions haunted me for months. I could run by using. Yes, I have to face it now. If I suppress my feelings, they will get me later and will probably only be more painful. I did nothing to deserve it. I was four years old when it started. As I grew older, I sexually abused myself. I can look back now with seventeen months clean and see how the child in me worked with my disease. I learned to use what I had between my legs to get the drugs and people I needed. I figured that if I were a 'whore', I'd be the best damned one around. That way I could tell the men who came back for more that they bored me. It gave me the power to use and abuse men. The joy I got from watching them beg me for sex was sick.

"This issue has now caused problems in my marriage. I was doing my 'wifely duty' to keep my husband happy despite how badly I felt afterwards. This self-sacrificing has to stop.

"I can't talk about this with my husband. I shared about it at a meeting where both men and women were present. I was afraid of their reactions but I was suffering more. Their reactions were so diverse and I discovered that I was not alone or unique. They told me that I would be okay; I would heal in my Higher Power's time. They told me that many of my fellow addicts are here for me, supporting and loving me. I can now go to the healing process.

"The healing process may very well be painful but I am open to it. I have no idea how it will actually work other than through prayer, sharing with fellow addicts whose lives this issue also affects, and

working the steps."

The thread of guilt that we carry because of abuse weaves through our lives so totally that we may be unable to trace its origins. While we rationalize our role in a situation to avoid guilt, reality allows us to know that we really were victims in instances of child abuse or molestation. Many of us addicts have abuse and neglect issues that affect our recovery in one way or another. We feel different. We feel unique. We feel no one will understand. We feel alone and lost. We also fear rejection. Fear and low self-esteem control us. Because of our inability to trust anyone or anything, we isolate ourselves. We feel that this is something about which people do not talk. We try to bury it as we always have in the past. The abuse issue still haunts us because we cannot 'will' it away or ignore the pain. Many addicts with abuse issues feel hopelessly lost. We feel that we are unable to own our feelings or ourselves. More importantly, we believe that we are unable to own our recovery. All we knew how to do was numb ourselves and medicate our feelings. Once in recovery, we can no longer do this. We are no longer able to deny the feelings that surface. If we are going to recover, a healing process must take place. If not, the cycle of violence will not be broken. We will continually make ourselves the victim. Our recovery will continue to suffer because of our inability to move forward.

REMEMBRANCE

Many of us are in our mid_thirties before we can remember abuse. Usually we blocked it out before then. Many of us feel shame and do not know why. We just feel that we are no good or feel like a bad person. Guilt is feeling bad about something we have done. Shame is feeling bad about who we are. Toxic shame is the feeling that we are bad and guilt is the only moral option open to us. Many addicts talk about feeling

different from others - not as good as, less than, inadequate and undeserving. Some of this is a part of our disease.

If you allow others to boss you around and control your life, they will. We must give up people pleasing and approval seeking. We must learn to speak up for what we want and need. We are not healthy in recovery if we are being a doormat. Assertiveness is a necessary skill.

We may look around at friends, mates, employers or sponsors and realize that they are all takers and we are running out of anything to give. While care-taking others, we are losing ourselves. So, we must use our power of choice and pick to be around people who treat us the way we want and deserve to be treated. We need to be careful not to stay in bad relationships hoping they will change. This is an illusion (like the denial of our disease). Realistically, we must accept things as they are now. To stay in bad situations is self-punishment. We deserve to receive respect and dignity from others.

As with every other aspect of our disease, sharing, caring and honesty are the keys to recovery. Abuse is often more upsetting than other areas, but when we approach it through the Steps and with spiritual principles, we can overcome it.

Sponsorship of an abused addict can be difficult if the sponsor did not live through abuse as well. We have to wait until the member is ready to get help and actually asks for help. Until we are open to help, we stand in fear of judgment and any attempts to help us may frighten us into our pattern of denial and flight.

It is important for the sponsor to help their sponsee by putting them in touch with someone who can relate and who has worked through this

issue using the Twelve Steps. Victims can not trust themselves, others or the process of recovery. Only patience, time, and understanding can allow a person to discover who they are in a safe place, come out of hiding, and begin to heal. We are not doctors and cannot employ any roles of authority beyond sharing our own personal experience.

Frequently others in our lives who do not have backgrounds of abuse have a hard time understanding our process. Partners of abused persons experience in their own way the feelings we have that result from past abuse. Allowing the past to dominate in the present occurs because we are unable to process it and put closure on the past. Until we do so, we will carry the past into every relationship and chance meeting. We will punish others for what they cannot know. It is our job to be happy, process this junk and get on with our lives free.

An addict's partner shared: "My feelings of helplessness and pain are overwhelmingly frustrating. I feel that no matter what I do or don't do, trust will not occur! The hurt and pain from her heart is that of uncontrollable emotions, confusion and anger!

"I want to know that my helplessness is real. Except for patience, love and most of all faith, what can I do? The willingness to understand or even try to understand is futile. Since I've not discussed this with others, the feelings that I experience change from love to hate to total confusion.

"Daily, I feel I should just leave her but then a second later, my love and faith is replenished and reorganized as fast as this thought occurred."

Often one of the partners feels ignored and that so much attention

revolves around the abused partner. It is essential in this healing process that we do not minimize or ignore our partner's value. Integrity is vital for ongoing communication, equality and balance. What we say needs to match up with what we do for us to be real persons. These principles apply in whatever type of relationship we are having: friendship, parenting or sponsorship. Couples already involved with these very sensitive and important issues, come to believe that together they can survive their dilemma and deepen and enrich their relationship with deeper commitment, respect and acceptance. The very nature of this process is often frightening and complicated. There is hope. We rely on the promise of 'together, we can - divided we die.' Trust and gender issues create problems that hinder the sharing of pain. Sincere confusion makes it hard on our partners. They want to do something but nothing seems to help. Partners have to come to terms with their own powerlessness. Abuse issues are but one limb on the tree of our pain. It is important for all addicts in recovery to remember that it is easy to sabotage our recovery by taking on the problems of another. We can not let worrying about what others think define what we think of ourselves. We must be free to share. Keeping our pain inside denies others the opportunity to learn who we are. We need to confirm, deny or explain our feelings.

Some of us have to deal with day-to-day reminders of our past. In order to live, many of us developed ways to deal with physical and sexual abuse as well as suppressing the feelings that we had behind the abuse. Some of us 'blink', having a temporary removal from the situation. This is when our eyes closed or went blank. We stopped moving our bodies and ceased to be part of what was happening. Many of us still experience a definite blink when trying to recall our pasts. We still know how a 'blink' feels. We can still do it if necessary. It is part of how we survived our pain, fear and helpless terror when we were small. Getting hurt badly

results in panic and depression. Panic is fleeting; depression is not being able to flee. When abused, we often had to leave our bodies rather than experience the situation. As we begin to deal with these issues in our lives, we begin to feel the feelings that we had avoided. This can be scary and seem overwhelming. It is very important for us to share our feelings with others and to maintain a close bond with the God of our understanding.

We need to find someone willing to walk us through these changes. We ask them if they will help us and get them to verbally agree. With the love and support of just one other person, the promise of 'never alone' becomes a reality for us. With the willingness to act, we can do anything. Intangible forms of abuse, those not physical in nature, are harder for many of us to accept and recognize. Mental abuse is visible only to someone open to the possibility and discerning enough to be able to separate abuse from normal interactions. Mental or emotional abuse is as damaging as any other form of abuse. It may in ways be harder to detect or deal with because of its apparently immaterial nature. Whether the abuse was one continuous session or small attacks, the effects left in a person by mental abuse are often very visible. Just as damaging is neglect and lack of any attention at all. Some have become excessively passive or aggressive to cope with those feelings. Individuals may be shielding themselves from closer interaction that would reveal their pain.

Our disease tries to separate us from the fellowship any way it can. Many of us have experienced physical or sexual abuse that we feel will kill us if we look at the pain it has caused us in our lives. We feel isolated and alone. Our disease tells us that we are different and that others do not know what it was like for us. We feel ashamed and dirty. We are afraid to tell others because we fear their judgment. It is important to remember that we are not alone, that others have similar

experiences. When we surrender and share with other addicts, our pain begins to lessen. If the addicts we chose to share with are unable to relate to our specific pain, they help us find other addicts who can. We gain strength and hope, when we realize that we are not alone and we can walk through the 'pain and fear' and live.

For many of us, our first means of escape was leaving our bodies in order to cope with the pain in our lives. This built in defense mechanism was necessary when we were experiencing abuse. As we continue to grow in our recovery, we begin to feel a sense of safety. We have escaped. With time, we are able to remain in touch with ourselves.

HEALING

The longer we stay clean, and continue to work on our recovery, the easier it is for us to recognize when we are reacting to our past experiences and not to our present situations. We may set unrealistic goals or create crises to protect us from unwanted attention. We frequently avoid giving ourselves a chance. First, we expect criticism and then we demand it. It is a sick form of attention-seeking behavior. We claim to fear judgment, shame, and guilt and yet we go out of our way to punish ourselves. Judgment of others is a key. We may accept abuse as our due. Abuse begets abuse.

Most of us deny that the abuse took place. In our First Step experience, we find ourselves unable to deal with portions of our early lives. For many of us, our adult lives were so awful that we could easily forget events and situations that happened when we were small. Sometimes it may have seemed like a bad dream. Since it hurt to remember, we found it easier to forget. We continue to grow in our recovery. We become productive and responsible. It is important to remember that we should

not be ashamed of our abuse or abusers because we are not at fault. Our responsibility is to seek recovery. Although the abuser may have been a family member or a loved one, it is imperative that we put our embarrassment aside and share our experience with others. By sharing our secrets, our pain is less and others may take hope from our courage. We are free to hold on to our pain as long as we can stand it. Sharing breaks the hold that our painful secrets have had over us. Once this power is broken, it has no way to renew its grip on us.

Many of us feel that childhood experiences can not hurt us today. We are so stuck in our background that we forget we can snap out of it and go on with life. This is actually normal for most adults whether addicted or not. Our desire for recovery urges us to include a realistic look into our past, especially our impressionable formative years. What took place back then left lasting images of the world and our relation to things in that world. Without further consideration, these images will remain the same and that can really trip us up when we begin to recover. Often something we see or hear will trigger our memory and we feel our old pain again. Frequently, we do not understand why we react so strongly to certain things and we certainly do not associate it with the past. The longer we stay clean and continue to work on our recovery, the easier it is for us to recognize the times that we are reacting to our past experiences and not to our present situations.

For those who did not receive nurturing or who suffered physical abuse, hugging everyone in the room can be a terrifying experience. In a situation where everyone seems comfortable touching each other and saying, "I love you," it is very easy for an addict with limited parental love to feel excluded. The disease tells us, "These people obviously don't understand me." Feelings of being unworthy and loneliness need to be dealt with but first, they must be recognized. We can only get help with

things that we are in denial about when we shown what those things are. It is important that groups create an atmosphere of recovery. It is important that we talk about feelings and thoughts so that everyone can feel included. Victims of abuse rarely understand that others have the same feelings and problems although the origin of those feelings and problems are different. The feelings and problems are the same and are subject to the solutions that the principles offer us.

We must not neglect or abuse each other in the Fellowship. Also, we must daily live the principles of love and acceptance. Many of those who suffered from neglect will not even recognize love for a long time, much less respond to it. It will take even longer for them to respond with love. We must let them into our daily lives. We must allow them to watch us and learn that the love and support will not go away. We must allow them the experience of knowing there is someone ‘there’ for them, no matter what. Victims of abuse rarely recognize safety and gentleness, and may confuse normal social interaction with verbal abuse. Only time will teach them to recognize the safety and love of the Fellowship, and only time and personal experiences will teach them other skills. Because of our distorted thinking, what we think is ‘socially acceptable’ can be quite destructive to everyone involved. We need to teach each other new ideas of society and belonging to that society. We can not expect someone to love unconditionally if they do not even know what love is. Accepting casual help from someone may create excessive feelings of obligation or expectation that make simple interactions seem hurtful or threatening. Those of us who do not have these problems may forget the benefits that we enjoy from experiencing the good treatment of others. Those who are more accustomed to pain and harsh treatment will experience confusion when they are treated kindly.

We discover that many of the bad dreams really happened and continue

to hurt us. We may not be able to change what happened, but we can change what it means to us. We can go back as adults and mentally revisit the events with our adult abilities to strengthen us. We may even find different interpretations for what happened. The guilt and suppressed anger devastate us in the present.

Most of us are furious with ourselves. We feel that if we were good people, only good things would have happened to us. We may even feel that it was somehow our fault. We might think that we could have stopped what was happening if we had only done something differently. Consequently, we feel like we must have done something to deserve the abuse. Our little spirits tried to make some sense of the event no matter how unfair or cruel it was.

Our anger has been focused on our attacker or abuser. How could they do this to us for no good reason? What gave them the right to do this? Boys and girls are both victims of these types of abuses on an equal basis but we generally identify only with the members of our sex. We forget that pain is pain.

We spent years developing a memory base to explain and live with what happened. Whenever we attempted to venture beyond the parameters of our rationalization, we fall into despair and depression. We may not even experience these things on our surface, especially if the events happened in our early childhood. It has been with us a long, long time. We may still ask, "Why did it happen to us?" Thinking that it will never go away generates depression. This disease will not allow us to have any hope of dealing with the event in a satisfactory manner. We may even feel that there is no answer and no possibility of help. Getting real about our hopelessness may just give us hope. We may discover that it is impossible to feel so hopeless once we are dealing with issues out in the

open or at least with the special people in our lives.

VICTIMS

If we work our way through to acceptance, we may come to realize that these events and situations really took place in the past. We realize that they have not happened to us against our will for some time now. If we find that these things are still happening, we can stop them by giving ourselves permission to live happy lives. We focus on the worst of the events or happenings and admit that they happened. What happened was not our fault. We were victims of a situation far beyond our control. Having worked through some of our feelings with a degree of relief may encourage us to go all the way. We find a place to sit quietly and allow ourselves to relive the incident as vividly and clearly as possible. We give ourselves permission to experience the anger and indignation that we may have suppressed for a long time. We found that we had to work through our anger no matter how long it took. Eventually we could even forgive those who abused us. We understand that they did the best they could with what they had to work with to deal with their pain and confusion. They may have been victims of abuse themselves.

We confront the issues and write down or think through clearly what we would say to the individual who hurt us if we could. We must state clearly our position as individuals as well as what our feelings and reactions are. Before we are done here, there are other things we need to do to complete the process of healing. We have to forgive our abuser as well as ourselves. Forgiveness does not mean that we like what happened. It only means that we are willing to let it subside into the past now that we have done all we can. This frees us to go on with our lives. Many of us have fallen into the victim role. We believe that we are helpless and that everyone hurts us. Another thing we should do is to

make a commitment to ourselves that we will not be a victim again. When we begin to work the Twelve Steps, we come to believe that we are no longer victims. This discovery includes our right not to victimize others, as we were ourselves victimized. Everything that we have experienced in our lives brought us to where we are today. There are no victims in recovery - only volunteers.

When we work a solid program of recovery, it is impossible for us to remain victims. Part of the healing process is learning to take responsibility for our part of things that happened and accepting the actions of those who hurt us. When we begin to use our skills of empathy and understanding, we let God help us to initiate the forgiveness of those we formerly blamed. We realize they are as sick as we are. This is when we start to heal. We must not continue to blame ourselves for things that we did not do. Often we need to talk to our sponsor or other addicts with similar experiences to help us sort out who is responsible for what. In some cases, an inventory may be necessary and requires honesty with one's self to share with others.

CHILD ABUSE _ A RECOVERING ADDICT'S PERSPECTIVE

Healing in this area is a long process. It may take years. Some seek many kinds of therapy to release the energy of the pent-up anger, rage, and hurt to get back in touch with that crushed child's spirit. Some of us use physical exercise or meditation. The important thing to remember is to hang in there. It will get better. Keep working your program, doing all of the maintenance things that have always worked for you in recovery and add what helps. Some extras that we have found helpful are more contact with our sponsor or friends in recovery, more meetings, more

writing, extra prayer, meditation and quiet time. We have faith that we are healing and we can be good to ourselves. We know that we will come out on the other side a happier, stronger, healthier person.

We try to be the best person that we can be. We stop feeding into self-pity, self-centeredness, selfishness and depression. We reach out to others and show concern for their well-being. We give as well as take. We make the effort to be a friend and to have friends. We weed out the things that make us feel bad about ourselves just as we would weed a flower garden. We leave or add whatever makes us feel good. For example, if participating in gossip or lying leaves us feeling guilty, we stop doing it. It may take a while to figure out what we are feeling and what is causing it. As we become aware, we pull out the weeds. As we do something nice for another without seeking recognition, we nourish the good feeling in our hearts. We allow ourselves to receive and to feel worthy.

Narcotics Anonymous helps give us the courage to open up to others and share honestly. All of us surrender in order to start the recovery process. Healing from abuse begins the same way. When we realize that the principle of surrender and the feeling of vulnerability that results are the same regardless of the focus of the surrender, we find it easier to do. We can become intimate. Sometimes, our negative self-image reflects our parents, relatives or teachers being very critical with us when we were young. Many of us carry a hopeless feeling of inadequacy into our adult lives. When we apply the principles of trust and faith, we learn how to overcome this.

In recovery, we begin to accept and love ourselves for who we are. When we love ourselves enough to stop stuffing our feelings, the memories and the pain will surface. This happens automatically as our

recovery progresses. We have suppressed these feelings for so long with our drug addiction and relationship fixations. We ducked and dodged our pain for a long time. At some point, we must face the truth. We feel overwhelming sadness for we remember what hurt, rejection and betrayal felt like. After we identify with others, we begin to feel a part of and our shame starts to subside. Many people have been through this. With caring and sharing, we begin to heal. We cry for the child who never had a chance to live, love, and laugh. We mourn the person that we could have been. Molestation ends childhood. We grieve for the loss of self and for the childhood that never was. We often feel extreme anger at those who have hurt us. Many times, it is our parents or other family members with whom we are angry. It is very important that we do not push our anger back down inside us. Many of us in recovery are able to have loving relationships with those who have hurt us in the past. We have put a lot of ourselves into rebuilding these relationships. We do not want to act out of anger and destroy everything that we have worked so hard to build. Periodically, we remind ourselves that this happened a long time ago. Now and again, we bring ourselves back into the present and remember what our relationships are like today.

We stay focused on ourselves and we remember that with the loving help of God, our anger will turn into forgiveness. It is not our fault that we have this disease. None of us intended to lose control. We must let go of this self-blame. Personal growth comes through self-forgiveness. We do need to accept our responsibility for our recovery - and that is to work the Steps, think positive, heal our wounds, develop faith and trust in a power greater than ourselves. Some of the healing comes through working through our feelings - feeling the feelings and letting them go. We must work through the hurt underneath all of the shame. How badly that hurt when we were told we were bad and worthless, etc. We will gradually lose that shame and hold our head up and look others in the

eye and be proud of who we are.

Healing this deep psychological wound is painful and difficult at best. We must continue to make meetings, call our sponsor and surround ourselves with recovering addicts. The risk of relapse can increase during this very emotional period. It is very important for us to seek out someone who has experienced grieving. In recovery, we begin to accept and love ourselves for who we are. We have held on to our pain for years. At some point, we have to face the truth.

The only way to heal from any kind of abuse is to grieve the loss and allow ourselves to remember what happened to us. When we are ready, our Higher Power lovingly guides us through. We pray to have the courage to face the fear and we welcome the pain for we know that our Higher Power is healing our fractured personality. We accept the memories and we begin the process of recovery from the pain. As each memory surfaces, it brings with it a flood of emotions. During these times, we allow ourselves the privilege to feel. We no longer have to push our feelings away. We feel the shame and the guilt, the anger and the hatred.

In order to begin the self-healing process, we need to replace the negative thoughts and tapes with positive thoughts and action as we change who we are and begin to feel better about ourselves. Some of this is shame that has come from people who have abused us. They have told us we are bad, worthless or ugly. They have blamed us for many things that are not our fault. We have felt guilty and blamed ourselves for things that are not our fault. We have used this guilt to feel bad and beat up on ourselves. Our disease has used this to help us to feel bad so we will use drugs.

Healing through grief is very helpful to the recovering addict who has survived abuse. Before the healing process began, we could only occasionally glimpse our real personalities in the mixture of our lives. The inner child peeps out now and again and retreats when confronted once more by our anxiety and our fear. The abuse survivor in recovery is usually very confused, lost, and empty. A sensation of blankness can pervade our existence much of the time. Those who experienced severe abuse may also suffer from emotional disorders. Panic attacks, multiple personality disorders and post-traumatic stress disorders are quite common problems for some of us.

Healing through grief takes time. The length of time differs from person to person. We must remember that there is no 'right or wrong' way to grieve pain. We accept whatever comes our way. Healing allows us to be ourselves. We feel whole for the first time. The person God intended us to be comes forth and we take our place in the world. However, recovery does not stop here. We continue with the program. We can not afford to fall into the delusion that this healing means that we heal from our disease. Our disease is still with us. We continue with our Step work. We are grateful to our Higher Power for freeing us and enabling us to give the program our undivided attention. Against the backdrop of our very real pain, it is hard to get positive and jump into positive emotions. Still, if we are to be happy, we need to begin to practice feeling good. If we have trouble with this, we can ask some of our friends to help us with this. Gratitude, tolerance, patience, thoughtfulness, and respect for others will help us develop the emotional muscles we need to open up our lives to everyday reality.

When we got clean, many of us were so full of guilt, shame and remorse that it was hard to find a positive thought about ourselves. We suffered with a low self-esteem and were plagued with negative thinking. Many

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of us have come from abusive child rearing. Many of us allowed abuse from others and experience guilt and shame over the behaviors that we practiced during active addiction. Doing a Fourth or Fifth Step relieves much of this guilt and shame.

This is not an outside issue! The difficulty is that we must discuss it in general terms so that all of our members can understand. Each of us has experienced abuse and neglect and must realize that we are human beings with the fatal disease of addiction. This disease has given us a primary excuse for using, to cover the pain of living. We need, as a group, to be able to talk freely about these things and openly recover in Narcotics Anonymous. What comes after the recognition of the problem is what's important. When the past is finally in the past, we can begin to enjoy the present and look forward to the future.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

BITTER ENDS - NEW BEGINNINGS

No work on how to live the NA way of life would be complete without something about how many of us reach the end of our journey in active addiction. In our history, we discover that the need for a fellowship of people, who could relate to each other in terms of addiction, first became known when addicts in jail were exposed to Alcoholics Anonymous. Being unable to understand or relate to the problems of these individuals in terms of addiction, the members of that Fellowship saw the need and encouraged other addicts to attend these meetings. Thus, NA first took root inside the walls of a prison hospital in Lexington Kentucky. Today, an estimated two-thirds of the prison population in America are serving time for drug related crimes. There is a large number of addicts in this population - some of whom will seek recovery if it is available.

DEATH ROW BARBER

"I lived under the 'System' for over twenty-five years of my life. From the time I was eighteen until the age of forty-three I was either in jail, prison, on parole or probation. Much of the time I was 'on the run. I never thought there would be any hope for a normal life.

"The first time I went to prison I was only eighteen. While I was there, I went to school to become a barber. That was a good career move for a 'convict.' It gave me a way to make spending money that I needed and it kept me from having to do any 'real work' like mowing grass or working in the fields. It also gave me the chance to get to know all the 'key players' inside the prison.

"Each time I went to prison after that the prison officials would see that I

held a barber's license and would put me to work in the prison Barbershop. This happened many times and I always took it for granted.

"The last time I was sent to prison something kind of different happened. All inmates going into the prison system in my state must go through a period of diagnostics and classification. This can take a period of eight to twelve weeks. While you are at the central intake facility, you are kept in lock down in an eight by ten cell for twenty-three hours a day.

"In order to get out of lock down, I 'volunteered' to be placed on a work detail. Once the prison officials looked at my record and saw that I was a master barber, they came up with a job for me. The Diagnostic Center is the state's highest security prison. It is also where Death Row is located. My job was to be the barber for inmates on Death Row.

"Wanting to 'escape' lock down twenty-three hours a day, I agreed to take the job. I was one of only a handful of people who were ever allowed to come in physical contact with those inmates. Guards in G-House (death row) are rotated every six months to keep them from becoming personally involved with any of the inmates. Guards have a minimum amount of physical contact with them. This is simply for security reasons.

"Each day I would go through the procedures of clearing a maze of five different steel doors, barred gates, and metal detectors on my way to 'work.' Once inside I was locked in a very small 'shop' where the men would be brought out one at a time and locked inside the shop with me until I was finished giving them a haircut. There was not a guard in the room. I was left alone with them for as long as it took.

"This gave me a very unique opportunity. These guys were hungry for

any kind of contact with anyone outside the cell-house and many just wanted to talk. Some had been there waiting to die in the state's electric chair for over twenty years. Some were famous outlaws, others I had never heard of. Some would die there, others would have their sentences reduced to life in prison through the process of appeals. Either way they all knew that life as they had once known it was over.

"I remained there for five months. Each day I would go to work. Besides giving haircuts like any good barber, my job was to listen to my 'customers.' As I listened, one common theme seemed to come up repeatedly. Almost without exception, they told me about how they got loaded before they committed the crimes that ended them up in this place. Many of the stories started out exactly like so many of my own experiences of getting high, or just living the lifestyle. I heard stories of jealous rages, of anger and resentment, of greed and lust not so unlike those I hear in meetings and in 5th Steps. The only difference came when these people took acting out on these feelings to the next level. Most say they would have never been able to have gone to that level without being loaded. Not all, but most.

"This experience was a real wake-up call for me. I would like to think that I am not the kind of person who could ever do the things that would ever land me in a place like that, waiting to die for an act I had committed against another person. Yet, as I listened to these men, most of them never expected it to ever happen to them either. But for the Grace of God . . . I honestly think that this experience was a wake-up call from God for me.

"I had been in N.A. seven years before and had managed to stay clean for five years that time. Maybe it was time for me to think about getting clean again. I did two years in prison that time without using. On my

first day 'free,' I got loaded. I stayed loaded for a couple of months. I knew that if I kept going that I would end back up in prison. I went to stay with an uncle and aunt who had stopped using four months before when their son had died from a snake bite. He raised rattlesnakes for the venom and was loaded one day while handling one. It bit him and he died at the hospital.

"My uncle was going to help me detox and help me get on my feet again. The first night I got real sick so he sent his wife to get me something. Before that night was over we were all loaded and the next day my uncle died from a stroke. I blamed myself for his death and went into an ever deeper depression. I rented a motel room and tried to kill myself with drugs for about two weeks. I would use until I passed out, wake up and do it again. I did not eat. I just felt hopeless.

"A friend showed up one day who knew I had once been in N.A. She asked me if I thought that it might help to go back. I did not think so but I knew it was just a matter of time until my parole officer found me and sent me back to prison. I knew one thing for sure, I did not want to have to detox in the county jail. So, I agreed to let my friend take me to a detox center. There, after a week or so, my counselor tried to contact my parole officer. We were told that he was going to be out of town for a few weeks. I knew that if I was released I would most likely just end up loaded again so I asked to be placed into the twenty-one day program. This was when I attended my first N.A. meeting after about eight years. It felt strange at first but soon I had the answers I needed. I knew that this was where my Higher Power had been leading me.

"That was almost four years ago (in 2001). Since that time, God has continued to put me in the places and around the people I need in my life in order to grow spiritually. A couple of weeks ago almost eight years of

pending sentences against me were dropped. Today for the first time in my entire adult life, I am a 'free' man in every sense of the word. I have had to face many fears and make untold changes in my life since I came back to N.A. As a result, today I can give back to others the freedom I have found. I have a new life and just for today, I never have to be imprisoned by active addiction again. Thank you all!"

Within the confines of these facilities we soon discovered we were at last united with those like ourselves. This is not to say that all addicts end up in jails or institutions, or that all people in jails and institutions are addicts. However, a common theme among many of us once we reach the meetings of NA, is that many of us have experienced in some capacity, the powerlessness of society intervening into our lives and into our addiction. Many of us found that once we were "in the system" there were many others who were much like ourselves. They too felt alone and rejected. They too sought relief through self-medication to the point of obsession. They too had done many of the same things to survive that we had done.

In many cases these facilities became our classrooms. We learned how others had experienced the same situations we often had to confront and obtained the knowledge of how they survived. We seldom questioned the fact that the methods described to us by our new peers and mentors were most often the same methods that had put them there alongside us. They, like us, were under a system that we neither understood nor respected. We simply felt that for once in our lives, there were those who understood our plight and were able to offer explanations, if not answers. At last we belonged. In some cases we even felt justified in all our fear and deception. We had learned a new way to live and dishonesty had no place in it.

Throughout our literature we read of how many of us ended up in jail or sought help through medicine, religion and psychiatry. Our Basic Text tells us how our ends are always the same: jails, institutions and death. In this chapter we will look at how so many of us, while on this hopeless journey, found hope within the principles, meetings and the fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.

Many of us may be living through the wreckage of our past when we first come to N.A. Some may be incarcerated, or under some type of court ordered supervision such as probation or parole. Others may be in hospitals or treatment centers of some type. For others the death of a friend or loved_one who never found help might be the motivation to find a better way to live.

“When he had enough,” a clean addict recalls, "I never went to jail while I was using. The only institution that I had been exposed to was when I once picked my brother up from one. You might say I was lucky enough to have had a friend who died from using. I remember at his wake, his sister explaining that his using was what killed him. I saw that I was going down the same path as my friend but at the time, I just did not seem to care.

“Today, it is a great feeling to be alive. My friend died so I didn't have to. I'm grateful for not going to jail. When I got clean, it was for me. I know that before I got clean, I was ready for death. I just did not know what to do. I still have to be reminded that jails, institutions and death are still out there - if I ever care to go back."

For many of us incarceration, or having our lives monitored or controlled by some agency, became our normal way of life. Jail has played a major role in the lives of many of our members. In one way or

another, our relationship with the 'system' has always been one of reality. We soon learn that the NA way of life can give us back our freedom. Freedom not only from drugs but also from the power held over us by our disease. We learn that courts and government agencies are only a reflection of the powerlessness and unmanageability of our lives due to this disease. Many times these agencies may have even saved our lives by 'slowing us down' until we could find a new way to live inside the rooms of N.A.

Consider the following, "By the grace of God, I am not there. Three DUI's over a one-month period did not wake me up. So, ten years later, with 20 felonies pending and headed for prison I decided to get clean. I had been trying to get clean but did not know how. I tried religion and psychiatry. I tried changing boyfriends and willpower but nothing worked.

"Then I found NA. I was at a very low point in my life. I surrendered. What I thought I would do was go to a mental institution for the rest of my life to avoid prison. I could not function in society. I could not hold a job. I could not take care of myself. I was on a real self-destructive road to nowhere.

"The place where I was had no NA so I switched psychiatrists to one that was 30 miles away. He sent me to treatment with a bunch of AA'ers a hundred miles away. They sent me to Atlanta to a halfway house (for long-term treatment). I had to convince the judge that addiction was a disease and sell him the recovery thing. I begged for probation and was on probation for the first five years of my recovery.

"I took the message into a lot of hospitals and jails (H&I work). It

helped me with gratitude because 'but for the grace of God,' I would be there. Then I worked starting a treatment program inside a county jail.

"When I got clean, I was almost dead. I weighed 82 pounds and was suicidal toward the end of my addiction. I have been through hell. Death would have been a welcome relief. Recovery has given me a new life. Today, I have something to give. I found a new understanding of God and a new purpose in life. I have found meaning in spiritual principles. I feel whole on the inside. I am happy today. Just for today, I live in recovery - I am free."

We have written this chapter in order to share our experience, strength, and hope with others who find themselves living out the consequences of their active addiction while trying to practice the spiritual principles of N.A. As we learn to live these principles, we strive to become acceptable, responsible and productive members of the N.A. Society. In time, we can learn to seek the direction of a Higher Power through working the 12 Steps of N.A. As a result, in many of our lives, it becomes unnecessary for society to place or keep these restrictions on us. For many of us N.A. gave us our first true glimpse of freedom.

Another member adds, "The worst jail I have ever been in is the one I create in my own mind. During the readings at the workshop today, I dozed off. I do not necessarily recall all of the early memories of my recovery, but I actually seemed to experience the feelings of that time. The sweet feelings that I felt after four or five months of detoxing, jonesing, and panic attacks. When I had just started to experience something very new and different - a passion for life.

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"I laughed again for the first time in years. I felt love and gratitude. I was thankful for those in the Fellowship who gave to me, and they gave plenty. I felt truly happy for the first time in my life.

"Often in recovery, I lock myself back in my 'jail.' What's so screwed up is that today I know better. The disease is cunning. I try often to force my will onto life's problems and situations. I often obsess on what is lacking in my life. I worry over how I need more and what I can do to obtain more. Soon, I find that I have imprisoned myself in worry and fear. Eventually this can lead to total a regression into my old thinking and behavior, unless I can find a way to surrender my self-centeredness.

"To live and enjoy life on life's terms is what NA teaches me. My disease wants me dead, but it will settle for my self-imposed incarceration. From there, I can still see the green fields of recovery but only through a barred hole. I laugh because it is insane. Especially since the key to unlock my 'prison' is as simple as living the steps of NA.

"I believe that the 11th Step is the one that I work the least. I know that if I don't listen, I won't be able to hear God, in His way, tell me that I am okay. Prayer and Meditation is a daily awakening to the gifts in life for me. They are the ability to breath and walk, when I should be dead. They are the gift of laughter when all my mouth and lungs did was ingest chemicals. They give me friendship and love based on friendship and love rather than the misery that loves company.

"My experience proves that the disease is still here with me, it is in me, I don't have to be vigilant to stay clean, but I must be vigilant

if I want to experience serenity and freedom. It helps when I work all the steps, including Step Eleven and Step Twelve."

Without a doubt, the one concept that causes most addicts problems early in our recovery is that of becoming rigorously honest. Who among us ever ended up in jail, prison or probation by practicing rigorous honesty? For most of us in active addiction, the word honesty was very much in our minds equal to the words 'self-destruction.' We believed that if we ever told the truth, we would be sure to suffer. Our lives were such that almost everything we did had to be kept a secret from someone and especially kept from anyone in authority. We stole, dealt drugs and cheated even our closest friends. We did whatever we had to do in order to survive. Deception was a way of life, an important part of our survival. It was our primary defense in what we viewed as a world full of deception. Without it, we could see no hope to survive at all.

We were people living in a society where we felt we would never belong. The power of labeling is great. We were identified and dealt with in terms of our active addiction. We knew that somehow we were different from the neighbors next door who would never speak to us as we passed them on the street or peeped at us through closed curtains. We lived in fear that everyone around us was out to get us in some way and the guilt of our method of survival drove us further away from others and deeper into isolation. The principle of anonymity in N.A. helps us escape these labels. We find that no matter what we have done in the past we are welcome inside the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous. We belong.

An addict shares: "It seems as though some feel that jails or institutions are a requirement or a great boost on the road to recovery. Some seem to use them as a boogey-man that can scare

them straight. I went to jail but it was not the 'end of my road.' The six confinements in a mental institution did not get me there either.

"It was only in the privilege of talking to and sharing with other addicts that I got to the end of the road. I finally realized that I simply could not function, even in NA, without learning something different."

Before coming to NA, we could not make the connection between the drugs and lifestyle and how those things created the vicious cycle of pain and rejection we lived in. We could see no problem with living next door to a drug dealer and could not understand why others around us should be concerned with how we lived. Whether we had to prostitute or write bad checks, why should that concern someone in another part of town or an entirely different part of the world for that matter? It was our own business, and besides, society forced us into living in the lies - or so we believed.

Our fight to hold on to or to regain control of our lives led us to reject many of the values that society must maintain in order to function. Soon one door after another was closed to us - our friends, families and then even strangers started to reject us because of the pain that they feared we would bring to them. Soon, we found ourselves outcasts to some degree or another either in reality or imagined. In either case, for us this was life. We viewed rules of any kind simply as an obstacle to our own survival. Laws were only society's way to keep us down, to put us in our place. A way to keep us separated from the rest of the world. Our creed became laws were made to be broken - and break them we did. The place society had for us soon became jails and institutions, and for a few viewed as hopeless, death was deemed justifiable.

Our bottoms came at different stages. For some of us, our first brush with the law was enough. For others, it took years of prison, parole and probation. For some it took the death of a close friend or perhaps a relative. We were eventually moved to the understanding that the getting, using, and finding ways and means to get more, might well be connected to the fear and depression of being discovered for who and what we were. Through our obsession and compulsion to use we were in fact in the grips of what was described in meetings as the "disease of addiction." Maybe - just maybe - we were addicts.

A member shares: "I have been in treatment. I was lost, scared and confused. I did not know where my life was going so I went to treatment to save my job. I had gone to NA meetings in the past but I did not believe that I was an addict. In the treatment program I was in, they told me some cool things, but I never grasped the true meaning of addiction.

"I soon found myself in NA trying to stay clean. Today, I understand that treatment and recovery are two separate things. The treatment center I was in did not seem to understand the difference between NA and other 12 Step fellowships. The doctors stuck me in NA and other fellowships meetings. I found out through NA that I needed to know the difference.

"Now I have begun reaching out within NA in order to live. The people in NA have been showing me what it is like to make and keep a commitment. I have always failed at that, you know, saying things like, 'I'll never do that again.'

"At times I have been scared to open up and let people know when I feel scared or shaken. Then I go to a meeting and hear someone

who is going through the same problem. I am grateful for life today. Well, most days. At times my disease still keeps me from doing things that I really want to do. Young and new to recovery, today I'm simply trying to learn about how to live life."

Some of us had already resigned ourselves to the idea of being addicts years before we sought help. We used our disease as an excuse to continue in the self-destructive behavior with which we had become so familiar. Sure, we were addicts. It made for a strong argument in court when we found ourselves facing the consequences of our actions. We would quickly tell anyone in authority that we were addicts so we could get special treatment. The one person to whom we could not admit the true nature of our disease, was ourselves.

Others found the image of being an addict so repulsive that we were unable to imagine the term ever applying to us. An addict was a weak, dirty, disgusting excuse for a human being, someone we would never want to be. We needed to re-think the idea of what an addict was, a person with a treatable illness.

We may have rationalized that we were simply victims of life. We were born into bad luck and our only enjoyment was to be able to party away our problems. We weren't 'addicted' - we just enjoyed getting high. Besides, in our experience, that is what everyone did. Like them, we deserved to get high. That did not make us addicts and as soon as things got better, we would have to use so much. Who could blame us, considering all we had gone through?

While not funny in the humorous sense, it remains a curious fact that almost all of us fail to connect our pain and failure with our using. We think that we are just going through rough times. The problem stems

from the fact that we can rationalize our using even after abundant evidence of our addiction. We can lose our money, friends, spouses, children, dogs, jobs and our self-esteem and still hold on to the idea that addiction is not the issue.

Many of us have managed, with the help of other NA members and a God of our understanding, to stop the insanity of repeating the patterns of our old behavior. For once we have a choice. No longer do we have to continue with the obsessive, compulsive behavior of addiction.

Inspiring Story of Carrying the Message behind Prison Bars

I knew a woman named Leanne, she was larger than life and full of life. Enjoying her recovery. I lost touch with her for a years. The next thing I know, she and I found each other again. Coming home to NA from a relapse, she cried etc. and picked up another white tag. We lost touch again a few months latter. I got a letter from her she had sent a few letters trying to get my address correct.

Her parole was violated from the relapse back to addiction. We wrote back and forth for a few months and after finding out the procedure needed to get NA books into a Maximum Security State Prison, I sent her a Basic Text, It Works, and a Just For Today. She began to find her recovery once again. There was an AA meeting in the prison chapel run by the Chaplain. To my knowledge, there is no H and I allowed within the walls of this facility and Leanne went to the AA meeting asking for an NA meeting repeatedly.

She thought the Chaplain was hoping she would go away and forgets about NA but she did not and managed to get a meeting once a week in the Chapel. The meeting was removed from the Chapel. The prison

administration said it was just a scheduling problem but latter Leanne shared that she always thought it was to see if the girls in the group would stick together. They did.

They began a meeting in the housing unit and requested more books from me, the only contact to NA they had on the outside. There were fifteen woman in the group and at \$30.08 per girl for the needed literature would come out to \$450.00. Where was I going to get that kind of money? As I already had a procedure I used to get Leanne's books in to the prison, I set off to raise the needed funds. I began asking people to sponsor a woman in prison by buying or getting others to commit to buy three books per inmate. What was important here was to carry the message into the prison. The miracle was that just an NA member and his home group without having to go through the H and I committee, could carry the message so successfully inside the walls. Today the group has grown to four small meetings in different "housing units" and a once a week meeting with nearly 60 addicts in attendance.

We put together the form for what soft cover NA items we want to send to the prison, we mail it with the funds to the Regional Service Office which is a licensed retailer for our World Service Office and as such are allowed to directly mail books to inmates in prisons in this state. By ordering the books in bulk, we make a few extra dollars on saved shipping which allows us to send one more book. Today, I am still trying to drum up book sets for the woman and have plans to hold a contest to raise money for Basic Texts for the ladies. The first prize is a gold NA charm I wear around my neck.

We who have experienced recovery for a number of years are convinced that we tend to get here as our "luck" is running out. If we do not hold on to this chance, we may not get another. While NA will welcome us

back, we may suffer from ego conflicts, incarceration, or catastrophic illness that prevents our return to a free and open way of life. Some people share in meetings that they are not afraid that their next usage will kill them - they are afraid that they will have to continue using, forced to live in the hell of active addiction.

For all addicts the drugs eventually stopped working. What then? Go on? Most of us had already reached jails or institutions at this point. Only two choices remained - either get better or die. We in the fellowship of NA choose life at some point. Yet, our choice at first seemed almost as hopeless as our addiction. At first, all we could do was try to find ways and means to not use. To try and stay clean for one day, or at times for just one hour or one minute. We could not imagine living without drugs and yet we instinctively knew how our lives with them would end. When your going nowhere any road will take you.

FOR THOSE REFERRED BY THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Some people who are referred to NA by the criminal justice system are addicts and some are not. Most of the time these individuals are court ordered to go to meetings and if they do not attend, they go to jail. The 3rd Tradition states that the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using, many of the people within this group do not have that desire. NA has long been aware that carrying our message to the addict who still suffers sometimes involves bringing it to those that without that desire.

There is a lie out there that using will improve your life and that it is okay to go along with the 'in crowd.' In this program of attraction rather than promotion, we demonstrate how our lives today are filled with joy,

excitement and purpose without the use of drugs. This is a reason that we have our Hospitals and Institutions (H&I) meetings inside hospitals, jails, and prisons. We know that those who attend these meetings are often required to go to them, do not really want to be there, and often have no desire to stop using. H&I meetings are thus tailored to meet the needs of this population.

In the last couple of decades, NA groups have had the challenge of masses of people coming into meetings from treatment centers. This is something that was not commonplace to the NA of the past. The people who did come in from treatment centers, by and large, were addicts. They had some education about the disease of addiction and recovery meetings. This is not the case with the criminal justice system-referred person of today. Having court ordered people in meetings is not something brand new to NA. What is new to us is the huge number of people now coming into meetings through lawyers, judges and probation officers who have little or no understanding of what NA is. We do not need to treat one addict differently from another because of how they get here. Many people who come into NA through the courts get the desire to stop using, stay around, become productive members of society, and become outstanding NA members. Our job as an NA members, through our groups, is to carry the message to the addicts who still suffer. That is the group's primary purpose. Some people may be disruptive to the program or disrespectful towards our members or meeting places. In such cases, the trusted servants of the group need to deal with these occasional situations on an individual basis. Fortunately, experience shows that these situations are rare and that the spiritual atmosphere created by NA groups seems to repel threats from the outside, for the most part. We let people know that meetings are for those who want recovery - if you decide you want it, get a sponsor and work the steps - until then, just listen. We just need to do what we do - welcome

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newcomers, carry the message, and stay clean.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

WHEN IT GETS TOUGH

"Today, I will do what's right – I will be true to others, as with myself.
And listen to those who know. I will help those in need.
Because yesterday is gone, And tomorrow uncertain.
I will live today, For today is a present to be fulfilled and cherished.
I have hope in Today!"

Addiction surrounds us with inaccurate and misleading information. In our active addiction, we believed and lived lies while the truth was hidden behind the fog of obsessions and compulsions. We get so used to the lies, we may still think they are the truth. As we settle into the path of recovery, we are endangered by complacency. We may surround ourselves with people who say yes to us even if we are wrong and they know it. We distance ourselves from the ones who might speak the truth – a symptom of drifting into relapse. We can drift away from people who really love and care about us. We may find their love and honesty inconvenient! It is hard to be bad to ourselves in the presence of people who would call us on our insanity. Distance making behavior is the primary evidence that we are headed for a relapse.

Privacy and alone time are not isolation. Meditation and rest can nurture and strengthen us so as to continue progressing is our chosen path. Otherwise, we may get drug along by our disease into the very problems we have sought to escape. Avoiding people we need to see, interpreting everything people say to us and planning our day or meetings so as to deny these issues is a good way to stay sick. Identifying these issues could be our only chance to catch ourselves before the relapse process goes too far. If we are obsessing, a warning bell should sound. Even with someone who has been clean a long time, relapse can occur. When we

stop doing the things that have been keeping us clean, we begin to slide towards relapse. It is almost like a magnetic attraction that affects addicts and draws us back to the brink of disaster. Recovery helps us realize we no longer deserve the punishments we put ourselves through.

There are certain, proven things we can do that will help us preserve our recovery and resume our spiritual growth. The first is to recognize warning signs in our recovery such as: boredom, changes, arrogance, self_will, attitude or indifference. We may feel the meetings aren't so much fun anymore. We don't hear people sharing honest pain; it sounds more like whining. We feel critical where we used to feel compassionate. NA is not marketing or management. While we are spiritual, we are not religious as a Fellowship or Program. Many of our people are severely damaged and it takes years for some to learn certain social skills. Others may appear well and stay clean in a perpetual stagnation because they can keep people at bay by looking and sounding good. Each of us has a responsibility to work the Twelve Steps of recovery. It is not ignorance that causes this, it is a disease called addiction. These good members don't use, go to meetings and somehow avoid working Steps. It is like a broken bone that is allowed to heal crooked. They may get good at being too busy to help others or go places with NA members. It may take great pain or tragedy to get them moving towards recovery again.

For some, when the going gets tough, we look back to our earliest recovery. By re-living the success of our own early recovery, we may find the recovery process re-engaged. We write down and recall the things that really stand out in our memory from when we first got clean or first started feeling recovery in our life. Take enough time with this to get several distinct basics together that you can start doing again. Then start doing them. It may not work right away, but using these tools is

almost sure to get positive results. If you went to many meetings, go to many meetings today. If you read recovery literature when you went to bed, read recovery literature when you go to bed. If you got phone numbers and called people, do that. If you went out to coffee several times a week after meetings, do that also. Back to basics, pray for peace, look for a key error or omission to remedy your feelings about recovery. Commit to 90 meetings in 90 days and read Chapter Seven from the Basic Text, looking for errors and omissions and developing recovery values through caring. We meditate on our own early recovery, recalling faces and conversations and bring them back into our lives. If you made notes or kept a recovery journal, this is a great time to go through it. The point is to make the reminder of prayer accessible, a hedge against the compulsion of complacency. We look for: 1) what is my problem and 2) how can I correct it?

Another thing that comes up is for you to look around in your life and try to find things that could be better. Is there something undone you should be working on? Is there someone you need to go see? Is there something blocking your progress that you really haven't dealt with? Get a grip on these things by writing them down if you are a writing person. If you like to 'keep it in your head', Just number the things. Make it less overwhelming by numbering. Try to limit your list to a few things. You are seeking things that have been irritating you and your spirit is telling you to deal with them now. You don't have to do this alone.

Share what is happening in your home group. Let your sponsor and some sponsees know all about it. Share some of your lists with others to actualize what you are doing and get the emotional and personal support you may need to see it all through. Don't put things on the list that you are totally powerless over. Maybe put them on another list but not on the list of things to actually do.

In many cases, the list will only point to things within that are unresolved and need to be dealt with there. In other words, the outside things are not important to us at all. We need to place closure on emotional issues. It is important to dismiss nagging thoughts. If you cannot act on them, don't list them.

Recalling and contacting people we spoke to in early recovery will give us some folks to visit or telephone. Reading some books we read, or even going to see movies we saw in early recovery may also help us reawaken our hope and desire.

Pray, really pray, for God to help you through your crisis. Write out your prayers, or recite the same ones in your mind. Some people can envision things with their eyes closed and that works for them. Other members are auditory and need to hear the words out loud. Repeat the prayers daily for a while, sometimes more than once a day. Some people write things on paper and tape it on the walls around their house or inside their car where they can see it going and coming from work.

Our program is based on abstinence from mood altering chemicals. Among our numbers are some with medical problems requiring medication to alleviate suffering. Such medication isn't about getting high. Perhaps this seems inconsistent. For us to fail to recognize this is to deny understanding of the disease of addiction as being other than a specific drug. Addiction exists separate from any drug.

It is not difficult to see an addict is using because of the obsession, compulsion and the need to cover up. Often, after working the Twelve Steps, many member's conditions stabilize. They may no longer need medication. Other remain under medical supervision It is hard for us to determine these things for ourselves. When we try to determine what's

right for others, we are even more powerless and apt to judge people harshly or impose what is right for us onto them. In NA, we know this can be life threatening. One thing we have learned - if you need medication and do not take it as prescribed, you are self-medicating. Self-medicating is using.

When we acknowledge that the going has gotten tough, we can take actions to ease up on ourselves. Surrender works. Part of addiction is making it hard on ourselves. Admission of our 1st Step allows us to make changes and back off from things we are powerless over. Why does this feel so badly when it is good for us?

In the early days of NA, it was common for some to see our way as insufficient, many assuming they could only find adequate sponsorship elsewhere. In the late seventies and early eighties, something happened: we discovered our greatest and primary resource in NA was clean addicts. We came together and remained in touch. We made the telephone part of our daily life. We pooled means of clearing habits that led to using. Addicts discussed a clean way of life and adapted to not using. We developed a "come early, stay late" process. Being the first to arrive provided an understanding that the meeting could not be there without our being there "for the meeting."

Being part of the writing of NA literature gave many of us actual participation in the group conscience of the NA program. Recovery came from brewing coffee, setting out chairs and literature; then remaining to pick up gum wrappers, empty ashtrays, and stacking chairs. Doing chores provided a sense of community. WE experienced newcomers. Some came to be detoxed so they could use manageably. Some hoped to beat a case. Many had no idea what recovery might mean to them. Some shouted hallelujah at one meeting and had vanished by

the next. Some died. Some made ninety meetings in ninety days and were able to keep coming back. This drew them into contact with the experience of a new way of life. God guided them through the experience of caring for the newcomer and found their own self-obsession going away. Within us occurred a shift from being around the program to being in the program. We came to understand what it meant to identify ourselves as "addicts." Recovery was not something we had, it was a feeling of belonging to a community of recovering people.

When it gets tough to stay clean, we have many resources built up from years of recovery. Addiction is such a powerful disease; it will wait for any chance to lead us into active addiction. If this happens to you, do the same thing you would do if you fell into an open sewer, get out as quick as you can, any way you can. You don't have to stand for it. With all the pain and hopelessness we go through, we deserve better now. People will help you if you ask for help and so will God.

LIST OF BASICS

When we are getting clean and going to meetings, we pick up certain phrases and slogans that go with recovery and the clean life. While any list will be incomplete, we have compiled the following as a reminder. Some of these basics will be new to you because they become popular in another area. One of the benefits of travel in the Fellowship is to pick up some new terminology.

Our program of recovery is based on total abstinence from all drugs. Almost all our members achieve this. We include among our addicts seeking recovery, members who have other problems and must take medications that alleviate their suffering and do not get them high. While in the intellectual sense, this may seem inconsistent; you have but

to open your heart to their predicament to understand their pain. To not include them would be to deny the fact that, in our understanding, the disease of addiction is something other than the specific drugs. These people stabilize and many eventually get off their medications. Others may be on medication for the rest of their lives. It takes no great wisdom to tell when an addict is loaded. They don't want to go to meetings and they don't seek out the company of clean addicts in NA. Perhaps the love of God allows us to include them as members simply because of their desire.

Money - It is all too apparent that money is a mood altering substance. Power can affect our feelings and conduct. Power junkies, food junkies, money junkies, sex junkies are terms we must come to terms with sometime in our recovery. If it were just the drugs, we wouldn't need the program to live clean. Once we were clean, we could stay clean. Our desire is the pointer and it directs our lives, one way or the other.

One Disease - One Program - In the early days, it was not uncommon for our members to go to many places seeking recovery. Then in the late seventies and early eighties, something different started happening.

Sponsor the Opposite Sex - In many of our smaller, growing communities, it was hard to establish, much less maintain, standards of conduct emphasizing our desire for spiritual growth. People on the path will fall prey to all sorts of mishaps, even in love. Talking about spiritual principles is not foreplay. Many of the emotions of heightened awareness and excitement make it easy to get sidetracked from recovery into the ordinary things of life. If a sponsor is a guide to principled living, then sex is no matter. If it becomes a matter, we need to be real enough to separate the two human experiences: the desire for satisfaction from the desire for a new life.

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NA Sponsor - There was a time when it was hard to find an NA member with more than a few years clean. Each one of our fledgling NA communities in the seventies and eighties went through a period of establishment as the dream of NA recovery became a reality. Members began to be able to draw on other members for strength. NA sponsors became more widely available.

90 in 90 - Ninety meetings in ninety days allows a person to contact and get to know other members over a sufficient period of time to experience the beginnings of some definite changes. That others really have had the exact same experiences and confusion we have had, sinks into our minds and hearts. We discover we care for some of these people and as we take an interest in their well_being, we begin to experience the loss of self_obsession. We get curious about the NA Way of Life and may begin to really work the NA 12 Step Program of recovery.

Get involved - As we become more caught up in what members are doing, we discover feelings and attitudes that may have been sleeping in us for quite a while. We begin to care. As we shift our focus from purely selfish concerns, we actually make the inner movement from someone who is 'around' the program to someone who is 'in' the program. This is when we actually become involved in the program. We make commitments and keep them. We show up on time. We become known to other members and a part of our NA community.

Stay away from the opposite sex - Early on, it was hard to tell what was meant by avoiding emotional relationships for a year. It sounded like well_meaning 'institution speak' for "don't get pregnant or catch a venereal disease while in our hospital, we're responsible for you!" Actually, considering we will die, that means everything gets messed up, even our sex lives! Putting time and energy into one thing can only

occur at the expense of others. Get recovery first, then you can enjoy the other things in life without obsession or compulsion. Sex and emotional involvements produce endorphins and we can learn to 'fix' on love as easy as dope or money!

No relationships for a year - Getting a year clean is a real event in the life of any addict! Consider if recovery were an obstacle course, would you knowingly throw rail road ties and concrete blocks along the pathway in front of you? Would you avoid doing homework and cut your exams in school? Would you keep your job if you took off three or four days a week? Almost nothing has as much power over our emotions, self_image and pleasure circuits as a romantic relationship.

Don't pick up - Making 'not using' an option short circuits most of the disease's power over us, at least for a while. While this may seem like 'conditioning' in some negative respect, it is actually 'conditioning' in its best respect! If we feel crazy, we substitute going to meetings, visiting members, going to NA dances and functions, or reading recovery literature. Substitute almost anything for using. Don't use. Really! Relapse is not a requirement for membership!

Get and use phone numbers - Our greatest resource and the primary service of NA is clean addicts. Staying in touch by phone or internet makes recovery part of our daily life. Quickly and naturally, we find a way of clearing away habits of thought that might lead us back to using and discussing clean ways of looking at life. This is how addicts can adapt to living without using.

Come early/stay late is something many members miss out on. If we are never among the first members to show up for a meeting, we get the association that the meeting is there for us without us ever being there

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for the meeting. Help set up a meeting regularly. Then stay late to help clean it up "better than we found it." You will never really feel a part of NA unless you do these chores. Those who get involved with their home group and become so involved they are among the first members to show up at the weekly meeting get a deep sense of involvement. Watching the new members come in and the rounds of exchanged greetings, gives us a real sense of the fellowship. Staying late and helping with the clean up also deepens this sense of being a part of the NA Fellowship.

Leave our meeting place better than we find it. - This basic has helped us enjoy a great range of meeting places. It speaks well of our validity as a recovery program and makes us experience the positive feelings of being responsible at the same time.

Pray in a.m. for Help - When we get up in the morning we ask our Higher Power to help us stay clean, maintain conscious contact, guide us and give us the strength to deal with what comes up.

Pray in p.m. and give Thanks - Before I go to bed at night, I thank my Higher Power for another day clean, for the loving and caring people in my life, for carrying me through the day, and all the gifts that were given.

Help another addict - Making and keeping commitments reflects growth of our character. We learn to become responsible starting out with small commitments and build up. We congratulate when we do it right.

Home group involvement - What it is and why it is. - Showing up early and staying late to clean up, participating in group, and letting people get to know you better. Keeping your home group informed is like recovery

insurance.

Group conscience meeting, not business meetings, attendance is a must - We define and maintain an atmosphere of recovery by discussing concerns that might affect our group. We want to be stable and attractive.

Listen and take direction, follow it, too - Pray for the willingness. Listen and take direction from sponsor and/or members who know you well.

Share in every meeting - at least the first three - to share to insure no bullshit - to establish and maintain our connection to N.A.

Get with the oldtimers and the newcomers - Newcomers will sometimes amaze you and give you the solutions. As one member shared: An old timer told me to dump about using a medication to get through an MRI at meeting with newcomers, and the newcomers at the meeting helped me.

Give out and get phone numbers - Men for men's phone numbers on meeting list, and women for women. Get with a person not of your sexual preference.

Get to the meeting early - Helps make you feel a part of with other members in a way that is impossible to foresee and provides identification with N.A. Lets other members know you're serious about N.A. You also have the opportunity to set up the meeting and learn about group service.

Go out after the meeting for coffee, food, visit another members' house along with other addicts - get to know other addicts and allows them to

get to know you. Cheaper than treatment!

Fellowship with all - Thank God there is still a thing called the coffee pot. Teaches us to have fun without the use of drugs. Dances, spiritual retreats, conventions, picnics, all give us new memories and help us develop positive associations.

Get into service structure - to give back what was so freely given to you. Maintain services beyond what individuals or groups can do alone.

Serve the home group - Setting out literature, chairing, making coffee, greeting the newcomer, attending business meetings.

Read any and all literature about N.A._ie; Basic Text, How it Works, Service Manual, Step Study Guide, Little White Book.

Go to out of town meetings - Traveling should become a part of your recovery at some point. While it may not be important right away, there comes a time when we need to be in touch with the 'greater NA.' This is where we deliberately travel to a distant convention or retreat to participate in Narcotics Anonymous and hear what we hear back home. There is a magic to realizing that the same message the same words are spoken by such a large group of people dedicated to recovery.

Support struggling groups/meetings - Often in recovery, you will find yourself at a plateau and feel there is something missing that you cannot put your finger on. One of the things we have learned to do is to take a look at the meeting schedule and do some driving. We find new phases in our recovery by the people we meet. We hear the familiar statements from unfamiliar faces and suddenly we get a whole new outlook. If you have never deliberately tried this, it may be your answer. Be sure that

you respect the core group that keeps any meeting going. They will want to know you are a member by hearing on some level, your pain and your desire for recovery. This combination of pain and desire is what makes us members.

Start new meetings - There are many times when the best thing that can happen is to start a new meeting. This keeps smaller meetings available and breaks up gatherings of 'old buddies' or cliques that may be unfriendly to 'outsiders' or new people. This is how we practice our societies enrichment.

Do local PI and H&I work - Providing these group and area services lets us reach into the community and institutions to make our recovery available. Along with a certain comradery, we get to experience first hand seeing an addict who has never been exposed to NA become interested, enter the program and get recovery. Sometimes, it is years later that someone comes up to us and say, "Hey, thanks! You really helped me back then."

Stay away from people, places and things that might get you loaded - In early recovery, it might seem unkind to stop calling, visiting or maintaining contact with out old playmates and playgrounds. Getting a new life involves getting into a new setting and picking up new ways of doing things that simple can only come to us by example.

Watch out for indirect obsession - When we are busy running from crisis to crisis, it is hard to sit down and look at what we have been doing. We can fall into traps and create situations that may be hard to see at the time. But we addicts seem to 'fall' into a hobby, recreation or sports so totally, that we don't see the repercussions. Like a Dad may avoid his family, feeling guilty for the past when all that is needed is simple

presence and honest feeling. Children know when we care. A deer hunter may find that time in the weather results in back pain, which results in pain meds, which results in relapse. Adapt. Don't go out without proper clothing or if the weather is too bad. Mom's have their shopping, hobbies and get togethers that may create imbalances. Do it, but just don't make another ##\$@ obsession out of it!

Don't act out on feelings - Feelings can trigger us to start making moves that reflect more where we come from than where we are at today. We may feel threatened or angry at a person or group without really knowing why. Just taking time to sit and think it over helps us avoid rushing into making mistakes that could have been avoided by simply waiting. Acting out on feelings can cause us to hurt people who don't deserve it and gives our disease a spawning ground for trouble.

Make a decision. where you gonna serve - Service is a big part of recovery. Service helped NA grow in a few years from a tiny Fellowship with no literature and few members and meetings into a world wide Fellowship.

Contact your sponsor every day - There are as many ways to sponsor or be sponsored as there are members in the program. And what we need today may change. Just because you have never done this does not mean you can't do it now. Sometimes a person is going through a change and the extra contact is necessary. Other times, contact may be limited and still the relationship is there and strong as ever. This is not a matter of right and wrong. Right is whatever works today and wrong is what not longer 'does it' for us.

No major decisions in the first year - While this may not be possible, it is still best to slow down our 'choice making' until we have become

more adjusted to living clean. There may be times when the choices we make are not for the best and getting locked into a major purchase or committed relationship may hold us back rather than be a step forward.

Don't do anything without talking to your sponsor first - This may not be for everyone, or for every time, but if we are going through something serious with the potential to really mess up, it is a real substitute for stumbling blindly forward.

Write about your feelings - It clears your head and helps you make better decisions to be able to write out what is going on inside. Especially if it is something different and you are having trouble sorting out what you really feel or need to do. It is mentioned here because many members don't write out their feelings and it adds to their confusion. The chance is that no one has recommended that they do so yet.

Stay for the whole meeting - A full meeting is from the opening prayer to the closing prayer. Surrender is a big part of how we get clean and stay clean. We have seen members jump up and leave the meeting early or without saying what's on their mind. This can devastate your recovery by creating the illusion that no one cares about you – yet you are not telling them, so you are leaving them in the dark.

Don't leave during the meeting - You might miss something that will save your life. Leaving the room to make extra trips to the bathroom or smoke can be a way to interrupt what is going on in the meeting. If you find yourself doing this, even if you don't stop right away, just think about how simple things we hear in meetings play a huge role in making OUR lives better.

Put up newcomers - You might want to think this over or ask other

members to tell you exactly what they do. Do not leave cash laying around. Do not leave someone you don't know well in your home while you are away. Do not give them a key. Try to know a little about them and their background. This is how some members work their 12th Step – but it is a serious matter and should not be done lightly.

Give people rides - The state of mind we have when giving people rides allows them to say and hear things that might not otherwise come out. Many times others have helped us get to the meetings. It feels good to repay their kindness by passing it on to others.

Go that one extra mile - Stay on the phone one extra minute – A good practice is to try to listen to what a person is not saying along with what comes out of their mouth. We use language to cover up what is happening with us as well as feel out others in the parts of life where we are embarrassed or uncertain. Frequently, it is what we say at the very last that brings out what is actually on our minds. If we practice this, we may be amazed to find someone who has been talking for a half hour or more, telling us what is really troubling them in a few minutes.

Speak in language that reflects the NA way of life - Our society has evolved a special language that deals with the things we need to communicate in recovery. Some words take on different meanings or connotations. Others become key terms in our recovery language. Some become very specific. Surrender, Faith, Amends, Inventory, Principles to name a few.

Read the meeting readings - If you don't read easily, you can read *Who is an Addict*. But time and practice may make it easier. Some of our members never read aloud before coming to NA. We also may help a person with reading glasses if we have them or ask if they feel like

reading something instead of just throwing down a reading in front of them. It is also good to be able to pass the reading to someone else if your eyesight is really bad or if a member is having a really tough time. Reading it is like hearing it on a different level. If you read well, yet never take your turn reading, you are leaving yourself out.

Speak after 90/90 - As we grow in recovery changes take place below the surface. Members who have done ninety meetings in ninety days tell us about the changes that take place. We become accustomed to having other people who know us well. We are able to see and feel how other people live. Gathering each evening for a meeting replicates gathering for the evening meal which has always been part of humanity. Speaking puts us before our fellows and we are often surprised at what we share. Speaking may help others, but it first helps us.

Speak on your anniversary - One nice thing about NA, is there are few hard and fast rules. In some groups, it is customary for the person celebrating to share what their last year clean has been like for them. In other groups this never happens. But we are free to speak if we feel the need or it is a group custom.

No drug_a_logs - Talking, thinking, planning, connecting are all part of a pattern. If we slip into talking about our drug_a_log, we begin to leave out recovery and this can be dangerous for us as well as some of our listeners. We all know how to use, what we need to hear about is recovery. A monolog is one person sharing. A dialogue is two or more sharing. A drug_a_log is a disease sharing.

Don't give therapeutic type feedback in meetings - While this will always occur on occasion, we are not a therapeutic treatment program or an extension of one. It is natural for people who come into NA through

treatment to carry the language and attitudes they have picked up along the way. A skilled NA group gently gives them our way of life without embarrassment or unnecessary interruption. Praise in public, criticize in private is a good rule to follow. Yelling at someone for violating a Tradition, likely violates a Tradition. In almost all cases, getting with them for a few moments after the meeting provides the setting to explain why we don't feedback in meetings, cross talk, use terminology from other programs, etc. during our meetings. Learning days also help provide a time and place to share the NA way of doing things.

Don't make comments after people share - While I have been to meetings long ago where this was the custom, it has been displaced so as to not water down what a person says or evaluate it like a therapy session. It is not meant to prevent open discussion but to support open discussion where you share what you have and I share what I have. Our disease is characterized by isolation, this kind of sincere listening is usually a learned ability.

Don't chair a meeting like a therapist runs group therapy - We are not a paid professional program but a living program of recovery. We don't set ourselves up to control others. We do not have all the answers and try not to voice opinions on outside issues. Many times someone comes in through treatment and thinks that how it is in NA. So, we learn to gently let them know how we do it in NA without being harsh or embarrassing them in front of a group.

Gotta give it away to keep it - When we are trying to help someone we care about, our memories seem to reach back further and bring to the front of our minds the things others told us that helped. It is like those things were put in our memory differently. When we do this giving it away, we get the benefit of vividly recalling not only what was shared

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with us but the feelings of gratification and surprise that the program really works. This has proved to be a major source of spiritual strength in ongoing recovery. So, when we have so many toys and demands on us that we can't take time for others, it is good to remember that without recovery, all the other stuff just disappears.

Willing to go to any lengths to stay clean - Funny thing about this one is that when we are willing, things work out so that we don't have to do much. But when we are unwilling, simple things take longer and longer. We forget that the spiritual blessings of recovery are what makes our lives different. Perhaps it is the disease of addiction or only human nature, but we seem to forget where the blessing come from: a sincere surrender and access to a power greater than ourselves.

Do things we don't want or like to do – Especially when it comes to spiritual growth, the part of us that has been holding us back will throw up a last ditch effort to keep control by preventing us from finding out about how easy it is to learn better ways to live and do things. Our minds and bodies may be sending signals. “No, it's too much. I don't want to try anything else new. I am not going to say I'm sorry and look bad. I'm not going to stop taking calls from my old 'friends.' Honesty will just get me in trouble.” There is another old saying, “Argue for your limitations, and they are yours forever.”

Attend group conscience meetings on a regular basis - Attending group conscience sessions is just part of being an active member in NA. For many, this is the first time they have been a part of a positive group of people. As you become accustomed to having a say in group business, it may help you become more responsible in other areas of your life.

Go around the room if needed so people will share - When we attend a

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service learning day, there may be a section on how to lead a discussion. We enjoy great flexibility in NA. We can make changes in group format easily. Depending on our usual crowd, we can have members share at random, as they are moved to do so. If we start hearing from only a few who seem to like to talk, going around the room in either direction is one way to give an attending member a chance to qualify as a member by stating they are an addict.

Fill all of the meeting/group trusted servant positions - Letting one of two members do all the work is unfair and may leave out the most important person needful of help – ourselves.

Support other NA meetings in your town - As we become more a part of NA, it is up to us to get out there and support our local meetings.

Doing something good for someone and not telling anyone that you did it - Like insulation in a radio receiver, silence keeps our good acts from shorting out by becoming known. Doing a good thing for recognition lends an air of insincerity to it. When we are the only one who knows, it may occur to us that we are the most important person to have a good opinion of ourselves. This is because we are in such a strong position to treat ourselves well or poorly.

Live in the here and now - Yesterday is gone and tomorrow's not here yet. The more we can do and get out of today, the better our tomorrows will be and the sooner we'll realize the past is behind us.

Keep the focus on yourself - If you're messing up, I'm in trouble. What can I do, I am powerless over you. If I can find something I can do better or less often, it gives me leverage to make things better. This is why NA is called the 'self-correcting' program.

Share your strength, experience, and hope - While this is often heard among NA's, it may be hard to do at times. We have to wait until a person is ready for help before we start trying to help them. We spend much of our time doing our inventory and interacting with our NA friends. But we try to stay away from preaching, making rules for others and playing big shot.

Be there for someone else, even if it is just to listen and not speak - After meetings, on the telephone or at a coffee shop, we may find ourselves slipping out of our self-obsession long enough to realize someone is using us as a sounding board for ideas on how to live. They may have pain or joy and not really know what to do. By letting them talk it out, they may find themselves developing their own answers, in a way they could not have done alone. When listening, it may help us to pray to be used as an instrument. Also, we may need to remind ourselves to listen rather than plan our next great statement!

Feelings pass - This can be a real stumbling block, even after we have been clean a while. Many times we get caught up in something that reminds us of a past event and can quickly bring back all the shame, guilt, disorientation and adrenaline based fear. Just by being calm and 'doing nothing' we find that the moment passes, the day passes and we are looking back on what happened with no real change in our situation, it was just the feelings that were tearing us up. The time we take with one another gives us someone to walk us through these things, and then we help others walk through their upsets.

Live in the solution, not the problem - While it may seem surprising, looking for a solution makes some problems just disappear. We become accustomed to being treated fairly and when a problem does come up, we may take the attitude that by dealing with what's in front of us, we

will eliminate the problem from our future. For some, being happy may just be a habit!

THREE MUSTS - 1. Don't take anything, go to a meeting, and talk about how you really feel. 2. Call your sponsor, not your connection, it is cheaper. 3. One step a year, you'll be alright; after 12 years, make a decision. Happiness comes from the inside, not the outside.

Say the serenity prayer - Saying this prayer helps us bring the program into our daily lives. As prayers go, this one seems to cover more ground than most!

Do you want to be right or do you want to be happy? - Most addicts have a fear based obsession with being right all the time. Many of us find after a while that it really doesn't matter that much and take a more relaxed, even curious, attitude towards being right. Now, being happy, that is something worth spending your time on.

Carry a meeting list with you at all times - We learn to structure our lives to allow for recovery. If we have a list with us, it is much easier to find a meeting if our car breaks down or we are stuck in a strange part of town.

Exchange phone numbers - From the beginning, we develop habits that make it easy to get in touch with one another. Care may be given in large groups where it is better to make sure someone is known to the group before giving a stranger your number. There is almost never a problem at smaller groups.

Circle an entire week's worth of meetings on a meeting list for the newcomer, and suggest that he/she attend one meeting a day.

Find somebody to listen - We get relief from sharing honestly about your feelings, even if you are not yet ninety days clean. This is especially important if you feel like using drugs or if you are having compulsions to steal or act out violently, and if you are feeling angry, fearful, and/or otherwise suffering. It's important!

These things kept me coming back:

1. Recovering addicts suggested to me that I plan out which meetings to go to throughout the week, to find meetings that felt comfortable, and stick to those meetings.
2. Recovering addicts offered aftercare, providing me with transportation home and showing concern with what my activities would be after the meetings.
3. Recovering addicts showed total acceptance and tolerance for my problems and concerns; thus, helping me feel valued and worthwhile.
4. Old-timers were willing to provide productive suggestions as to what to look for when trying to find a sponsor. One suggested that I might find a temporary sponsor, and that if everything worked out, the temporary sponsor could become my permanent sponsor. Another oldtimer suggested that the group could be my temporary sponsor until I could find a permanent one.

Disease Concept - Addiction, as a disease, negates the idea that each drug used entails a different approach to recovery. The idiosyncrasies of each drug used may vary; but, recovery is a simple and unified path. Abstinence is mandatory to initiate and continue this process. The urge to differentiate one's using and consequences thereof serves no purpose

but to diffuse efforts towards recovery. Wasted motion for recovery can kill. Concentration of our endeavors toward recovery insures our survival. The process of recovery is slow and tedious. Distraction from this focus is similar to our active addiction's compulsion to avoid reality by changing our playgrounds and playthings.

If I go after recovery like I went after the drugs - The single-minded search for drugs can be the most glaring example of our disease. This same energy directed towards our spiritual growth and ongoing abstinence can be the practical application of actions and ideas learned or developed in active addiction, now transposed to positive results.

We make NA our priority to stay clean. Put the same effort we used into getting high to stay clean. Made NA the most important thing in our life. NA comes ahead of girlfriends and boyfriends. Maintain a humble and honest job, going out with people after the meeting, getting involved in NA service committee_ especially fun things like newsletters, special events, making cookies and goodies to bring to our home groups. Our families and real friends who care about us will see the change in us and will encourage our positive obsession in the fellowship. Some may not understand, and we do not need to explain it to them, because only we know our happiness and despair of active addiction.

What comes around goes around - The notion of karma is deeply embedded in our culture. While getting little 'official' attention, almost everyone believes in spiritual reciprocity. If you do good, it comes back to you in some form. Bad acts place a cloud over our heads. In recovery, we offset this effect by helping others.

What you give is what you get - Sometimes it is easier to do the right thing if you realize that there is a pay off or a 'cookie' that will come

your way eventually. Being good and doing the right thing is not always easy for us.

What you put into it is what you get out of it - If we want a lot, we give a lot. Since there is a possibility that we won't get back all that we have given, we can stack the deck in our favor by doing more than our fair share.

We are the only ones who can be responsible for our recovery and do anything about it. - This is a super basic of our NA 12 Step recovery process. We learn that by finding something we did wrong, even if it is something small, by doing it, the whole situation can become balanced in a favorable direction. It is a way to find hope.

Surrender is the key - Surrender is going from the losing side to the winning side. Surrender is not losing, it is not joining the losers, it is joining the winners. Surrender to the disease that wants to kill you. Surrender to the fact that your best thinking got you headed for jails, institutions and death. Surrender to the fact that life is simple; addicts make it complicated. Surrender to the fact that as an addict you have a progressive, incurable, fatal disease.

Change - For addicts seeking recovery, it is nice to remember that change is a part of life. The great thing about life is that we can always change things about ourselves, the way we take what is given to us - we can change the way we perceive the world. The serenity prayer is a nice way of getting grounded and stepping back. If we are willing to surrender to the things we cannot change and move on, we will be part of the solution. For newcomers, it is important to try to do things differently. To try to get off the beaten path and try new ways. Our old ways kept us sick, trying something new could be something that opens

part of us that previously had been closed. Honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness can help us to have the courage to do things differently. If we get stuck in a rut, we can pray for the willingness to be open-minded.

Never Alone - As addicts, we tend to rely on ourselves most of the time. But it is this same self-reliance which feeds our disease causing us to perceive our world as manageable and generally O.K.. But under the foundation of denial, our spirit burns like an underground oil-well fire: quiet, seemingly calm, but eventually bound to erupt causing great damage. It is important to do what we can to seek the help of other recovering addicts for anything we do or require assistance in. This way, other recovering addicts can share their experience, strength and hope in a most personal and convincing way. It's a win-win situation.

Inclusiveness, not exclusiveness - We are all the same. The disease affects us all. We want to isolate and exclude ourselves with our differences and uniqueness. Our idiosyncrasies are often aspects of our disease, or drug induced aberrations of our personalities. The common ground of addiction eliminates a "pecking order" or "rank". No one of us is different when our disease brings us to surrender.

Basic Living - We could not live and enjoy life as others do. Taking care of ourselves was a struggle. Small things were put off until they became massive and impossible to deal with. The day to day routine was so boring. Yet taking care of our needs seemed not worth the effort. Today we can take the time to attend to the basic things in life that lead to a sense of manageability, cleaning the bathroom, dusting, taking out the trash, etc. We regain the abilities that we once used to live in the real world. The pressures of addiction often overrode our command or realistic attitudes, ideas and emotions. Recovery gradually allows us to

change into real humans, not just look like them.

Carry the message not the addict - We are messages of hope. Our actions speak louder than words. An addict shares, "A friend had relapsed, which I believe is a sign of asking for help. I had to confront him about it. It was painful to do, but I told him I knew he was using, that it was bound to surface. I could see the death and despair of addiction in his eyes. We told him we'd been there, and that NA had saved our lives. We encouraged him to go to the nearest and next meeting. That's the best place for a relapsing addict. The power of the group works miracles. That's where our strength and focus come from. I pray for people who are hurting and then anyone who comes to my mind - which is funny, because quite often the people I'm resenting or jealous of or afraid of come up in my prayers, too, and I'm at ease. The desire and willingness to recover will change; it is different with each addict. I believe my best moments are when I'm grateful or surrendered to a commitment in service." We see clearly when this gratitude is put into action. Unconditionally loving our members (no matter what), forgiveness and empathy is what helps us recover. This miracle is our answer. We can recover. The hardest thing is asking for help.

Dealing with feeling tired, miserable, and uncomfortable can really be challenging. There are things we can do to get through these periods in recovery. Getting enough rest and eating properly may help. Listening to other recovering addicts share their experience, strength, and hope can provide insight for us; and, perhaps, also give us what we need at that moment. Hearing other recovering addicts say that in recovery they learned how to get through difficult times, can give us hope that we can do the same. Staying clean, no matter what, gives us the opportunity to figure out what will work for us when we aren't feeling good. Staying clean in spite of our negative feelings and attitudes will give us the

opportunity to have real change occur in our lives. Gaining perspective on what we really need can be achieved by us like it was for others. Complaining can only put us in a place of lacking and insufficiency. Gratitude is the antithesis of this, and gratitude can keep us clean. Having gratitude for the things we want as well as the things we have can ease the suffering created in our desires.

Be an active listener - Don't just try to get your thoughts out, but be there for someone else's need. Be open to what they are saying and accept it or not accept it and talk about it then. Harboring past conversations takes me away from the day.

Live in today - in thought and action. I find that if I cannot do anything about a given situation, because the opportunity does not present itself today, then I better save myself the anguish of the "what ifs" and focus on what is before me at the present time. This also includes re-living past situations (resentments) which I have been unable to let go of. The re-living of painful situations brings to light the destructive, self-defeating aspect of the disease of addiction and I need to talk about it and find out what other members do when presented with this. I need to get humble and get the help by asking for it.

Talking with other addicts before or after a meeting or just when you find yourself wanting to talk to someone who has some life experience with addiction is a great help. Sometimes, it seems, that when your thoughts become burdensome and/or you are having trouble making an important decision relating to work, relationships or life in general and you still need to cope with the "straight world", sharing your thoughts with another recovering addict can be vital to your mental health. This is why it is suggested in the literature to obtain phone numbers of other recovering addicts and use the phone numbers. As addicts, we

sometimes feel awkward about reaching out and calling other addicts for help if not just to talk out of boredom. But this feeling soon passes once the addict on the other side of the phone line answers. You'll find that very often that that addict is relieved and happy that someone actually wants to talk to him/her. Both parties benefit from such a reaching out. Remember that the same brain that motivated your actions when coping dope on the streets or wherever is the same brain that is unable to sometimes make decisions in your best interest. Call, share or write to other addicts in recovery. Bounce your thoughts, ideas and feeling off of them. It will help them as well as yourself. And soon you will be on a good path.

Essays from NA Members

RELATIONSHIPS: THEN AND NOW

The following is by no means to be a guide or cure all to the problems many of us encounter in relationships. Rather, it is the freely shared experience of our members.

While actively using, true meaningful connections between people, including ourselves, seemed impossible. Acceptance, friendship or the simple love from another seemed to be our most elusive goal. When the use of chemicals ended, our senses seemed to awaken tenfold. We allowed ourselves feelings and responded to others in ways strange to us. For the first time in our lives, relationships began to have a sense of meaning.

In recovery, we seem amazed at how many forms of relationships we may allow ourselves. Before, our thinking may have been very limited in understanding the word "relationship." Many of us may have naturally thought of this topic in the male/female form. But this subject, while talked about often at meetings, covers a very broad area.

We now realize that we can have relationships with other men, women, children, employers, our Higher Power, ourselves and so on. The list may seem endless once we permit ourselves the freedom that is given to each of us. We come to the conclusion that it is important to deal with all forms of relationships. If they are good, bad or indifferent, we have to deal with them somehow. It is necessary in our program of recovery to respect first ourselves, and our lives, for what they are. This lays the groundwork for any association we may have with others.

Our capacity to have meaningful relationships has been damaged by our self centered attitude and the kind of thinking we developed over time as our disease progressed. We learn to stop making excuses for our past and accept our reality. We need to realize that there are many recovering addicts struggling with the same feelings regarding relationships.

It is important to begin forming new bonds with people who are going to teach us a new way of life. We begin to trust them and believe in the principles of this program.

Relationships are a process and in anything we do, we need to always remember that we only need to improve, we will never stop growing. We need to challenge our 'old beliefs' about relationships. We learn from our past mistakes that led to problems in dealing with others. We accept the fact that work and effort must be applied and are willing to make the necessary changes.

But what changes and options are available? This list may also seem unlimited, considering we all walk different paths in our recovery. What works for one may not work for another. We need not dwell on the negatives in our relationships but instead nurture our positive qualities. In the past, we may have thought that a troubled relationship was not worth saving. We were blinded by chemicals and unsure feelings. In essence we weren't sure what we wanted and where we were headed.

Today, we can envision our relationships with others and how we would like them to be. We learn to develop any associations we have in the present moment and proceed from there. If we allow ourselves to be tormented by past memories or threatened by future worries, we may never attain a truly loving relationship. Unnecessary stress will be placed on all our daily encounters.

Honesty, trust, open communication, acceptance, courage and wisdom are some of the more important aspects of leading a spiritual life and nurturing both existing and new found relationships. Many of us never learned these attributes or lost them while we were using. However, we can acquire them through listening at meetings, using the Serenity Prayer and working the Twelve Steps. [Input from Philadelphia Area Lit]

NO COMPROMISE

One member shares, "One of the most painful and degrading actions my active addiction demanded of me was that I consistently had to compromise my ideals to survive. I had grown up believing in honesty and personal integrity. I'd learned to be "... as good as my word." In my youth, before active addiction stole my self-worth, I was a person of my word. You could believe what I said. You could count on me. I believed in certain principles, and consistently stood up for them. I wasn't always right but I stood up for what I believed. My belief system was based in my perception of reality. Honesty was honesty, and like pregnancy, you either were or you weren't. Personal integrity meant doing the right thing for the right reason, telling the truth, living without deceit, being fair, just, standing up for principles courageously and accepting the consequences of my actions.

"Addiction altered my behavior. Reality became uncomfortable, eventually intolerable. I needed more and more drugs to survive. When I was under the influence of drugs, honesty and integrity were less important and often inconvenient. Between 'runs,' honesty and integrity were burdens that would have prevented getting more drugs and the relief I needed. My values were still there, however and the only escape from this inner conflict of addiction vs. conscience was to use more

drugs. Eventually addiction conquered conscience. Dishonesty, deceit and injustice became as much a part of my life as drugs. I would do whatever was needed, say whatever was required, be whoever the drug culture I lived in expected, to get the money and drugs my addiction demanded. Whatever the consequences of my actions were, there always seemed to be enough drugs to compensate.

“Dishonesty, deceit and cowardice became habitual. My self-esteem was lost to the demands of active addiction. I lied and stole for practice, even when I didn't need to. I laughed at honest people who stood up for their beliefs and called them square and used them. Living up to principles made them vulnerable, I thought them weak. Addiction twisted reality cruelly so that I began to feel that my dishonesty and deceit could result in some benefit for them. After all, I thought, I am sophisticated and they are naive. I was baffled when their pain and confusion increased. I gradually began to see myself as hopelessly immoral. The drugs slowly stopped working so well and conscience nagged me about my dishonesty and cowardice. My denial forced me to continue telling myself that I'd become such a bad person that there was no hope. I'd become what I despised and there was no reconciliation between my actions and my ideals. Only death or permanent institutionalization could save the world from my taint. I began killing myself with drugs. It didn't work. The fog of addiction thickened and I groped hopelessly for help.

“Blindly I reached out and you took my hand. Narcotics Anonymous rescued me from my dishonest, deceitful, cowardly drug-altered world of self-destruction. You taught me that I was powerless over the disease of addiction. I stopped using. You taught me that simple abstinence was not enough. I got honest. You taught me to walk my prayer. I stopped compromising. Courage came slowly and painfully. You taught me that

addiction had many more symptoms than just drug use. I didn't understand that at first. My dishonesty, my deceitfulness and cowardice were more difficult to abstain from than drugs. You showed me actively that the spiritual principles of recovery were pure. You taught me by example that compromising on these principles was just as self-destructive as using drugs. The faith to act can only come from acting on faith. My way didn't work any better in recovery than it had in active addiction. My life had become unmanageable, and as I accepted this, my mind opened. Watching you live clean and recover led me to believe in abstinence, accept my condition, and gave me the faith to try recovery.

“Narcotics Anonymous taught me that anything less than a total commitment to all twenty-four spiritual principles of recovery and sharing is denial of my decision to turn my will and life over to the Spirit of recovery. I perceive. Therefore, I cannot compromise. Acceptance is acceptance. Reality shows me that I'm powerless over addiction and my life is unmanageable by me. I can choose to accept that or deny it. Recovery demands acceptance. Faith is faith. Hope comes from faith in my life and I believe I can recover. I need to act on this faith or become hopeless again. Commitment is uncompromising to me. It is surrender in action. Honesty is honesty. Recovery reinforces personal integrity for me. I am free to be as honest, courageous and just as I am willing to be uncompromising on spiritual principles.

“This kind of limitless recovery forces me to accept my humanity. I fall short of my goals consistently. But by ‘... shaping my thoughts with the spiritual principles ... (I'm) ... moving toward, ... (I'm) ... free to become who ... (I) .. want to be.’

“When I compromise spiritual principles in my life, I limit my recovery. When I compromise spiritual principles in my service, I deny addicts the

recovery they seek. Just as acceptance is acceptance, faith is faith and honesty is honesty, so group conscience is group conscience, direct responsibility is direct responsibility and anonymity is anonymity. Compromise of these spiritual principles in service brings me similar life-limitation to compromise in my recovery. Except that the life I may limit, the recovery that I may deny, is often someone else's.

“Our predecessors taught us that "Half measure's avail us nothing". Compromising Spiritual Principles in recovery and service can only hurt. My recovery demands uncompromising honesty and personal integrity. Real recovery and true service means NO COMPROMISE.”

QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

We don't need to be politically correct, because in the spirit of anonymity, we are all basically the same.

The large linen 12 steps & 12 traditions banners hanging on the wall of our group help us focus on the principles when sharing; and, it inspires purpose and thought; thus, giving a good NA focus.

It's okay, you used today, but come back clean tomorrow. And even if you used, come anyway and listen; we care and have been there. But if you used within 24 hours, please refrain from commenting.

Regarding total abstinence, we include everyone and encourage everyone to get clean. While some members need to take medication, we do not separate ourselves. In the spirit of anonymity, we are all basically the same. We do not make one member different from one another. "Oh, he's too sick; he needs that medication for his suicidal depression." We are all examples of hope. Anyone can get clean and stay clean. If we

believe in the miracle of NA, in the miracle of our second step, it will work for us. No matter who you are, it can work; but, you are no different. Maybe we can't help everyone, but we know that total abstinence works, and we encourage anyone to try it. In time of illness, sure, medication may be required; but, our bodies, minds, and spirits do not know the difference between street, homegrown, prescribed, over the counter or not 'yet' invented drugs.

SURRENDER

"I attended a meeting where there was a newcomer sharing about letting go, of 'turning it over.' 'What does this mean?', he asked. And all around the room, the old timers all looked at each other as if to say, 'You want to field this one?'

"Truthfully, surrender is one of the most profound personal experiences that exist. But sadly, not many truly ever experience a powerful, spirit cleansing surrender. Maybe it's because even though we want to let go of certain ideas, behaviors, and situations outside of ourselves, we rarely ever surrender. The pain must be great, even unbearable, before we surrender that something is bothering us.

"What we surrender to when we come into Narcotics Anonymous is a powerful program of recovery. We get here in pain, and we surrender the disease to recovery. Later, when we have had some time in the fellowship, we discover that there are other things that we must surrender, things that are causing us nearly as much pain as using. For some this has been relationships, for others this has been behaviors, but the one thing that rings true for us all is that we must continue our path of recovery, or we will use drugs again. Continuing down this path involves doing the same things that we did in the beginning; looking at

ourselves to see where we are in recovery today. Often, after this self-examination, we find that we are not where we want to be in recovery, that we want to be 'more recovered'. This is when our ego begins to reassert itself. It is at this time that the pain of change begins. It can be said that this pain is not necessary, but many of us have experience that it is. Without awareness, we cannot change. Without pain, we would not know joy, or serenity. Our pain is necessary for our individual, and collective growth. And yet we hear in our meetings, 'You're right where you're supposed to be,' when we share this pain. The truth is, we are right where we are supposed to be. Through sharing, and obsessing over our personal problems, we learn that we get exactly what comes as a result of obsession: pain. It is then that we learn how to surrender because it is necessary for our survival as recovering addicts. We learn how to surrender by experiencing our pain, and it becomes easier as we walk down the path of recovery. Our level of pain that we can take becomes less and less, and we surrender quicker each time. By surrendering to this new way of life, we are finally able to learn that it takes each of us to help each other to the spiritual principle of surrender. We each have times when we are unable to see what we need to do next. That is when we reach out to our sponsors, our meetings, and the fellowship. Invariably they will tell us to 'keep coming back', and 'don't leave before the miracles happen'. Then one day, we realize that the miracle they spoke of was our own recovery, having grown by surrendering our will."

SPIRIT AWAKENS

I came to find this fellowship after a long search. I really don't know what I was searching for, but when I walked through the door of that first meeting and was told to "keep coming back", I felt that you all had what I wanted, and were willing to give it to me, if only I asked. It took

me a while before this first awakening came to me. "We aren't going to hand this to you on a silver platter", I was told.

You had to ask. "If you want what we have to offer and are willing to make the effort to get it then you are ready to take certain steps, these are the principles that made our recovery possible."

Well I was more than willing, I was "wanting it all now." The next great awakening for me was perspective. I either did whatever until it was all gone or I lost interest. "Sounds like addiction to me." someone said.

I learned the meanings of obsession and compulsion. I learned that it can be beneficial to me and the fellowship if I make service an obsession. The only thing is I can't expect anything in return for my selfless efforts. The rewards are much greater than anything that can be expressed on paper. This spiritual program has given me back the self respect I lost while running from the truth. These things we are in search for are all but glimpses of the way things are meant to be. We will find them in Gods time. "Coincidences are miracles in which God chooses to remain anonymous." So keep in mind that the gifts we receive that touch the heart are the truths we once were searching for, and the awakening is in changing the old patterns and knowing we are getting what we need and not what we want. So get ready for the awakening of a Spirit that lives inside of you that was harnessed and put to rest by the abuses and habits learned and adopted as a way of living. Today we are awakened to a new way of life. The truth will set you free from the old way of living and into a new way of life. Today I can feel and I have a lot of empathy for the newcomer. I know your pain and I believe in my heart we can love you until you learn to love yourself. So please give yourself a break and let us help you and give me a break and don't try to manipulate. Just ask and you may find we will give you the answer you were searching for all

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along. And if you do get the answer that you want, get honest. Honesty is the truth. The spirit awakens! - Anonymous

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

LIFE THREATENING ILLNESS

Total abstinence from all drugs is the hallmark of NA recovery. The key to the disease concept is the desire to grow along with total abstinence. Some of our members suffer from illnesses that require the use of drugs but that does not prevent their finding recovery in NA. During illness, we just have to do the best we can. Those who use illness as a way to use soon find out that if you cheat, you lose. Recovery depends on desire for freedom from active addiction. We do not make people sick or well. We share a tried and true approach to living with addicts in need of help.

There are some among us with diseases in addition to addiction (like Hepatitis C or HIV) who need to be able to live clean while dealing with such an illness. The answers to our living problems are in the Twelve Steps and for us addicts there is no exception to this issue.

Living with a life-threatening illness is a relevant issue to our Fellowship, although it may not be talked about much. It is recovery while coping with another life-threatening illnesses. When we were out there using, a lot of us did irreparable damage to our bodies. Today, in recovery we have to live with the consequences of our active addiction and somehow stay clean as well. We wish to share how we manage to do this on a daily basis.

We know that addiction is incurable, progressive and fatal. It can be arrested at some point and recovery is then possible. The same holds true for other illnesses in recovery. We cannot go back and change what we did to ourselves, but we can choose to live just for today. Even if we cannot arrest physical illness, the spiritual damage it does to us can be stopped. Recovery shows us a new way to live - even with a potentially

fatal illness. Anyone with health problems that stays clean "come hell or high water" has something very valuable to share.

Recovery helps us find out what we need to become complete and guides us in the direction we need to go when we need help. Power is the ability to define reality. While our disease robs us of this power, our recovery restores it. Dealing with life on life's terms means being able to get through times of illness or being able to adapt to living with something we can't control. We can accept these realities and get support from our fellow members.

One of the things we guard against in writing this material is the presentation of 'good ideas' for others to live by with no personal involvement or validating experience to back it up. Instead, we find people with our problem and find out what they do to get along. We have known members who died from cancer, AIDS and other causes but never lost faith and never stopped working their NA program. They would go to meetings and share what was going on with them. We are sure they helped others by the courage of their example.

An addict shared: "Just before I first came to the program, I had a broken foot and it hurt like hell. I was prescribed a painkiller and took it as prescribed. I remember the point where it was starting to get me going in a way that was all too familiar. It scared me and I stopped taking it before the pain was gone. It felt like a close call. After I got in recovery, it made more sense to me. I had the desire for recovery before I had the Program.

"I sponsor a man who went through the removal of a lung. He was in pain and had to take medication but he never lost the attitude and desire for recovery that makes us members. I never felt he was

being dishonest or playing games. He could have died easily. It would be cruel to tell someone in that situation to throw away their medication. Recovery works and can help us in all sorts of circumstances."

Members who lose even for a short time the desire for recovery run the risk of relapse. After all, most members who have relapsed speak of losing their desire well before actual picking up the first drug. Developing a playful attitude towards the essentials of recovery is a warning sign. Stopping some of the things they have been doing to stay clean or grow spiritually are bigger warning signs.

An addict shared: "I always have to remember that addiction itself is a life threatening disease. Whenever I allow myself to become spiritually hungry, I find the urge to feed the addiction emerging.

"One of our local members is a paraplegic. He comes to the meeting in a wheelchair. Luckily, the building where we meet allows him to enter and exit under his own steam. Last Friday night, I went to 'Buckhead' to walk and stare at the neighborhood I used to live in during my college days. It has sure changed a lot as there are many more people and entertainment spots. Alongside one of the streets was a musician sitting with his guitar, amplifier and a set of harmonicas. He was setting up to do a live street performance.

"It took me a moment to realize that it was my buddy from the meeting, in his wheelchair, singing his heart out for tips and kicks. His first song was 'Hoochie-Coochie Man.' Sometimes, I think am a pretty fearless guy but I swear I do not currently have the guts to do what he did! I can play and even sing sometimes (I think!) but

to do it in public along a street on a Friday night is awesome. I was impressed! I did not realize until I came past this topic that while his illness may or may not be life threatening, it is sure life limiting. At least I thought so until I realized that he is doing things that I cannot do! He helped me grow that night - and kicked out some really good blues!"

Another addict shared: "Being in the situation at present of dealing with several health issues for which the treatments are apparently somewhat counterproductive at times, I find that 'keeping it as simple as possible' definitely helps.

"I have experienced all the things that went on when I first got clean. I have been putting a lot of attention into modifying my eating patterns. I recall at about two weeks into the commitment, My head hurt, my belly hurt, my arm hurt, my toe hurt, etc. and this disease said, 'If you're gonna still feel bad, why bother?'

"I picked-up the tools that y'all gave me. The Basic Text tells me that the only alternatives to recovery are jails, institutions, dereliction and death. I find that when I start feeling 'hopeless and powerless' with what is going on - it helps me to remember that dereliction is a neglect of, or failure in, duty. It is being remiss.

"I found that I have to dedicate my life each day to 'recovery' and then God provides me with reminders of my commitment and provides the strength to stay with it - no matter what."

We do not play doctors in NA; we share a proven program of recovery from addiction. We do not claim to have all the answers. Where NA is new, there have been tragic occasions where uninformed people have

given irresponsible medical advice and we take the issue very seriously: we are not doctors! Some drugs have side effects from unsupervised withdrawal like heart attack and other major concerns. Sadly, addicts have died from unwanted medical advice. We recommend that you seek the help of an informed physician and we pledge to do all we can to help the medical community get accurate information on our experience with addiction and recovery.

Someone who is required to take medication to deal with illness outside their control is not using. We have found that our members stay clean through major surgery and amputations requiring all sorts of drugs: they did not relapse spiritually and required no detox. As the pain subsided, they dispensed with the medication. In many of these cases, they had members visiting them in the hospital, bringing them a meeting, visits from their sponsors and the literature open at hand! It is hard to imagine a greater testimony to the healing power of NA recovery.

Others have had physical and emotional complications that resulted in medications that while they do not get you high, they are definitely to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, the rule 'if it is for an illness, it is not using' applies in nearly every case. Naturally, some will abuse this but we cannot control that. We can make someone who expresses a sincere desire for recovery welcome in our meetings. They may have nowhere else to go. Whether their personal situation allows them to get off 'everything' or not is something that is between them, their sponsor, their physician and their Higher Power. No one can judge their situation with the assurance of accuracy. Sincerity most always triumphs and those who have gaps in their desire for recovery will always find a way to use. We would hope that our members take time to pray when and where concerns of this type come up. Narcotics Anonymous is a program of total abstinence and yet we utilize practical spirituality.

Someone with emotional disorders on medication may feel comfortable in our meetings for a time, yet never be an addict. Disruption of any sort is rarely tolerated beyond a point, but a surrendered, sincere desire for self-betterment is most respectable. Life threatening illness means someone is living with imminent death. Kindness and restraint can help us reserve our "firebrand" statements about staying clean for those who are not otherwise ill. Recalling our pasts, we try to make room for those who need us reserve our judgment for ourselves and do the best we can to live the will of our loving Ultimate Authority. The temptation to give advice may be great but all we can actually share is our experience. Recalling this may help us to avoid situations where we might hurt someone unintentionally.

So long as a problem or issue can hide and avoid admission, discussion and honest sharing of recovery experience, just that long will our pain and sense of isolation endure. While it has long been said, "We are not doctors." there is no reason why we cannot share our real recovery in areas that concern, or will concern, most of our members. If not directly, we need to be aware of situations that may occur and what has worked for other NA members facing the same or similar problems. As written elsewhere in our Program of recovery, there is no safe usage of drugs. Our bodies do not know the difference. Also, while we are free to make generalizations, it is most important that the reader understand that generalizations do not apply in every case.

Total abstinence has long been the bedrock for recovery in Narcotics Anonymous. Over the years, progress in medicine has resulted in proliferation of drugs designed to help people with all sorts of illness or complaints. This has made the very idea of total abstinence seem antiquated and out of date with all the new medications to choose from. Narcotics Anonymous, as a program, cannot survive unless we keep NA

a safe place for addicts seeking recovery. While we may include members who are forced to take medication in our Fellowship, we are not unclear about our insistence on keeping total abstinence as our primary goal in recovery. The more we are freed from the effects of drugs in one form or another, the more we are free to be ourselves. We may be great or less than great but at least we are free. Active addiction is being forced to use against our will.

Doctors, in most cases, do not receive training in the area of addiction. When we use the phrase ‘informed physician’ what we mean is a doctor who knows something about NA and the disease concept. The recovery process is not yet recognized in the greater society. It is something we have worked out among ourselves, putting our lives on the line for what we believe. Devastation and death have marked our mistakes. What we have learned has worked for hundreds of thousands with more addicts getting clean every day. While we still say, “We are not doctors.” we may now add, “We have learned . . .” It requires very little effort to have people who are trained physicians, especially doctors who are also in NA, to look through what we share in writing and bring any need for inclusion, exclusion or restatement to our attention. But to pretend that we know nothing is not based in reality.

Long clean time results from living the Program on a daily basis. Any day we stop working our program, the Program will stop working for us. Without application, NA is as useless as an umbrella in the coat closet on a rainy day. Nobody is exempt from illness and we need to share how we stay clean when we are sick. While we can discuss particular problems and solutions, we bear in mind that in human beings, no part exists separate from the whole. Age, general health and common illnesses may affect us in ways that are more intense than in the general population.

Physical

Cancer – Stop hating anyone. This seems to be a general truth that comes up in reality where a person is diagnosed with cancer in any form. While this may sound like ‘folk medicine,’ it is what you hear among people who actually have cancer – and what’s the harm? We are finding out more about how the thoughts we hold in our minds affect the events that happen in our lives. There can be no doubt that our minds have much to say about how our bodies feel and function. Everything from our diets and respiration to our physiological state and development can be affected for the better or worse by our mental state. Hating in general creates a negative state of mind and that negativity can carry through to our physical condition. The body registers everything we eat, breath or drink.

Injury – Our members have awakened after an auto accident in a hospital with no idea what happened. There have been times when they were put on medication while they were still out cold. There are other times when their thinking and perceptions are impaired. Let’s make sure our people get the best medical treatment. Any addict who has this misfortune should be willing to go through medical detox, if necessary.

Mental

Perceptions may or may not be real. Many upsets and imbalances result in changes in the way we see things and this in turn changes our reaction. If we feel threatened or out of sorts, the first thing most of us do is blame it on whoever is closest at hand. So, our loved ones become the focus of our concern rather than considering our own need for mood management, taking care of ourselves and double checking our

thinking. Just a little restraint will go a long way to avoiding lashing out at others when we need to be making adjustments in our thinking. Not getting too hungry, angry, lonely, or tired is one way we keep ourselves in a good state of mind.

Just as 'breakthroughs' in medications have occurred, many forms of mental illness now have names unknown in the past. Borderline personality, multiple personality, bipolar and clinical depression are helping us understand what is happening to us and how we can deal with perceptions that may be self-generated based on disturbances in our body chemistry. Other people may in fact be doing things that upset us but that cannot explain the degree to which we get upset.

Emotions

Diet, exercise, spending enough time alone, with others and in study will all help keep us balanced. Even member's diagnosed with emotional illness will benefit from these things. We want our program to be available to all who need it and this forces us to think through what we say and do in recovery. If someone has a headache, take Aspirin. If a member suffers from mental illness, they may need prescribed medication. If a member is feeling upset or going through some emotional upheavals associated with working the 12 Steps, take nothing. Shame, guilt, remorse are all healthy feelings for people who have done wrong and not been able to admit it. They are accurate.

The point of recovery is we can change and as we change, our feelings change. We do not medicate these feelings, we deal with them. We go over what has happened that makes us feel badly and perhaps discuss it with our sponsor or at a home group. Do not discuss illegal things unless you know every group member. 'No surveillance' may be 'no known

surveillance' at a meeting with two or three hundred people present. Anonymity, in practice, seems to apply more to people who know us and care about us.

Medications

Always a hot spot for recovering addicts, medication for real needs is considered separate from questionable medication or using by volition. Sickness is one of the realities we face in recovery. A valid medication makes it possible for us to live without pain or disorientation. Using in terms of active addiction is evident when obsession, compulsion or excessive justification shows up. Much of our using took place in secret, or at least secret from those who did not use like we did. Just so, make sure you share what is happening in your life with your sponsor, trusted friends and others whose opinion or experience you value. Don't ask someone who has never owned a car how to change a spare tire. They may give you great theories but lack effective experience. Don't ask someone who has never been sick how to survive surgery or a major illness. They just don't know. Great danger lies in the fact that many times a well-intended person will make up something helpful to avoid admitting they have no successful experience to share. If we allow ourselves to become subject to their fantasy of what will help, we expose ourselves to all kinds of mistakes.

Spiritual

Being cut off from contact with our Higher Power shifts everything in our lives out of focus. We renew our recovering state of mind by surrendering when we encounter things too big for us to handle on our own. Being able to turn these things over mentally and in reality for our Higher Power to handle takes us off the hook and frequently solutions

appear almost immediately. We have known for years that we are our own worst enemy but is surprising to most of us how many forms this self-destructiveness can take. God help us!

HIV/AIDS & Recovery
Member's Personal Account

Part of my story is that I shot drugs from early 1970's to the early 1980's the last four years were almost daily. I remember some of the old time junkies that ran some of the galleries that I frequented were going to the hospital with this weird pneumonia that was killing some of them in the early 1980's. They found a name for my disease. They called it HIV/AIDS.

I took the HIV test after a routine physical showed that I had a low white cell count. I had about ten days to wait for the results to come back. During this time I reflected back on all the people who had died of AIDS related illnesses that were from my circle of close friends that I shot dope with. Knowing how many of them close friends of mine were real blood brothers mixing blood because you get in a hurry to get your fix, then shaking like a leaf for a minute or two. The fact that we used the same works or used the shooting gallery works instead of new one should have made me want to take the HIV test many years earlier, but I believe that subconsciously, I did not want to know. My denial could have landed me in the hospital had not the GOD of my understanding intervened and do for me what I was not willing to do for myself. November 9th 1997, I was diagnosed with clinical AIDS. I was clean nine years at the time of my diagnosis and one month shy of celebrating my 20th wedding anniversary. I was lucky my wife rode this out with me, as she rode out living with me in active addiction. Some are not as lucky as I was. Their wives, lovers, or partners think they can but soon

find out they can not handle living with a person who has HIV/AIDS.

By the time I went to the doctor to find out what the test results were, I had, through the principles on our program, already accepted what I knew he was going to tell me. Once the diagnosis was confirmed, it was actually a relief. I had no idea how heavy the weight was until it was gone. The poor doctor kept asking me over and over, "Do you understand what I have just told you?" My reply was, "Yes, Doc. I am in a 12 Step program. My concern is not how I got this way, my concern is what are we going to do about it starting today." I then told him, "As long as you give me what you gave Magic, I am going to be ok." He said that is just what we are going to do. I have through the course of my therapy had a pill count as high as 33 pills a day. Even though I have a program, the regimen I was on at first wore me down. After a year and I became very depressed as a result. It was a bad situation to have any disease run my life. The disease of addiction is one we can take charge of and keep arrested using the NA program. The HIV/AIDS meds I was taking were ruling my life. They had to be taken on time, every time, to be effective. That was not so bad. I could do that but when I would meet with you after a meeting and you say, "Come on Ron, lets go get something to eat." I would have to look at my watch because I had to wait two hours after or one hour before I took my meds.

It sucked, having pills dictate your eating habits. I sought some outside help on this issue and fought with my doctor to change my meds to something I could take and eat when I wanted to. That is what NA taught me that I am responsible for my recovery from all diseases.

I used the principle of acceptance to deal with my situation, no one but me had put myself at risk to acquire HIV/AIDS. I used the principle of surrender to move on and take responsibility to take care of my new

disease just for today. I used the 4th, 5th, and 8th steps to not let guilt interfere and cause me to not take my meds on time every time. Through prayer and meditation I was able to disclose and be open about my AIDS status from day one. I hear you tell me for years that my secrets will keep me sick. I got rid of all secrets writing my 4th step, so I was not about to start keeping news secrets.

The bottom line was that through the practice of the 12 steps and 12 traditions I was able to look at my new disease as a gift. I know some of you as you read that line will ask how he can look at such a life changing disease as a gift. I will tell you how and why.

The GOD of my understanding has taken care of me since the day I asked to be taken off the streets and not let me use drugs any more. When I was in treatment, and did not know where my wife and kids were, I got mad at GOD and demanded to see my family. Being the loving and caring GOD that he is, I saw my family the next day. He has reunited me with my family after I got out of treatment. He has restored me to sanity. He sent me to NA to get a sponsor and learn through the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions exactly who I really am. So, with all the good things he has given me, why not look at this as just another gift from GOD. That's right I said gift.

You see the day I disclosed my AIDS status, people inside and outside the rooms made it their business not to be in my life any more. There were even a few NA members who I did not get hugs from - or when I did get a hug it was not the same tight 'hold on for you life' hug. Well let us look at what a gift that was. If they can not accept me the way I am, they did not need to be in my life anyway. So GOD removed some people who did not believe in me and want to help me in my recovery. There was lady friend of mine who after the meeting came up to me and

said, “You have been helping us in NA for a long time, GOD wants you help some other people now who have a different disease.” Man, talking about GOD speaking through other people. I was blown away but I was also able to take what that lady had told me and run with it.

Here is another way this has been a gift. We have people in NA who are not as comfortable as I am with my AIDS status and they do not feel that they can disclose their HIV/AIDS status, the reasons why vary but the bottom line is they ask if they can share with me what is going on with them in relation to their HIV, I am willing to be of service and give them the recovery from HIV/AIDS I have learned. So I now felt pleased that I was able to be open with my HIV status because they could not.

The 12 Steps and 12 Traditions play a big part in my HIV therapy. I had a job making \$50,000 plus a year. It was in the chemical industry, and I was also working shift work, all three shifts every month, including most holidays. You can not find a doctor that will tell you that is a healthy way to live your life. It actually takes time of the end of your life. Then there are the safety and EPA regulations you have to abide by. I just wanted to paint the stressful environment I was working under. Mind you, when you are in the process of doing this day in and day out, you do not feel the stress. How I found out was I had come to the point where the money was not as important as my health. And after eighteen months away from that job my T-Cell (CD4) count went from 221 up to 587, my doctor said that was a dramatic jump. This is what the 12 Steps taught me. It was, and still is, a painful decision I made. My family suffered because I lost close to \$30,000 in income, but we are making it just for today.

On the back of our medallion it says “We share and care with others the NA way” to me others meant everybody. I am a certified HIV educator.

This is another gift; I was able to get educated to HIV/AIDS at no cost, you can not beat free education. I do a lot of speaking to a lot of different audiences. I always share as if I am in a NA meeting and it always goes well. I do not have to tell a person that I am sharing the 12 Steps with them as long as they benefit from what I am telling them it is all good.

I am also Hepatitis C positive. Again another result of sticking needles in my arms. The 12 Steps of NA helped me to take and own responsibility for my actions. We all have our wreckage of the past that sooner or later we have to deal with and these diseases are my wreckage. I also became Diabetic as a result of the meds, the virus, or the way I was eating, again it is not how we got it, it is what we do about it. The doctor told me that if I lost thirty pounds, I would not have to take Diabetes medicine. I have already told you how many pills I was taking and I was not trying to add any more. I went from 231 lbs. to 205 lbs. My goal is 190 lbs. I am so into my recovery that I laughed when I found out about acquiring another disease, thinking to myself, when is this gonna end, and knowing that the answer is when you guys hear that I have left this world and gone on the big meeting in the sky.

My sponsor beat into my head a few things some of them go like this, "Don't take anything personal." So when all this happened, I did not take it personal. The 12 Steps ease the pain of living life on life's terms, not remove it. He also said, "Once you identify the problem, it is half solved. You just have to put some positive action to it and you are in the recovery process." He used to use this analogy, if there is a quarter on the floor and its heads up, you know tails is on the other side but until you bend down and flip it over you can not see the other side. Action had and continues to have to be taken for me to remain in our recovery process. Life is good when I am in the recovery process.

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I am taking better care of myself today than I ever did prior to finding out I was AIDS positive. Today I work in the HIV/AIDS field helping other people who are positive get their medicine and see a doctor so they can live a quality life. I am coming up on fifteen years of recovery. I have been in the same home group for fourteen and a half years, we are a group that meets to help each other stay clean and we practice the 12 Traditions to the best of our ability. I will end this by saying this. I have seen many HIV+ people. They all do not take their diagnosis the way. It takes many of them a long time to come to grips with their situation. I am so grateful that I am a member of NA and had a program to help me deal with my situation. Some of those people do not have a good outlook on life. I love knowing the fact that I have a program that has already been proven in the lives of many addicts. So I know it can be the guide through any thing that life throws my way, and I never have to use over it.

Life Limiting Illness

“I have felt that I needed to write this in hopes it will help others, in addition to having been encouraged by my sponsor write about this for some time now. I confess to all the usual pitfalls that seem to appear as insurmountable. So, with your patient attention, here goes:

“I was diagnosed with both diabetes and lymphodema prior to entering recovery. I struggled with living with both of these life-limiting conditions. I was able after coming into recovery to accept that I was as responsible for my recovery or lack thereof in these disorders as well. The saving grace, I thought was that I did not have to take any questionable medications for them. As I have progressed in the recovery process, it has become apparent to me that not taking that responsibility places me dangerously close to the line. The disease of addiction tells

me that I don't have to monitor my diet, that if I eat things that drive up my blood sugar I can shoot a little more insulin to compensate. While, clearly insulin will not get me high – it would be without a doubt using behavior and thinking.

“I heard it said, in the beginning that we start the process of recovery by stopping the drugs and as time passes we should begin to address other symptoms of using. That has been my experience.

“Then life threw me a curve ball; after a 6 week confinement in the hospital I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer almost two years ago. Of course, I was put on morphine at the hospital for pain management. I struggled against it, begged the doctor to give me something else. I would go as long as I could stand it before taking it, I guess I tried all the solutions that the disease of addiction suggested until my sponsor told me that an addict in recovery could follow directions. I surrendered, asked the nurses for any information they had on pain management and began to educate myself on this concept. In the process, I learned the vast difference between pain management and pain response. The latter applies to pain that should subside as the injury heals; the other is to prevent further complications to recovery that are caused by pain.

“I had to have exploratory surgery to get a biopsy and a diagnosis. They also mechanically removed about seven liters of fluid from my abdomen. Further surgery was not recommended because of my weight [another life-limiting, self-inflicted condition] which ironically had increased by almost forty pounds lbs due to fluid retention. Initially, I was very committed to losing enough weight to proceed in the usual manner, surgery followed by chemotherapy.

“My oncologist said we really didn't need to wait the time it may take to

achieve that option, I was already stage 4 which only leaves the final stage when the cancer leaves the abdomen and travels to other areas. So then the choice is chemotherapy or nothing. I have developed a close enough relationship with God as to be absolutely convinced that I'm going to be okay, no matter what. So much information, so many choices, and so little time to process things – my head was spinning and I had to go on the instincts God has blessed me with and pray, pray, pray! Therefore, I went for the chemotherapy.

“I took the first chemo session and came through quite well, which helped me leave the hospital very optimistic. I live about seventy miles from the hospital and the ride home was tiring indeed. It seems that the process of my husband loading me in the truck [my lymphodema was seriously out of control, I think the entire amount of fluid retention was in my legs because I could only take a few steps with assistance and could not move them on my own], had put pressure on one of the incisions from the laparoscopic surgery. When we arrived home, my dress was wet enough to have water squeezed from it. We came in the house and settled for the night. I still had fluid coming from the incision in such force that it was quite obvious the next morning. By this time, I was feeling some of the effects of the chemo but we had to reload and drive back to the doctor's office to get stitched.

“I returned to the hospital in three weeks for my next chemo session and after ten attempts to start an IV the nurses at the cancer clinic said no go. Then, of course, I had to have another surgery to have an access device installed for chemo and whatever. Still they doctors said I could not survive having the major surgery necessary to remove the cancer. I had chemo as well as blood transfusions every three weeks for the following year. I have not had chemo for a year now and my levels are holding steady so we are most definitely on a one day at a time basis.

“I was sent home with a morphine patch delivery system. Initially, I was on 25mg with a prescription for OxyContin to take for break through pain [lovely situation for an addict to be in, huh?] When I revisited my primary physician in a couple of weeks, we had a serious discussion about this. The results were: he increased the dosage to 50mg and we discontinued the other drug.

“I am still not able to attend meetings on a regular basis. My home group has been so wonderfully supportive. They bring me NA meetings at home and continued to allow me to celebrate my anniversaries. I have a sponsee who is celebrating in July. She lives about 5 hours away and her home group wants me to come speak but I cannot possibly make such a trip. In talking to my home group members, they have invited her to celebrate here and allow us to make a recording that she can take back to play at her home group.

“A lot of people that I thought were friends are no longer coming around because they cannot accept my medications. I lost a sponsee, she felt that I was entirely too comfortable with the situation. Some have pulled away long enough to process things and are back and quite fiercely defensive of me when others attack. I resigned as Area Chairperson as soon as I received my diagnosis and what lay ahead. I did this over some quite vocal objections from some who are now on a character assignation campaign. I would not even attempt to hold a position within the service structure with these forces at work in my life today. I remain available as a resource but have no business in a representative capacity.

“I am clearly aware of the physical effects of my medications on my system and am also clearly convinced that I have not relapsed. I am also aware that this situation like any that I may go through requires that I

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remain open and vocal about what I am going through and that I must remain vigilant. The need for medications has physically placed me a step or two closer to the line but my continuing surrender and commitment to recovery both mentally and spiritually are allowing me to remain in the recovery process. As the old song goes, “two out of three ain’t bad!” As a parting thought to others who find themselves in a similar situation, I would like to say: Trust God, talk to your sponsor and/or your immediate network regularly, take suggestions ONLY from those who have personal experience in this area to share with you rather than opinions or hearsay, recommit to recovery DAILY, seek and follow the directions of your doctor exactly, and remain vigilant. We do recover and can continue to recover through life-threatening illnesses.-
A Grateful Addict from Georgia

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships keep us aware of the fact that we really do need each other. Meaningful and fulfilling relationships are possible. Although isolated by the disease of addiction, we long for friends, companions and lovers. We want to trust and to be trusted. With practice, we learn that taking healthy risks, letting down our walls, and being vulnerable are assets rather than liabilities. Each success strengthens us and each failure instructs. Any time that there is trust between two people a positive relationship can result. Honest communication and respect for one another enhances these relationships. We develop these virtues by working on ourselves with the Steps. We come to know and love ourselves. Our expanding definitions of love cause our relationships to improve. As we grow healthier, we find relief from the aspects of our personality that cause us trouble when we get close to others. One area of learning to live that addicts refer to most frequently and with the greatest pain and confusion is 'relationships'. It is hard to accept the responsibility of getting the stuff out of the way that prevents us from having happy relationships. Before we can enjoy this aspect of humanness, we have to let the changes settle into our hearts and take root there. Otherwise, we can only build our nests by instinct.

As we grow out of an immature need for love to a mature giving of love, we increase our capacity to care about others. When we learn to express our love, we feel loved in return. As we understand more about love, the more our relationships improve. We become less sensitive and suspicious with others. If there are upsets, we find ways to deal with them. We do not just duck and dodge problems. Everything that we did not face from our pasts will surface and magnify in our relationships. It has to become an issue for us in order for us to become willing to walk

through it. When this happens, we need a sponsor and a home group to help us walk through the situation and make the necessary changes. Sometimes our members learn to interact like a healthy family. Not harsh or overbearing, they just stick by us and when we are ready for help, they are present, able and willing to help. Some members seem to like to be told what to do by someone they respect. Too often this ends in a predictable let down when the idiot who falls for it fails to give the proper instruction in some way as judged by the 'dependent' member, who then can anguish over how the 'program' let them down and they went back to using. Another, more widespread way of relating, involves sharing what worked for us with a surrendered addict seeking recovery who then strives to put into action the best they can and keeps asking help when they need it. Actually, all we can do is share what works for us. We can pattern after others successfully as long as we are alert and willing to do our part.

Our problems with relationships bring Twelve Step recovery into the here and now for many of us. This is one more reason we do not hold back when working the Steps. We want our defects to come out so we can identify and get rid of them. Through living the Steps, our defects will not hurt others as often or cause us years of additional and unnecessary pain. This is why we do not share our advice, just honest sharing about what works for us. Even in recovery, our addictive nature forces us to feel hopeless as to whether a true personality change can happen for us. Our commitment to personal growth through prayer, helping others and working the Steps grows proportionally as our desperation fades.

Many of us have avoided relationships as a natural defense mechanism during active addiction. Positive interaction with other people had virtually disappeared because of our anti-social activities. We thought

that even if a meaningful relationship could exist at all, it wouldn't happen for us. The more isolated we became; the more we needed a way to feel connected with the rest of the world. Addiction stole our identities. We suppressed our emotions, feelings and dignity slowly and deliberately until we existed only as a shadow of a human being. We sought ways to regain lost dreams and abilities but we only found more loneliness and misery. Nothing that we have tried seemed to work, especially the drugs. We began to question our very existence. The initial step in relating effectively to others is to realize that we do not and can not exist in a vacuum. While we may be dependent on others for much of our sense of well-being, this does not mean that we rely on others to provide our happiness. Knowing and feeling that others care for us reinforces the desire for recovery and encourages us to reach out. The spiritual nature of recovery moves according to a precise and comprehensive plan to secure for us what we need the most. If we are praying to God to work miracles in our lives, amazing things will happen. We have been doing things backwards for so long, that down looks like up and straight lines seem crooked! Although a relationship isn't the first thing that we have to have in recovery, many of us get into one as soon as we can although we are not ready for one. We might miss having a romantic relationship just as we miss not having a car. We have difficulty in accepting that either our license is suspended or we can not buy gas, in other words 'our responsibility' in the situation. When we work the Program, we know that our turn will come when it is time.

Through a combination of many types of relationships with other recovering addicts, our sponsors, oneself, and the God of our understanding, our lives begin to fall into place. Many of us have found it best to develop a relationship with God first. As this relationship grows, we can better relate with all the others. As we pray and develop more faith, our relationship with the God of our understanding improves

thereby making it easier to examine who we are. We found peace of mind when we surrendered to the First Step and some of us experienced a glimmer of hope following our first meeting. When we shared with that first person in recovery about our true feelings, we began to break through the fear toward healing our fractured personalities. Looking into another person's eyes and being able to see the empathy and understanding is a precious gift indeed. Perhaps our first positive relationship in recovery began when we simply became willing to listen to others. We faced head on our 'aloneness' and faced our need to change our ways. The next relationship began when we got a sponsor and learned how to have a healthy relationship with another human being.

We take an honest look at our regrets, resentments, defects and assets. We recall our lost hopes in writing about our past dreams, daily accomplishments, and future goals. By maintaining the awareness of our gifts and assets, we get a picture of ourselves that is honest and accurate. Sharing the vision of 'who we think we are' with someone we trust is a key to our ongoing growth. When we share all of our weaknesses as well as strengths with at least one other person, we gain a new perspective. The more people that we interact with only helps this perspective to grow. Self-examination gives us the willingness to surrender our character defects and improve our character assets. We accept that others are blameless for our problems when we take personal responsibility for our lives. We learn to forgive ourselves as well as those who may have harmed us and we ask the forgiveness from those that we have harmed.

The ability to recognize when we are wrong and admit it to another person is an important quality in strengthening our relationships. When we only pray for knowledge of God's will, miracles will happen. The knowledge of our personal purpose plus a sense of that mission prepares us for whatever action is necessary. As we begin to feel worthwhile and

fulfilled, we awaken to the fact that we are not alone in this world. Many of the self-imposed barriers to intimacy disappear as the grace of our Higher Power restores our spirit. From that point forward, we are ready, willing and able to live life. Whatever we lack inwardly can most quickly and painfully surface in our relationships. There isn't any doubt that love offers us the ultimate experience of affirmation and joy as well as the potential for depression and desperation. In other words, the possibility that character defects that we may yet be unaware of could devastate our relationships. These defects are some of the issues that we deal with in our ongoing recovery. Amends we cannot acknowledge or initiate create other internal barriers to pain or advancement. Only our NA 12 Steps can root them out.

Many of us have apparently developed a pattern in that all our 'serious relationships' turn out to be only temporary love affairs. From these experiences, we sometimes learn more about ourselves than we care to know. We pick lovers who are emotionally unhealthy and even abusive or we may display these same traits ourselves. The experience of others is there to help us but we usually do just as we please based solely on whether we feel like the victimizer or the victim. When we realize that the relationship isn't working, we have already committed or we are so deeply involved that it is difficult or impossible to walk away. We 'hang in there' trying to make it work and manage to convince ourselves that we are 'sticking with it' long after we should have ended our love affair with dignity. It is then that we ask ourselves "Is this God's will or our ego?" Most of us realize that we have an inner voice that gives us direction but it takes commitment and practice to follow it. Some call this inner voice God and others call it instinct but it does not matter what we call it. We benefit when we listen to it.

Some of us have learned to support our weakened egos by tearing down

those around us. In recovery, we have a chance to consider what we are doing and decide if we want to keep doing it. For instance, a lady who knows only how to chase and catch a man, may be quite lost when it comes to staying with them, sharing their lives and dealing with the many little things that come up. They know how to 'get' a man, not how to 'keep' one. They may make themselves feel ok by homing in on the failures or imperfections of the men they are with. If this ever made sense, what happens today is our concern. A person can never have a good mate if they systematically undermine them. It just can not happen. Learning a new way would be to take stock several times a day of our recovery, asking for the help of our HP and trying out things we see other ladies - who are happy and successful - doing.

Loving and depending on others for certain things is not in itself wrong or unhealthy. Taken to an extreme, we will try to push our responsibilities onto another person and that is terrible wrong. When we think we are free to avoid doing our part, we sabotage our own happiness. The love of another is empty if we do not love ourselves. Love cannot give us an identity. Over-dependency, exploitation, domination and subservience will cave in the strongest love. If we lack a HP, we will fear being alone. If we make peace with our life and world by coming to believe, all else will start to come together. It is the two keys of surrender and belief that open the doorway to a new life.

The longer we stay clean, the more we see how addiction interfered in our relationships. Most of us have grown slowly and we have experienced some painful mistakes even when we tried to do everything right. Seeking out those who are having successful relationships can provide us with guidance but the only way to learn about having a relationship is to have one. It is like learning how to drive because until we get behind the wheel, we can not get down the road. Often, we

addicts are only vaguely aware of our defects and not yet able to see the actual impact that they have on our lives. Probably, the only accurate measure that we have in knowing that these defects are a problem is that things go wrong. Today, we understand that if something is wrong there are defects involved and that we are not necessarily unloving, uncaring, or unfeeling people. We must take care though to maintain our responsibilities and not cop out. These defects helped us avoid pain in the past by preventing others from getting close enough to hurt us. These defects need dismantling before we can reasonably expect relationships to work for us. Otherwise, we may end up hurting someone and then begging them not to leave us. We may want to ask ourselves, "Hey! What would happen if we were to stop hitting or yelling at our partners?" They might just stop fleeing from us!

Unfortunately, it is all too common for us to jump into a sexual relationship when we first get clean in an attempt to replace the high that we found with drugs or to avoid the pain of withdrawal. If we are not serious about recovery, we will not be able to stay clean through these behaviors. We get into these relationships for many reasons: orgasm, personal acceptance, as well as control issues but no matter the reason for getting into them, we may find ourselves in trouble. We discover that it is more important to know who we are so that we can initiate relationships with people who really care about us. We need to practice safe habits in all of our relationships and not merely in our sexual encounters. We do this by continuing to spend time with our friends and our sponsor. We shouldn't abandon our hobbies, interests or goals to impress our lover or to keep peace. Our relationships do not ensure our happiness or provide positive self-esteem especially if we have those expectations. By relying on our Higher Power and the NA Program, we can maintain self-reliance. We eventually realize that we have to work on ourselves if we want our relationships to get better. 'Our personal

recovery depends on NA unity' because we believe that we have a spiritual connection with each other. This belief motivates us to treat everyone with love and concern whether they are inside or outside the Fellowship. If we want the best for ourselves then we must give our best to the world.

One NA member shares, "I came into the rooms of NA about March 11, 1998, twenty months ago, for my second attempt to get clean. In September of '95, I came to NA after going through treatment and only achieved approximately sixty days clean time and decided I wasn't an addict and went back out there. I didn't follow any suggestions, work steps, etc. But most importantly, I didn't understand anonymity.

"When I came back into the rooms this time I was in total desperation. I was also in a relationship with a man who was in active addiction. I had been in this relationship for 2 ½ years. I realized I had a 'drug' problem and sought help through treatment. He, on the other hand, was in total denial and vowed he could quit using anytime. I started going to meetings. I was serious about my recovery. I listened. I shared in meetings. I got a sponsor. Did 90 in 90. But this relationship was not working out. People in the rooms suggested, at the very least I needed to set some boundaries. I did. I truly believed he wasn't an addict. He honored my boundaries (or so I thought). But I still found us growing in separate directions. I continued this relationship for approximately four months.

"People in the rooms told me when the pain got bad enough I would either do something about it to better my chances at recovery or get loaded. I knew I didn't want to use. I discovered that this person whom I trusted and thought was changing his life

too, was lying to me the entire time I had been clean. I had to make a choice. I prayed about it a lot. Then, one day, the answer came to me clear as a bell. I couldn't continue to save this relationship with an addict who was in complete denial. For the first time in my life, I put my needs first. I trusted the people in the rooms of NA who told me if I take care of myself, stay clean and come to meetings things would work out the way they were supposed to. I was terrified! I loved this man with all my heart but I knew until he could get honest about addiction that we didn't have a chance. He left and suddenly I found myself alone for the first time in my life. See, I always felt I needed a man in my life to make me feel whole. However, the friends and support I had found in NA saved my life. They were there to hold my hand, cry on their shoulder, and help me through this trying time.

"Even though I knew that I had done the right thing my heart was still broken because I loved the man and, since I had been coming to NA, I started learning about the disease of addiction, and how it takes over lives. The denial and self-deception are part of this disease of addiction. I felt bad for him but I knew that he had to hit rock bottom and realize on his own that he needed help. I didn't call or communicate with him at all after the break up. I continued to pray every day and night for God to help me get through this and to do the next right thing. Then after a short time apart, I realized that I was pregnant with this man's baby. I didn't know what to do.

"I leaned on my support from my friends in NA. I finally called him to let him know about the baby. He said some hurtful things and then hung up on me. I called his mother and informed her about the situation. I gave her a meeting schedule to pass onto him,

and hung up the phone. I was devastated, however I knew that all that I could do was turn it over to my higher power, not use, and accept whatever happened. That night I went to a meeting. I was a little late and the meeting had already started when I got there. When I walked in the door, I saw him sitting there at a meeting. My heart sank. I sat in the back where he couldn't see me. Then after the meeting, we talked. He told me that he was sorry and that he realized he had a problem and wanted help.

"My first thought was to hug him and tell him that everything would be fine and lets go home. But I knew that if this was ever going to work out I had to know that he was doing this for himself and not to get me back. Since we were having a child together, I did make an effort to try and save this relationship. He had to prove to me that he wanted a new way of life and was willing to do whatever necessary to stay clean. We didn't move back in together for a while. He went to meetings, got a sponsor and stayed clean. After a lot of prayer and thought, we did get back together.

"Today we have a beautiful eight month old daughter. I now have 27 months clean now and he has 16 months clean. We both attend meetings daily, are involved in service work, etc. Most importantly, we make NA our life. We are both learning the true meaning of love. Our lives today are good. I do realize that this is probably an exception to the rule about early relationships. However, I do believe that my higher power knew that I was willing to go to any length for my recovery and eventually so was he.

"I truly believe that we are supposed to be together. Putting our recovery first before anything else and having some faith that by

doing the next right thing that our higher power will take care of us and things will end up the way they are supposed to be was a lesson I learned early in my recovery. This relationship may not last forever, but this program has taught me Just For Today I am happy and it is working. And that's all we really have is today. And if tomorrow things all went to hell, I know that with the help of my higher power, and the love and support of NA, that as long as I put my recovery first everything is going to be ok. For that I am eternally grateful."

We want to share with you the loving hope that we find at our own level of happiness with other human beings. Sharing our lives with someone special opens doors to potentials that we could miss and never even know it. Working the Steps is the way that we begin living our lives so that happy meaningful relationships become possible.

Considering the people in our lives as a part of us rather than apart from us makes it easier to find our common ground and welfare. We try to get a view of what is best for everyone involved, not just our own wants and needs. We can deal with all of our relationships this way because if we want to build quality associations we need to see others as being equal with and as important as we are. When we consider what might happen if we extend the notion of common welfare to our families, neighborhoods, and communities the potentials are unlimited. In some cultures, practicing this concept could place an individual at risk. Remember if it isn't practical, it isn't spiritual. In NA, we learn that while the group is precious to the individual, the individual is also precious to the group. This equality is essential in the development of any loving relationship. The good of the majority should never take precedence over an individual's well-being because when one of us suffers, we all suffer.

The idea that we can prosper at the expense of another implies that we have no natural sense of honor or that we think we can get away with things that make us feel badly about ourselves. Until the teachings of this spiritual way of life impress upon us the necessity for change, we continued to be unhappy. It may truly seem to be the other person's fault, yet who really wins, especially if we are blameless but miserable? Our personal well-being depends upon our ability to relate to others with whom we come into contact. The ability to relate is especially important in our relationships with those who are closest to us. The myth about 'good' relationships is that we will find that perfect person and everything will fall into place. We think that they will love us and please us, and oh, how we are going to love them. We'll care for them and give them everything they want. Somehow, we have gotten the idea that it is our job to make our partners happy and that it is their job to make us happy. This is not possible. The reality is this: we can be happy together but only if we are at peace with ourselves. Inner peace happens when we accept and treasure our own identities. The inventory process helps us in self-discovery and further Step work helps us love ourselves.

Our desire to have relationships may only be our attempts to exercise our imaginary powers over another or to transfer the power and responsibility to another. We may simply want someone in place to blame if things go wrong. In recovery, we have learned that ultimate authority belongs to God so we try not to create situations in which our partner or us have to be 'the boss.' Each of us has our own good qualities that we bring to the relationship along with our defects. We accept that these talents and abilities will benefit us as long as we do not try to assume God's role. Listening to one another's point of view and then figuring out what to do together is the ideal for which we strive. This is what we do in our recovery meetings and with time, we can do it in our personal relationships. When alone and trying to make a decision,

we consult God through quiet prayer and we meditate to see the knowledge and intuition that He provides us. We visualize our loved ones being with us. In the midst of this meditation, we may even sense the preferences of others involved and perhaps we can even hear them speak.

Whether proceeding with humor or melodrama, one problem that recovering addicts experience in forming secure relationships is accepting that people with the natural ability to form lasting trust bonds have already done so. The rest have trouble just as we do. In order for us to get better, we find that we no longer have to find someone as sincere as we are. We can wait and work on our steps until we find ourselves with someone to whom we are pleasant and attractive. We find that even with a lot of the fear and games gone it is best to take things slowly. The ability to enter a 'group conscience' state of mind is available to us, anywhere and anytime. When deciding on the course of action that we need to take, we must consider our common welfare and purpose. In this way, we are truly serving one another. We learn to trust each other and in turn are trusted. Being of service in a relationship does not mean doing things for people that they should be doing for themselves. It means helping them realize that, with God's help, they can do it for themselves. This is the spirit of service referred to in our Second Tradition.

On one level, we work hard to gain 'good sense' - while we look about frantically for a member who is available sexually. People always seem to tell us what we should do yet we usually do exactly as we please, regardless of the results we get. Listening to people who have good relationships and who have bonded themselves to us will keep us from going off the deep end. One consideration that most of us still use in order to evaluate our situation is whether the relationship in which we

are involved is a healthy one. Many of the problems may evolve from our desire for the status which society-at-large places on those who are in successful relationships. Using someone to get status is dishonest. If the basis for desiring something is clean and honest and we are willing to pay the price required, our chances for a successful relationship are excellent. If we think that we can get away with dishonesty, deceit or manipulation of others just because we are clean and clever, we have a rude awakening ahead.

We are so furious when things go wrong. It has been hard to trust again. Problems make us want to lash out at someone we love for the pain of inadequacy we feel inside! In our frustration, we try harder. And because we try harder to be careful and considerate, we become anxious and uncomfortable. Unless our mate is extraordinary, they may see our efforts as contrived and insincere, when it is just the opposite. So, again, we fail. Oh well, we will try harder the next time.

We must desire to have relationships before we can choose how closely we might relate to others. How do we handle those who wish for a closer relationship with us when the feeling is not mutual? How do we apply principles in such a situation? The idea that we should allow people that want to participate in our lives to do so can be scary and perhaps even repugnant. However, when we remember that we are in a relationship with everyone around us, we see that we have the right to limit our choices of whom we interact on an intimate basis. We choose the depth and intensity of each of our relationships. We may decide that avoiding personal contact with certain people is necessary for us to remain healthy. We may continue to hold them in loving esteem, pray for their well-being, and visualize the best for them in our meditations. The idea of 'must' is a spirit killer. The spiritual principle we are speaking of here is the unconditional acceptance of others. We have learned not to place

unrealistic expectations or conditions on the people in our lives. We have learned to be satisfied with the simple reality that they are with us because they think that we are worthy of their companionship. The desire of another to be part of our life is a precious gift indeed. Control and manipulation destroy even the most intense relationships. Whenever we place unfair conditions on our love, we only cheat ourselves and restrict our ability to have healthy relationships with others. Many times, we learn things that are bitter in the beginning turn sweet in time. And often sweet goes to sour as time goes by...

We consider the old saying, "Never place your affections on a green growing tree." This reminds us that a person changing in recovery will be different after a time and that in spite of the fact that love and tenderness may be quite real today, one or both partners will likely feel differently tomorrow. We say, "Wear the world like a loose garment." This makes it easier to change. When we search for the best in others, we find the best in ourselves. We practice acceptance by looking past the flaws of others and concentrating on their virtues. We seek not to be perfectionists and yet we continue to seek the perfection that we believe dwells in those we love. What we mean is that we look for the 'God' in others and embrace those 'divine qualities' by treating our loved ones with the same honor and respect that we desire for ourselves.

As one addict shared: " I know a man who has been in recovery for a long time, yet when I see him at meetings, he is the one at the door greeting people. He makes them feel welcome with his smile and a hug or by offering them a cup of coffee. When he speaks to me, I feel like my presence is especially important to him, but he treats everyone this way. When someone is feeling low or struggling with a problem, he is the first to offer words of hope or encouragement by pointing out their good qualities.

"Naturally, everyone looks forward to seeing him at the meetings. He is one of the most loved and respected people I know. The reason for this adoration is not in what he says or does. The key to his popularity is in how he treats others. He treats them with love."

In learning to open ourselves up to the forces of life that surround us, we develop the ability to give and receive more freely. We see many things that we were unable to see before. This is what being clean is all about. When we help others, we receive help. As we express truths to others, we increase our understanding and open new doors of opportunity. Our sharing goes beyond basic communication. It can give us the energy we need to rebuild. We show our love and teach one another what we have learned. Defining our purpose in life is also helpful. What is the purpose of our various relationships? Friendships include feelings of mutual affection, respect, support, shared interests and adventure. A romantic relationship might include all of the above as well as a deeper level of intimacy and possibly sex. Parental relationships might include the qualities of friendship as well as stability, consistency, and responsibility. As parents, we help our children to form their values, nurture them and pass on our experience, strength and hope. Just as we use our primary purpose of carrying the message in our groups, we can use it for guidance in our private lives. The test for any proposed activity in our ongoing relationships is the question, "Does this further our primary purpose as a person or divert us from it?"

In the past, we have agreed with others' ideas for acceptance but we no longer feel the need to agree unless it is sincere. We can agree to disagree and we believe that we do not have to give up our own or disprove someone else's beliefs. The power and prestige of 'being right' is an area where our egos overpower our best thinking. Money issues

trigger our insecurities and can cause many disputes amongst us. It is important that we realize that these things are petty considerations when compared with unity. First, we focus on our primary purpose. If we find that our definition of our primary purpose conflicts with our partners', we need to remember that 'spiritual principles are never in conflict.' Therefore, if a conflict exists we need to re-evaluate the situation. Confusing wants and needs creates un-necessary problems.

The principle of self-support is the privilege to contribute our fair share wherever we are involved. Contributing to the welfare of the relationship gives us the feeling that we are part of something greater than we are so we give something to each of our relationships. Sometimes we give money, emotional support, or enormous physical effort and we know that we can not really lose by doing this. The rewards from everything we do multiply and return to us when we least expect it. Many addicts contribute to society both within the Fellowship and at large in ways that are not glamorous or important. We can be of service no matter what our 'job' may be. It helps if we look for the ways that what we do can affect and enrich the lives of others. We must be careful not to let our job, education or our perceived 'station in life', distort our perception of reality. Feeling either superior or inferior is a good indicator that we have a lack of humility. Each of us has unique talents and abilities and sharing them with the world is our responsibility but we remember that anonymity means that we all hold equal value in our relationships.

We recall the last time that we changed from being a friendly, warm, open, welcoming person with appropriate behavior into a tyrannical, lonely, and arrogant person. We remember the tenderness and love that filled our hearts when we first met 'someone special' only to find out that they were only human and not so 'special' at all. We outgrow these disheartening changes if we are honest and willing. Often, we discover

great beauty and character under the so called flaws. Their preferences may make more sense in time and some of the they just can not help. The same way we can not help our own scars. Most of us have worked very hard to become responsible and productive members of society both within and outside of the Fellowship. We have reached heights that were undreamed of in our using days. Accomplishments should produce pride but we must temper this pride with the humility of knowing where much of the credit lies.

We forget to respect that which we cannot see and thus miss all the wonderful things that might lie ahead for us. In part, our industrial/informational civilization might lead us to emphasize flaws over real assets. What a monster a perfect person would be! The pretense and quest for perfection keeps us from enjoying life. Sometimes, we will we allow ourselves to respond to outside criticism that is uninformed and intrusive. Lacking the emotional and social skills to take up for our mate, we will buy into the gossip rather than setting the person straight!

Our successes are usually due to a reliance on a loving God, the support of our NA friends, and often the sacrifices made by our friends and families. We have found that our most important relationship is with God and until we establish that one, all others should wait. From the womb forward, we have suffered various degrees of injury. This suffering may have either been part of our addiction or because of incidental occurrences. We learned pain, how to live with it, and we continue to expect it. We have learned specific ways of doing things and will continue to do them that way until we decide to change.

Grief in Recovery

An addict shares about grieving: "I have been a member of Narcotics Anonymous since 1992 and I have been one of the fortunate ones that has not gone back out. I also believe that relapse does not have to be part of recovery and the sooner that it's not all about the drugs anymore and it's about living, we stand a better chance of not picking up. The 12 Steps have saved my life and I also believe in our readings when it say sometimes we need to seek outside help and for me part of that means to seek information to help me get well.

"As I did my Steps over and over, I found some issues that didn't go away, like my Mom and issues with my x-wife. I wasn't grieving them and I didn't know how.

"We are born with the natural ability to grieve. We trust our care givers and they allow us to grieve as a child. When we take a ball away from a child, the child cries for the loss of the ball and then moves on. The child has grieved. As we get older, like five or six, things change in our environment. We start getting mixed messages.

"The messages we start getting are things like 'go to your room,' 'stop crying or I will give you something to cry about.' We come home after having a fight with a friend and Mom says here, have a cookie, so we learn to stuff our feelings. We bring it up again and then we're told not to cry over spilt milk, so we're taught not to feel. Our pet dog dies and on the weekend Dad goes out to buy us a new dog so we learn to replace the loss. How many of us have gone from one relationship to another replacing the loss, never grieving the last relationship and bringing our baggage with us to the next with all our insecurities with us wondering why nothing

changes. We grieve more things in our lives that we don't realize. Moving from our home, pets, relationships, or life with drugs, jobs, friends, etc. We are taught to be strong for others. Not to show our feelings. Get over it. Time will heal everything. Some of us escape by gambling, shopping, eating, drugs and I am sure you can identify more in your own life.

"I had a friend that watched his Father set up a hose to his car before going to school and when he came home that day, found his Dad dead. He was eight years old. His Uncle sat him on his knee and told him he had fifteen minutes to cry and after that, he didn't want to see him cry over his Dad again. What kind of message are we getting here? No wonder he relapsed around the anniversary date of his loss. He hadn't grieved or was not allowed to process his loss. Are we getting the big picture here? We are taught that grief isn't a feeling and we need to not feel it at any cost. Most of us are afraid to talk to someone that has had significant loss, saying things that are inappropriate, like there's a lot of fish in the sea, you can always have another child, they are in a better place and running away as fast as we can because we are not comfortable talking about it.

"The best medicine for someone who is grieving is talking about it. I always ask open-ended questions so it gives that person an opportunity to share their feelings and I listen, not trying to fix them. When we grieve, we suffer from a broken heart. We are not dealing with a disease, so why are we always trying to fix them? What I suggest to people is to make a life graph from the time of their first memory to today. Then I suggest they do a relationship graph of the person they are grieving, pointing out all the highs and lows.

"The next thing to do is forgive them for all they ever did to you, even the abuse. Ask for forgiveness for all you have done to them and tell them any significant emotional statement you may need to say to them. And be honest. A good way to do this is to write it down and share it with someone you trust.

"I have learned to do this naturally again today. I had a very close friend in the program who hung himself. I was angry with him and that was ok. I went to the coffin and told him what I needed to tell. I told him I was angry, I forgave him. I asked for forgiveness and told him I would miss him.

"I also didn't feel guilty like most people that knew him for hanging himself, asking themselves what could they have done, because I didn't do anything on purpose to hurt him. We feel guilty for too many things in life that we are not responsible for. the definition of guilt is hurting someone on purpose. Think about it.

"I have learned to do this naturally again. something that was taken away from me as a child. Something all of us have lost and can get back. We need to re-educate ourselves and allow ourselves to grieve. I really believe in my heart with all that has been going on in my recovery the last few years and believe me being clean doesn't mean that life is always ok. I wouldn't have gotten through it without grieving my losses."

We often want to know, "Who's in charge?" Is it ever necessary to be a boss? When God's in charge, we do not need a boss. How does this apply to the relationship that we have with our children? Most of the relationships that we have discussed so far have involved the interaction

of equals and no hierarchy is necessary for success in these relationships. Parental responsibilities are 'controlling by nature.' Some choices have to be made by parents because children by definition just do not know any better. It confuses children to tell them one thing and do another. Parents should always back each other up at the time. If there is a disagreement, it can be talked over privately, not in front of the child. However, trying to dictate to or intimidate children is counterproductive. Healthy children often have strong wills. Children learn much more through our example than through intimidation. When we depend on God to be the boss, we gain the freedom to become an example rather than a dictator. Remember how much we learned from "Do as I say, not as I do!" We have learned that this concept applies truthfully to most of the people that we would like to influence. We are striving to be of service to those with whom we associate in recovery. Responsibility is part of service. Taking actions that affect others without considering their welfare or discussing it with them beforehand isn't responsible. We did not consider the impact that our behavior had on others before but now in recovery it is a vital part of our new lives.

Autonomy is an important part of being our own person. In our relationships, we repeat the same mistakes and have the same difficulties yet we still find it hard to vary the things that we do in our attempt to get different results. Some of us have practiced celibacy, in order to gain time to stabilize emotionally. Freedom allows us to take what we think will work for us and try it. So often we have had the pleasant experience of finding ways once blocked were quietly opened when we gave it another try. We have gone through the feeling that change was impossible or unlikely for us. One break-through comes only after we reach the point of practicing spiritual principles. We still do not clearly understand why the 'surrender factor' is so important. Perhaps our efforts to open a door were so forceful that we actually held the door

shut or maybe we just forgot to turn the knob. Running other people's lives and affairs is not healthy for anyone. Attempts to coerce others into giving up their hopes, dreams or leisure activities are clear invasions of that person's autonomy. Being autonomous means that each person in the relationship should also be self-governing, free to make decisions, and act without outside interference as long as there is no harm to others.

We have found that sometimes expending less energy gets more results. The principles of honesty, open-mindedness and willingness give us the opportunity to check out things the way non-addicts might go shopping. In our case, we go shopping for life. We learn to use the principles in the Steps to resolve personality conflicts because they keep the focus on ourselves. The principles in the Traditions focus on our internal and external relationships as a Fellowship. Application of the principles contained in the Traditions is beneficial and maybe even necessary, to having healthy personal relationships. Since it is widely accepted that spiritual principles are universal, it is only logical that we extend their practice into our everyday relationships. It is best to leave some things unsaid. If we speak ill of past friends and lovers, the person before us will feel like a candidate for future personal slurs.

Talking has gotten us into some of our difficulties and talking can get us out again. If we are incurable romantics, we may need reminding that there are many reasons for people to become our lovers besides love. Besides friendship, someone can use our vulnerability and trust in many areas. Maybe the most important lesson to learn about relationships is that they are not that important to the recovery process and that waiting may be for the best. We are well advised to wait before getting into a relationship. We wait until we have worked the Twelve Steps enough so that character defects and shortcomings are not as likely to spoil our chances of happiness no matter whether they are our own or our

partner's. Most of us categorize our relationships: family, friendly, professional, romantic, and sexual, etc. This seems to mean that we think we should treat each relationship differently because one person or relationship is somehow more valuable than another is. We wonder what might happen if we stopped doing this and started to give unconditionally in all of our encounters. We find that love freely shared multiplies and returns to us. When we trust someone else enough to be vulnerable and genuine with them, we lay the groundwork for building a positive relationship. Overcoming our fear of rejection or others' judgment has been challenging for many of us. Those of us who have found relief from these character defects through the Twelve Steps testify that the rewards of loving unconditionally are well worth the effort that we invested.

So-called 'normal' people spend an estimated 90% of their time thinking about relationships from their past. In other words, they are still dealing with pain that originated in their childhood or from situations with family, friends, or lovers that they have known. It is essential that we learn to relate to the person that is in front of us at this time. We do not punish them for the wrongs done to us by others in the past. We expect 'a reasonable best' from the person that we feel drawn to and we give them the full benefit of the doubt when conflicts occur. We know our addiction exaggerates the wrongs of others, which may make our wrongs seem smaller. We may be wrong some of the time but we have to learn to believe in people all over again. We find that much of the expected hurt does not occur because the person who did that to us is no longer present and we are no longer the same person that it happened to.

When addicts feel attraction, they generally act upon it. If all goes well, they get the name straight and perhaps go to dinner and the movies. If they still have a feeling for the person they are with, they might hold

hands. In health, it begins just the other way - with holding hands.

Living clean is the biggest lifestyle change that any addict can undertake. If we have specific emotional or mental problems, we choose to get specialized help but this is not part of the NA Program of recovery. Getting better from the disease of addiction is the objective of recovery. We have learned to mind our own business. Gossiping and insinuating things about others isn't a desirable characteristic today. We are learning to be gentler when judging each other and helping one another. While striving for honesty, not brutality, we are positive in our comments rather than taking and analyzing others' inventories. Saying hurtful things to each other is always something we regret therefore, we try not to speak negatively. Speaking ill of others is a habit that will poison our relationships. We do not want to be in denial so we look for our own part in problems.

We are attractive when we practice the Program of Narcotics Anonymous. Manipulation and control are old behaviors that we are trying to abandon. False images of one's self can not contribute positively to the health of our relationships. Where we were once con artists who lived behind many masks, we have learned to be ourselves today. We no longer want to be the great promoters and sell ourselves with promises of 'if you do this, then I will do that.' Promotion indicates a slickness that borders on deception. Attractiveness in its truest sense is humility in action. Humility is the unconditional love and acceptance of one's self and presenting that human being to the world. Projecting our thoughts, feelings and intentions onto other people can be extremely sad or hysterically humorous. This practice for addicts who have experienced years of isolation can be especially harmful. We addicts are far more accustomed to judgments of ourselves than we are at judging others. Rather than evaluating facts with humane insight and intent we

frequently project our worst fears, see our own guilt in others, and set about punishing them before they can do anything to us. It might help to remember that the reason we call the mind 'the dirtiest part of the body' is that it creates disorder, blame, and chaos when there is none. It makes us see vice where there is virtue. It tells us that judgment is fine as long as we share it as 'constructive criticism.' We have learned that when we play judge and jury we hurt ourselves far more than anyone else. We learn to be generous in our judgment of others because we will need all of the generosity we can muster to sit in judgment of ourselves.

Some have said that addiction is 'a disease of love.' We know that we are inexperienced at being good to ourselves and that our addiction has frequently reduced us to selling out our relationships to meet our needs. Much of our suffering is simply due to our inexperience. We test someone's love by hurting them and if they do not leave us, we assume that they love us. It never occurs to us that they might just be desperate or just slow to react. Isolation has enabled us to become insensitive to pain in others as well as ourselves. We lack the knowledge of what to do and when to do it. Much of this knowledge is going to be learned painfully and on a somewhat hit or miss basis. If it is true that we stop growing emotionally when we start using, we have to allow ourselves to go through our 'teenage years' all over again to get it right. At other times, we can find NA members with whom we can share specific and detailed personal experiences. We find that we can benefit from what others have learned and share with us as long as we are willing to try.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SEX

What is sex? The dictionary gives three definitions: 1) either of the two divisions of living things especially humans, male and female, 2) the physical things that make males and females different from each other, and 3) sexual activity. It is apparent that when we try to define, discuss or participate in 'sex' that our character defects become exaggerated. When 'sex' becomes a drug to us, we lose the power of choice. We have no place to hide after we let another human being inside our lives. It is extremely important that we remain focused on our right to change. We no longer allow past events, shame, guilt, and behavior to stick to us anymore than we allow dirt to remain stuck to our skin. The recovery process helps us get clean and feel renewed. We may wish that the pain will just 'go away' but this may be impossible, especially in the beginning of the recovery process. We work for our recovery and what we do is real. We give, struggle and pay many prices - some that carry high interest rates or penalties.

We may find that the issue of lust often clouds our minds when we talk about sex in recovery. Lust, memories of abuse, resentments and fears can keep us from hearing the recovery that another addict tries to share. These also motivate us to judge the person who is sharing. While it is true that sex or romantic feelings can set us on a course of relapse, they aren't the only ones. Until we get comfortable with ourselves, our sexuality and sexual preferences, we will continue to have trouble in relating to others. We may find ourselves with feelings that we can easily associate with past pain. We owe it to others as well as ourselves to project these fears and negative expectations on the current object of our affection. One way to fight this is by writing out what we know to be happening. The tool of writing allows us to choose actions that differ

from what our life-limiting feelings are screaming at us to do.

Sex generates energy that can make us feel as though life is wonderful or horrible. It is easy for any issue relating to sex to place us in a cycle of extremes. There is a definite potential for us to feel the entire range of emotions and to take extreme actions that range from total abstinence to promiscuity. We have to learn to put our recovery first. If a time should ever come where we feel uncomfortable saying this to a sexual partner, we will be in jeopardy. NA members put their recovery first. The people we get involved with should know this from the beginning.

Sex requires energy and love. We sometimes mistake the energy that we feel for love. The Fellowship of NA includes members from various backgrounds, religious beliefs and personal preferences yet we care about all newcomers succeeding in recovery. We all know that the first year can be hell. Some try relationships including sex during early recovery. We warn against this only because of the confusion it can bring. We are not goody-goody at least most of us are not.

We caution our members to avoid 'mere sex' that can lead us into situations that can jerk us into a sense of total despair and desolation. Being with someone involves more than the body. We begin to take on their aspects, their views, opinions, fears, joys and if we are not settled in ourselves, it is easy to get lost in the other person. This is especially true if the other person is not settled in their own right. It is not the 'good time' we wish to avoid, it is the confusion that can distract us from recovery and prevent us from learning this life-giving process.

Our experience shows us that we need to have a solid foundation in recovery before we become sexually involved with a new partner. Having that foundation increases the likelihood that these relationships

can succeed. Some members have chosen to wait until they had a year clean before trying to have a sexual relationship. Others have committed to working the Steps first. Some have talked with their sponsors or other recovering addicts. These individuals know them well enough to give informed and honest responses. There is no hard and fast 'rule' on how to handle issues regarding sex. No matter which path we pick, we want to grow from experience, not fall by the wayside.

Being a member of NA does not give us the right to impose our moral values on others. Instead, membership gives us the opportunity to define our own 'moral beliefs' and to live in harmony with them. If we want intimacy, we may find sex is only getting in the way. Intimacy involves mutual dependence. Our fear of dependence on another can lead us to resume habit patterns, although we know that they will not work for us. We spend our time with people who tell us the truth and hang around long enough to hear what they are saying. We add names to the list of people with whom we can relate and spend time by working on having friendships. This allows us to be in a position to share and receive what we need to grow. We may continue to set ourselves up for betrayal but this does not undermine the strength of spiritual principles. It just means that we can 'mess up' if we are not full of care.

We learn that each effort helps us grow. If it is good, we can repeat it. If bad, we can avoid it in the future. We have to change our ways to change our results.

Rape, incest, abuse, lust, sexual tension and fear of other past problems may cause us not to trust others. It may help to remember that we do not all share the same life experiences or symptoms of addiction. We share a common bond of addiction. We will not apologize for our openness, for it plays a large part in our common welfare. We know that there are

those who need recovery that have different sexual preference from ours. Why should they suffer the pain and terror of active addiction because of these differences? It is wonderful that they can find recovery in NA in spite of these differences. It is good that we look at similarities and not the things that could separate or divide us. We must each individually and as a member of the Fellowship remain open to the changes that will occur in others and ourselves during this process called recovery.

Many of us were confused about sex when we first came into NA. Love-making may have been such a part of our lifestyle while using that we may need to wait a while for the water to clear before taking stock of our feelings. Issues of sexual preference may further complicate and confuse us. By making friends with others, we secure allies who help us learn what we have missed so far. By talking with a sponsor or trusted friend, we find the desire for growth becoming so strong in us that we take the leap. Today, we can actually go up to someone and ask for help in these areas. Some of us have used words like, "I've always gotten into serious relationships and it occurred to me that I may be trying too hard. Would you be my friend? Can we talk and do a few things together? I'm not interested in a relationship right now."

Spiritual honesty is not a part of foreplay. Sharing with another human being on a deep personal level may awaken feelings of desire and intimacy that we associate only with those we love. It is easy to get confused and that is why we remain focused on recovery. Spiritual sharing does not mean that we give ourselves physically or that we abandon 'common sense.' The purpose of sharing is to lower some barriers and open ourselves up to new ideas, feelings, and viewpoints. We gain from acquired memories because we do not have to live through everything to learn how to live. We seek the assistance of our Higher Power to do this in safety expecting that the person we are

trusting will not exploit our vulnerability. If they let us down, it is usually more harmful to them than to us. We may want to make a special prayer of some sort before we open ourselves up completely.

Fear is often the great lie. It makes us incapable of clear thinking and prevents us from getting help. Shame keeps us chained long after the prison doors have opened. It is what we do to ourselves to cut us off from others for fear of repeating our mistakes. Yes, we have to be as sure as possible that we are on sound footing before we revisit some of the sites of our personal tragedies. It is ok to hold back until we are ready. The origins of our fear, shame or limitations usually resulted from a dysfunctional upbringing or developed during the course of active addiction. We examine these feelings in light of our present experience and resources. Guilt can be addressed directly through Steps Eight and Nine. We do not want to carry the burden of our pasts forever. While in active addiction we were so busy running through the maze of our lives that we had no time to take a careful look. If we do not stay focused on the present, we may subject ourselves to improperly assigned guilt and blame. Recovery grants us the right to be free.

As we become aware of feelings that we have suppressed and restrained for so long, we begin to get comfortable with them. They become our normal state of existence. We also become aware that others around us are going through this same process. We probably exchanged feelings with others only on a physical level and now the need for exchanges with others of an emotional and spiritual nature that we could not reach before is overwhelming. Honesty, trust and sincerity are principles that work well and are necessary in all areas of our lives. We learn that it may not always be best to get what we want or what we think we need. Praying about our wants and needs helps us get through the insanity of obsessing over another person or being overwhelmed by lust.

Our sexual behavior while in active addiction was mostly elaborate fantasies that we played out on an imaginary theater stage. We want more in life than the self-centered displays of personal power that we have settled for in the past. The desire to have sexual relations is fundamental drive in most humans and we are no different just because we are addicts. Sharing our emotions and feelings can easily intensify these desires and our disease can cause us to misinterpret this fact. Sexual activity is neither right nor wrong. However, if we use manipulation, deceit and exploitation to get sex then we are wrong. The one on the receiving end hurts now but the one doing the exploiting always hurts later.

Old timers in the Fellowship are just as vulnerable to acting inappropriately on these desires as newcomers are although they fall prey less frequently. Relationships between newcomers and older members can be especially dangerous in this regard. There is no excuse for older and newer members to avoid each other entirely. That would go against the WE concept upon which NA is built. We all need to have our vulnerability, confusion, and loneliness treated in a spiritual way rather than as a sexual come-on. We should be careful not to judge one innocent and the other guilty. We must love and try to help both. Most of us have had the painful experience of playing God. Today, we try to respect the feelings of everyone that wants the NA way of life, especially if their process of recovery seems different from ours.

Many of our feelings are instinctively correct even when new to recovery. What takes time is gaining the ability to interpret these feelings and acting properly to get what we want. Generally, if we feel cornered or threatened, we talk about how we feel with others that we trust to see what they think. Recovery is a contact sport but this does not necessarily mean physical contact. An understanding of this will reduce

our tendency to see things that are not there or do not mean what we think they do. This will save everyone the trouble of over_reacting and choosing the avoidance patterns that are no longer necessary. When we see and hear clearly, we truly begin to experience what we feel and are no longer deluded into thinking it is something else. Our lives reflect reality.

Addiction makes us cover our motives and feelings up with clouds of confusion. This is one of the reasons that we suggest to newcomers that they avoid sexual relationships until they have some time clean. There are as many opinions on this topic as there are members of NA and any reader of this material will surely have their own. We as a Fellowship, attempt to not moralize or judge someone because their opinion differs from our own. We see that great harm happens in the name of recovery when we give advice if we really do not know what that person went or is going through.

The objective of the NA society is to encourage one another to be a whole and healthy human being. We learn to allow women to be feminine and attractive as well as allowing men to be handsome, courtly and charming if they so choose. Likewise, we learn that women can be strong and assertive while men can be gentle and loving. In other words, we all get to be human and can express our emotions in a way that is appropriate to the situation or demands of the moment. We want to create a safe environment for freedom and not another place that advocates conformity with severe social punishment for offenders. When we find ourselves dressing provocatively in the attempt to dazzle and confuse, we may want to stop and think it over. If we decide to go ahead, we have not lost a thing and certainly have not lost recovery. If we spot an area of or a moment of concern, we can pass on the opportunity. We must remember that when we influence or distract

someone else in harmful ways, we will always pay the price. Sometimes this cost seems to be too high and we can refuse to participate. We are our own worst witnesses, judges and executioners so we must maintain our connection with other addicts in order to have a better view of reality.

There is a story of a scientific experiment about a group of lab rats placed in a maze that had three separate and distinct sections. At either end of this maze were one-way entrances that were defensible. There were many rooms behind each entrance, but there was only one way in and one way out. Food could be stored in one room, babies tended in another, and adults could sleep in yet another room. The rats that inhabited the areas at either end of the maze developed into communities made up of individual families. The rat families ate, reproduced and went about life in an orderly manner.

The indefensible territory in the middle of the maze was another matter entirely. The rats that lived here could not go into the secure territories. They were unable to store food and they were always hungry. They ate all they could, even each other. They could have sexual intercourse as rats do but couldn't produce babies, not for long anyway. They had no safe place to hide in and they couldn't find one. It was exciting to live in this area because it was dangerous although it was impossible to build anything secure.

Occasionally, some of the females wandered away from the secure territories and experienced what can only be called 'rat rape.' Some were lucky enough to make it back to the territory. Sometimes, because of the sexual activity even if it was not a free choice, these females experienced banishment. Most young males and some

females experienced banishment from the secure territories just because they matured and became sexually active.

This brief description may help us to picture what happened to us. We begin to understand that there are rules for families with defendable boundaries and that bonding is possible. Outside of the defendable boundaries is chaos, which is stimulating but provides no lasting reward. The way we lived in active addiction was similar to the way that even animals live when they cannot assure themselves of the necessities of life. We all need and deserve a territory we can defend. Look closely and you will see it is built into our legal system.

Another point of confusion is that there are different sets of rules for people who are in relationships and people who are bachelors. Bachelors are without someone to build and maintain a territory. This is not a value judgment, just an observation. This does not mean they are bad or unworthy. Pair bonding is just another part of life. Some people choose to live outside of a pair bond. What is important is that one of the things we tend to do as people new to 'civilization' is to judge harshly those who do not conform to our ideas of what is proper and what is not. Bachelors have a different set of rules. Pair bonded people do not cheat on one another, do not side against their partner and protect one another rigorously. You can not be monogamous and run around on your mate. If they do not, they have no bond. They have a set of behavior and conduct different from bachelors. It is very important for a community to understand, help and support its people as human beings, each going through his or her set of changes.

It is another way of looking at active addiction. In recovery, we notice that some of the rules seem to change and this is probably real. We change our ideas of the things that we want, discover what is possible for

us to do or have, and most importantly we learn to accept who we are.

An addict, whether male or female, in active addiction is forced to play by rules not of their making. They must do so in order to survive. In recovery, we judge ourselves harshly and tend to forget that if we were sick in some areas, we were probably sick in all. By learning to be gentle, we find those with whom we can share our pain. Praying to an all-powerful and loving God for help in finding ways to become healthier gives us the hope of real and lasting growth. We only have to look around the Fellowship to know the pain we have all come through. We learn that the blessings of recovery are ours if we only have the desire and the willingness to do the footwork that is necessary to receive them.

Whether to have sexual relationships is a major decision in these times because of the extreme health problems that can occur. The risk of pregnancy or venereal disease used to be the worst things that could happen because of sexual activity. Today we have AIDS, Hepatitis B and Herpes to name a few that are incurable and potentially fatal. More than ever, we need to be careful. The disease of addiction will use any method at its disposal to kill us. Our only protection is in this awareness and the commitment to practice safe sexual habits. These methods range from abstinence to the use of condoms. The choice belongs to each one of us. It comforts us when we remember that our life energy is not limitless and that people have always had the task of being careful about their mental, spiritual and physical health.

Spirituality and intimacy are synonymous in our striving to be real, honest, sincere and loving towards each other. Our spiritual beliefs and practices increase immensely when we become intimate with another. We may feel challenged by others because it seems to be human nature

to be defensive in order to protect our territory. If we are not so defensive, others may perceive us as being vulnerable and weak. We weather these storms and grow from our suffering. We flourish in the atmosphere of love, intimacy and nurturing as a flower flourishes from rain, sunshine and fertilizer. This support gives us the strength that is necessary in order for us to survive the tough times. Periodic, meaningful, safe and natural are recovery terms that we apply to sex rather than the terms of addiction: compulsive, placating, impulsive and dishonest. When a person shares intimate details about their life that could be embarrassing or harmful, we must keep it in trust amongst ourselves and within the Fellowship. Active addiction forces all of us to say and do things that make us feel guilty and ashamed. Recovery is the choice to change with the help of others and the commitment to enjoy a better life.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

GENDER AND THE MESSAGE

One of the amazing things about the experiences shared in recovery is that we have survived. We will experience them ourselves, eventually if we do not find a way out. These experiences do not need any explanation. Living and enjoying life is the essence of life and we pursue happiness in recovery. In our recovery literature, we read what others share on topics of mutual interest. Acquired memories give us a new way to learn. The feeling that others care reinforces our desire for recovery and encourages us to reach for things that weren't possible not so long ago. One thing that we have learned is that the message of recovery in Narcotics Anonymous doesn't have a gender. People are people and no one group of people has a corner on suffering. In our isolation, we are unable to see very far beyond ourselves and our identity group gets smaller. Feelings don't have a gender nor do they have gender specific behaviors.

Although some of us have to overcome a dysfunctional up_bringing, we must remember that each of us has our own painful reality to deal with. The experience we share may or may not apply to another's situation. Being a good listener is important here. We may differ in details yet the pain is the same. It may take time and work for us to trust any member of a person of the abuser's sex. Our own issues may keep us from hearing the recovery another addict shares, simply because of his or her gender. These issues can cause us to have a gender specific prejudice.

As we attend NA meetings, we learn that this is a 'WE' Program and includes both men and women. To feel that we have to live as though it was "them against us," confines us. In time, as we work the program, we develop a point of view that allows us to live life as free human beings

amongst all other human beings. There is no way to win the 'war of the sexes' by fighting. The suffering that one experiences from the other side losing does not bring any peace and joy. Stereotyping is one of the things that fueled the lie, : "Once as addict, always an addict." Just because a person is a man or a woman does not mean the abuse is likely to recur. The point is that we need to be gentler when it comes to judging each other and helping each other. Let us all remember that love and nurturing, as well as anger and violence, can exist within any individual. We addicts are capable of the entire spectrum.

Communication between the sexes, especially among addicts, is even more awkward than conversations between non-addicts. Other problems, whether our own or another's, such as mistaken identity, defensiveness, past painful experiences, etc., all make for difficulties in this crucial area of recovery. Out of the confusion that has dominated our lives, we begin to learn how to live. Many of us have special insight not only into our lives but also into our interpersonal relationships with others. Working the 4th Step, we find assets among what we thought were liabilities and this affirms our sense of identity. No longer do we feel that we are at the mercy of the forces that surround us. Our self-acceptance, as well as the freedom from the ego-induced fears, grows as we get over our self-centeredness. Finally, we reach a point in recovery where we are no longer limited to the scope of our personal power in seeking direction for our lives. Something greater is caring for us. Basking in this freedom, we find ourselves at a deeper level of acceptance about our strengths and weaknesses. We reach out and discover many things about the world around us. Not only are we able to come out of the closet of our fear-induced isolation, we are able to go back and clean out the closet! Everyone has a closet. When we become receptive to the forces of life around us, we can give and receive more freely. We have much revealed to us that we couldn't see or make sense of before. This is what being

clean is all about. By helping others, we get help. When we share the truths that we discover with others, we increase our understanding as well as opening new doors for ourselves. Our sharing goes far beyond simple conversation. We demonstrate our love for one another and teach others that ask for help what we have learned.

We measure intimacy between people in terms of trust and shared experiences. A test of our motives and honesty is whether we act the same towards or treat a person the same as we would our same sex best friend in a similar opportunity. Respect for others' feelings and privacy is the building block of having successful, intimate relationships. In recovery, we learn that intimate relationships are possible for us no matter the gender of the other person. Intimacy is a 'fact of life' and we will face it during our recovery. We emphasize that if we are sincere in your desire and put our recovery first, chances are that we will come through the tension and strain of any relationship, clean. It's when we put other things first that we seem to get in the most trouble. Our disease can make it seem as if a person, place, or thing got us loaded yet we all know that's a lie. We must take care not to drift into this justification mode lest we are sucked under and drown in the whirlpool of addiction. The presence of our desire for recovery makes us members of this Fellowship from the first moment that we commit to living the NA way of life. We cease to be members when we lose this desire, no matter whether we use or not. Some of our members have experienced a non-chemical relapse and have awakened the next day feeling like they had a physical hangover. Spiritual relapse is sometimes our last warning that something is terribly wrong with the way we are working the Program. It can be a strong motivator for us to renew our commitment to recovery.

One of the benefits that comes from going to many meetings. is that we learn not to practice our natural yet diseased ability to label the people,

places, and things in our daily lives. Part of the damage done through active addiction is that we forget what everyday life is like and that everyone else feels the same things that we do. We spend a lot of time over-reacting or under-reacting to situations that need a response from us. It takes time to get it right. It is hard to overcome the social conditioning that we get from the wide range of advice-sellers and professional advice-givers. In the end, we realize that it's our responsibility to live our lives. We cannot blame our problems on others once we begin to take personal responsibility for our lives. Many of us struggle with obsessive thoughts of continuing to blame others and we can easily alienate ourselves as part of our addiction's general isolation.

It is a clearly recognizable part of our disability to respond without thinking. For instance, many of us do not even know what it means to date or have a casual relationship. In a similar fashion, many of us do not know what it is like to depend on others without being constantly let down. Much of recovery is discovery - and it is this inquisitive attitude that enables us to do things differently in order to experience the variations that life offers. Some of us had the 'couples' mentality so deeply instilled in us that having friends without sex was impossible. With a 'couples' mentality we view every encounter as a potential marriage or relationship. We have to approach other people carefully to actually understand and experience what the other person is saying or doing. We find life between estrangement and total intimacy. So much of our lives are lived in the fear of the recurrence of past pain. We spend so much time with our guard up that we can't see what's happening today! We carry our pasts into our present and our childhood is with us forever.

Society as a whole is like the ocean, with all kinds of life in it. We seek to feel that we have a protected place for our recovery. We do not

knowingly swim with sharks or unquestionably accept everything just because it comes from the greater culture. We share with one another the freedom to determine what our way of life will be from day to day. If we did not stress this freedom, we would be ignoring the sensitivities that our members have because of painful experiences from their active addiction. It is safe to say that we suffer from a family disease. Some of the abuse we survived and learned as children will continue to make us overly sensitive today. Addicts who were victimized may feel more alarm than necessary, until they get used to their new state of existence in recovery. Others who were taught to hide their emotions suffer in many of the same ways. Those of us reared in dictatorial households have a similar problem as to those who automatically feel inferior to others. It is difficult to recognize the similarities because it is so easy to see the differences. In general, we regard everything that happens in recovery as something we need to know about. Usually, we need more than one response to the situations that arise during the process of recovery. Social standards may or may not have a place in this and that is for each of us to determine. This is not to say that we act crazily or wildly. Most of us are rather calm in recovery except in situations that can arouse great pain or fear in us. Recovery helps us settle down to living life on life's terms but we must constantly move towards this goal.

Most of our members seek sponsors of the same sex. They feel that this allows them to have a sponsor who identifies with them as a man or as a woman without the necessity for explanations that might arise between men and women. Reflecting on the great variety of our members, there are those who have to find a person who suits them regardless of what others may think. Sincerity speaks for itself in spite of the fact that our members sometimes live beyond established norms.

An addict shared: "I was so eager and anxious to learn new things

to do when I first got clean. I had the impatience that newcomers seem especially susceptible to catching. I began to see all the things wrong and wanted to fix them all immediately. Only one other female went to NA meetings in my hometown so I asked her to be my sponsor. She agreed and when I asked her what to do first and was told to get material other than NA, I quickly thanked her and told her, "Thanks." I went into a depression because I felt like all the hope that I found in the rooms was lost.

"Thank you God for the men and women in recovery who only care whether another addict stays clean or not. I've had five sponsors, two males and three females. I learned valuable lessons from each, and each will forever occupy that special place in my heart. I used to hear others share about meeting the first person with whom they could so closely identify. The most shocking revelation is that I'm a middle-aged grandmother and my 'mirror-image' has turned out to be a twenty year old 'gentleman.' He is wonderful and it's most amazing that everything he says is 'me.'

"These are the gifts that my Higher Power gives me, every day that I choose to stay clean and try to live the NA way of life. Early recovery takes place in the midst of pain and confusion. We need to find a balance between what we hear that makes sense to us and what feels right. If it feels right but makes no sense and doesn't work, we can make changes to get better results. If something seems to make sense yet fails to satisfy our need for a spiritual feeling, we will eventually abandon those efforts that conflict with our internal guidance systems. As we begin to accept others into our lives, we try to respect their feelings and living requirements. We do this even if their way of moving towards recovery is different from ours."

We do not apologize for our openness. It plays a big part in our common welfare. Gender confusion is a reality of the world in which we live. Some of us need to learn how the opposite sex works in order to learn that they are not so different. This is how we begin to identify with persons of that gender. Many of our members suffer confusion about gender issues. We must learn not to isolate from another addict simply because of their gender.

It is a good thing that we look at our similarities and not the things that would separate or divide us. The idea is to encourage each other to be whole, healthy human being. We can be gentle and loving while being strong and assertive. In other words, we can all be human and express our emotions in a way that matches our true personalities and meets the situation or demands of the moment. We want our Fellowship to be a safe environment and not another place with severe social pressures and punishments for non_conforming offenders.

We will experience many types of relationships. Our relationships are usually one of two types, and give us the opportunity to ask questions and experience different types and degrees of closeness. Small 'r' relationships include friends in our home groups, our local Fellowship, our sponsor, family and co-workers. We enjoy giving special attention and support without reservation or expectations to the special people in our lives. Large 'R' relationships are the exclusive loving of a specific individual where the sharing of life becomes a commitment to the other person. These relationships affect our health, our finances and our overall well-being. Coming from dysfunctional family situations, we may have to learn these lessons by study or counseling. Your meaningful relationship is at risk if you assume you know what you are doing! If the other person has family or financial obligations, these become ours as

well. We need to know a person's background if we are contemplating a serious relationship. If the other person has health problems, we accept them as our own. In today's world, that means STD and HIV along with others are possible even if the the other person doesn't know it!. "When is the last time you had a physical?" is a nice way to start... What we do becomes the proper business of the other. It is hard for the freedom of spirit and action to survive the demands placed on individuals by the demands of a 'Relationship' in early recovery. First things first. We aren't moralizing because we know how hard our emotions can be on us, and we have to protect our fragile desire to live better lives against the intense battering of these emotional issues. When we do get in a relationship, there is a dance going on between our desire for recovery and our desire to get lost in the love of the other person.

"Viva le difference!" say the French and we agree with them. It is our similarities that give us things in common, but it is our differences that make it interesting. The physical differences between men and women are a fact of biology. They can also hinder us in developing close relations or friendships with members of the opposite sex. Some suffer with the confusion of determining their sexual preferences as well as the inability to trust neither male nor female. Those unaccustomed to these differences need to spend a little extra time with their sponsor or friends of the opposite sex to gain information they may not have learned from their families as children or growing up. People with our disorder are entirely capable of the most glaring deficiencies when it comes to basic information. We develop a questioning mind, keep it open, feed it new ideas, and watch it grow. We can compare ourselves out of having close associations with other people regardless of their gender, and we can disqualify ourselves by selecting and obsessing on the points of conflict and differences. While we may never resolve all of our issues, we can still enjoy members of the opposite sex. The growth that we gain in

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dealing with other human beings is phenomenal.

CHAPTER NINETEEN
YOUTH IN RECOVERY

NOT EVEN LEGAL

I wanted to be accepted
and known as very cool
I partied with the best of them
and acted like a fool.

Just on the weekends
sounded great to me
if only it was that easy
in N.A. I would not be.

My life was a mess
nothing was going right
all I did was use more drugs
and get in a million fights.

I didn't have any faith
I thought there was no hope
but I knew there had to be more
than just using dope.

I came to the rooms of N.A.
at nineteen years of age
with a great deal of fear
not to mention all the rage.

I thought I was too young

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totally too hardcore
to be classified as an addict
and for drugs to work no more.

I didn't relate to everything
there were some things I didn't do
but if I had stayed out longer
I'm sure I would have too.

I found some other people
young and staying clean
that had been where I'd been
and seen what I had seen.

Reservations I had
about turning twenty_one
turned into anticipation
of having clean 'ole fun.

I work very hard
on every Step I do
I have a sponsor and home group
and I do service work too.

I have my whole life
to look forward to now
with the help of my Higher Power
and sponsor to show me how.

So when a new comer comes in
and want to stay off drugs

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I can offer my experience
and a whole lot of hugs.
I don't know what comes next
I live just for today
all I can do is stay clean, and
get down on my knees and pray.
- *anonymous*

The only requirement for membership in Narcotics Anonymous is a desire to stop using. While this statement is clear in meaning, it seems indefinite at times. We have to show our desire to other members in order to find the identification and acceptance that we need to begin our recovery as NA members. Growing up in recovery has taught us that becoming an acceptable, responsible, productive member of society means much more than ‘just not picking up.’ Self-centeredness had ruled our lives during active addiction. When we became humble, honest and realistic, we soon found that we could recover too. Regardless of age, working the Steps is the key to recovery.

When we were using, we only learned what we needed to survive. When we are clean, we learn things we need to know when we are in recovery. Unfortunately, some of us do not easily identify with the other members of a group, area or region. These members have to make an extra effort to make their desire for recovery clear and express to some extent their First Step. We have all felt that we were letting our desire show. It was almost like the ‘cartoon drowning’ scenario as we count one, two, three. It escaped us for a time that simply telling members one on one or in a recovery meeting would work. We share what our addiction was like and why we want to learn to live clean. This may be the best way for any member to gain the recognition, acceptance and support of a NA group. Someone who never shares their pain may be accepted on a personal

level yet not be identified and supported as an addict seeking recovery.

A young lady shares, "Young people sometimes have this problem when their age is well under the average for their area or group. This fact alone makes it harder to identify with older members. It's not that our older members want to exclude someone or deny membership just because of their age. Young members who may 'feel funny' need to know they didn't do anything wrong. Sometimes, the older members feel embarrassed to admit their need for help when younger people are present. Unfortunately, this embarrassment is often misinterpreted as rejection by a young addict seeking recovery. It is your responsibility as a member to find ways to identify into the solution recovery has to offer. Our disease always tries to find differences so that recovery doesn't apply to us. The reality is that in carrying our message to young people, we encounter the same situations we find in any effort to let people know they don't have to use. The recovery experience rewards the extra effort that we make to try to hear someone's plea for help or to make them feel welcome. Their feelings are the same - their situations are different. They have to do what their parents say."

This is just one of the situations in which we have to wait for clearer thinking to happen before we can state the problem. We need to state it in a way that acknowledges the difficulty as well as providing a way to deal with it successfully. Even with as much as we share in our meetings, it takes a long time for the facts of our addiction to all come out. We adapt to our changing habits of going to meetings, calling other members and generally adopting the NA way of life. Doing anything that is out of our way may take a little extra effort on our part. If we find ourselves feeling awkward or uncertain, we step back and honestly

evaluate what is happening. We must remain vigilant in order to not quickly discount how someone else is feeling. If we find ourselves jumping to conclusions about why they are doing something, we may want to postpone acting on our assumptions. We learn to wait until we have had a chance to reconsider our feelings and evaluations before acting.

Young people in recovery are not exempt from the problems that addicts have in facing fear and loneliness. Sometimes, it seems as though, they have it rougher because many adults forget how awake and intelligent young people are. They may lack experience but they catch on real quick. Today we have members who got clean at twelve or fifteen. Embarrassment at discussing problems openly in the presence of youthful members can be a problem. Most of us became acquainted with pain at an early age and soon believed that nobody understood us. If young people are in our meetings for recovery, it might be interesting to take the time to hear them out. We can satisfy ourselves as to the validity of their claim to membership. Helping others who are presently experiencing our particular hell is sometimes the only way that we can find relief. Our own pain subsides at the point of identification that happens when we seek to ease the pain of another. Self-pity along with a fear of acceptance or rejection can unnecessarily add to the confusion of younger addicts. Any excuse that an addict uses to get out of identifying with clean addicts eventually translates into using. It's the nature of our disease to act against our own happiness.

Sharing their pain, one fifteen-year-old member tells us, "I've been to many family gatherings and been alone there. I didn't know these people at all. I wanted to know them, develop close relationships with them, to feel feelings for them and them for me. The force of fear drove the pain and loneliness inside me to an

overwhelming point. I had to leave these people so that I could run and hide. I didn't want anyone to see me. I didn't want to take the hand of their love, knowledge or friendship. Yet - I did. I truly wanted everything that they had - the love, attention and companionship. I longed to be a part of . . .

"They tried to love me, get to know me, to befriend me but I was too scared because I dwelled in my pain. I obsessed on my fear of failure and my character defects. I told myself that they hated me because I was always a failure. Because I couldn't even conceive of success, I wouldn't allow myself to feel good. I was always hiding and running. I was living in the negativity and slowly committing suicide with drugs at a young age.

"In school, I was the 'class clown.' I was the center of a lot of negative attention. I hated myself and I wanted so badly to be like anyone else rather than myself. I pushed family, friends and teachers away. I shoved everyone away yet at the same time feebly grasping to keep them close to me. I hated myself so much that I wouldn't let myself feel or cry. It was impossible to let people know that I cared or to let myself care. I didn't believe that I could succeed in school, art or life. I was never satisfied with anything or grateful for anything because I was always comparing myself to everyone else.

"I had so many chances to make friends or to have a girlfriend but I let the fear control me. I hate it! I'm so sick of being alone, so desolate. Why can't I be comfortable? Why am I so afraid? Today I realize that I don't need to be alone anymore. I could be in a crowd with a million people and still feel alone in my head. Lonely, heartsick, self-obsessed, and dizzy with self-pity I cry, 'Help me!

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Come to me because I'm too afraid to come to you.' I still struggle because I would rather feel sorry for myself than to allow myself to feel my furious pain."

There are windows of learning that every person goes through in their development as a human being. Erroneous beliefs and unworkable ideas may have been embedded in us by those who knew even less than we do. Some things are right, be glad for them. Some things are wrong and will have to be corrected if you are going to be happy and effective in life. In recovery, you resume your life. Be good to your family. Find other good people to spend your time with. Avoid noisy or superficial people when you can. Doing these things will help you focus on who you want to be. Do not hate others because it will poison your living. Forgiveness helps you maintain your mood of choice, may it be a good one. Fear and hatred can embed themselves and we get used to being hate_filled. Focus on joy and learning and be good to your associations. Doing good things for people is the finest art there is.

We are not here to sell you anything. We are not here to make you do anything. We are not here to punish you. We are all here to welcome you. If you look closely, you will find some of us are even younger than you! Be glad if you are young and have found the program! What a blessing. Make friendships that will last a lifetime. You have many new relatives to meet. Spend the time it takes to reform the parts of you that need completion. You are a miracle - enjoy it!

CHAPTER TWENTY

PARENTING

Mirroring Feelings

“What mirroring feelings means to a parent is that I see a person is angry and I say to them (if they are my child or a safe person in my life), ‘I see that you are angry. Would you like to talk about it?’ Taking time with our sons and daughters is one of the blessing of recovery. This was especially helpful when my children were going through something. I would say to one of my sons, ‘I see that you are frustrated.’ And this helped them put a word to what they were feeling, so that they would understand, identify and possibly verbalize it for them selves as they grew older. Also, I would say, ‘Would you like Daddy to hold you while you are frustrated?’ And they would inevitably say yes, and this taught them that these feelings can be processed and contained safely with a safe person. Sometimes, I would make them sad by hurting their feelings through some sort of correction, and I would still say, ‘I see that you are sad, and I am sorry that I hurt your feelings. Would you like me to hold you while you are sad?’ And, most often they would still seek the safety of my arms, process their feelings, and move on. Often, my oldest boy would act out through one inappropriate behavior or another, and I knew from my own past, that he just needed my attention, so I would say, ‘So, you are behaving inappropriately. Do you need my attention? Would you like me to hold you or talk to you?’ And, nine times out of ten, he would just be trying to get my attention, and what he learned was not just that he could get my attention, but that I knew what he was doing, and he could just ask for me rather than act out in the future.

“Mirroring feelings is having empathy. I cannot identify what I do not recognize; therefore, I would intuitively know what he was feeling and would help him identify it, which is exercising empathy. The feeling is understood, and, all behavior aside, is accepted and affirmed and therein lies compassion. So, to mirror feelings for another, or to have empathy for another, I must exercise patience, tolerance, acceptance, discernment, understanding, compassion and even forgiveness, all under the umbrella of love. Love is an action: ‘Lots Of Voluntary Effort.’ Program love isn't easy, but it is priceless. Contrast all this to the smack up side the head I got when I acted out!”

- From George P., June 30, 2008

Foster Parenting

Parenting as an addict is an exercise in compromise, growth and fear. Foster parenting the children of addicts is often like being on a trampoline that has barbed wire covered with electric fence wiring, and you feel like everyone is watching and laughing.

As an addict in recovery, foster parenting, every day, is an act of blind faith. You must believe that if you try to control the system you work with, the child in your home who is acting out on what was learned while living with an active addict, if you try to control the recovery of the parent who lost the child you are caring for, your life will become unmanageable. Since I am unable to control it, I must believe that my Higher Power, who I choose to call Creator, will watch over for those children until they can find a Higher Power of their own. I must make a decision, daily, to turn my will and my life, and their will and life, over to the power greater than us all, and trust that blind faith will prevail.

I am an addict, my name is Gail G. and at this writing I have just over twenty years clean and have been a foster parent to fifty-seven children over the past five years. I can not think of a single child who I have live with me that did not come from, directly or indirectly, a family like we came from. From the youngest to the oldest, they showed their addictive behaviors, their people pleasing skills, their ability to manipulate every situation, their need for creative venues in order to survive, and their elasticity in showing that they could take a beating, often not just figuratively, and bounce back. Once again proving that addicts are strong, versatile and hard to kill or keep down.

As a foster parent, I am dealing with the system (Child Protection Service and the Courts), the children, their doctors and therapists, their psychiatrists and support councilors, their teachers and mentors, their biological parents, previous and future foster parents, and their past, present and future. And all this, without directions.

If I could convey any message I wanted to the biological addict parent who lost their child along the way, it would be this. While you may never be able to atone for what was done, or not done, in some cases, while you can never have a magic 'do over,' while it may be the hardest items you put down on your forth and eighth Steps, you will eventually forgive yourself. I tell my kids that their parents are addicts; they suffer from the disease of addiction for which there is no know cure. It can however, be arrested at some point and there is always hope that the parent will find love, surrender and guidance in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous.

I have never been a biological parent; a situation I blamed God for quite often. When I found a loving power greater than myself, Creator, I came to believe that just as I lived through my addiction to help another

addict, I had not had children of my own so I could be there to help the kids caught in the cross fire – yours. From teaching these kids daily grooming and hygiene habits, to homework, dating, nightmares and bathroom accidents, I have loved each and every one, each and every step. And with each, I plant a seed - a seed of love, hope, nourishment, cherishment, delight, wonder, self-esteem, hope, a future and the possibility of life without drugs.

I plant these seeds, and I water them with hugs and kisses. I nourish them with action, with direction, with purpose. And I never see them bloom. On the rare occasions, I see them take root, start to grow and then the child moves on. I am often blessed with having that adult child contact me again, once the system is not controlling Life, and that child contacts me, and I see that my seed did sprout, into a beautiful and wonderful adult.

But I must express, while I have the voice and the audience, that this is truly the hardest job I have ever undertaken in my life, either when using or clean. To love someone so unconditionally, to open my heart so completely, to welcome and crave the unconditional love from that child, is truly a gift from Creator. As is the pain that comes when it feels my heart is being ripped from my chest with each and every child that leaves. I act brave, and say all the right things for the system. I use the Steps, and I am direct and honest, except when to do so will injure them or others, and so I say what must be said and what I hope, in blind faith, will come to be true, and I let that spirit and little body go, back to the system. Then I wonder, once again, why I open myself up for this heart wrenching, gut twisting, soul crushing pain.

And then I see the smile in my mind's eye, I feel the little hand holding mine, I remember the warmth of a good night embrace and that sweet

little kiss on my cheek and I remember. I did this for the child. For the wonderful person they will someday be. I did this for their parents, who are trying to find recovery and who may or may not make it, I do it for my fellow addict. Mostly, I do this for me. Balance, that is what I have been taught on my spiritual path following Creator - balance. To know the love, I must walk through the pain. To know the truth, I must wade through the lies. To be warmed by the sunlight of recovery, I must remember the darkness of my disease.

I really don't like feeling the bad parts, but I would not trade them for anything if it meant losing those hugs, that love and the wondrous gift that Creator has bestowed upon me, the ability to Let Go and Let God do his job.

Mitakuye Oyasin - All my relations - I ask that Creator watch over you, that your children find someone who understand recovery and will love your child, then let them go as their path decrees. I have survived another day, I have lived today without using, even though my heart hurts deeply right now, for I have just experienced again that true and trusting love, and another child has left my home, but never my heart.

Grateful to be in recovery today, a loving addict. - Gayle G. March 2006

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

MIDLIFE CRISIS

One thing about recovery, we will live to experience the emotional crisis that comes in our forties and fifties. This phase of recovery's journey can destroy addicts' lives and affect anyone that is close to them. If we stop working our program, it stops working for us. Respect for age keeps some people from challenging, commenting or correcting us if we are lucky enough to be 'older.' While we might appreciate this courtesy, don't 'nice' us to death. This is not just a problem that is linked to one specific gender. It affects male and female as well as married and single relationships. Our fellowship age range has expanded from young people years ago to many people in their late forties and fifties today. With the age of this generation, many new issues that have never been approached in writing have arisen to affect our members today. This area is identified as 'midlife crisis.' It affects both genders in varied ways. Sometimes the results are staggering. We feel that the importance of this chapter is needed to help fellow members get a grip in a area we all will probably be involved in directly or indirectly.

'Midlife crisis' gives us a reality check on being clean and working the program. We can share from our own personal experience what has worked for us. It is nothing to be ashamed of. But there is an urgent need to address these problems before it destroys us or the people we love. We will discuss crises that will affect our members during this age range. We desire our fellow addicts to come through this phase of life with victory not defeat. Typically, midlife crisis refers to a man or woman seeking to recapture youth. It is more important to realize ourselves 'at our true age.' There are advantages to being older. Some of the demands of child rearing and making a living are lessened. Some of us have accumulated money so we don't have to work. Others have made

working a comfortable part of their lives. We know our bodies better and are better able to eat the proper foods, get our rest and take care of ourselves. One of the greatest joys is being there for our young.

Self-centeredness and fear will be the first two characteristics that reveal themselves. As with addicts in active addiction, we did not want to hear that we had a problem. By the time we were ready to admit to a problem and to decide to get help, the damage was done and frequently irreversible. During this period, communication is crucial. We may not want to hear what is being said or may not be able to understand what is happening. But to communicate will give us a way to vent and express our feelings even though we are confused. Many times, we tend to listen to friends that have not gone through what we are going through. We base our decisions at that point on their advice. Example: a man telling a woman what it is like to have a baby. Do not listen to opinion the same way you listen to experience. Like most people, we attempt to deal with these issues ourselves. It is like self_medicating our pain. At this point, an addict making decisions without additional input is dangerous and requires extended thought and time with their sponsor. It is important to explore all options and to seek all resources to either resolve the dilemma.

Emotions in recovery are sometimes as deceptive as they were in active addiction. Making a major decision when confused or upset may lead to poor decisions. Making decisions based on emotions may result in the same problems we had while using. Not making a decision is best at this point in time. We still adhere to our decision knowing that the consequences and outcomes will be negative. This is like walking off the edge of a cliff, knowing what will happen, yet still doing it. Because we have made that insane decision and insist on following through with the insanity.

During this crisis in one's life, confusion runs rampant. Even simple rational decisions are sometimes clouded. We know that we are confused and staying in this mindset is the first step to either using or suicide. We are not capable at this stage of making rational decisions. All our relationships are confused, even with ourselves! We expect rejection, not support, from either a spouse or lover - and in some cases close friends. Even though this is not true in most cases, we tend to believe our own deception and follow through with this insane thinking. Taking time out for a weekend vacation may give us time to clear our minds by getting away from the daily routine. Many people associate the pain they are going through with those they are close to even if they did not do anything to cause the problem.

Many times our responses to these situations come from learned behavior. An example would be in most cases our family setting as we grew up. If our parents were divorced or separated during our early or teenage years, we would probably try to resolve the situation the way our role models addressed the situation. In most cases, it would either be by divorce or separation and even unfaithfulness in the relationship or marriage. Kids pick up and learn many characteristics that parents operate in during their growing years. We may not realize the coping skills that we operate under are usually the skills we learned from our parents. That is why it is important to communicate these feelings or frustrations. Our parents were taught to either grin and bear it or just give up and leave. As addicts, we tend to say 'screw everything and run.' This reflects addiction and is a poor way of handling a major problem. Many times, we look for a short term fix to a long-term problem: it keeps coming back. Since the issues that produced the problem are still in place, they keep generating the problem. Again, this is the addictive behavior at its strongest, most destructive stage. In recovery we are taught to be willing to change everything and it is of utmost importance

to get other perspectives during a time when one major decision could totally ruin our life. We need to use all tools at our disposal to either clear the situation up or come up with some alternative plan of action to help us make it through this troubled time in our life and recovery.

Issues of this type have sometimes been labeled outside issues because they were seen as separate from our addiction. Sharing about certain problems was considered not working our program. When some members were struggling just to stay clean, others were unable to help because they lacked the personal experience. Today, we have that experience. Life does not always deal each addict a straight and smooth road of recovery. We recognize the importance of looking at all aspects of our addiction. As we grow from one level to the next, we realize that life is a journey that goes on throughout all our lives. We share whatever may help or be at use at some point, even if our younger members haven't reached the stage of life where they need to know more about these things.

During this period, trust becomes an issue of major magnitude. Legal entanglements combine with emotions and fears to stress long standing love affairs and committed relationships. Trust is essential in repairing and healing the devastation done during this stage or phase of mistrust. Mistrust during this time is a seed that will be planted and if not dealt with, will grow and reap a crop of pain and misery. In some cases, it may become virtually impossible to trust the other party. Lying and deception during this phase is common and when a spouse finds out about this deception, trust is no longer a bond to keep the relationship together. Especially when a spouse has concrete evidence of deception and constantly seems to catch the spouse in lies. As addicts, we all know that lying was a integral part of our using and usually our only problem was we could not remember the exact way we told the first lie, so

therefore we usually got caught in the lie. The deceptive spouse operating in this active addiction mode feels comfortable that all tracks have been covered. Yet, the other spouse is only becoming more hostile because of the deception, and the lies that are being fed to them. This disease will blind us to the point that we actually believe our own lies. Again, this is the disease of addiction at its strongest point.

Children are usually affected the most during this insanity. Adults like to deny that children see the devastation. Children pick up on the insanity. Major emotional scars are created that our children may not be able to resolve. Children as young as three years old are capable of reading between the lines and sensing the uncertain and insecure atmosphere that we create during this phase. How we respond as adults will affect these children for life. Our faith and recovery will be reflected in their lives. During this insanity, we have become selfish people who are only concerned about our own needs and care about no one else's well being. Again, this is another attribute of our addictive thinking and why addiction progresses to isolation. Children during this phase will act out in many ways. We can send them to their room but they will take their pain, confusion and unanswered questions with them. Disobedience, attention-seeking acts, times of crying and in some cases blaming themselves for the problems the family is going through. Even though it is our own insanity causing this turmoil, we will not admit to our problems and seek professional help. We are selfish, inconsiderate, cold people and think of no one but ourselves. We create our world by the way we respond to today's problems. Children are our future and the way we respond to today's problems will mold these adults in the making.

Many times in meetings, we are told that our drug of choice is only one symptom of our disease. Therefore, we must look at all aspects of our

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life and seek out these addictive characteristics and ways that will destroy us and our families. Many times these problems begin with not having balance in our lives. Balance is when we maintain a well_rounded program of recovery and a well rounded program of being a family.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

EMPLOYMENT

This chapter is not an employment manual. We have no specific suggestions on "how to get and keep a job." It is a collection of shared experience by addicts on a subject that consumes a large quantity of time in our lives. Our occupations vary widely so there is no 'cookie cutter' method of practicing recovery that applies to everyone in all situations. We utilize a system of principles centered on honesty, openness and willingness to try. These three will go a long way on most workdays! Our goal is to get the most out of life and be the best we can be at whatever we choose to do. We have found that whether we wear white collars, blue collars, or no collars at all, our jobs, and our lives are more meaningful and enjoyable as we grow spiritually. We practice the spiritual principles that we learn in recovery on the job. Many of us were unemployed or unemployable when we got clean and we soon realized that our old ways of supporting ourselves wouldn't work in this new way of life. A life of crime or using others to get by just wouldn't fit into a program based on spiritual principles. For the first time in quite a while, we may have found ourselves looking for a job.

Applying the principle of the Seventh Tradition to our personal recovery and being fully self-supporting often raises our self-esteem and generates enthusiasm. However, some of us quickly found that we had to do more work. Our disease made it easy for us to give ourselves an unrealistic picture of what we could or could not do. It seemed that we were fluctuating to the opposite ends of the spectrum and had no hope of finding the middle ground. Either we thought we should run the business or we felt we weren't qualified for the simplest entry-level job. After we write and talk with our sponsors and other members of NA, we began to get a more accurate perspective. We learn and accept our value as a

marketable resource. Many of us have struggled with the question, "When is the right time to leave my job or change careers?" Most of us have heard the suggestion, "Don't make any major changes early in recovery." This advice, usually given to newcomers, will help us focus on the changes going on inside of us rather than us causing changes on the outside and focusing on that. As we work through the Steps and practice total abstinence, our wants and needs change. These changes seem to come so rapidly that what we think we need today may be different in just a short time. We learn that what we 'think we need' may not necessarily be 'what we need.'

Our working lives improve when we grow in recovery. 'Work' consumes a great deal of our time. Our work becomes something enjoyable when we apply the principle of service to it. As we give to our jobs, we gain proportionally to our efforts. As we become more proficient and skillful, we can enjoy a high level of satisfaction in our work place. This can foster pride and arrogance. It is just our place in the pecking order changes. We learn the 'cure' is the same gentleness and forbearance shown to us by others.

Our program teaches us to live 'in the moment' and sometimes we must take our work 'just for the moment.' Looking at the 'big picture' can sometimes be overwhelming, so we break it down into manageable pieces. This is very similar to the concept of not using just for today. Some of us take jobs in fields that are totally alien to us. We may be frightened and this can turn into a paralysis that keeps us from learning our job. The principle of trust can help us here. We found that in our work, we were not as bad or worthless as we thought, nor as perfect as we pretended to be. Our true self-worth comes from knowing that our future is looking brighter. Our futures look brighter because we take the appropriate steps to better our lives today. We learn that our Higher

Power's guidance is always available to us through the 11th Step. Surrender is the key to recovery in any area where we want or need improvement. We must admit our need for help before any change is possible.

Our defense mechanisms are so strong that we tend to defeat any attempts that others make to help raise us above our present level of acceptance. Criticism seems threatening and final. Criticism can be a step towards increased awareness and control of our lives and the things that make us happy. We accept personal responsibility for the level of income and performance that we currently enjoy in this life. No business in the world can survive without reliable workers who show up and do a good job. Being clean gives us an advantage in the workplace.

Does this mean that we should never try anything new? Of course not! We know from experience that our disease makes us think that it is the things outside of us that are the problem and not our attitude. We have found that 'practicing patience' has a way of sifting out the perceived problems from the real ones. Almost always, our present concerns will melt away in time. When we tried changing our thinking before changing our place of employment, we discovered that we have the capacity to make decisions. "Should I stay or move on?" is a question we occasionally asked ourselves. We seemed to decide this question based more on positive spiritual principles than on negative self-centeredness. As we stay clean, many of us find new opportunities from which we can choose. Stay on a job at least two years. These positive chances are acknowledgments of our Higher Power's 'good will' presenting itself at the correct moment. We should not be afraid to accept a challenge that feels 'spiritually right.' One rule of thumb that some addicts use to assist them in making changes is: If we are moving toward something good instead of running from something bad, the likelihood of a positive

outcome is greatly increased. We often hear around the meetings that members are doing old things with new attitudes. One of those 'things' that we can do with a new attitude is our job.

One addict shared his experience at gaining a new look at an old situation: "I worked in a factory as a machinist and I'd performed this work for many years before getting clean. After a short time in recovery, I began to think that life should offer me a lot more than the drudgery of running the same machine every day. I wanted something different and I wanted to feel useful so I talked to my sponsor about it. He worked in a different factory doing work that seemed even less interesting than my job. He milled the heads of hammers squarely. I asked him, 'How do you feel good about doing the same job every day? Don't you think God has something better in store for us?'

"He said, 'we're working with God substance, whether we're dealing with other people or materials. I try to be aware that whatever I'm doing, I'm in the presence of my Higher Power and that's what gives me the ability to mold something seemingly worthless into something useful. If we put love first, it will show us a way to work with materials and people. A soul satisfaction takes place when we're practicing this attitude. Another thing I do is picture the people that will be using my hammers and all the good that will come from it. They will be building homes, toys for children and many other things that will bring joy to others. I try to experience that joy as I'm working and I get a greater feeling of serving others.'

"That's good for you,' I told him, 'but I build the gearboxes that go on F-16 fighter planes. Am I suppose to picture them dropping

bombs on somebody?’ Patiently my sponsor answered, ‘No, but you can send your love to the pilot and crew. You know they will be safe because of your fine craftsmanship. As you finish each one, you need to say a prayer that it will never have to harm anyone.’

"Moreover, that's exactly what I did for the next three years. Then a different job became available to me and I went on to do something different. I still try to practice love in all my labors. I find that not only does the day go smoother, but the quality of my work is better and people enjoy working with me more today."

When we first came to Narcotics Anonymous, ‘gainful employment’ may have been unattainable in our daily lives as finding the fabled Lost City of Atlantis. Many of us had been unemployed or ‘unemployable’ for as long as we could remember. For others, our employment record paralleled our drug use because we could pull things together for a little while. We were productive on a job but soon the drugs would take precedence over going to work every day and doing a good job. We would quit, before the axe fell, or found ourselves fired. For some of us, our jobs provided the last ammunition in our fight to retain our denial and avoid the First Step. We might say, "Yes, I'm all alone! My family and friends will not speak to me. My health is bad but I don't have a drug problem because I go to work every day!" Sometimes our performance level is limited by reality or in our minds by past deeds or actions that make us feel ashamed or unable to move forward in that area.

We find it is generally cheaper to make amends than to be permanently limited in some area of our lives, like employment. No matter what our employment status in early recovery, chances are that some big changes had to happen shortly after we got clean. Even after years in NA, we find that employment provides unique opportunities and challenges in which

we can work the Program. One challenge we may face is that, for the most part, we can choose our friends but not our co-workers. It is possible that for eight or more hours a day we are expected to interact with people who probably know nothing about Twelve step recovery and do not care to know about it. Our work environments run the gamut from a very positive and enjoyable place to an atmosphere that is as bad as any place that we frequented during our using. We must deal with racism, sexism, dishonesty, gossip, intimidation, hatred, and more. We can not always remove ourselves from the situation by leaving work. Abstinence, simply not doing, is not a viable option in this area of life for most of us.

At times, it helps to remember that we are responsible for our own behavior wherever we are. It is often tempting to 'go along with the crowd' for acceptance when someone exhibits negative behavior in our presence. We need to ask ourselves, "If I were sitting in my home group, how would I react to this situation." Answers to questions like this one keep us doing the right thing. We say a silent prayer for help and guidance in whatever action we take. By re-evaluating our ideas and thinking things through, we begin to enjoy the real benefits of recovery. This is why our program involves so much discussion and personal interaction both privately and in meetings. We can rewrite our roles in life in order to suit ourselves and our Higher Power. We do not feel so trapped by our minds and egos that we cannot try something out on a limited basis to see if it works. We do this with the total freedom to change our minds if we are not pleased with the results. Life is becoming an adventure again. Doing our jobs with the same humility and selfless love that we put into carrying the message to the addict still suffering is self-affirming. It seems impossible but many of us experience this and choose to make it a regular practice in our recovery. Why should we cheat ourselves of the gratitude that comes from unconditionally doing

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‘good’ for someone else? Why should we express unconditional love only while serving Narcotics Anonymous when our Twelfth Step says to ‘practice these principles in all our affairs’? Many of us use a ‘workplace Tenth Step’ to keep our program on track throughout the day. Some questions we might ask ourselves are:

What good is coming from my labor and who am I serving?

Am I expressing love as I perform my job?

Does my ‘on the job’ behavior demonstrate humility and loving service?

Did I approach this task with the same enthusiasm that I show for NA service?

Did I tell someone I work with (for) how valuable their contributions are today?

Am I doing all I can to create and maintain an atmosphere of recovery in the workplace?

If I were the customer/employer, would I want fifty more people just like me working here?

What are my motives for doing my best at this job (e.g. to get a raise, promotion, recognition, or serving others)?

Which motive elevates me to my highest spiritual good?

If I am ‘being of service’ for the right reasons, do I believe that ‘good’ will come to me without my having to manipulate the outcome?

We also try out the principles that we have heard so much about. While we can only work with the principles that we are personally ready for and open to, anything we learn benefits us. This is a healthy sort of 'trial and error.' Clean, we do not have to fear failure as much. In active addiction, we viewed any weakness or admission of fault as an end to us since we lived in such a hostile environment. As members of Narcotics Anonymous, we enjoy the help and affection of others. We feel as if we are merely confused members of a caring and loving great family. When we find we are at fault, we can replace the lengthy and troublesome process of getting out of trouble with a simple admission of fault and a willingness to make amends. Usually, the amends is sufficient and no further action on our part is called for.

Many of us have found that with a little practice and effort we can communicate spiritual principles to co-workers without using 'program language.' Admitting fault or thanking someone in front of others is a good example of "Praise in public, criticize in private." There are many ways we can advertise our openness to improvement to others. In some job situations, talking too much is a bad idea. We learn to 'tune in' to the people around us before shooting off our mouths. People observe how we behave and react; but more importantly, they listen to what we say. Exhibiting patience in a stressful situation, showing kindness when confronted by someone's anger, praising another's attributes instead of gossiping, and being truthful in our dealings with everyone go a long way to create a program of 'attraction rather than promotion.' It is easy to fall into feeling 'holier than thou' and getting on a soap-box to preach about all that we have learned about spiritual principles since coming to Narcotics Anonymous. Those of us who have practiced this behavior soon found that we 'turned-off' far more people than we reached. Thank God that we recalled the spiritual principle embodied in the Eleventh Step and refocused to set things right. Our faith in the power of a loving

and caring God to take care of us helps us avoid defensiveness or aggression.

When we first got clean one of two things was true: either we had a job or we did not. Sometimes, we take a job simply because it is the first one offered and we feel unemployable. We commit to try to perform to the best of our ability. By doing this, the feeling of self-worth starts to become evident. This is one spoke in the wheel of recovery. Those of us who come into recovery still working often find that damage from old using behavior needs correcting. We work our Steps in order and do not recommend rushing forward and making amends until we reach the Ninth Step. This is because some of the changes we need to go through will give us some basic changes so that our amends will be both honest and not create more harm and disorder. In plain language, we do not want to get you fired or held accountable for things you did not do. So, take it easy. Stay clean, help others, take your time.

When we reach the Ninth Step, a direct amends to our employer, co-workers, and in some cases, customers, is in order. Saying "I'm sorry" is meaningless unless we have stopped doing the harm. We begin changing the negative behaviors that created the need for amends by applying positive spiritual principles and action to our daily work life. We work hard at being dependable. We come to work every day, we show up on time, complete projects when we said we would, and take responsibility for our mistakes/shortcomings rather than trying to hide them or blame someone else. In short, we begin to do an old job with a new attitude. In time, people who resented us the most come to value our contribution and enjoy working with us.

Many of us languish needlessly just to remain near remedies that we still cannot quite reach. This may allow us to restructure our lives with this

relief in sight and without the demands of 'moving on' that may overwhelm us at times. However, we have the obligation to assist others whenever, wherever, and however. We must meet this obligation if we expect to maintain recovery that is worth passing on to those in need. This commitment exerts a steady pressure on us that keeps what we practice close to what we recommend to others. We addicts easily drift without using this mechanism for giving ourselves reality checks. Our best fantasies nearly killed us. We do not recommend giving unwanted advice. We define readiness as 'not just needing help but as asking for help sincerely.' Caring and exerting our energy to help others is the value of our recovery in 'social terms.' This strengthens us and cancels out the bad feelings we can not get rid of any other way. For many of us, our place of employment was another 'playground' when we were using. We may have had 'using friends' on the job that pose a potential threat to our newly found recovery. The answer to this problem varies from addict to addict. Some of us had to leave in order to maintain something more precious than working, staying clean. Many of us though continued in our jobs by simply changing our thinking patterns instead of leaving our place of employment.

As one addict shared: "I got clean by going through an inpatient treatment center. One of my biggest fears about getting out was returning to work. I wondered how everyone was going to treat me. I was worried about 'what would they think' and 'would they talk to me.' After returning to work, I found that almost everyone was happy to see me come back clean and offered words of encouragement. When I thought about it later, I realized they were probably delighted that I was clean because they wouldn't have to put up with some of the antics that I used to pull during my active addiction!

"Even most of my using friends backed off when I told them that I was serious about staying clean. I did have a run in with one guy I used with the most. He would try to convince me that I didn't have a problem and even offered to 'buy me one.' I realized that 'my being clean' was a threat to him. He knew that he used like I had used and if I had the disease of addiction that probably meant that he was an addict too. I just continued to associate with the people at work who didn't use, prayed and talked regularly with addicts in recovery to reaffirm my decision to stay clean. In time, even my old friend accepted my recovery and changed his attitude toward me. As a matter of fact, almost two years later he surrendered to the First Step and came into recovery."

Passing on what we have found to be true in recovery is the key. It allows us to benefit from our human associations in a way we never thought possible. Many of us found this impossible until we found these answers are true for us, in terms of our own successful experience. Is it easy? Does it always work? Will some people come to the program seeking things other than recovery? No, it is not always easy. It works for us proportionally to how much we work it. Not everyone comes to the rooms for recovery. Fears such as these can rule us if we forget the spiritual laws that seemed so vivid to us in the beginning. There is a law of nature that says, "We get what we give, we keep what we let go of and that what we send out always comes back to us." The disturbance caused by our addiction makes it hard for us to see the connection of the using to our pain. We need to avoid games that might allow our disease to screen our real agendas for personal fame and glory! Hey, we can relate to that form of insanity quite readily. Let's just look at this logically. Some of us think that we are smarter than the rest and that when we take charge of things, it is for the betterment of all. These unfortunates must then pretend to surrender, pretend to have faith in a

loving God and pretend to stop hurting. We pray that this pretense will end before a relapse occurs.

Passing on what we have learned about employment is important for other recovering addicts. We all know the pain of insecurity that financial insufficiency brings. We empower our fear by disallowing any discussion of our financial needs and concerns. Some of us believe, fervently and erroneously, that we must give away money so that we can receive more. There will always be ways to make money quickly however, self-sabotage seems to exact a terrible toll that we are not willing to pay today. We may self-destruct by placing a low value on the things that we can do easily, especially if others can not do them at all. It seems we are experts at being too hard on ourselves. If we feel dissatisfied with our performance at work, we may need to review our abilities and apply a little gratitude for the talents that we have failed to treasure. It is possible that the answers we seek are close and we only need a little more strength and courage from praying to awaken ourselves.

Another area of employment that creates a conflict for some NA members when starting a new job is whether to break our anonymity about being a recovering addict. Certainly, we should fully inform our doctors, dentists and other medical people treating us for injury or illness, but is this rule true for employers? What about telling our customers or co-workers? As members of a program with more members reaching longer periods of total abstinence, we enjoy a good track record as employees who no longer have a drug problem, just for today. If we put 'no' on the form, we might get the job, only to be fired for lying later on, without notice. If we put 'yes' on the form, we may benefit from the recognition that some companies have that recovery does in fact take place. Some companies already have clean addicts on their payrolls. As

time goes by, perhaps new answers will come clear to us on these issues. Certainly, if we lie on the form and relapse later, our disease will begin tearing up our lives again. So, there is no escape from the reality of our addiction. Companies may not understand 'addiction' as a disease requiring ongoing effort and care to recover, but they do understand 'total abstinence' phrases like: "I don't use drugs."

Unfortunately, no single answer applies to everyone in every situation. Listening to that inner voice of guidance has probably been the best advice that any of us has received. One thing is true, that while we shouldn't have to suffer discrimination because we are in recovery, neither should we expect special treatment because we are addicts. Some members say, that as a general rule of thumb, "I don't bring up the subject but if asked, I tell the truth." The time proven problem with spiritual principles is that they will not seem to work, at all or as well as, the ways of the world in meeting our needs. Each of us seems to go through ongoing battles to practice the principles. We continue to fear failure, pain, or other negative results. This disease plants the idea that we can not afford to be open, honest and plain deep inside of us. Spiritual principles help us obtain things that are more valuable than the worth of worldly goods. Sometimes these things seem unreal when compared to food, shelter, and clothing. It may help to realize that spiritual principles bring us a sense of peace, clarity of mind and the ability to achieve the personal goals that we set for ourselves. We have probably set goals in the past yet it seemed as if something deflected us, often just as the goal seemed to be within our reach.

Certain characteristics kept us alive during a time when we could not do any better. The 'secret' of recovery is to pay attention, go slowly, attend to the spirit and learn how to recognize other spiritual players in the game of life. We must love as well as avoid becoming subject to those

who have not learned these lessons yet. Clean addicts enjoy an advantage in life just from being clean. As addicts, we come to terms with how isolation cuts us off from the strengths that we would otherwise get from our close companions or coworkers. Plainly and simply, we all have one or several areas of need, many talents, as well as a few real strengths. As long as we can access what we need in other spiritually principled people, God meets our needs.

As we grow spiritually, our ideas of what's important changes. We are better able to work without the intense drive of desperation. 'Giving selfless service' is a principle which, when practiced, brings us spiritual growth. Most of our lives were lived in the pursuit of the things about which the Sixth Tradition warns us. Money, property and prestige will divert us from our primary purpose: 'staying clean and carrying the message.'

Today, we choose to focus on our purpose by expressing love through service in all that we do. Many of us have found because of this commitment that all the things we pursued so vigorously yet could not get enough of are available in abundance through practicing spiritual principles. By concentrating on the good that we could do with every act, we gain recognition from others, received monetary compensation, and gained the awareness of a closer conscious contact with our Higher Power. We have learned from experience that whatever we choose to do, when we put God first, 'good' will result. We need reminding that we do not have to be the beneficiaries of these actions. Our Higher Power goes with us wherever we are and meets all our needs.

We try to look for the best in ourselves and others today. We have found that when we express love in all the things that we do, that same love comes back to us in countless ways. We strive to remain open to God-

inspired ideas from others by maintaining a closer conscious contact with our Higher Power. We have come to expect as well as experience miracles every day that we stay clean. We no longer see ourselves as merely a worker or a businessperson. We are visionaries who plan what we need to do each day in order to make the vision a reality. It does not matter whether we are the president of a huge corporation or a minor employee of a small company, we can see ourselves as a success.

In Narcotics Anonymous, we do not measure our recovery progress by how much we have acquired or accomplished but by how much we have overcome thus far. An intuitive faith develops within each of us. As we begin to believe that if we are doing our part in our Higher Power's plan, we are in the right place and even greater things will come our way tomorrow.

Sharing our feelings with our new boss may seem risky but this vulnerability can clear the way to having an open and honest relationship. This practice can bear fruit during our employment. Occasionally, we may have a negative experience. However, reaching out for the help of others is usually the first steps on the road back to sanity and reason. We continue to do our best and are usually mildly surprised to find ourselves feeling more competent. Soon we begin to feel quite able and adept. We may find ourselves thinking about moving on to other more challenging projects or positions. We step out in spite of the remaining fear and take the challenge of working in a new position.

We can responsibly leave one job in order to move to another while remaining on good terms with our previous employer. Then the process starts all over again. The world is searching yet going bankrupt trying to find people who will give an honest day's work for an honest day's pay.

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Being clean provides us with an automatic advantage over some of our co_workers. Our spiritual growth helps us to accept these new advantages without feeling superior to others. Practicing spiritual principles in the workplace is part of the process that allows us to take our rightful place in the world.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

COMPULSIVE SPENDING

We use the term retail therapy to describe the rush we feel when we spend money recklessly. This is different from hurting a spouse or buying someone's affection and loyalty. While the term may seem humorous, we know all too well that money is a mood-changing substance for many of us. Our disease may use this humor in an effort to diminish the seriousness of the problem. It may be helpful to give some examples of this symptom as we have experienced it. An addict says, "I feel unloved so I think buying a present for myself would be nice." This is not a bad thing as long as it does not result in spending money that one needs for living expenses or providing for our dependents. If it crosses the line by hurting us or someone else, we need to learn to identify it as a symptom of our disease. It enhances our state while savaging our finances and our personal reputation.

Another sign of the illness might be getting more than one item of something whether necessary or not. An addict recalls, "I remember that when I found a comfortable pair of shoes, I would buy a pair of each color in the store." We may tell ourselves, "I worked hard this week and I deserve to have fun but I barely have rent money." The impulse to spend what we have to make us feel better is another example of this symptom. Some of us go to the opposite extreme and refuse to spend any money on ourselves because we feel unworthy.

Many other things may involve spending money and yet not be 'retail therapy.' When we buy a gift because someone may submit to our will out of indebtedness, it is not retail therapy. This act is a mere attempt to purchase favor rather than a kindness. We rationalize this kind of spending as love instead of control. Since the goods involved can easily

seem to be gifts, we need to be honest with ourselves. Some gift giving is actually an attempt to purchase from others what we think we need. The opposite end of the spectrum is that some of us are cautious about accepting gifts is because we fear unspecified indebtedness. Sometimes the gift may call for far more than a simple 'thank you.'

Overspending like all the symptoms of addiction is a form of entrapment. It is just like using drugs when we said, "I know better than to do what I'm doing, yet I go right ahead and do it anyway." We easily see that we're doing something against our will. Mimicking retail therapy, buying forms of special treatment may be just as wrong. Dishonesty, in any form, has a price. There usually is no rush or thrill that we associate with addiction.

One addict shared, "I grew up with my mother overspending for years and knew well the results on the family. I made a promise to myself that I wouldn't become a 'shop-a-holic.' This promise has led me to the other extreme. I hate to shop at all. It is a task to go to the grocery store. Today, because I see this symptom in my life I can choose to behave differently.

"I want to live as normally as possible in the world today so I try practical solutions. Once a month, I buy myself something unnecessary like nail polish or a hat. Today, I can go to the drugstore, I don't have to 'buy junk' to distract myself from looking at the over-the-counter medications. Once a month, I just go shopping (the 99 cent stores are wonderful) and I buy as much as I can tote home for \$20, and not have the guilt of spending too much. Today when I go to the grocery store, I avoid some problems by making a list and not impulse buying."

As with any symptom of addiction, the illusion of 'personal power' that money gives us is pervasive and convincing. Only the hollow, empty feeling of not enough warns us that we are in trouble. This disease forces us to do something against our true nature. We can not get what we want by buying material things in vain and futile effort to create a spiritual reality for ourselves. Happiness is spiritual fitness. We attempt to validate our disease when we make shiny toys and needless goods our goal. Our personal illusion that we can control our world and lives makes these fantasies seem like possible realities. If we are not vigilant, we soon find that we live in the center of an expensive fantasy that removes us from the care of God. The progression of the disease results in denial of our spiritual needs. It tells us that 'plenty' will make it better but we find ourselves in a sickening plenty. It is no accident that we make the association between things and pleasure. If the flood of product advertisements has its desired effect and addiction is in the mixture, we are in trouble. For some of us, the nifty trigger of 'buying happiness' becomes the target of our obsession.

Giving to induce someone's compliance is a form of financial tyranny, manipulation and enslavement. The perpetrator is more enslaved than the person forced to act against their will - at least they can rebel! Addiction tells us that at least the victim has a chance of escape or can surrender their desire to eliminate the attraction. From childhood forward, it is instilled in us that we need and want the best and most. Ad campaigns will be sure to keep this illusion in place. This is an extremely difficult belief to alter. In recovery, we learn not to spend all of our money on payday. We learn to manage and control our shopping in time. As we have our spiritual needs satisfied in other ways, some of our obsessions just dry up and seemingly disappear.

As we become humble, we find that we don't want to continue using

these 'expensive substitutes' in our feeble effort to find contentment. We may experiment with waiting until we have 'made the decision to buy' several times over several days before actually spending the money. This delay can be an area of exploration for us. We may find we still get what we want. Other times, we will find ourselves saying, "Heck, no! I don't really want that junk. I'll keep my money for something better!" Better is worth the wait.

Repeatedly our addiction tells us that we have control over how we feel therefore buying becomes an obsession with the 'quick fix', which we know will never last. The destructive guilt is right behind this compulsive behavior and steals what we were looking for in the first place. Things can not make us feel good or better about ourselves, any more than drugs did. We work on ourselves with the Steps to find the happiness we seek. We work the Steps and find ourselves. We find that the need to seek for things to make us happy disappears in the light of reality.

An addict shared: "Learning the value of keeping my hunger, anger, loneliness, and fatigue under surveillance taught me that my feelings or perceptions rarely met reality or my needs. I learned that eating regularly and more wisely helped stave off what I thought were cravings for drugs but were really hunger pangs. Later, walking through the mall, I recognized that buying a new sweater would not provide nourishment for my growing spirit. This realization resulted in a new awareness that matched the strength of this symptom of my disease. Further, I realized that all these and all the other feelings generated by my disease as evidence of real problems are actually just empties (my term). It's my choice, once I expose my rationalizations, to see the empties as a function of imbalance (the goal being balance) or as opportunities - a feeling

of health and striving to create a whole me.

"I have learned a lot about 'I don't know' and 'I changed my mind' in this arena. I learned to pause and make a decision based on real information, not impulse. And, if information changes, to return something for cash to redeposit to my spiritual account."

Most of us have listened to our disease whisper, "If I only had this or that, then I'd be okay. Relating this in meetings can arouse empathy in those who have experienced this symptom of addiction. It may have taken us quite some time to realize that the problem with this logic is that the store doesn't stock what we really need. Many of us have the memory of having a temper tantrum to get a new toy. We also recall that as soon as we got it, we started looking for the next toy and were unable to enjoy what we had. Today, the excitement and thrill of owning new toys is short-lived and un-fulfilling. At some point, we make the connection in our consciousness that we felt exactly the same way before we put the drugs down. This awareness allows us to begin to practice the principles of recovery on this symptom. Change your mind, change your life.

A member shared: "I rationalize to myself that I can afford to overspend and buy happiness. I also deserve to have some rewards for the hard work I have done in NA. Isn't personal gain OK? I have a hard time drawing the line. I tend to live in one extreme or the other. To what extent is my phone bill healthy? I do need others and want to be a part of NA as a whole. Where do I draw the line? What is healthy dependence and what is self-destructive behavior? I remember deluding myself into thinking that my life was manageable if I limited myself only to cheap and legal drugs, which I could afford. Because of Narcotics Anonymous, I know

that I cannot buy happiness."

All of us have found ourselves in the awkward position of realizing that once the drugs are gone, our addiction breaks out in all other areas of our life. Although they have been present for some time, addictive behavior suddenly becomes visible. We know that one of the directions that our disease can take is telling us that if we spend money, we can change our moods. In early recovery, worldly concerns occupy much of our conscious mind and we can't seem to think of anything else. As recovery progresses, we will improve in this area as well.

We must continue to tell ourselves that no matter how much material or credit we get, it won't increase our feelings of well-being or self-worth. Living a spiritual life of recovery requires that we stop substituting symbols or labels for the real thing. Accumulating goods and wielding financial power may only make us feel more burdened and less able to respond to our spiritual impulses. Balance is our goal. Self-destructive feelings force us into illogical ways of thinking and doing that actually release our addiction that comes out in new symptoms. One of these apparently is in the concept that the compulsive wasting of money purchasing goods as a way of changing moods will make us feel better. Self-destructive means it will hurt someone. It may hurt us, those we love or innocent bystanders.

An addict shared: "What happens is, I tell myself I'll simply go to the mall and look around. I won't buy anything, so much for good intentions. Then my disease rationalizes as follows: this is something I need - besides I can afford it. I'll just be good to myself for once. At the same time that I know this, I feel like I need flashy things so that you'll like me. You will look at me and say, 'Oh, wow, nice shoes; I gotta get to know that guy.' The

contradiction is that I have no space for superficiality in my life today. What is the antidote for retail therapy? Fellowshiping, practicing abstinence, and changing habits. Needless spending makes me feel so worthless and such a loser. I don't need or have to feel that way today.

"The bottom line is that I'm trying to stuff things into a void in my soul that I can't possibly fill with material things. The lie is that the new car, house, stereo, baseball card, or clothes, etc. will finally be the plug for that empty, spacious void."

The disease wants us to believe that we can more easily acquire the lives we want for ourselves by from the outside inward. Sometimes, it tells us that for us to feel better, we must look good. Even after we get clean and work the Steps, many of us struggle with this twisted concept. We may even go after material possessions and call them 'rewards of the program' while justifying our continuous state of disbelief. The power of the Twelve Steps changes who we are not simply the external circumstances of our lives. We must be clear about this because this mistake might kill us. The 'change' of recovery is internal and shines through our exteriors. If we want our lives to change, we have to change our lives. Some of us may have misinterpreted 'leaving the past behind' to mean that nothing we have is good enough for us anymore and that we must find a brand new us. Many times, we overspend believing that we deserve more than we can afford. At some point, we wonder, "Do my possessions define who I am? Or can I define the things around me through the growing force of my recovery?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

MIRACLES

Fate is what is going to happen unless there is some kind of change or intervention. The spiritual reality of recovery brings with it the power and responsibility to defy fate at its worst. Recovery allows us to first see and then participate in God's miracles. Sometimes the new sense of personal power overwhelms us. It is not our own personal power that works these miracles, it is the power of life and God in us all that is awake and directs all action in our lives. We can see it around the edges of everything. Occasionally, we can see it head on. It is mind blowing. It can seem impossible, frightening, intimidating and just too much for someone new to living a spiritual life. We try to be gentle with someone just starting on the road to recovery. The power that links us together as humankind is a force in our daily lives. We missed a lot of this in our former lives simply because we didn't hold still long enough to see it or think things through. It may be the power that most religions call God. Regardless of our differences as to language, culture and personal experience, the principle of reflection plays a role in our miracles. Whatever we do is matched by the universe surrounding us. We never stop being a part of the whole. If we are indifferent and uncaring, we can expect the same from life. If we show concern for others and an ability for self-improvement, we cannot escape the attention of those who treasure such inclinations. If we show concern for others and ability for self-improvement, we cannot escape the attention of those who treasure such inclinations. What we get is a reflection of what we give.

The changes for the better we permit ourselves add up to a lot of positive change for humanity. Just because we are clean and trying to live better lives, we are very definitely removing things from our future. Auto accidents, jail time, broken friendships, love affairs and marriages might

not occur. Families might not be broken and children might not be hurt. Being clean changes everything. Where the mistakes eat up our lives in active addiction, the corrections we make in recovery refill our lives and lead to a steady supply of good times. There is always one more miracle ahead of us. We just have to keep the faith and trust that things will work out. No doubt tragedies will occur but very often, beautiful occurrences and surprising outcomes will amaze us. One explanation for this is that we have become so accustomed to bad things happening that we just don't expect the good. Miracles seemed unlikely or impossible in ordinary times. Miracles occur by the grace of God and represent evidence of the spirit working in the world.

An addict seeking recovery finds the only meeting in town. A member plagued by a need to make amends runs into someone on the street they thought was dead. A member who really needs a job, tries one more time, and gets it. Large and small miracles seem to take place endlessly among members who are active in recovery and working their steps. Like so many other things in life, we get more out when we put more in.

Many of us come to believe that God is the doer of all things. We can participate, try to block the flow or get pushed out of the way. Naturally, when we were loaded, we were out of it most of the time. The 'it' we were out of is a healthy and functional state of mind, body and spirit. While wounds of the mind and body are more obvious in our society, wounds of the spirit show in our attitudes and our inability to process certain feelings, like enthusiasm and joy. Because of our addiction, we became accustomed to despair and misery to some extent. We must learn or re-learn happiness, acceptance and courage. Clean, we not only get to see the divine force move in our daily lives, we get to participate and play a role as part of the greater hand that is moving. Through working the 12 Steps of NA, we are reformed into people who can live in God's

love, be selfless and occasionally angelic. It happens.

As one addict shared this story the way it was told to him. A lady in the rooms for a few years said, "I was going with a guy who looked and acted a lot like Charlie Manson. I was sick of the way my life was going. It got so bad that I actually got down on my knees and prayed for God to help me, help me any way He could. As the intensity of my pain and disgust over my situation subsided, I realized nothing had changed. Somehow, I had always had the notion that if I prayed, really prayed, it would make a difference. Since nothing had changed, God had let me down. I was really shocked in a way.

"After a time, I decided to take a walk down to the Korean Market and get some smokes. Along the two lane road, I was suddenly struck with a need to take a pee! It was awful, I couldn't just go along the road and there were no bushes! I ran to the nearest house and knocked on the door and when a man answered, I immediately asked if I could use his bathroom! It was embarrassing but I really, really had to go. A few minutes later, very relieved, I walked back to the front of the house and the guy who had let me in was sitting on the front porch.

"For some reason I felt comfortable talking with him and told him what had happened earlier in the day when I had prayed and nothing had happened. I really hated the way I was living and there seemed no way. As I shared more of my story, the man who let me in got kind of quiet. He asked me if I knew where I was? I said no, I just had to use the restroom and he let me in. He said this is the only clubhouse where NA meetings are held east of the Mississippi."

The biggest miracle we get to experience is the adventure of personality change. The more we learn, the more we realize that people just lose the capacity to change as they grow older. Many forces outside themselves make change almost impossible. Anonymity is one way we elude these forces. As long as we are clean, the old labels don't apply to us. By staying clean and living differently, new labels begin to apply. This is not a bad deal for society - or for us. Without an alternative, we are generally useless to ourselves and others. Most of us begin making amends immediately without realizing it. We subtract the burden our using takes out of the general economy, and especially those close to us.

The catch is that we stay clean and grow spiritually. If we do not, we will miss out on the rest of what recovery has to offer us. It is all set up so that the benefits stay hidden until the moment they are released to us. How often have we in ongoing recovery reached points where we had no real reason to go on and yet we did? Later, we found out that our fears were for nothing and miracles of precisely the type we yearned for were moving right to us. We forget that part of our human condition prevents us from being able to see through our present reality to what is headed our way. We just have to have the faith to wait and see.

Many of the miracles we experience come from the application of what we call spiritual principles. Although, the words we use to describe these principles seem to change for us as we grow in recovery, they are convenient. They give us a basic way to communicate our inadequacy along with areas of proficiency. We are able to navigate life in this new world of recovery. Over time, everything changes.

When we first hear the phrase "surrender to win," we assume this is a quaint way to sugar coat the fact that we can't handle many parts of life

or any part of using drugs. Later in recovery, we discover that surrender means not having to waste energy. We can let our egos subside and escape graciously from situations where we used to feel the need to assert ourselves uselessly. Assertion is no substitute for ability. While the world will still step aside for someone who appears sure of themselves, it helps to know where you are going.

When powerlessness became a word in our vocabulary, we lost the need to interfere in the affairs of others. Also, we could more clearly see when someone was actually meddling in our affairs. We are getting somewhere when we realize we are the 'someone' we have been looking for to straighten out the messes we have made of our lives. Finding a way to communicate with our higher power through prayer and meditation allows us to grow into our own solution. Fellow members can and should be allowed to help us out. We help others in our turn. Recovery is interactive. As we change, changes appear in those around us. Still, we must bear the burden of our choices whether they be the most we could hope for or the least. Strangely, reality doesn't seem to care much what we get as long as we're happy with it and can take care of what is entrusted to our safekeeping.

When death is staring us in the face, we get a whole new perspective on life. Honesty helps us match up our feelings with reality and the result is almost magical. Workable solutions appear close at hand and we may have trouble understanding that it was our ego that stood in the way of our happiness. Defects of character which we were barely aware of, assured our misery through self-defeating actions carried on with unvarying regularity. By taking personal responsibility for our choices, we gain the control we need to better our lives. No one can do this for us because we will stop them. We can defeat the best efforts of those who would help us. This is why we have to want recovery before we can get

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recovery. Once we make this basic shift of direction, things start to happen that surprise, amaze and may frighten us. For all our tough talk, we addicts don't venture far from certain habitual patterns. The weakness of addiction shows up clearly as our disease progresses to where we begin to have difficulty making simple adaptations in our daily lives. Being able to jump out of these habit patterns is miraculous to us and those close to us. A coincidence is a miracle in which God prefers to remain anonymous.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

HISTORY AND ORIGINS

EARLIEST MENTION OF 12 STEPS FOR ADDICTS

"What about the program that operates among addicts employing the same 12 Steps as AA?" This question was addressed to a Mr. William Wilson at the Yale Summer School for Alcohol and Drugs. His response evades the question but since the publication date would be after the Summer School, it took place in 1944. This is the earliest date we have referring to the beginnings of a 12 Step Fellowship for addicts.

(Page 472 Alcohol, Science and Society, C. 1945 Journal of Studies on Alcohol.)

SECOND EARLIEST MENTION OF 12 STEP PROGRAM FOR ADDICTS

"In 1947 an organization patterned after Alcoholics Anonymous was founded by patients of the federal hospital at Lexington. The founders called it Addicts Anonymous, and got help in getting started from members of an Alcoholics Anonymous chapter in a nearby town. The organization has the same basic principles of mutual help in warding off the threat of relapse governing the original AA group, which has scored impressive successes in saving many former alcoholics from falling off the wagon. Chapters of Addicts Anonymous have been established in several large cities. All ex-addicts are welcomed as members. So far, the results have been most promising." [U.S. Public Health Service - Public Affairs Pamphlet #186, September, 1952 - (Section entitled Addicts Anonymous on page 29)]

Much time and energy has been spent in researching and documenting

our origins. Danny Carlson in the late Forties and Jimmy Kinnon in the early Fifties surely played a role. Yet, isn't it obvious that NA is still being 'founded' today? Jimmy K. called himself a co-founder because he realized that we are all in this together. No single person is responsible for anything that happens in NA. Much of the recovery process is about getting away from seeing ourselves as separate and apart from our fellow recovering addicts. None of us wants to take the credit for God's miracle. Nearly everyone who reads this material has played some role in founding their local Fellowship. We are all founders and the only important thing about this is our gratitude and the experience that we have to share with others. The power of a loving God has found a way for us to stay alive long enough to get the basics of recovery. NA began when the first two addicts seeking recovery got together and found they could stay clean through their common desire. Only God knows where and when this occurred. Many say, "If NA did not exist, someone would have to invent it." This is what happened again and again. Some had ties with other efforts and some did not but they all deserve our respect and gratitude. If we go back far enough, we will find the future and the means to change it. Perhaps it is easier to see the principles when we do not know the personalities.

Another name has been added to the list of those who played key roles in the early days. This is Houston Sewell from Montgomery, Alabama. He went north in the late 1940's to Lexington, Kentucky to see what could be done about carrying a message of recovery utilizing the 'new Twelve Step method.' As of yet, we are unaware that anyone has come forward and claimed to have been the founder of what we know today as Narcotics Anonymous. Until a few years ago, Jimmy K was thought to be the only acknowledged 'cofounder' of Narcotics Anonymous. Since then, other names like Daniel Carlson have come to light. Many, many members have played a role in the founding NA, as we know it. The

intense pressure out in the 'world' to spawn and operate addiction related organizations such as the criminal justice system and treatment facilities couples with the reluctance of recovering addicts to 'feed their sick egos' makes it real hard for the 'truth' to come out.

This may lack the clarity that 'a fearless leader' could give us. The blessing is that we also lack many of the limitations that are incumbent with individual leadership. Somehow, we get what we need - when we need it. God always seems to be on time. Thanks Jimmy! Thanks Daniel! Thanks Houston! Thanks to all you early members!

The Saturday Evening Post - These Drug Addicts Cure One Another -
By Jerome Ellison - August 7, 1954 (page 22)

"In June of that year an inebriate mining engineer whom we'll call Houston 'hit bottom' with his drinking in Montgomery, Alabama, and the local AA's dried him up. Houston gobbled the AA program and began helping other alcoholics. One of the drunks he worked with_____, a sales executive who can be called Harry was involved not only with alcohol but also morphine. AA took care of the alcoholic factor, but left Harry's drug habit unchanged. Interested and baffled, Houston watched his new friend struggle in his strange self-constructed trap.

The opiate theme of the narrative now reappears. Harry's pattern had been a roaring drunk, take morphine to avoid a hangover, get drunk again and take morphine again. Thus he became "hooked", addicted. He drove through a red light one day and was stopped by a policeman. The officer found morphine and turned him over to the Federal jurisdiction, with the result that Harry spent twenty-seven months at Lexington, where both voluntary and involuntary patients are accommodated, as a prisoner. After his discharge he met Houston, and, through AA found

relief from the booze issue. The drug problem continued to plague him.

During this period, Houston, through one of those coincidences which AA's like to attribute to a Higher Power, was transferred by his employers to Frankfort, Kentucky, just a few miles from Lexington. "Harry's troubles kept jumping through my brain," Houston says. "I was convinced that the twelve Suggested Steps would work as well for drugs as for alcohol if conscientiously applied. One day I called on Dr. V. H. Vogel, the medical officer then in charge at Lexington. I told him of our work with Harry and offered to assist in starting a group in the hospital. Doctor Vogel accepted the offer and on Feb. 16, 1947, the first meeting was held. Weekly meetings have been going on ever since."

"In further research by members of NA who live in "Houston's" home town of South Boston, Virginia, we come to find that his name really was Houston. Actually, it was Houston Sewell. His niece, who is well aware of what she calls "my uncle the founder of Narcotics Anonymous", has spoken to my sponsee on the subject in depth. Apparently Houston moved to Lexington for a job there and having tried to help his friend in Montgomery, Alabama get off morphine, he wouldn't let the idea go. The idea being that addicts could use the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and stay clean. He took this idea to Dr. Vogel who as stated above was the director of the only place addicts could go to detox in America in the 1940's. This was the Federal Detox Facility in Lexington, Kentucky. It is here that the very first documented seeds of addicts using the AA 12 steps for recovery was ever mentioned." - From a member in Virginia.

This Lexington Group, known early on as Addicts Anonymous, held regularly scheduled meetings and even sent out newsletters to members who left the facility and went back home. This newsletter, called "The

Key" holds a very firm place in the foundation of NA as we know it. The minutes of the very first business meetings to start NA made direct reference to said newsletter. "Our purpose, taken from the Key, is to stay clean... etc etc etc.." The Key they referred to is this very same newsletter from Lexington and probably latter from the newer Detox in Ft Worth, TX, which was sending addicts back to Los Angeles and surrounding areas with the same seeds of 12 step recovery for addicts that were patterned in the Lexington Detox.

From this original Lexington Detox, a man named Danny Carlson who went through Lexington nine times, finally surrendered to the program and got clean. He went back to NYC and started something in late 1949 or thereabouts, known as Narcotics Anonymous. He and his sidekick/sponsee a woman named Ray Lopez maintained several meetings a week, I believe three, and even got the first H&I meeting going at Rikers Island. "This quote is from Time, May 1951, so it may be May 1950. Now, on the first anniversary of Narcotics Anonymous, Danny could report on about 80 addicts who had tried mutual_aid, group therapy. Six had stayed drug-free for a year or more; five more have been free for a shorter time. Ten are known to have slipped back into the habit; so, probably, have most of the 60 who cannot be traced.

Numerically, it was a small beginning. But the group in Manhattan (and others being formed in Chicago, Los Angeles and Vancouver) offered new hope to men who had suffered the agonies of withdrawal at Lexington or at the similar P.H.S. hospital at Fort Worth....."

The problems that may have plagued this small NA group were generally addressed in latter years when AA wrote the 12 traditions. This group did a lot of social welfare type working, getting clothes and shelter for addicts, helping them find employment etc. The had a Board

of Trustees with Major Berry and Father Dan Eagan on it, but sadly no addicts were allowed to be on this Board.

Danny passed away with cancer after a few years and this left the fellowship in the hands of Ray Lopez - a dedicated member herself. Ray even got an office donated for Narcotics Anonymous which was in the same space as the Narcotics Division for NY City. The group faded away, and once the Rockefeller laws came into effect in NYC, that was the death knoll. It was illegal for addicts to congregate in the city. The interesting thing is that when the law was finally repealed, the 13th World Convention of Narcotics Anonymous, the largest congregation of addicts on the East Coast of America was held in the World Trade Center in the Wall Street District of NYC owned by none other than Mr. Rockefeller.

Writing about any history is in some ways an exercise in writing speculative fiction. There will always be the problem of sketchy and uncertain facts. Interpretation will limit the perception of historical events for people who did not live the experience. Even among actual participants, honest disagreements of recollection and viewpoint will occur. Those involved in the wonderfully complicated process of our evolution from using to regaining health and being more human will have different views on the same event. If this were to be simply an evolution of events, it would be simple to write and quickly accomplished. There is, however, a story that is more demanding. We hope that we have captured some of the difficulty as well as the excitement of the birth and growth of the largest source of help for the drug addict on the planet today.

Bill Wilson and the members at that time originated the Twelve Steps in 1939. We owe these alcohol addicts a deep debt of gratitude for having

the courage and vision to formulate a recipe for recovery from addiction to alcohol. We have used their recipe with our own ingredients and we share a cake that we baked ourselves in our own kitchen with our own ingredients. If our methods had failed to keep us clean, there would be no question of founders. We would find it hard to ask these questions from our graves. Certainly, we need our sense of integrity and we have paid an awesome price to stand on our own as 'a program of recovery from addiction.' The long hard struggle for addicts to be able to live clean lives began some time ago and many good people paid a part of the price which has resulted in our being able to live clean today. That is of importance to many of us. More than anything else, we are grateful to these men and women. They endured struggles that we can only imagine. A handful of them may still be alive today but many have probably died feeling like their contribution was in vain! They had problems such as being arrested as they walked out of the door after a meeting as well as strong support from a few but indifference from the many. They have each made a contribution that encouraged others to carry on and helped them do so.

From the earliest of times, the members of NA had to fend for themselves. Against the pitfalls of addiction, we had to provide for our needs. We have photocopied material and done everything within our power to make our message available to addicts though writing, personal visits and any other methods available. There has never been a serious instance of intrusion from the outside. With our Twelve Steps in place for twenty years by the early Seventies, we have to wonder why it took so long to grow. One possible explanation is because personal initiative is somehow bound to be egotistical. What kind of egotism is it to criticize someone that is trying to help? Without willing instruments, even God must wait. Fear of personal criticism should not be allowed to block our way. Even today with all the growth and progress in NA, we

sometimes have to wait for a long time for some simple needs to be met.

There were addicts trying to stay clean through the Twelve Steps in the early Forties. Already mentioned were the efforts to form something called Narcotics Anonymous as early as 1948. There are Saturday Evening Post articles on NA from the early Fifties. There are mentions of these efforts in several books and magazine articles. Brigadier General Dorothy Berry of the Salvation Army apparently played a strong supportive role to help meetings get started in New York City in the late 1940's. In 1947 Dorothy Berry provided meeting space for a group in a room at the Manhattan men's social center. In 1948 she offered Danny Carlson a room on Tuesday and Fridays in the Salvation Army building at 535 W. 48th Street . Danny relapsed & re-entered Lexington on The Narcotics Farm for his 8th & final time.

While he was there that time, he started attending the Addicts Anonymous meetings who's philosophy was based on the 12 Steps of A.A. Upon release started talking with other Alumni of Lexington & based on the 12 Step made a decision to restart what's known as Narcotics Anonymous, Many references to AA in the Lexington files refer to Addicts Anonymous, confusing many readers. The name is attributed to a man named Charles "Chuck" McGee .The Salvation Army made room for a meeting at it's 46 Street cafeteria.

Later the Mc Burney YMCA on 23 Street offered a meeting room where meetings were held twice a week . On February 25 1951 Danny Carlson incorporated the name & movement Narcotics Anonymous, Inc . Later that year a Booklet called "Our Way of Life - an Introduction to N.A."was published at the Rikers Island print shop inmate vocational training.

There were meetings in at the Federal Prison at Angola in Louisiana. Ft. Worth was another prison site that shared what was known of recovery at the time. Early meetings took place in Cleveland, Ohio and parts of eastern Pennsylvania. Meetings in Wilkes-Barre and Scranton endured through the late 1970's when NA again began to grow in the East. In 1953, there was an effort to start a new meeting in faraway Sun Valley, California. It would be unkind and inaccurate to leave out any of these efforts that contributed to what we know as NA today.

All these meetings are noteworthy. All played a role and none can judge with certainty which were 'better' than others. We can not even agree on meetings today! What works for some, may not work for others. What worked then was definitely different from what works today. The miracle is that the effort was made. In the Fifties, a man named Cy Melas was active along with Jimmy K. and others in Los Angeles, California. Cy was in touch with the NA Fellowship back East in Lexington and New York. These meetings may have survived in Eastern Pennsylvania or they may have died out. There were conflicts. Two hard heads with different experiences were bound to see things differently. Free addicts in an open atmosphere of recovery conflict so that more can be known. The fears of disapproval and inflicting injury are part of the jungle that lives outside the door of NA. The Twelve Steps of NA allow for correction of character defects and a process of making amends. Enforced indoctrination will never be a real part of Narcotics Anonymous. Eyewitnesses gave accounts of addicts being arrested leaving NA meetings. Others related stories of addicts going to other Fellowships, and having to sit in the back of the room for years, never being allowed to share. Amazingly, there are members among us today from these 'olden times.'

Very important was the publication of an early form of the White

Booklet put together by the NA members in Southern California in Los Angeles. It was printed in the early fifties, perhaps 1954. This served our Fellowship as our literature until well into the early seventies. No other known literature has survived from the Eastern meetings except for a newsletter publication called the Key, a newsletter put out from the meetings at Lexington. In 1959, there was a week or two when no known meetings took place in Los Angeles. This was not the result of members resigning from NA. Each member had a good excuse, out of town convention, vacation and whatever, they had one thing in common: they were sure the other members would be there and take care of the meeting. This is actually one of the most significant things in our entire history because it triggered basic change. No more could anyone say it would work out on its own. A few members took personal responsibility and the results have been continuous meetings since then. Personal responsibility, sharing our experiences in recovery from our disease, and the willingness to do our part to help make it better for others are probably the three big building blocks for our entire Fellowship. Hope, faith personal commitment and self-less action resulted in slow but steady growth. In the mid-sixties, the White Booklet was expanded and stories were added to the back section. We were called a 'hip pocket program' because you could get our entire written message in your purse or back pocket.

Out of the time when NA ceased to meet in LA, the Parent Service Board was formed in the sixties to insure that there would never be a time when NA ceased to meet again. By the end of the Sixties, this Board had changed its name to the 'Board of Trustees' or the World Service Board (WSB). According to Greg Pierce who got clean in LA in 1970, there were twenty known meetings in the world. The World Service Office (WSO) was in Bob B's home downstairs and was later moved to the trunk of a car. After that, it found its address for the

Seventies in a side room of Jimmy Kinnons home. The members of the Board of Trustees agreed to pay some on the rent but Jimmy K. bore most of the burden himself. The first World Convention of NA (WCNA) was held in 1971 in Southern California. It has continued to meet since then annually until the 1990's. Much of the early 'business of NA' was dealt with at the World Convention in the late 70's, particularly the newly formed World Service Conference. There were only three Regional Service Committees until well into the 1980's. In 1996, the World Convention went to a two-year rotation. Today, our 'business' is dealt with every two years at the World Service Conference and discussions are held at 'zonal forums' with no voting.

Terrific growth marked the Seventies and the Eighties. Friendliness and openness works. In 1973, work began on what would become the NA Tree, our first service structure. This was approved by the Board of Trustees (WSB or BOT) for use in 1975. In 1976, the first meeting of the World Service Conference (WSC) was held at the World Convention in Southern California. Its first act was to approve the NA Tree as its structural document. Several members have pointed out the humorous irony of the Conference approving the document that created it. In 1977, the second World Service Conference was held at the World Convention in San Francisco, California. Only one Regional Service Representative (RSR) showed up for the Conference, the one from Southern California. The RSR from Northern California did not make it. There were only those two regions at the time. Members showed up from Texas and Atlanta and the World Convention began to move all around the country until it began to be held overseas. The next World Convention was held in Houston, Texas. The WSC continued to meet in Southern California, at Valley College near Sun Valley.

The WSO continued to grow. Thousands of recovering addicts from

around the country began to get the phone number and whenever there was a new meeting or trouble, a call went to Jimmy K., now the WSO manager. In the mid-seventies, there were only two hundred meetings in the world. Work on the Basic Text grew out of the WSC and the general interest from the growing Fellowship. The new service structure allowed a 'structurally correct' way for members to get involved without risking relapse that sometimes followed excessive personal involvement with projects. Over-involvement was considered a possible opening to self-will. The first World Literature Conference was held in Wichita, Kansas. It produced the Handbook for NA Literature Committees that was approved by the 1980 WSC. Input was collected and processed in open participatory Literature Conferences. The sites of these conferences were: Wichita, Kansas; Lincoln, Nebraska; Memphis, Tennessee; Santa Monica, California; Warren, Ohio; Miami, Florida; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Monthly letters went to a list of participants that grew to include two thousand NA members. These members who wrote the Basic Text also founded thousands of meetings all over the Fellowship. They backed up the structure and the structure backed them up. The book was approved in 1982 as the result of a 'motion to approve' made by the RSR from Las Vegas, Nevada. It was published as a hardback in 1983 and presented at the WSC. By the end of the decade, over one million copies had been sold. The number of meetings swelled to over twenty thousand.

The publication of our Basic Text allowed for a revolution of immense importance to our young Fellowship. Suddenly there was money in World Services, a lot of money. This put pressure on those entrusted to serve us at the world level in two ways. There was more to do and more to do with, yet the scale was balanced by the problems of money, property and prestige that were no longer a matter of program rhetoric. An office that grossed less than ten thousand dollars the year before the

literature movement began in 1979 was now bearing the strain of millions of dollars. The strain alone created problems. They say there is a blessing in every difficulty and a curse in every blessing. Certainly, our radical, accelerated growth resulted in some painful disillusionment. Too often, personalities pushed aside principles to get in on the action. The emptiness of these apparent victories is vivid in hindsight. Those who did not give way to the fear and justifications of the moment are still with us today while others fell by the wayside. If you ever feel these strains, start talking about them with your sponsor and home group. The fresh air of discussion usually kills the fungus of self_will when it starts to make us believe that we run the show!

Hiring people to replace volunteer workers at strategic points of service created the potential for conflicts that were not foreseen or thought of as being possible by the leadership at the time. These professionals should be trained to avoid conflicting with Fellowship procedures. This period of discomfort ended with the failure of a new effort to write a book on the Steps and Traditions. It was called *It Works: How and Why* and went out to the Fellowship for approval in the mid-eighties. The task of writing had been turned over to a professional by the WSO, which was against the existing policies of the WSC Literature Committee. While the exact details are not yet clear, the Office Manager signed a contract under pressure with a professional writer the author who was to do the work. All this took place just two weeks prior to the WSC where the hiring of a writer was the subject of a published motion.

The Fellowship was dismayed yet gave their support for the effort. Thoughtful members were stunned. A lot of members who had been the source of solid support left the Fellowship or survived in a damaged form. It was obvious to them that the people taking charge were out of touch with the love and care that had built NA up to that point. When

service is a matter of the heart, betrayal of principles for business purposes creates heartbreak. When the resulting Approval Form of *It Works: How and Why* came out, numerous errors of voice, feeling and content resulted in a 'no' vote at the next Conference. The conflict that was set in motion consisted of the Office, on one hand, trying to get out more 'product.' On the other hand, the Fellowship was trying to maintain the traditional group conscience processes. These processes were what had built the Fellowship up to the point of writing material to serve the needs of the worldwide Fellowship. The attraction of the message that was contained in the original Basic Text continued to draw in addicts from the world of active addiction. This was not enough and there were those who sought to control the copyrights on the material and made changes outside of the Fellowship's view. It is important that these incidents were perpetuated by as few as ten or fifteen people. Our disease is characterized by tunnel vision where something small can seem tragically important and widespread. Of the ten or fifteen, most were duped into the conspiracy by the ringleaders. The Fellowship continued to grow despite all these things. One spiritual way of looking at the whole mess is that it confined those involved in increasingly high profiles and kept them from reaching the great thing called the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. The 'few' could get away with these things but they had to be 'oh, so careful.' This kept them within some boundaries while excesses continued. Possibly no single item could be more obvious than the 'Inventory' undertaken in the 1990's that pro-ported to answer the question, "What does the Fellowship expect from world services?" Interesting question to ask a Fellowship with an approved service structure who had recently written their Basic Text and started over ten thousand meetings. There is little point in raking over these old coals unless we are working to better the situation. Someone might suggest to take a careful look at the service structure outlined in the *NA Tree*.

Back in the 1980's, a housekeeping motion from the 1985 WSC to correct errors of grammar, spelling, tense, gender agreement, etc. was misconstrued to mean that hundreds of changes in the Basic Text were permissible if not absolutely necessary. The word 'syntax' was removed from the original motion lest it be expanded to mean 'grammar.' There was concern that the motion would get out of hand and result in abusive or unnecessary changes. A few sentences had already been changed from the original Approval Form of Narcotics Anonymous. The 1981 Approval form was universally available within NA and a free copy was sent to every registered group in the world, including overseas. The strength of the material to withstand the intense discussion and scrutiny of thousands of members, each of whom was free to input recommended changes is what Approval used to mean. Changes in a few sentences by a few members betrayed the faith of thousands of members who had surrendered in trust to the process. Everything in those days was wide-screen and full color! This is why the unauthorized changes made by a few people in positions of trust were so devastating emotionally and spiritually. such a big deal. These good members were carrying our message to the world and it undercut them terribly to have 'officials' betray their trust. The people at the world level who fostered these disorders knew less about what was happening than active members in the groups, areas and regions of NA.

The minor changes that were made from year to year were used to justify calling different printings of the Basic Text 'editions.' Usually, editions reflect substantial changes or major edits and require a new edition number to keep old material from being confused with heavily reworked, new material. The change of a sentence or two out of hundreds of thousands of words does not comprise a new 'edition' and yet we have had many. In 1988, the Basic Text was edited to make the work consistent with quoted changes in the Little White Book. This

revised form of the Third Edition was called the Third Edition, Revised. When an editor was found to make the superficial edit of the Basic Text in keeping with the 1985 motion, the editor was given a manuscript of the Third Edition, a prior form that did not contain the changes made in the Little White Booklet by a well done, group conscience process. As NA members know, the White Booklet is quoted before each relevant chapter and there are quotes in the Basic Text that had also been updated. So this created a built-in problem from the start of the editing process. Nobody caught the error at the time. There were several glaring oversights like this at the time.

Either no one knows or will divulge who changed the instructions that were given to the editor. The editor, to the best of my knowledge, was a student in West Texas who was apparently unaware of the minefield he or she was stepping into. The instructions that were given the editor were to make a deep edit of the Basic Text instead of the instructions from the carefully worded WSC 85 Motion. The 85 Motion spelled out very carefully that the edit was to be minor, confined to verb agreement, gender, typos, and so forth. The word 'grammar' was taken out of the original motion lest it open the door to any and all changes an editor might deem helpful or appropriate. Amazingly, later examination showed the word 'grammar' had been re-inserted into the published minutes! The spirit of unity was great but over three years were to elapse before an editor was selected and no one suspected the minutes were adulterated.

While it is important to trust our trusted servants, when grievous errors occur, amends must be made. Bob Stone made a plea for understanding and acknowledged that the Office had been blinded by 'who' voiced the concerns. Just how totally this violates anonymity and makes plain the buddy system that had begun to replace our service structure is amazing.

And it was so overwhelming that no one even mentioned it at the time. WSO employees and supporters had begun an 'us and them' mentality that is hard to break. Simple checks and balances would have prevented the initial small problems from escalating into major concerns.

The amount of \$3000 was to be paid to the editor who in a generous spirit offered to either perform a deep edit or a light edit for the same amount. The offer of a deep edit was too much for someone in a position of trust and they forgot all about the conference motion and discussion to not do a deep edit. So, the die was cast because while the good members of the World Literature Committee worked long and hard, it was quite a while before simple things like having the wrong version of the Basic Text to begin with came out. The sheer volume of comments, discourses, suggestions, changes, grammatical concerns went so far beyond what the WSC had asked for, it is astonishing that no one raised major concern outside the Committee. The World Service Board of Trustees was unaware of the deep edit and therefore had no opportunity to offer suggestions or announce the oversights. Possibly almost no one at WSO had any real idea. It was only later at the firm insistence of the World Lit Chair that the WSO began to check things.

No one thought to compare the work of the editor with the Third Edition, Revised. Therefore, the differences were handled as if they were the correct form of the work. Further, the changes were discussed and voted on by the Committee in a series of exhaustive and expensive conference calls with up to fifteen members in on the call from all over the United States but only one able to speak at a time. The changes were brought up, line by line, discussed and voted on prior to moving on to the next change. Participants were not given finals of the edited changes prior to the printing and distribution of the new form of the Basic Text, now in its Fourth Edition. So, they had no chance to review the changes to see if

the votes held on the telephone had really been adhered to in the editing. Some members think there may have been changes beyond what the Committee voted on but we will never know. This should not have been done secretly. Where changes had involved twenty or thirty words, there were now changes in hundreds of sentences involving thousands of words.

The Board of Trustees was not given a copy of the work prior to printing despite repeated assurances to the WSO Board that this would be done. The entire Fellowship went into convulsions when the treasured phrases and meaningful lines were found to be altered or deleted. Not improved, not better grammar - just changed or deleted to suit a small group of people who were in on the changes. Even the members of the Committee were not in a position to appreciate the magnitude of the breach of faith that was committed by the World Service Office management and certain members of the WSC Literature Committee. This embarrassing situation resulted in either the immediate or the eventual dismissal of the culprits. The real fault lay with the general lack of care and concern. Secrecy, closed session processing, and the management system kept the excessive changes from the general membership, including members working at WSO. The reader of this material should realize that because of the openness that led to our rapid expansion, any member would have known at a glance that the WSC motion was not being followed. Addicts died over this. Many left NA forever. Far from angry disgruntled addicts who failed to work a good program, they were the most loving, kind, grateful and wonderful recovering addicts in the the history of the human race. Yeah, we survived but we have to tell the truth. This is why many members do not believe that the 4th, 5th and other future editions are valid Fellowship literature. Approval in those days meant the whole Fellowship saw the material in review or approval form long enough to develop an opinion and express that opinion in a service structure that

required its representatives to vote accordingly. Today, votes do not reflect the wishes of individual members anymore. So, the kind of approval that took place with the Basic Text and many of the IP's just cannot take place under the existing system. They do not even call them representatives anymore. Curiously, the facts never really came out into the full view of the Fellowship.

Bob Stone, manager of the World Service Office and later, its Executive Director, wrote a book: *My Years with Narcotics Anonymous*. He continuously refers to members who were informed enough and fearless enough to complain as the 'vocal minority.' How poorly he rewarded these good members for the time, study, and discipline it took to become an informed and fearless member in those days. When anyone in the written, approved, service structure got out of line or overstepped their boundaries, these informed members would speak up and expected their correction to be at least refuted, if no correction was made. Instead, "WSO policy" became "NA law." Members who thought differently were branded as radical, disruptive addicts who were probably getting ready to relapse. This denies them their full rights as members. This is not a very spiritual way to run a Fellowship. Also, WSO is not empowered to run our Fellowship. WSO was supposed to be our primary service center. People at the center do not realize how their centralist perspective can blind them to the overview. Detractors may appear to be malefactors. People at the center select information that supports their centralist viewpoint. Any other viewpoint is not allowed. Perhaps the single most revealing recorded instance of disclosure of just how far off base these matters can get comes from Bob Stone's admission of fault at the 1988 World Service Conference in Southern California.

The following transcription of the WSC tape is verbal input by Bob Stone, WSO manager to the 1988 WSC on the 4th Edition

The reason Chuck that I have asked for this opportunity to give my report specifically although there is only one part of the report that I wish to address is that it has a direct bearing or a significant bearing on the 4th Edition. There are two parts that I have to say concerning this matter. One relates specifically to the issue of the 4th Edition itself and one relates to my oral presentation at this Conference.

There is a relationship between the two and I wish to address the first one initially. Last year I conveyed to you, I hope, my fears and frustrations over the reality that exists of the two sides of NA. The two sides being 'them and us' whoever that happens to be in any conversation or any meeting having to do with the region or world level.

It is a tragic thing when it occurs and it has occurred with such frequency and severity that it has caused all of us some pain and some suffering and some problems in our areas and regions and certainly at the World Service Conference.

I am here to address that now from having experienced the ultimate failure in our ability to get alone and overcome the evils of that issue.

What that issue does is it blinds us, it makes us impervious to listening really to what somebody else is saying. And when we become impervious to what other people are saying, we do a disservice to the Fellowship and we cause additional problems. And that what has occurred during the last year. It has occurred over the 4th Edition of the Basic Text.

When the Basic Text was published as the 4th Edition last year, as would have been expected, a number of people decided that they should on their on go through it word for word and compare it with the 3rd Edition Revised to determine what they thought about this as a different publication.

This is an issue that is completely aside from the issue of whether or not a 4th Edition should have been printed and published in the way that it was. That issue I don't care to get involved with at this time. I am concerned in the trail of events that took place as a result of this publication.

Some of those folks who did the word for word comparison were immediately disheartened, dismayed, angered, frustrated, hurt and a number of other adjectives I could think of in time. This prompted an immediate action on their part to bring to the world's attention the problems they felt were centered in this because of its differences. Unfortunately, the "we vs them" syndrome entered into the discussion immediately. Because of how the alarm was raised - and in some degree because of who raised the alarm - other people did not as seriously as now seems necessary and appropriate to thoroughly study everything they were saying and determine its validity. When the issue hit the street it became immediately an issue of confrontation between those people who were saying something was wrong with it and disagreeing with its content and those who might have had a different opinion.

That blindness in my opinion now has been contributing factor in a error that originated two years that I have now to address. That blindness prevented all the people who got that manuscript from the committee that sent the manuscript out. It blinded them from

bringing to the attention of all the rest of us and certain key people in particular what was specifically contained in there that had more validity than they themselves knew of or recognized.

And here's how that works. We've discovered as a result of Michael Lee's insistence that a word for word complete master be prepared.

Those discussions took place in January and February and my staff got assigned that task and we are doing it. It was slow work and we did not assign sufficient resources to do that until recently and what I'm going to tell you in terms of sequence has only occurred recently.

pause

On Friday, not this last one but the Friday before, it was my tragic and unfortunate experience to learn that, my staff informed me, that there were places in the manuscript that was delivered to the editor for editing - and the same manuscript that was used by the Literature Review committee to review the work - that there were lines of text that had not appeared that were in the 3rd Edition Revised. Those lines of text in our review of the events that took place are relatively easy to understand what took place and we have included the twenty-five lines in the back portion of this report. We have underlined the lines that were omitted from the 3rd Edition Revised as the manuscript was prepared.

I cannot tell you or find words to express my anguish over this, and my fear, and just general displeasure. There is no excuse whatsoever for this to have occurred. Unfortunately, I would only

tell you that if we didn't make mistakes we probably wouldn't be human. On the other hand, I can tell you that making mistakes of this type are simply not acceptable. And had we become aware of them at an earlier date, it might have been possible to do something else and perhaps other mistakes might not have occurred.

Had the alarm been raised last October and November, been raised in a way that rest of the Fellowship had not been blinded to its contents, we might have been following an entirely different course and having an entirely different discussion today. So, there's two issues. One, and I am taking this one very calmly because in the last ten days learning the extent of this problem, I've had to go through a lot of personal growth and personal changes. Those are very hard for all of us to do and they are hard for me as well as for you. It is important, I think, to understand that these changes, uh, excuse my language, I'm ____.

long pause

I've attempted to explain on page 48, in a very short number of paragraphs, the facts of the events and I have not attempted to induce any language to this discussion other than the facts. If I had been more diligence in supervising the proof reading, it is possible that this error might not have occurred. I do not have any personal assurance of that or any guarantee but it has renewed our understanding of this enormity and preciseness of our responsibility to the structure.

We have made the corrective actions that we believe are necessary or laid the foundation for those corrective actions so that this will not occur again in the future. An example of the corrective action

is to go back to how the 2nd Edition was produced in 1983. The book was re-typeset following the Conference in 1983 and published about four months later. When the book was type set it was done by a company known in California.

After the initial proofreading was done, a proofreading session was held in which members of the Board of Trustees, members of the Literature Committee and WSO Board of Directors participated in a word for word comparison of the manuscript. It is that manuscript where the majority of the errors were found, although there were some discrepancies during the following year,

But they found the major problems, the big problems were corrected and the 2nd Edition was then printed. Since that time we have not felt it was essential to have this kind of proofreading session. The tragic of this mistake clearly pinpoints again that we must return to that form of proofreading system to involve major service arms in such major publications as the Basic Text.

And that correction system alone I believe would probably be expanded to include to sending copies of the draft prior to its publication to other committees or individuals on a fairly limited basis who may be interested in doing a simultaneous proofreading who may wish to assist in this process. We believe that by gaining the Fellowships participation and assistance in this we can avoid the types errors that this _____.

At the end of the report, as I indicated, there are the words that are missing, Typical, if you turn to page 232 or 238, it seems obvious that, when the typist was working on 238, their eye movement in some way as typists normally do from one place to another, and

when their eyes fell on the words “I tried” they missed the next part and went right on to “I got _____.” It is easy to understand how that mistake occurs. The errors are generally of that type. There are some that are a little different but like I said, there is no justification for it. I am so sorry and have an inability to express how remorseful I felt over this error.

Thank you very much.

This concludes the verbal input given by Bob Stone, Manager of the World Service Office, the 1988 WSC on the 4th Edition.

These types of problems hide in the dark and derive most of their power from secrecy. As long as they can hide, they will endure. This material is not to blame anyone for past errors, it is our hope that bringing the troubles out in the open will help others in positions of trust not repeat the same errors, which are to an extent inevitable. Knowledge is our only protection. Bringing mistakes and errors out into the open is the only pathway to avoiding making the same wrong decisions in the present and future. It would be nice if these things did not occur but also unrealistic. We live in a world where many important truths are covered up or denied. In a spiritual Fellowship like ours, we learn to step past our fears and trust to a Loving Ultimate Authority to help us get realer and put our fear driven past behind us.

Recapping the material just covered, this is what happened. Starting with a motion was made to correct typos in the Basic Text during the 1985 WSC, it took two years to get an editor that suited the WSB and by mistake the editor was given a copy of the 3rd Edition instead of the then approved 3rd Edition Revised which contained newly approved material

for the updated White Booklet. No one caught this. The WLC was secluded and no one from the outside was able to point out this problem at an early stage. There was an attitude in the WLC at this time that the Fellowship would only go after nagging details and delay real work. The editor was a devoted member of NA and offered to do a light or deep edit for the same price as a friendly gesture. No one told the editor that the WSC 85 motion allowed for only a light edit. The WLC chair jumped at the chance to get a deep edit at a bargain rate and so it was done. When the chairperson went further, they allowed for a series of conference call discussions with 13 members voting over the phone on each change throughout the ten chapters. No WLC review of whether the final draft reflected all these votes - or not - was ever made by members of the WLC or anyone else. Only the chair and vice-chair had the notations and they were kept from view. So, the Basic Text went to the printer with countless changes, most of which exceeded the enabling motion. This is why the Fellowship was in such an uproar. It is possible that Bob Stone's tearful admission of fault was only a cover up and diversion to distract Fellowship attention away from the injurious changes to the book and focus purely on the twenty-five incomplete sentences. Unfortunately, the Chairperson took advantage of the moment to add three other changes where he differed with the Committee and so over ruled the group conscience of the committee on the floor of the WSC without even stating for the record what the substance of those changes were!

So, the hundreds of unauthorized changes slipped by the emotionally charged WSC where most RSR's came with directives from their home regions to go back to the 3rd Edition Revised version of the Basic Text. Having the Regional Representative vote the group conscience of their home region was an important hedge against their being swayed or confused by orators or convincing speakers presenting material unknown

or unavailable during the WSC Conference Agenda Report workshops held in the months prior to attending the World Service Conference. Letting our representatives vote their own conscience leaves the door wide open for crowd manipulation like this. A stable and well thought out service structure protects its trusted servants from being trapped in situations like this where major issues are at stake. Was Bob Stone smart enough to pull off something like this? As WSO Manager, he had received an advance from a non-fellowship source an advance of \$250,000 for shipments of the new 4th Edition. He may have intuited a little public shame was a small price to pay for situation where he had a large inventory of books that would be un-sellable without approval by the NA World Service Conference.

Another sore spot that concerned many members who had participated in the writing of the Basic Text was that there was an original understanding that the price of the book would go down after a decent interval. The original price of \$8.00 for a blue cover 1st Edition and \$25 for a numbered red cover was suggested by Greg Pierce, the long time Trustee who had been such a great help to the Committee and all aspects of the effort. The entire world-wide Fellowship agreed to this in order to help our WSO expand into its new service demands. Although this had come up year after year at the WSC, everybody was convinced by WSO that to lower the price would break the Fellowship by the time the vote was taken. This picture was a far different one from the reality of the Spirit-based Fellowship potent enough to write the book that attracted the millions. This book was written anonymously and within all the peculiar boundaries that we set for ourselves in order to maintain our humility and recovery. More and more the general Fellowship was unable to understand the origins of the book, to appreciate the trust bonds that were made, to conjure up the tremendous effort, and to comprehend the personal sacrifice that it took to generate the Basic Text.

One way to try and get a glimpse of this energy in the simplest terms is by using simple mathematics. Some of the early Literature Conferences were attended by less than seventy-five or a hundred members. Some later Conferences had more members in attendance. In addition, many members worked a considerable number of weekends in local literature committees getting material ready for the next Literature Conference. The members who attended the Literature Conferences usually came from these local committees and carried their group's conscience with them. They were asked to consider what members in meetings in their home area thought. This was expressed separately from their personal feelings and responses. In this way, the spirit of discussions in many local communities was brought into the deliberations on the writing of our Basic Text. A hundred members who were at a Conference might have come from seventy different communities, each with maybe fifteen to thirty members involved.

There were seven 'official' WSC Literature Conferences held from 1979 to 1982. Each Conference encouraged participants who came from all over the Fellowship to take home photocopies of the new writing as evidence to support the tales that the participants had to tell. Early experience taught us that the participants would have trouble conveying all the information they picked up in a week of these incredible working Conferences. Multiply a hundred people by twenty hours a day for a week and see what you get. They say it took 100,000 hours to build the first atomic bomb. With 2,000 addict hours a day, a weeklong conference might involve 14,000 on site. There were numbers of members working at home in local literature committees to top off the hours spent writing the text just during a conference week. Several large communities worked from Friday to Sunday several weekends in a row with thirty to fifty addicts attending. The miracle is that not only did the book get written; no one got loaded at a World Literature Conference.

The pressure was intense, but it was good pressure. The love and compassion at the conferences were emblematic of the new Fellowship that was finally writing its Basic Text, after so many years. These open, participatory conferences were styled to include all members. No clean addict was ever turned away or kept from participating. One sixteen year old girl who helped with typing had to sit on seven big Memphis telephone directories to be able to reach the typewriter. At the Lincoln Literature Conference held in Nebraska, a cowboy from the Snake River rode into Lincoln on his horse to give us his story of becoming addicted in the trenches of World War II. Since he was illiterate, a young lady sat and wrote out his story as he told it. Those who were new to recovery were valued for their fresh viewpoint just as those who had long periods of clean time were valued for theirs. A tremendous bonding took place among members working on the book from all over the world. This openness and freedom can be felt when you read the original, unedited works. This bonding made the arbitrary changes by a management system horrific to the Fellowship whose unity and coherence is embodied in the Basic Text, Narcotics Anonymous. It is possible that the leadership at the time was still thinking of the Fellowship as the random attendees in small towns with little or no recovery over a year.

When the Forth Edition came out in 1987, it had thousands of unauthorized changes. Members, who were gathered at Jackson Mill, West Virginia for the True Colors Convention, sat and compared the Forth Edition with the Third Edition, Revised. Members took turns reading aloud from the Fourth Edition while ten members followed the reading with Third Edition, Revised in their hands. The first few variations weren't too alarming. Once the reading got into the chapters of the Book, it was obvious to anyone present that great liberties had been taken and there would be major problems. A call was made to the World Service Office and certain members in the service structure expressed

their surprise at the notion that there were problems. A hideous era proceeded to unfold during which several competing versions, about what had happened and what the repercussions would be began to multiply endlessly throughout the Fellowship. It was self-evident that the changes had been made and obvious that they exceeded the scope of a motion that had been amended to remove the word 'syntax' in order to prevent excessive editing while correcting spelling and making other minor changes. Specifically, 'syntax' was removed from the motion lest it be considered as grammar, which would throw open the door to any sort of change. This is not what the Fellowship wanted in 1985. They just wanted to clear up any misspellings and errors made by the WSO in type setting the original or by the Literature Committee in writing the book. 'Who had done what...and why?' preoccupied the Fellowship. While the World Service Office justified its actions, the Fellowship was torn apart.

At the 1989 WSC, the voting participants approved a plan to restore a few deleted sentences and call it the Fifth Edition! This happened despite the fact that many Regional Representatives came to the WSC with specific instructions from their home regions to vote down the Forth Edition and restore the Third Edition, Revised. It would be tedious to reiterate here, all of the maneuvers that occurred at the Conference. What happened seemed to justify some of the fears of certain members: that 'World Services' was getting out of hand and acting on its own outside of the Fellowships' knowledge or approval. This type of irresponsible action is known as following a separate agenda, let alone extreme self-will! The difficulty that we experienced with this situation is that although the spiritual Fellowship can tell something is going on, we may not be able to correct the wrong. We have to go to extraordinary lengths in our efforts to deal effectively with this sort of wrongdoing.

One member from West Virginia (who had informed himself as to the many WSC minutes, reports, and guidelines) decided to take on the system. This member was known affectionately as 'Grateful Dave.' Where others had backed off, he made a point of infuriating the members in World Service until they could see no way out but to sue good old Dave in Federal Court. After all, he had caused thousands of copies of the Third Edition, Revised to be printed, sold, or given away all over the Fellowship. This infamous Baby Blue version of the Basic Text was actually given out at some meetings to newcomers instead of the usual white poker chips or key tags because of its low cost. It was Dave's metaphor to get across the point that the Fourth and Fifth Editions had never enjoyed the benefit of having been approved by the voting members of the NA Fellowship at the group level like all other literature up to that point in time. His often stated concern was that we have to be very careful in our written message. He believed that our literature should be within the reach of as many addicts seeking recovery as possible. Financial concerns should not outweigh the needs of those who would die of addiction because they happen to miss out on our message.

Efforts to avoid a lawsuit in the fall of 1990 were unsuccessful. Tempers flared in World Services and the intensity of the personal attack and venom was unparalleled in our history. How dare a member challenge the 'machinery of World Services' over the price of literature as well as questioning the correctness of printing the Fifth Edition that was never subjected to Fellowship-wide review or approval. Surely, he was profiteering and making money by printing and selling the Baby Blue. It became generally known that Dave was financially broke and was dying of another disease. Still, it was Dave's tactic to get the forces that had worked behind the scenes making the unauthorized changes out into the open and it worked. The viewpoint that key members ran World

Services was challenged in a memorable way.

On January 3, 1991, Dave was called to Federal court in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The judge was the one who was responsible for putting away the French Connection's New York dope man. Without repeating all the details, suffice it to say that the Honorable Judge Pollack could have easily ordered 'Grateful Dave' to stop printing and distributing the Baby Blue and that would have been the end of it. The Judge was so moved by the phenomenal effort of thousands of recovering addicts that he carried the case forward and admonished the WSO to fulfill their side of the agreement as well as Dave. Dave's case relied on the position that the Fellowship wrote the literature and therefore had printing rights. It also alleged that the WSO had no right to print literature that was not voted on by the 'general membership', hence the Fourth and Fifth Editions were illegal printings. The WSO took the opposing position that he was intruding on the copyrights. The WSO claimed that the work was 'done for hire' and justified this position by pointing to the money that the WSO had paid to the editor who had worked on the Fourth Edition.

Judge Louis Pollack, Judge for Federal District Court at Philadelphia, stated in his address at the end of the first day of trial that he dealt with people who were afflicted with our disease on a daily basis in his courtroom. He stated that we had stumbled on to something special but had evidently forgotten our primary purpose along the way. This opinion was definitely an unexpected and strange turn of events that forced certain members, who were in favor of pursuing the lawsuit, to rethink their positions. Some members who had opposed Dave were embarrassed when they began to find out more particulars. Many more had heard the rumors but never heard the truth. Grateful Dave died in the fall of 1992 with the fervent hope that the case would make certain members admit and acknowledge how their actions affect others. He

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hoped that this would result in affordable, 'group conscience' based literature for the Fellowship. Many members stand ready to challenge any and all efforts to make unauthorized attempts to do away with our traditional approaches to 'service' in NA.

It may sound like a lot of work and in many ways it is. If we do not take up for ourselves, who will? This dedication and commitment is what it takes for us to have our own Fellowship. It is hard copy evidence of our love, gratitude and devotion backed up by hard work, clear thinking and dedication. It is also enormously fun and has a lot of real life excitement rather than the alternatives. We get to spend our time with people who enjoy our company and frequently appear to be amused by our worst problems. They have been there and they have simple answers and suggestions that might work for us. It is scary to have answers after all the years of hopelessness. These clean addicts are growing in number constantly and are available in countries all over the world. We will continue to learn and to share the NA Way and carry our message to every corner of the globe. We, recovering addicts in NA today, are grateful to all of those who made the Program and our recovery possible. Many people loved us and wished us well even when we were difficult and undeserving. Living our life clean gives us some general idea of how hard it is to love us. The lessons that we learn by helping others teaches us that we have to give a little but we get a lot. Grateful NA members, who contribute of their time, and with their lives, can say, "It is only quantity that we give and fortunately, we get quality in return."

Purist Movement History

Dear Family,

Some thoughts on the history of the Purist Movement in by a founding member.

The Purist movement official got it's name from a small newsletter written by a guy named Jimmy D from New Jersey. He took the logo from my tee shirt, "BRING THE WORLD TO THE BEACH!" which was a bid shirt for WCNA 15 for Virginia. We lost to DC whose slogan was about unifying the divide between inner city blacks and the suburban whites. The tee shirt was black with a bright blue outline of the globe.

But the story starts long before that. In the early days of the Literature movement to write a book by addicts for addicts, there was a member named Jim M from Ohio who showed up at one of the first Literature conferences. Jim was a very intelligent guy and one of the first things he noticed was that hardly a single person attending identified themselves the same way. Hi my names Sue and I'm a dope fiend, my name's Bob and I'm a drunk and a junky, my name's Bill and I'm a drug addict. and so on. Jim was the guy who questioned folks about getting the words right. Meaning, that we needed to come up with a language that fit all addicts no matter what their drug of choice might be. This is probably were the original seeds of the purist movement were first formulated and they didn't even know that was what they were doing. It just made sense that using the term clean, would cover any substance, were sober only spoke of alcohol, or that calling ourselves addicts would strengthen our unity, rather than dividing us by our drugs, which we were no longer doing, for example, drunk and junky, boozier and user, slimy dope fiend. The term addict fit everyone equally whether your drug of choice was alcohol, heroin, or marijuana. It

also leveled the playing field with no group of users being any better or worse than another.

The members of these literature conferences were becoming enlightened as to this new vision and another one that was talked about outside the working sessions. That one was about only attending NA for your recovery. Back then and even into the early 1980's, that was a very foreign idea. We had all gotten clean in AA meetings and had started a small handful of meeting in our areas or towns. Hardly enough to recover in, but a place were we could go once a week or so and feel free to talk about our drug usage. Our foundation and our recovery was in AA and we felt safe in their years of experience. NA was that other meeting that we could go to once a week and talk about drugs. Recovery in NA was just a dream for most of us. Yea, man, that would be cool to have NA every night. Some day!

Something that the key players in the Lit movement understood was that you had to bet your life on NA or no one else would! They began to become adamant about this stand and would leave these Lit conferences and NA conventions were they met up with each other and get pumped up, then would go back to their small NA communities and with the excitement they had gained by being around other like minded folks, would push the new message of one disease and one program to all the poor unsuspecting drunks and junkies back home. The results were mixed of course. One member said to my wife, well if it was so good back their in Georgia, why don't you go the hell back there! Many were intimidated and saw this new movement as a clear loss of power, as they had been ruling the roost for many years now. NA was more like counseling sessions with powerful personalities at the

helm. I know, I was one just like that.

Back then, they came up with the name S.W.A.T which stood for Service Workers Attack Team! This was really the first organized, named purist group. They even made up tee shirts for you collector types. In discussions with the spiritual leader of the literature movement, Greg Pierce, several of the members he sponsored wanted to come up with a name and purpose other than SWAT. The discussion came around to a simple card and a simple name and a simple purpose. Greg said to me; "You don't wanna know what it started as.. smile!" I guess he toned it down a bit. It was called Anonymi, and it was simply a printed blue calling card that said: (I apologize, I can't find mine so I will do as best I can, and hope that someone will edit it correctly) "A worldwide NA home group who's trusted servants gather to gain the love and support they need to continue carrying the message in their home groups and areas. Its primary purpose is to disband."

Think about that, an NA home group who's primary purpose it to "DISBAND". The idea was that by getting this new information and becoming enlightened to a new view of NA, you would go back home and often times be met with scorn or worse by some members. You would meet up with other Anonymi members at NA conventions and re-charge your batteries to go back into the fray. I was given my card by my sponsor Joe P from Memphis, Tennessee who was one of the 4 key players in the literature movement. Greg referred to Joseph as the "Sgt. Bilko" of NA. Joseph wasn't a writer per se, but he could get stuff. Joseph would show up at a lit conference with dozens of copying machines and Greg would say: "Joseph, where did you get these? Wow!" And Joseph would say; "Don't ask!". Joseph was treasurer for World Lit as the Basic Text

was being written and without his tireless and selfless service, this project would have probably taken many years, instead of the two that it did take to write. We as a fellowship owe him a huge debt of gratitude. His efforts to put together the lit conference at Memphis State University and his tireless efforts to stay on the job even after the week long conference, assured us that the Grey review form of the Text went out to all the addicts that they had addresses for.

The idea of an NA home group who's primary purpose was to disband, stood on the foundation that some day NA would be a strong vibrant fellowship. That most addicts would identify themselves as that. Folks would get and stay clean in NA and have no need to go to another fellowship for support. That us isolated members who were out their fighting for these things, would not be out their but simply a part of a world wide Narcotics Anonymous clean and whole fellowship. Today that dream is a reality for those of us who not so long ago could only hope and pray for... sniff sniff.

So the purist movement was actually made up mostly of sons and daughters of Anonymi and SWAT. With a few original members in the mix. The seeds of the movement were firmly planted at a late night rap session in Washington, DC prior to the WCNA 14 Miracles Happen convention in Chicago September, 1984. It was during this year that DC had a fund raiser for their bid committee. The cool thing about NA was that all the opposing bid committees showed up to support them, Virginia, Pennsylvania etc. They were so moved by this, as their turn out from the local fellowship was a bit weak and our coming to support them made the event a success.

Late night Saturday, a bunch of us Anonymi's/Convention/Service

friends were gathered in a room at Georgetown University where the event was being held. We jokingly began talking about the do's and don'ts of being a purist. The word had been floating around for a few months by now. It came out of an article that the guy Jim M from Ohio had written for an early NA way magazine entitled "The unfolding of the fellowship". It asked "what about those folks that only go to NA meetings for their recovery and identify themselves simply as addicts. Are these folks radicals? No they are merely purists".

In our late night talk session, we came up with 24 do's and don'ts to be a purist. Some was for fun, some we truly believed in our hearts was the right thing and the only true future for NA. We had made our stand in Narcotics Anonymous and we were fearful that it might not become what we needed it to be to recover. We could no longer feel comfortable in meetings that were filled with confusing languages of recovery and mixed messages and quotes from AA literature... of course we could, we all had for the most part gotten clean in AA, but you know how the old saying goes "there's nothing worse than a convert!" For it is usually the converts that are the loudest, strongest voices about a cause. We had for the most part, all been clean and sober for just a few months (or years) ago.

We had made our stand, we had bet our lives on NA and we were damned determined to see this work. Sadly we were a bit too determined and very forceful in our approach to NA language and the use of it in our NA meetings. We often would confront poor newcomers in the middle of the meeting, "it's clean, not sober!" Our text is basic, it's not big!.. Sober stands for short of being entirely ready! If you call your self an addict and an alcoholic, then

put \$2.00 in the basic as you're treating two diseases! And so on...

A friend of mine in England put it so well. He said: "We are the children of Alcoholics Anonymous. When I was a kid and I got to 16 years old, you couldn't tell me anything, I knew the right way, you were wrong, and I was angry. As I grew up, I got married and now I am an adult with my own family and I have a much different relationship with my parents, we are more like equals." Narcotics Anonymous had to go through it's growing up phase. It had to break the apron strings to AA and stand on its own two feet. Sadly we did it with the hostility of a teenager, rather than the maturity that we do today. Today it is so simple just to read an identity statement at the beginning of the meeting and let folks know what we do here in NA and ask them for the cooperation in this simple yet important matter. But that was then and this is now.

Jimmy D was at that meeting that night and felt inspired to go home and create. He came up with a simple purple bandana and a folded up little news letter called the Purist News volume 1, number 1. Jimmy says he had the bandana at Chicago. I know that the Newsletter was distributed at the 6th East Coast Convention held at Towson State University, Towson, Maryland in June of 1985, just prior to the World which was being held right next door in DC in September, 1985. Jimmy gave me a copy of the Purist News and like the rest of the gang, I went home and copied it like mad! It became our manifesto. It was the first thing in written form that spelled out what it was we that had become imbedded in our hearts and minds for a long time now.

I took a big stack with me to the 2nd European Service Conference in England a few months latter. The host committee had a meeting

on the pamphlet that I had put out on the table with convention flyers. They asked me if I would come speak to them about it, but I declined.. I was a bit of a chicken.. Braaaaack! They voted that it was neat stuff but not appropriate on the table at the convention. They were right but I had gotten the word out, any way I could... tee hee. A few months latter, as I sat in a World International Committee meeting in California at the WSC, I was invited into a room for discussion. There was a long table of 14 World Level big shots and Bob Stone, the then manager of the World Service Office. Bob and I were on good speaking terms, having crossed paths at several events and our interactions were always pleasant and friendly. Bob started talking in a round about manner about how being at the central site of NA, he had to deal with all manner of things that come up, and then he whips out a copy of the purist news and forcefully tells me this showed up on the tables at a meeting in Denmark or Holland.. I thought to myself, cool! Bob wanted to know all about this movement and how organized it was, etc. I withered under Bob's attack. Bob, man, it's just a cool pamphlet that a bunch of us made copies and passed out. I put some out at ECCNA in London and it must have made its way to that group. Sorry. It was interesting that they needed 14 people to confront one member on this daring issue.. not! The reality was that they were trying to put a finger on a feeling and they couldn't. For it wasn't in a piece of paper, it wasn't in a few members who were vocal.. it was an idea who's time had come and there was no way for a small handful at the center of power to stop it from happening. It's time had come, and some of us were just a few steps ahead. Not that they disagreed with what we were doing, most every trusted servant at the World Level were pure NA members by now. Okay, a few old timer Californians were still going to always be clean and sober. They just differed in how it

should come to pass.

They got their chance to heal this area of our fellowship and did a stellar job. George H and Lea G of Florida along with others at the center of power spear headed a movement to re-write the Little White Book and take out the denial and endorsements of the outside enterprise AA, which we had been reading in meetings every night. The White book used to state " We are deeply grateful to the AA fellowship for pointing the way for us to a new way of life". This is a great truth and it was moved to the front of our Basic Text but it was inappropriate to be read in a meeting each night, along with a Tradition that tells us not to endorse, finance, or lend the NA name to any outside enterprises. The task was given to the Board of Trustees to come up with a new version and they did an excellent job. They gave us the readings we have today, and explained why each change was necessary. It was overwhelmingly approved at the conference that year. This solidified us as a one disease, one program fellowship. Thanks Guys!

The Purist movement begins to splinter. During the next few short years, the folks at NA World Service Office started utilizing the funds that were being generated by the growing sales of literature to an ever growing NA fellowship. They traveled a lot to carry the message around the world. The group of folks I was in, which Bob Stone fondly referred to in his book as "The Vocal Minority" was becoming more and more ostracized from power in NA and more and more angered by what they saw as an inner circle of addicts with NA credit cards using fellowship funds for personal enrichment.

It's an interesting thought that we were labeled the vocal minority,

when in fact we were in touch with a vast group of members across the entire fellowship. So we were hardly a minority. Our voices, loud yes, were being stifled at the World Level by a centralization of power in the hands of a smaller and smaller few. These were the ones who had their hands on all the methods of communication to the fellowship. They seemed to answer only to themselves.. so in reality, it was more likely that they were the true vocal minority.

It came to a head in a discussion at my kitchen table with my NA mentor, Larry North. Larry was a fusty old Irishman who brought the message of NA to me in 1982 when we were first starting our little NA meeting in the mountains of Virginia. Larry had some nine years back then and was involved in the literature movement, the area, the region and the world. We lovingly called him the old man. He knew everything there was to know about service and the Traditions: he was the king of Tradition Troopers. He also loved newcomers like nobody's business. He took you under his wing and showed you all the ropes and then some. Larry took me everywhere; we were like two peas in a pod for many, many, many years.

Larry was an accountant by trade and a damn good one. He handled accounting for large companies and could run numbers on an adding machine like nothing you have ever seen. As we sat in my kitchen one evening, Larry said; "The ultimate authority is not a loving God... the ultimate authority is the purse strings.. it's the money!" He was referring to dealing with what he saw as the abuses of World NA. We control them by the fund flow from the sales of literature. How do we do that, I asked? Simple, you see it only cost about \$2.00 to make a Basic Text, and the rest of the money goes to feed the WSO. We can make a Basic Text in

paperback that can be copied on a copying machine for about a buck or less. We give them away free or at very little cost. In this way we kill two birds with one stone. The first being that the Basic Text should be a lot less expensive so it can be freely given to newcomers and the 2nd is that for everyone of those texts that we give free, that is a lot less money in the hands of the World Gang! And so began the idea for a baby blue bootleg copy of the Basic Text.

The idea was to put items back into the Basic Text that had been taken out without group conscience of the fellowship, and to distribute them at cost or free. Most importantly of these edited items was two sentences that had been taken out of the text before it even had come to print. Upon reviewing the material in the approval form of the Basic Text, then manager of WSO, Jimmy Kinnon (our founder), had taken exception to two lines in the Traditions. He believed that they were in violation and conflict with the traditions and wanted to remove them. He knew that if he sent them back to the fellowship for discussion it would be another year before our book was published. He chose a second course of action and had a group conscience of The Board of Trustees Chair, the Office Board Chair, the Conference Chair and they all agreed to allow him to take out the following lines and print the Basic Text as amended.... in the 2nd and 4th Traditions.... it was written "what about our service boards, our committees, are these things NA. No, they are not NA, they are services that a group may or may not choose to utilize. And another line stated: "a service committee cannot decide, rule, dictate or censor". Well this service body decided, ruled and dictated to censor those two lines. Of course at the time, the literature folks were furious. The fellowship had studied every word and prayed over their decisions to vote on

the book as it was. This flagrant violation of group conscience was wholly unacceptable to them. This one action created a rift in the fellowship that is still not completely healed to this day.

Some members in Miami, who more than likely took their cue from Larry North, printed up the first copies of the Baby Blue and began distributing them in large numbers. In the North, my friend Grateful Dave took the ball and ran hard and long with it as well. Copies started showing up in all manner of colors. The Georgia Peach, The Resentment Red from England, Pink, Beige and several variations of blue. There is even a site on the internet that shows all known copies. Search for "Baby Blue + Basic Text."

This is when the movement starts to splinter. This is when I took my ball and went home. I had been actively working steps for a while now and had given up my need to fight. I didn't have it in my heart to do something that would damage NA as a whole, even if I disagreed in my heart with what folks were doing. I had learned that those extra dollars from the sale of NA literature do a lot more than just provide travel and lodging for World Level Trusted servants. The money goes to translate the literature into foreign languages, to help our World PI efforts, our World H&I efforts, to make NA available anywhere on the planet. I knew there was no way to take money out of one part of NA without hurting addicts in some other part of NA. Dave grabbed me outside a workshop in Memphis on the Basic Text issue and said, "Come on, we need you in here. You got me started on this thing." I said, "Dave I'm sorry I'm just not there anymore." I tried to point out to him that the very people he was antagonizing over this issue were the folks he would need to be there for him when his Aids got worse. He told me he had been prayed over and that he hadn't felt ill since. That was the

last time I saw my friend Dave.

He had decided to force the issue to court. This was his plan all along. It was a lose, lose situation for the World Service Office in that they would never come out a winner by taking a concerned NA member to court over the literature. It was actually a pretty brilliant idea. It all came to a head in a court room in Pennsylvania with a very wise Judge. The Judge first looked at them and said what are you guys doing here? I spend every day dealing with addicts that don't have the answer and you guys do! He motioned, after much back and forth, that if Dave would agree to stop printing and selling Baby Blues, that the World Service Office would put a motion into the conference agenda to have a worldwide vote of every individual NA home group as to which Basic Text they wanted. By now there had been 5 printings with the 4th edition being an editors nightmare and having lost pages due to inaccurate transcribers at WSO and no final proof read. The 5th Edition apparently still hadn't corrected all the missed sections.

The Office managed to stall and delay, and Grateful Dave's Aids finally progressed and he passed away. Along with him went the court case. There are those who still talk about taking up arms and getting the case re-examined.

I had moved around a few times and about a year ago, I was driving back to my home in Montgomery, Alabama. We had an NA club house with meetings twice a day. All the members only went to NA and all identified themselves as addicts. I was coming down the highway from Birmingham and it dawned on me that I couldn't remember the name of that group, what was it anonymsomething... that we had all belonged to back then, oh yes,

ANONYMI.

Apparently it had disbanded, as it was no longer needed.

In loving service,
Anonymi - peace _ 9.3.03

The Purist Movement was abused by members who took it as an opportunity to interrupt, yell and act badly during an NA recovery meeting - in the name of our Traditions. Looking back on it all, it probably gave many a newcomer - getting in touch with their powerlessness - a chance to blow off steam. As contrary as this was to our spiritual principles, it replaced in many cases the intrusion of alcoholics who were just as interruptive - but were not NA members. Legions of young AA members were accustomed to parading through NA meetings as though paragons of recovery among the great unwashed clusters of addicts. As the Purist Movement subsided, it left NA meetings that followed the NA 12 Traditions, worked the NA 12 Steps and made the difference for many, many addicts seeking recovery. This empowering of NA marked the transition from a weak NA Fellowship to a real force for recovery. Out of the sickness came the strength.

IT WORKS: HOW AND WHY

There is a rumor of long standing that some members in the early 1980's from California agreed to support the new book as long as they got to write another book on the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions. This book would parallel the AA 12 and 12 book. This is not the kind of rumor that can easily be checked out. Those 'in' on it would be slow to admit their participation in such an agreement. Still, the book that eventually came forth was called "It Works: How and Why." From an early draft

produced at Fresno, California, called the 'Fresno Final,' the book went through a variety of steps before completion much later in the 1980's. A professional writer was engaged to edit the Fellowship work into a better form. This went out to the Fellowship for Approval before the membership got to see it as a review form. Changes in the way the book was being written added to the confusion. The Approval form contained errors that could have been corrected had the Fellowship had a chance to read and review the material. Because this was not done, and because many of the most serious flaws were in the first three chapters, there was no way to 'approve as is' and so the approval draft was trashed and a new approach was taken.

There is an amazing story of several informed members who opposed the material getting with members of the Board of Trustees and the WSO Board of Directors at the MARLCNA Conference in Pennsylvania and going through the material together. To their credit, the members involved with world services could easily see the points of concern and this agreement paved the way for a new effort to get underway. We had to have a book on the Steps and Traditions.

THE TWELVE CONCEPTS

There are several of the Twelve Traditions that have to do with keeping NA separate from outside issues and keeping NA as such from being organized in terms of management and control. This was seen as a problem in making radical changes to our service structure in the 1990's. AA has 12 Concepts and since we borrowed the Steps and Traditions from them, why not the Concepts. The presumption that our 12 Concepts bear some resemblance to the AA Concepts is a strange illusion. Taking a few moments to locate the AA Concepts and doing your own direct comparison reveals the fact they are very different.

DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES

Democratic principles are more than just talk. There is a real feeling of shared responsibility among members who take care of a group, an area, a region or the entire theater of world services. Micro-management to the side, having a say in what happens at the world level was very invigorating to the Fellowship in the 1980's. Even when the vote went against you, it was supported because after all, you had your say. Changing the 'representative' group conscience system to a 'delegated authority' that might - or might not - vote as directed by the members back home weakened NA considerably. After five years or so, you began to hear members identifying as 'addicts and a _____' again.

Perhaps in reaction to the aggressive Judge Pollack who kept the case open for several years, NA world services moved in a new direction. Under the guise of determining what the Fellowship wanted them to do, an 'inventory' was undertaken. This 'inventory' lasted about eight years from 1990 to 1997. From the day the Basic Text was approved in 1982 when the words, "The WSO can sue an NA member over copyright issues." were first spoken, the conflict began. The swirl of events surrounding the start up of WSO into a modern company created new forces arrayed against the spiritual Fellowship of NA. Since the main source of income was literature sales, WSO might be expected to regard monies spent to create new literature as seed money that would bring a handsome return. Almost overnight, a new crowd invested themselves in the newly expanded WSO basing their employment on resumes and work skills from the general market place. Few had intimate knowledge of where the Basic Text came from. All they knew was it was ultimately their job to sell it.

Good clerical services and proper accounting within WSO is both

expected and required by the NA Fellowship. This has never been an issue. What is the issue is that WSO consistently seems to miss the main job a primary service center is supposed to do. Crossing the line from printing and distributing Fellowship materials occurs when the business staff begins to produce the Fellowship materials. Suddenly loyal dedicated informed members who challenge what they see happening become a threat to the corporation. Corporations are set up to be adversarial. After a ten or twenty year period, rapprochement becomes complex. Forced to oppose structural malfeasance, the members knowledgeable about the 12 Traditions are forced to conduct meetings with a minimum contact with the system. It is hard to work your program in a case like this. It is a clear that what is good for the Fellowship is good for the office but what is good for the office may not be good for the Fellowship.

It is not about clerical efficiency, employee policies, Seventh Tradition issues of protecting the Fellowship from itself. It is to involve and inform members so that they will be best able to see to their needs and provide whatever materials might be helpful in doing that. Shutting down the input and output capability is quite possibly a move towards efficiency that can be sold to a corporate board of directors. It can be charted just how much money and time is spent to 'get the word out.' It costs more if you have to produce paperwork, mail it to regions and supply them with information upon which they can make an informed and effective decision. What they seem to miss is the importance of keeping a 'spiritual fellowship' on the same page. In the past, this was done by the World Service Conference. Micro-management can easily turn into meddling. Helping when asked is more the NA way of doing things.

This is done not by direction but containment. Leadership grows

naturally in the Groups, Areas and Regions. Like many other successful systems, our system works best when members closest to the action - service - are informed and experienced. A child in a family will never learn to change a tire on a car until they are allowed to try, unassisted, on their own. They will make mistakes, but they will learn. Otherwise, the controlling parent has to do it all. Just so, many of our 'world' level servants seem to think in terms of control rather than forbearance. Jumping in a 'fixing things' is a character defect. It presupposes that someone doesn't know what they are doing. Even if this is so, it is likely that if they are trying and not yet asking for help, they will eventually get it right. Isn't that what worked for us? Letting go and letting God is not just for staying clean. God can do many things.

The members who wrote the attractive message in the Basic Text not only took over the World Service Conference in the early 1980's, they went out and started all the meetings, areas and regions including many that still exist today. They were empowered by the information and experienced as no other generation has been in carrying the message and working the Steps. When world services seem to loose restraint in the late 1980's, they first launched a law suit against an individual member. With the support of an NA home group in Philadelphia, this member was not so alone as WS supposed. Next, an inventory was invented to ascertain exactly what the Fellowship wanted world service, particularly the WSO, to do. This somehow required shutting down not the Office but the WSC for seven years. At the end of this period, there were no WSC standing committees and a World Board had been implemented. Members working in the WSC Policy Sub-Committee years before had worked on the formation of a World Committee - but with checks and balances to keep the WS Conference and the WS Board of Trustees strong and in place in case WSO ever began to exceed their carefully written guidelines. The first half of the WS Policy Committees work on

the NA service structure was approved as the 'Green' service manual, referring to the color of the approval form. Since the 'world' section was undone, it was called the 'Temporary Working Guide to our Service Structure.' The acronym for this is 'twgss.' The original NA service manual, the NA Tree, had been reduced to twigs - TWGSS! Since we were moving forward so quickly and since we did not, as a Fellowship, have experience with these things, world services eventually developed its own ideas, if members in world services did not have them already and engineer the inventory and structural changes.

The Superboard

Ask yourself: what group of NA members in the early 1990's thought up the idea of a world board? All the money, all the functions and all the 'power' in the hands of a small group of members, less than twelve actually elected though guides originally allowed for over twenty. How was this the best idea we could come up with? Why did some of the members involved complain that parts of the guides they worked on had been left out of the motions or manuals presented at the WSC? The answer may simply be that just as in physics when a rock starts rolling downhill, it develops a momentum of its own. It will keep rolling to the bottom or until something stops it. Even if there was a 'coup' type of take over, does this mean we are powerless today? What are the implications of the structural changes? Who gets the money? What is best for the Fellowship today and in the future? What is the difference between our world service structure and a private corporation held in a few hands without even stockholders to answer to? Is this what the Fellowship wanted or voted for at some point in the 1980's, 1990's or after the years 2000?

One member shares:

"I served as policy chair of a large regional service committee on the East Coast in the late 1980's. Having had some experience in service both locally and at world level, I collected all the minutes from the region, the motions in force separated out, the guidelines that applied to our region from the service structure, the motions in force separated into the sub-committees they governed (guidelines cease to be 'suggested' when they are voted on and approved by a service body) and contact information for all the area committees that belonged to the region. When I had it all together, I made up twenty notebooks and gave one to each area chairperson and one to each regional sub-committee chair. There was about an inch of paperwork in each copy. The ring binders allowed additional minutes and updates to be inserted easily.

"One by one over the next year, the notebooks disappeared. Finally, there was only one left and the regional chairperson wanted to make a copy, so I gave mine to him with the understanding that my original would be returned. This last copy never came back to me. I am sure there is some kind of lesson in this but for me, it can only be that God, not minutes, rule in NA. Those who think differently will surely act differently and I have no problem with that. But I think there is a possibility that an old spiritual lesson may apply here. That is that God manifests itself in ways that fit what people expect. God and the people will be here long after the minutes are dust. I am content to follow God's Will in this as in all matters of my life and will."

"Back to Basics" is a term used frequently in our recovery process. It allows someone to get back on track when they have become lost in the direction of their personal recovery. The answer to all our ultimate

questions is to be found in our earliest beginnings when we had neither meetings, assemblies, committees or 'governing' bodies. It was our individual desire for recovery that started all this and it is our desire that will carry us forward. The answer will never be in good guidelines. Good guidelines can be ignored or motioned aside in the blink of an eye. The answer is in the hearts of good people and good people come from working the Steps. Working the Steps gives each of us conscious contact with the God of our understanding and that is the answer. Without this contact we revert to type and become the playthings of our compulsions and obsessions.

A former chairperson of the World Literature Committee shares:

"Some members believed it was impossible to type and copy the Conference minutes as we went from session to session. We had great trouble with this in our First World Literature Conference at Wichita. We were new and the minutes taken in the various sessions were almost impossible to recall and not clearly written. Thereafter we did the minutes as we went.

"There were instances where a regional secretary would 'create' a different version of a motion that passed. The minutes would be taken down in an undecipherable short hand and typed up later. Two months later, it was possible to convince the Committee that the motion carried in the wording in the minutes though the motion was clearly different. To prevent the possibility of this as well as other problems, we did the minutes as we went. Members in attendance were asked to read and approve minutes from the last session at the following session. This meant that discussions with motions from the morning sessions were on the table at your place when you got in from lunch. The afternoon sessions were at your

seat at the beginning of the evening sessions. Copies of the minutes were also taped to the wall near the entrance of the building for members to view and discuss. There were never any problems with this procedure though loud voiced complained at first that it could not be done this way. As chairperson, I asked them if it would be ok for us to try.

"One of the lessons learned from Greg Pierce was that 'bureaucracy is the enemy of self-help organizations. Another similar lesson had to do with mailing lists. We found that the more copies of the list the better. When ever there was only one copy, someone would take it and hide it. The information was seen as 'powerful' and our members we soon learned were allergic to power. So, we made these little adaptations as we went along to keep the work moving forward."

These lessons were added to the *Handbook for NA Literature Committees* but the WSO never updated the Handbook in subsequent printings. They may not have printed any at all. But a thousand were printed and handed out to begin with and they got out to thousands of members. Members were encouraged to photocopy anything they needed to propagate Fellowship publications.

After the Basic Text was in publication and Bob Stone installed as manager, the term 'us and them' became common among everyone having to do with world services. This division is probably going to always exist. It is hard to get rid of even though some people seem to think that the use of the term itself creates the division. Actually, it is reasonable enough term because it describes two sets of people with different viewpoints. The Fellowship had been instructed for years that they were in charge of NA and had the final say on all questions through

the same group conscience processes they had just used in writing the Basic Text and then going home to raise the local standards to those set in the new book. The results are spectacular growth wherein NA moved from a few thousand members to a few hundred thousand members.

Up until this time, no one took NA seriously. NA was called the Sister Program or the Backdoor to AA. Members in AA lived up to incredible standards and made a point of keeping their commitments. It was almost exactly reversed in NA. Despite an overwhelming presence of Young People in AA members dominating the sub-committees of the Atlanta World Convention, no one expressed dismay or surprise when those sub-committees overspent their budgets. After all, what can you expect from a bunch of addicts. In AA prices were kept down and no one overspent anything. After all, they were grateful to AA for saving lives. NA had no such heritage. There was some discomfiture among these interlopers when NA got their Basic Text. Their play ground was gone and the Purist Movement made sure they understood things had changed a bit in NA.

By the end of the 1990's, NA was quite a different Program. The members and program at the local level appeared much the same. What was missing were two things: no one knew for sure what motions had been carried at last year's World Service Conference and no one knew what motions were to be voted on at the upcoming World Service Conference. Most members thought we still had a Board of Trustees and sub-committees of the World Service Conference. While some knew that the terminology for persons sent to attend the World Service Conference were now 'delegates,' not 'representatives,' members were not quite sure what that change represented. Members who complained about the changes were regarded as 'dinosaurs' although no one was quite sure how the new changes were any better than the way it was before.

Perhaps the best summation for all this was the one voice of a young woman in the Las Vegas Fellowship:

"Members here seem to agree that there is a problem but whatever that problem is, is lost on them. They regard it as an oldtimers problem. If anyone is going to deal with it, it will have to be oldtimers. These guys are fighting for their lives on a daily basis."

The situation is such today that there is no going back. We have to find something we can move forward to. Certainly it is possible to re-institute the information distribution and polling of members for group conscience. Democratic principles are so pervasive in the minds of people that members could be expected to step up to new opportunities to get involved and have a say in NA without much trouble. Perhaps the effects of 'bureaucratic deadening' could become known enough so that members would avoid making back room deals or 'orchestrating' elections or motions at the expense of the members spiritual condition. These solutions are unlikely because of the apathy that accompanies such problems. Also, infighting and jockeying for positions has wasted the time, energy and resources of some of our finest trusted servants. Many instigators of these changes from the 1990's are still in place and probably can't imagine a world without themselves in charge. If you wait for them to set things right, better get a good seat. It will never happen.

My WSO/WSC Experiences 1987_2004

I am an Addict. To begin with I wish to make it clear that I believe those addicts involved in service work at all levels do so in an honest effort to help others find what we have found. I was introduced to NA in 1983 through an H&I meeting inside a correctional facility. My clean date is July 26, 1987 so I have seen our service structure at a point in time where the voice of the group was held in high regard. We were blessed,

many years ago, to have representatives who sought to carry the conscience of their respective service bodies (Group, ASC, RSC,) and truly serve the groups. The following information is what I can recall of some of my interactions with members and staff at the World Service level over the years. My dates are fuzzy and I hope that all who read this would help correct errors and provide substantiation and documentation of these events if possible.

Rhetoric

I became a GSR in late '87 and by 1990 I was serving at the regional level. During my first decade in recovery I witnessed many things. I watched as a friend, who served as an RSR, became active in the World Services inventory process and the resolution group and eventually became employed by the WSO. As there are a few who fit this profile I feel that I am maintaining his anonymity. The fact that several NAWS employees followed a similar path substantiates my observations. I watched as the staff at WSO, Inc courted my friend. He was approached at the first conference he attended and groomed from that point forward for a position within the corporation. I find it interesting that many of our brightest members are recruited to work for NAWS INC. This is a good business practice and seems to be working well for the corporation.

The other side of the coin is that I was exposed to some of the corporate rhetoric of a "global vision", which seems to confuse many and distract from our primary focus of carrying the message through the groups. These changes in attitude have brought us to a point where the focus seems to be more on generating funds that assisting the groups who maintain our frontlines and are often the initial point of contact.

Finances

I attended a two-fold WSO Inc. event in Denver, CO; I believe it was in Oct. of 1996. This was near the end of the WSO, Inc. inventory process. There was a presentation of the upcoming literature discount changes and the projected impact and there was also a presentation on the structuring of conventions. I attended as our Regional Chairperson, along with our Convention Board of Directors Chairperson. Our region was exploring the feasibility of a RSO and our State convention was solidifying as a major annual event. The RSC chose to send us to the event with hopes of gaining valuable insight. I can only write of the presentation I received. WSO staff members communicated that the discounts to service offices would be eliminated, as the WSO, Inc. was no longer willing to subsidize these ventures. This was not an item open for discussion or input as many of those who attended felt it would be. Rather the decision had been made and the fellowship was being informed. I discovered that there were several regional service offices throughout the United States that were not paying their invoices for literature shipped from the WSO, Inc. and that many of these offices received an additional discount beyond the standard volume discount for purchases. Some of the debts were in the tens of thousands dollars. I also became aware that the sales of our Basic Text are the single greatest source of income for WSO, Inc. I then realized that the moratorium on changes to the Basic Text had caused a reduction in income at WSO, Inc., hence the necessity for the reduction in discounts. It was obvious that throughout the 1980's when we were publishing multiple revisions and perpetuating the belief that only the most recent revision was acceptable to be read from in meetings we were also generating a consistent income for WSO, Inc.

As a result of these changes in the discount policies at WSO, Inc., several Regional Service Offices were forced to close and the WSO, Inc.

then serviced their customers directly. The rational was that if these changes in discount policies did not occur WSO, Inc. would soon be bankrupt.

The Resolutions Committee presented a similar rationalization for change in 1997 complete with the first ever layoff of special workers at the WSO, Inc. I was visiting southern CA when the pink slips were distributed. The mismanagement of WSO, Inc. was never even discussed as a possible rationale for the existing financial condition of WSO, Inc. at the time. The WSO, Inc. inventory process had stopped most of the group services previously provided by the WSO, Inc. This in_turn exhausted a large amount of funds on conference calls and travel for the working groups. This stall tactic, which was used to avoid addressing the directives regarding the federal lawsuit on the Baby Blue, was in fact the root cause of the financial disparity of the WSO, Inc. in 1997. This presentation by the Resolutions Committee also made clear the reasoning for the elimination of our successful literature development process in favor of a "fast food" style of development that provided several new income sources for the corporation in a very short time span. Expanding the product line had taken precedent over quality of material developed.

Pilgrimage

In the spring of 1997 I visited WSO, Inc., as it was known then, and the office reminded me of a small print distribution center. It was stale and plain on the inside and the staff had small offices to work from. The appearance was very modest and unassuming. Many employees spoke often of NA groups in other countries, almost as if there were a need to justify the existence of their jobs. I do believe that we should strive to carry this message on a global scale. It is just that in retrospect I can see

that much of the information I heard was taught and eventually memorized. Though the sources differed, the message often sounded scripted and was presented as corporate rhetoric of a higher purpose and global vision. These dogmatic beliefs place the majority of our fellowship at a disadvantage as it portrays any group that complains of inadequate services or questions exorbitant spending as "not supporting our global mission" and therefore being "self-centered." This is similar to labeling those who oppose war as unpatriotic and works well when seeking to stifle organized resistance.

At the time of my visit the Resolution group was finishing up their proposals and the focus was on the upcoming changes in world services. As I mentioned before, the groundwork and financial rationalizations for change had been presented in Denver and now, almost 6 months later, the first ever layoff of special workers at WSO, Inc occurred. This was one event in a series that eventually lead to the adoption of the resolutions and the creation of the "Super board." The actual layoff notices were distributed the week I was visiting WSO and this had a dramatic effect on the overall tone within the facility. In addition, a special worker suddenly passed away that week due to an aneurysm while jogging one morning.

My interpretation of the Resolution Group's work and the general attitude at WSO, Inc. at that point in time was that the changes were a done deal, not that these items would be discussed by the fellowship and revised accordingly. Keep in mind that during the WSO, Inc. inventory process much of the services, which had existed prior to it, had ceased so as not to inhibit the inventory. This restriction of services freed the funding required to maintain the inventory process. Those of us who continued to put money into our home group baskets funded the charade. A major item of note here is that the majority of the local service bodies

survived quite well without the world services during these years. This was primarily due to the continued production and distribution of literature that has always been the primary purpose of WSO, Inc. Indeed upon this initial visit I, like so many others before and after me, felt as though I had been to the mountaintop and visited the holy shrine. In retrospect, I see that the real shrines are every Home Group and service meeting that continue to fulfill our Primary Purpose. Even without the WSO, we carried on with our mission.

Fate

In the fall of that same year (1997) I attended a WSC meeting in Providence, RI along with our RSR to take part in the presentation of the Resolution Group's proposals. The general consensus was that the plan was rolled out on the East Coast to hopefully win their support of the restructuring. This weekend changed my view of world services forever. I have always been the quiet one in the corner watching and observing the action; and I witnessed things that disturbed me deeply. There were several workgroups organized to review portions of the plan and then we would all meet and present our interpretations to the group as a whole. I realized that by following this plan no single representative really had an opportunity to see the big picture, only the small pieces we were presented. A member of the WSO staff always presented the overview of the proposals to us. I also watched as many representatives would walk to the back of the room and consult with an older member prior to going up to the microphone to present their questions or statements. It was disheartening to see that a single member had that much influence on this process. By the end of the weekend it became clear to me that the decisions regarding the implementation of these dramatic changes to our service structure were already a done deal. The event in Providence was merely a walk through of the information so that those representatives

who attended would leave with the impression that they had participated in the process. The proposals were presented at the following conference as initially written. These resolutions have since been implemented with the exception of "resolution A" which coincidentally was the foundation of the remaining resolutions. Note: In the 2004 CAR, just seven years later, NAWS, Inc. reported that there was no longer any need to implement "resolution A".

Following my disillusionment in Providence I resigned my regional service position, as it was clear that an agenda for the reformation of our service structure was in place and the course would not be altered. I accepted employment out of state and removed myself from active NA participation for several years. My personal experiences during my self-imposed isolation are better suited to be written of elsewhere. I honestly feel that all of us who participated in the traumatic events of the past 15 years believe we are doing what is best for NA as a whole and are usually not acting out of malice. When I came here, I was told our service structure ran from the group down to the world level and that the highest form of service was being a Home Group member. Our pyramid of service has been upended and, more times than not, I see our groups taking direction from the ASC, RSC and NAWS, Inc. because many current members believe this is how it has always been done. I received an email earlier this year from an addict who came into recovery after we lost our representation and he stated that we should view NAWS, Inc. as our "service sponsor". I was taught early in my recovery to only have one sponsor and trust his experience as if my life depended on it, because it does.

NAWS, Inc.

In June of 2004 I took my wife and son to Chatsworth, CA so that they could tour the NAWS, Inc. facility. I must say that the appearance has changed dramatically and it now resembles a world-class corporate headquarters. There are display cases in the lobby and artwork throughout the halls. Many of the items I recognized as those purchased from Betty K. (Jimmy's wife) back in 1997. It was nice to see our history out where others can view it. You can see pictures of several items in the *Miracles Happen* book as it was developed by WSO, Inc. to offset the expense of purchasing the items. This was not a WSC decision, but we (through our donations) paid for it and the delegates then voted to produce a revised history book shortly thereafter. The rhetoric of the staff, many did not realize I had been there in the past, was the same reiteration of global vision with an emphasis on translations and groups outside the U.S. that I had heard on my initial visit. I found it interesting that much of the staff had been removed from regular duties to assist with the recent conference. I believe that answering inmate mail or sending out starter kits would have been a higher purpose for these special workers. But they were pulled to the WSC to "train on how to run a WSC event" (the tour guide's description) .

I did meet an old friend in the hall and questioned as to what his job was now. His response was that NAWS had been "proactive" with the changes adopted at the recent conference and as a result his responsibilities had expanded. The "proactive" statement concerns me, as the implication was that changes had been implemented prior to approval, or direction, from the WSC. This mind-set reminds me of what I witnessed years ago and confirms that the conscience of my home group is a moot point in regards to the business matters of service bodies. Unfortunately many of the service body meetings I have attended in recent years reaffirmed that most committees serve themselves first and the groups are a secondary concern. The primary

purpose of the groups, when looking at the actions of many committees, seems to be to provide funds for the service committees to spend.

Did you know that anyone could now make a NAWS donation online? There is a direct link on the NAWS homepage for donations. Another current news item is that the I.P. on "self-support" is on the work schedule to be revised. I guess we never can have enough literature about fund flow.

Conventions

I can remember when only regions held conventions, they were few and far between and this helped to make it an extra special event. Currently many ASC's choose to hold their own conventions and the competition for the addicts dollar continues to grow, just look at all of the area conventions listed in the current NA Way. I have actually sat in committee meetings where the capability to generate funds from an event was the focus and justification of an event, rather than the ability to help the still suffering addict. Yet, many of the still suffering cannot even afford to attend the events we present in their name. The more I look around at our fellowship today, the more I realize we have lost our focus and are severely distracted by money, property and prestige. These were the very things that our predecessors spoke of and held true to the 12 Traditions to avoid. At several of our local service committee's the focus seems to be on group donations and fund-flow rather than assisting groups to better carry the message. All of this serves to motivate me to continue to share of our history with any all whom will listen. My hope in sharing NA history is that we will not have to repeat errors made in the past. NA cannot follow a corporate model and stay spiritual.

Many members have gotten clean in NA since the changes of the early

1990's. They have never been in charge of anything beyond their home group and possible their area. They are responding to the call to recovery found in the Basic Text. As elsewhere written in this book, you can't ride two horses at once. You can be honest and open while abusing your position of trust. The changes made in the 1990's were presented as if they came from the Fellowship when they were clearly the work of a Board of Directors of a corporation which was supposed to take its cue from the World Service Conference. We may survive this but we need to know what happened and work out a solution that does not cripple us. While many have experienced a degree of group conscience in their regions since the 1990's, they still have no idea what has happened. They don't actualize it is their book, their office and their Fellowship. That's still the truth because - they can walk away. Many have done so already. Members who are not power hungry are rapidly pushed to the side while pretenders speak in loud and convincing tones. It would take a real miracle for these things to change. We need peace makers and honest study materials with wide spread discussion to work out a more realistic way of getting things done in NA.

The thunderbolt revelation of having one big board to sort through and co-ordinate our resources so as the best meet our needs and aspirations as a Fellowship is not too realistic. Even if well-intended people do a great job and work miracles in our name, we the Fellowship are left out of the loop. As Socrates said, "The population that is deprived of knowledge of its technology becomes starved philosophically." Fortunately, addicts are so bright and optimistic, they have not seen what's happening on a broad scale. And in ways, they need never know. Let them work their programs and grow through the 12 Steps. Our recovery process has been carrying the load for the last twenty years. But you who read this will know the great love and consideration that has been given to our service structure. We know group conscience

works to meet our needs and keep the Fellowship in a supportive, informed relationship with what's happening in their Program. It is very presumptuous for those who come to NA from the professions to delude themselves into thinking they know better. NA is streetwise and addicts have many ways to get around obstacles. It is better for all if we are up front and above board with all that we do. It is up to each of us to pray and do our part. By maintaining our conscious contact, we will be protected and guided around the most terrible obstacles. The disease of addiction waits like a bird of prey for us to get despondent, forget our miracles and fall into judgmental disbelief. God really is taking care of us. Service boards and committees that get lost in their own dust merely delay the good things God is sending us. Occasionally, where egos and temper tantrums get in the way, the delivery has to get rerouted, but God is always on the way to bring us our next miracle. Bad things can happen, and will happen, but our spirituality gives us ways to overcome our pain and disillusion and find our way through to the light.

The history of NA is not over. Great things happen when people are honest and open with one another and have the courage to step out on faith. With God's grace and our dedication, we will endure.

Many spiritual leaders from all faiths have warned their faithful of the dangers of money and worldly attachment. It is an axiom in professional detective work to 'follow the money trail' to find the perpetrator of a crime. We have to carefully separate the worldly from the spiritual. One of the last things Jimmy Kinnon was quoted as saying was, "I wish we had put the Long Form of the Twelve Traditions into the Basic Text." The meaning of this is the Long Form carefully makes clear the need for separation of business from the spiritual fellowship. This will always be our greatest problem excepting only our need to stay clean and work on our gratitude.

THE N.A. TWELVE TRADITIONS - Long Form

With due respect and gratitude to AA for breaking the ground. This adaptation is the beginning of a Fellowship-wide group conscience to include the information for the betterment of all. Along with the permission granted to NA for the adaptation of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, surely this includes the Traditions Long Form and the Twelve Concepts. If it should be requested, we can create elaboration that would provide the same information to our own people. This attempt at an adaptation is just more straightforward.

Our N.A. experience has taught us that:

- 1.) Each member of Narcotics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. N.A. must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward.
- 2.) For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority _ a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Where groups are lacking information or misinformed, problems will occur prompting solutions after the matter is brought to the attention of the group.
- 3.) Our membership ought to include all who suffer from addiction. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought N.A. membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three addicts gathered together for recovery may call themselves an N.A. Group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.
- 4.) With respect to its own affairs, each N.A. group should be responsible to no other authority than its own conscience. But when its

plans concern the welfare of neighboring groups also, those groups ought to be consulted. And no group, regional committee, or individual should ever take any action that might greatly affect N.A. as a whole without conferring with the World Service Conference. On such issues our common welfare is paramount.

5.) Each Narcotics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity having but one primary purpose - that of carrying its message to the addict who still suffers.

6.) Problems of money, property, and authority may easily divert us from our primary spiritual aim. We think, therefore, that any considerable property of genuine use to N.A. should be separately incorporated and managed, thus dividing the material from the spiritual. An N.A. group, as such, should never go into business. Secondary aids to N.A., such as clubs or hospitals which require much property or administration, ought to be incorporated and so set apart that, if necessary, they can be freely discarded by the groups. Hence such facilities ought not to use the N.A. name. Their management should be the sole responsibility of those people who financially support them. For clubs, N.A. managers are usually preferred. But hospitals, as well as other places of recuperation, ought to be well outside N.A. - and medically supervised. While an N.A. group may cooperate with anyone, such cooperation ought never go so far as affiliation or endorsement, actual or implied. An N.A. group can bind itself to no one.

7.) The N.A. groups themselves ought to be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of their own members. We think that each group should soon achieve this ideal; that any public solicitation of funds using the name of Narcotics Anonymous is highly dangerous, whether by groups, clubs, hospitals, or other outside agencies; that acceptance of

large gifts from any source, or of contributions carrying any obligation whatever, is unwise. Then too, we view with much concern those N.A. treasuries which continue, beyond prudent reserves, to accumulate funds for no stated N.A. purpose. Experience has often warned us that nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money, and authority.

8.) Narcotics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional. We define professionalism as the occupation of counseling addicts for fees or hire. But we may employ addicts where they are going to perform those services for which we may otherwise have to engage non-addicts. Such special services may be well recompensed. But our usual N.A. "12th Step" work is never to be paid for.

9.) Each N.A. group needs the least possible organization. Rotating leadership is the best. The small group may elect its Secretary, the large group its Rotating Committee, and the groups of a large Metropolitan area their Area Service Committee, which often employs a full-time Secretary. The members of the World Service Conference are, in effect, our N.A. World Service Committee. They are the custodians of our N.A. Tradition and the receivers of voluntary N.A. contributions by which we maintain our N.A. World Service Office at Los Angeles. They are authorized by the groups to handle our over-all public relations and they guarantee the integrity of our principle newspaper, "The N.A. Way Magazine." All such representatives are to be guided in the spirit of service, for true leaders in N.A. are but trusted and experienced servants of the whole. They derive no real authority from their titles; they do not govern. Universal respect is the key to their usefulness.

10.) No N.A. group or member should ever, in such a way as to implicate N.A., express any opinion on outside controversial issues -

particularly those of politics, addiction reform, or sectarian religion. The Narcotics Anonymous groups oppose no one. Concerning such matters they can express no views whatever.

11.) Our relations with the general public should be characterized by personal anonymity. We think N.A. ought to avoid sensational advertising. Our names and pictures as N.A. members ought not be broadcast, filmed, or publicly printed. Our public relations should be guided by the principle of attraction rather than promotion. There is never need to praise ourselves. We feel it better to let our friends recommend us.

12.) And finally, we of Narcotics Anonymous believe that the principle of Anonymity has an immense spiritual significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practice a genuine humility. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of Him who presides over us all.

Adapted from the A.A. Twelve Traditions __ Long Form.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

SERVICE

Changing from a taker to a giver is one of the most dramatic personality changes that can occur in someone's life. There are two basic questions in the minds of our members: have these people really been where I've been and do they really care about me. The magic in Narcotics Anonymous is that these two questions are true. There may be some who hide out in NA or are court ordered non-addicts but no one would mistake them for NA members. They show no desire for recovery. You become a member when you say your are - but you must say it in word and deed. It serves no one to soft pedal this important distinction. It has been said that we don't need everybody to love us, just one person will do for starters. Any addict seeking recovery can find at least that one in NA. But it may be important to remember that service is also an area of personal growth. While services are the primary result of our efforts to help others know NA exists and find a meeting, services also provided an important area of personal growth. We learn, practice and become effective in group settings in ways that would not be possible without service.

Service is the one of the most essential parts of staying clean in Narcotics Anonymous. In the past, helping professionals over hundreds of years of studying addicts, came up with two basic concepts or truths. First was that addicts had big ego's which needed deflating and second was that if they could get them to help others to get and stay clean, they had the best chances of success. Thus formulated what we kindly refer to in NA as Torture Chambers or T.C.s (Therapeutic Communities). Addicts were ridiculed and shamed to break down those monumental egos through ritualistic behavior modification. If you were vain, you were made to wear a mirror on your neck, if you were acting childish;

you spent your days in diapers. Today we realize that the addict's ego will be broken by his own drug use and not any form of shaming or manipulation. We let their bottom be of their own making and if they are not there yet, we allow them the time and self-will to get there. The second part of treatment was the idea of one addict helping another, which of course in NA we say is without parallel. The ideas that early therapeutic communities and NA alike have come to understand is that the value is not only in the newcomer getting better by easily identifying with the oldtimer, but conversely and most importantly, the old timer stays clean by actively helping newcomers. This spiritual truth transcends all addictive peoples. If you live in the problem, the problem increases and if you live in the answer, the problem goes away! It is very hard, if not impossible, to come from a place of helping others get off drugs and then go directly to the dope house to cop dope.

When we talk about service in Narcotics Anonymous, we often conjure up visions of service committees huddled in a room arguing over the finer points of Roberts Rules of Order, or maybe a committee working on a convention for the Region. Service work in NA has many levels and most of them need you and me to ensure that they are not omitted and addicts die.

Someone once asked; "What's the opposite of love?" Everyone in the room yelled out "Hate!" The speaker replied; "Nope! Hate is a strong emotion, just like love. The opposite of love is indifference!" Conversely, love means paying attention to others, taking time to listen and to care about their needs. For isn't our time, the only thing we truly have to give. To stop and give someone our full attention is the purest form of love and the true meaning of selfless service. It is easy to talk the good talk but it takes giving up a little piece of our egos to stop and listen to that newcomer who is mumbling at the end of the meeting,

when what we really want to do is be surrounded by those who were moved by our speech during the meeting.

Love is the heart of all service in NA. We have all heard the newcomer say, "I don't have much clean time, how can I be of service." Listen. We have learned that if you listen to someone long enough, you can be with them the moment when they will hear themselves. Most people just need to vent their feelings by sharing them with another. They do not need counseling, therapy or 12 Step advice. They just need to share. So, anyone who is practicing love, not indifference, will be able to help another addict, simply by taking time to actively listen to what he or she has to say. Active listening is a skill well worth learning and practicing because we will need it to communicate with everyone that we contact. Not just NA members but our wives, husbands, children, bosses, etc. Narcotics Anonymous is an awakening of the spirit and part of this awakening comes from losing our self-centeredness and learning that everyone has something to offer us. Why, because God can and does speak to us through other people. Our journey is to become one with God's will and it is through this form of service called actively listening, that we hone our skills and learning knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.

How do we actively listen to others? The easiest and most effective way to be a good listener is to clear out all the crap that is in your head to start with. That is what keeps us from being in the here and now and living in the moment. We do this by, you guessed it, working the NA 12 Steps of recovery. When we write things down on paper, we get them out of our own heads, which leaves room for new information, get it. So, we begin by putting our thoughts and feelings down on paper to free our minds for new positive input. This does not mean that we can not listen to the suffering addict prior to Step work; it just means we will be more

effective once we have done some writing and sharing with our sponsors.

Anyone can listen. Just try to put yourself in the other members' shoes and know how you would feel if you were pouring your heart out to someone and they kept looking at their watch or the floor. Looking a member in the eye will give them the knowledge that someone truly cares what they have to say. For most of us, our childhoods were not filled with a lot of caring souls.

For most, we grew up in addictive households where the grown ups were not emotionally present. A lot of us gravitated toward gangs or friends that were emotionally unavailable and as we grew up, either prior to our in recovery, we tended to pick partners that could not be there for us like we thought they should be. Without various elements like loving parents, stability, and various factors that knocked us off balance, we often defaulted into doing the best we could and that best was severely lacking in many respects. Yet we were relegated to sub-ordinate roles and pushed aside by a society that could not understand our situation. Illegalities, violence, stealing and various anti-social attitudes compounded whatever was wrong with us into something worse.

One of the greatest gifts ever given to us is to find one person, a sponsor, who will actively listen and take part in our lives. As sponsors, we have a great trust placed on us to be non-judgmental, as most addicts have judged themselves harsher than any critic ever could. Relying on spiritual principles instead of personalities takes practice. It helps to have a guide to living spiritual principles and that is what a sponsor does for us. The healing starts when we see the newcomer, not as what he/she is, but what they could be. It is our vision of seeing them clean and picking_up many chips that often sustains those who have no vision

themselves but failure. That is one of the truly magical gifts that God has given us, the ability to see hope when there should be none, success where only failure has dwelt and recovery where the disease has been running rampant for decades. This vision of hope can and does make all the difference to the still suffering addict. From the beginning, our sponsors and members with time on the program suggest that we become actively involved with service, if we are to stay clean. The suggestions for newcomers range from; getting a home group, emptying ashtrays, help setting up and breaking down the meeting place, making coffee, to greeting people as they come in the door. If we think of NA as a circle, then it is easy to see that if we can stay on the edge, near what is outside of NA, sitting in the back of the room, coming in late, leaving early, it will be easy to fall outside the circle. But, if we come early, lend a hand in setting up, become active in even small ways, then we are inside NA and no longer on the edge. This also helps us to feel a part of, rather than a part from. It also strengthens our commitment because we feel that we belong here and that it is no longer your fellowship, your meetings, but our fellowship and our meeting!

This stage of not feeling like we fit out there and yet not feeling like we fit in inside NA is a very dangerous and crucial place in our recovery. This is where the disease will often manifest symptoms of loneliness and isolation, a longing for our old playgrounds and playmates to ease the feelings of discomfort. Feelings are not facts; they are just feelings and the best way we have learned to get past them quickest and with the least amount of pain, is to be of service at the group level. By doing a few simple tasks, like greeting others, making coffee, etc. We quickly begin to meet others and learn their names. We also are viewed by others as a winner! Someone who is here for the long haul and not just a taker who will come for a short time and then go back out. Part of service on the group level that is hardly mentioned is group etiquette. "Is there such a

thing?" you ask, "Hell yes!" Often we learn through sponsorship about such things but this is a great venue to talk about it up front and out in the open. Of course, the rule of thumb with etiquette is that its usually the polite things that make the most sense and are the most helpful in our recovery.

Come early and stay late. Yes we have all heard about being fashionably late to a party but this isn't a party, this is life or and death. Coming early gives us opportunities to meet other members for possibly finding a good sponsor. It says to stick with the winners! Well, winners come early to be of service for there own recovery. Winners are the people who make the announcements in the meetings. Winners are the ones who actively give out there phone numbers, who reach out to the newcomer standing alone by the literature rack. It is a good clue that if someone is at a meeting and they are looking over the meeting schedule, it is for only one of two reasons. Either (a)A. they are a newcomer, which means anyone can reach out to them, or (b)B. they are from out of town and anyone can let them feel welcome by saying hello and letting them know were and when the local meetings are held. Being polite and reaching out to a stranger is always a win/win situation.

Reaching out to out-of-towners can be the most rewarding thing you have ever done in your recovery. Face it; listening to the same people saying the same things can get boring, new faces means new ideas and new perspectives on recovery. Pick their brains for this new input. If they are recovering and on the road, chances are that, they have been clean a while. They may be on the road a lot and can give you neat insights into what other NA communities are doing around the country and around the world. Do not get stuck in the rut of only talking to one click of NA members, your recovery can suffer greatly and you can miss the opportunity to have some very rewarding experiences. You never

know when that person that just walked through the door might be your next sponsor. Take a risk and reach out, they are feeling vulnerable because they are out of their element. Put yourself in their shoes, wouldn't you want someone to greet you when you went to a strange new NA meeting out of your home town?

Showing up when the meeting has begun, in the middle of the readings, is distracting to the group and the newcomer who might be hearing them for the first time. It also sets a bad example to those who are not really surrendered and gives them an out when they see someone coming in late, they know they can do the same and no one will get on them for it, hey, why not just come near the end and get that paper signed, yes that is the ticket. NOT! Coming in late and smiling and waving to all that you know is also rude and disruptive. Put yourself in the other person's shoes. You really need a meeting, your boyfriend just left you after being violent, I am sure you do not want Joe Popular bouncing in his seat and waving to his adoring fans while you are hanging onto the edge of your seat trying not to use that day,

Do we announce to the group an apology for being late? This is a good question, the answer is no. The group isn't responsible for your recovery, you are. Also, the group is there to serve the member, not the other way around. If the only requirement is a desire to stop using, then apologizing seems pointless, it isn't a requirement. It also gives a false message to the newcomer that someone here is in charge and that we need to be apologetic to our trusted servants. Polite maybe but apologetic, we think not. Unless it's a gross misconduct that truly disrupts the message being carried. Of course, there are times when the best we can do is getting to part of a meeting and that is definitely okay.

However, dragging our feet and making needless delays so that we are

late on a regular basis is not. Talk is cheap, as the old saying goes and in NA, amends means living in a way that it does not happen again. If this means leaving twenty minutes earlier than we are used to and maybe having to hang out with that newcomer before the meeting and helping set up, so be it. Could be one of the smartest moves you ever make in your recovery.

The opposite is true as well, stay late. It is easy to get sucked out in a whirlwind of 'gotta have to's' in life. For many nights, this can be true, especially with jobs and families. However, our home groups need to be the exception to the rule. Anyone can organize their schedules to be free an extra half-hour for one night a week. This again is a powerful example to the newcomer of the importance we place in our lives for our home group. If we rush out the door as soon as the 'keep coming back' part of the closing prayer, what does that tell the newcomer about home group service? How would you feel if most of the members of your home group split as soon as the meeting ended, leaving one or two members to clean up after everyone? Sounds kind of dreary don't you think? Sad to say, that it is more probably the norm, than the exception.

Staying late is a privilege. Now there's an interesting thought. "Service as a privilege not a chore". We feel pride in knowing that we have done something to keep the door to NA open for the still suffering addict and for ourselves as well. We feel honored that others trust us to see that the coffee will be ready, the literature will be out, the readings available, etc.

There is an old rule of thumb in NA - leave a place better than when you came to it. That means the meeting place but it also means the convention site, the picnic place or the NA campout site. It is our job as members to be sure that when people outside think of Narcotics Anonymous, they do not think, "Oh yea, that bunch of pigs, who would

want to send someone to a group like that for help." We may be the only copy of the basic text that the non-addict sees and it will more than likely be through that one encounter that they make their decisions about sending someone to us for help. Can you see that a life may depend on you cleaning up after yourselves at an NA function out in the community?

Our answers are to be found in better spirituality, not in better political science. Those whose quest for recovery includes these things can find them here, if that is what they want or need. But it should be constantly brought up that there is much more to be found. Our disease does not look for a better program, full of happy, grateful, recovering addicts. It looks for loopholes, inequities, and defective people, poorly phrased motions and rigged elections.

FELLOWSHIP INTELLECTUAL PROPERTIES TRUST

Addiction will use anything to make NA not okay; anything to destroy what has been built up for us. We have gone the way before them and can share our experience. Whether we kept the faith through a burning desire for recovery or simply followed the advice to "Keep comin' back," we stayed clean and continued to grow. Almost everyday in some way our surrender, faith and hope have been tested. Many, many times we make mistakes and yet we are protected. We are grateful for the passing of the obsession to use, for the support that keeps us going and for the choice we have today. Undue emphasis on the business of NA can result in the kind of strain where it takes a lot of effort to do a little good. Our Fellowship has proved itself endlessly creative in finding ways around the games of those who would seek to control us.

An experienced member shares, "When I was doing research on

the F.I.P.T. (Fellowship Intellectual Properties Trust) and the 'birth and growth' of the WSO, BOT, etc., I could not help but compare it to the way the administrative side of the fire department worked against the fire fighting side.

"The WSO was the Fire Department Administration. The fellowship was the fire fighters. The administration would make decisions and then give us, the fire fighters, little or no time to look them over and vote on them. The administration would not listen to our objections or input to any of their edicts. They refused to listen to how they were endangering our lives on the fire front. They were old timers who had forgotten where they came from. They refused to see that we not only had to upgrade our equipment and techniques, but that society had changed. We would be shot at, have knives pulled on us and all the other sick actions and reactions of angry people. The administrations refusal to accept this greatly endangered our lives, worse then the burning buildings did. This was insanity full blown.

"I see the same insanity in what is going on in the fellowship today. The WSO has been making decisions without any or very little input from the fellowship. They have violated our Traditions just as the Fire Department Administration violated our bylaws. This has endangered our recovery, our way of life.

"Being able to see that insanity, control and manipulation goes on in two totally different 'organizations' was a powerful awakening for me. In the fire department, I was basically powerless over the 'good old boys.' In recovery, I can either accept it as is and complain about it, or I can be spiritual and try to change it with the help and support of others. The feelings that were awakened in me

were at times, overwhelming, At seeing how the WSO had manipulated us and continues to try to rule the fellowship, I became fearful and angry. I felt like the proverbial trapped animal that was trying to decide whether to react with 'fight or flight.'

"Part of me was thinking, 'who am I to buck the WSO? I only have fourteen months clean.' Part was thinking, 'Oh well, there are others in the fellowship who can handle this.' Part was thinking, 'this is just like my right to vote: if I don't vote, I have no right to complain about the way the government works.' I have a given right, along with my fellow recovering addicts to vote on how NA literature is to be done, on what the WSO can or cannot do.

"My fears of being manipulated and used in recovery were based on my feelings of NA no longer being a safe haven. Once again, I felt threatened. This fear then turned into anger, deep-seated anger. Not 'good anger,' that was very frightening to me. At first, I was confused and wandering in my recovery. I shared about it and it was suggested to pray. I did. My higher power turned my anger to resolve. Resolve to experience dysfunction both in and out of this fellowship. Resolve to share my hope of seeking a spiritual solution that would or could pull the fellowship together in unity instead of being a catalyst that could divide and tear our fellowship apart.

"I love this fellowship. I love what NA has given me - a way of life. I cherish this new life and wish to see it continue to be nurtured and grow in the unconditional love and acceptance of the fellowship of NA. I wish to be an active, positive participant of fellow-shiping and recovery; not someone who is going to let the fears and other negative feelings tear me away from the

fellowship."

This should provide comfort for some and guidance for others. The answer is not in bureaucracy. It is in the will of a loving God. There are reasons why we involved so many people in our decisions. Parts of this well may be revealed to each of us, so we have to share. This is not the kind of Fellowship where we follow orders. It is our business to know why we do things as much as what we do in different cases. It takes a steady diet of information covering broad outlines and detailed aspects of our way of life to continually find the common denominators that bind us together spiritually. We have to fit the pieces together to see the picture in the puzzle. If you feel at any point that your recovery is threatened by your service involvement, run to your sponsor and if the problem can not be resolved, resign and get back to basics. In Narcotics Anonymous, we see a steady stream of movements. Understandably these spiritual principles takes away some of the fears that force some members to become zealots. There are enough loving, caring, experienced members to make the thorniest problems solvable in time. Just so long as we stick together, extend ourselves for the newcomer and maintain our spiritual condition, nothing can break our circle.

Somewhere, someone cares about the problem that is troubling you and has some positive solutions to offer from their personal experience. Do not isolate or let yourself feel that no one cares. While some problems will be solved easier than others, try to bear in mind that this is our Fellowship and if we have problems, it is because our growth constantly brings our members into areas where they have little or no positive experience and conflicts are inevitable. Whatever the matter is, we do care and we are trying to make it better for everyone. We just have a few more addicts than we used to and that means we have to consider a few more personalities.

We will get good at either explaining how what happened has neither the effect nor the implication that bothers you until you are fully and completely satisfied. Hope, for the sake of NA that you had it wrong and once it was explained your sense of outrage goes away. Now, what if the members whose council you seek agree with you and explain exactly what it is that bothers you so that you know you're not alone. That efforts towards a remedy are either initiated or the matter is brought to the attention of others who share your concerns and the remedy of the problem you experienced will be covered over a broader portion of the Fellowship. There is really no alternative to the approach outlined above. There may be a few eternal problems that will never go away but they will likely have some positive function to offset the trouble they put us to from time to time.

If you see or know of a disorder, you should take several steps. First, calm down. There is hardly any area of interpersonal trust that has not been violated. The Spirit of Recovery has survived. There is probably no type of structural violation that hasn't been explored more than once. Narcotics Anonymous survives. Any impropriety, any exploitation and any particular thing that upsets your sense of moral correctness: it has all been done and we have survived. So lighten up a little so you can think clearly. If possible, speaking to the concern at the instant it is perceived can be corrective. If there is resistance or you are treated poorly or told to shut up, bide your time. Write out in detail what your concerns are and take them to your sponsor.

Whenever people get involved with one another on an ongoing basis, they become subject to generalizations that apply to all groups. Certain aspects of our NA way of life are like social movements. It is interesting to see the movement of ideas and the effects these ideas have on people in a similar way.

First, one or more people discover something wrong, something that has to be changed, improved or dealt with to satisfy a need. These people are called zealots. They will work for little or nothing, are capable of great effort and play the crucial role of initiating action.

Second, if the zealots are successful, they attract the popular interest of others who see the need and agree something ought to be done. Various proposals as to what ought to be done are presented and discussed. This is the popular stage and leaders are likely to be prophets or reformers.

Third, one of the proposals discussed in the earlier stages gains popular support and must then be formalized to gain the support needed to address the need or deal with the issue of concern. A president is typical of the leadership required for this phase of a social movement.

Fourth, if the first three phases are successful, the formalized proposal becomes institutionalized. Funding, staffing and interaction with other organizations must be worked out. A new bureau is formed and lines of support are formalized. Leadership is likely to be an executive director and while some of the early energy is gone, the original needs are to some extent, being met.

This may be a good place to remind ourselves that all problems yield to gentleness and kindness. No lasting progress is based on manipulation or coercion or unknowing or unwilling addicts. We always find out. Then, with the help of a loving God, we set matters to rest and go our way in peace.

There is a distinct example that may provide an interesting topic of discussion. Voting when uninformed or unsure of our feelings on the issues before us is not spiritual, it is lazy. It postpones a solution while

creating new disorders. People can not agree in reality unless they have a common understanding and a good feeling inside. Remember, NA is a spiritual fellowship and not a for profit organization. We have to stick to the principles that work for a fellowship like ours. Quoting from a book called Bureaucracy, "In bureaucracies of a profit making or financial nature, individual opinion is sacrificed in favor of efficiency. In bureaucracies of a spiritual or religious nature, efficiency is sacrificed in favor of individual opinion." When assemblies vote, participants can vote for the motion, against the motion or abstain from voting. Does this seem simple to you? The voting on the clear yeses and noes is in itself deceptive. If we are agreed on using voting as a means of deciding issues, what occurs if there is an overwhelming majority of voting participants who are in favor of a motion yet share in common a lack of understanding the question. Or they may be ignorant of some key point that would switch their position totally. What is the value of a vote in these cases?

For those new to the questions posed above, we could continue with a successful, textbook style presentation that would satisfy the job of presenting the point in clear unmistakable terms. By doing this, we would lend creditability to the notion that voting is the answer. Our Traditions tell us, in a clear definite way, that our Ultimate Authority may express itself in group conscience. This may seem to lack the force and clarity of voting but it is group conscience that will carry in the end. This is because a group may pass a motion, unaware of certain elements and the motion may be considered to be in force. As soon as members become aware of the error, they are usually free to change their mind or discontinue their support, claiming rightfully that the effect of the motion was not considered possible, or likely when they voted. This observation makes it a wonder that we ever agree on anything or what is more important, that we are effective instruments of the loving God that

we reach through the Twelve Steps. As with other aspects of the NA program, this appears to be more confusing than it is in practice.

Second Tradition in mind, to effectively serve in this Fellowship, we have to consider these questions on one hand and develop a feel for getting good things done on the other. Another study topic that comes up among students of politics and religion, is the difference between objective and subjective questions. Such topics may help us understand what other people are saying or getting upset about. Our base line in NA is just to relate effectively enough to get some help for some addict who is hurting and would get the help we offer if it is available in their area at the time that they need it. If the help line is working, they will call. If a meeting is listed on the schedule, they will come. If they can make contact with the NA recovery process, they will be able to stop using and start living. This, we hopefully will remember, is what it is all about.

We have been forced to consider such questions as the price of growing. When we get pressure on us and demands for action exceed general knowledge, problems are inevitable. The goal before us, many of us believe, is to make the written structure accord with the wishes and reasonable expectation of our newcomers. Financial accountability should be clear and up front. Questions under consideration require adequate information in a useful form to equip the member who may lack specific knowledge on key subjects. Many times, we have to rough it or make mistakes before we can get it right. The answer is never money.

Now, do abstentions count yes or no? Or do they count nothing? Do they count on ordinary motions and not on motions of substance? Or is it the reverse? Do voting participants have a right to refrain from voting? In the case of representatives, do they serve those they represent well by

voting yes or no without regard for the express - sometimes 'voted' - will of those they represent? Suppose their vote is going to count for or against the question regardless of their wish to abstain. In other words, by not voting, they may under the rules of order agreed to by the assembly, they in effect vote yes..

Service is not about control. It is about helping others with the strength and guidance of a loving God. Control is a tool of management systems and may work very well in corporate settings. Narcotics Anonymous is a spiritual Fellowship, not a management system. This is why it is important to keep our services simple and direct. It is easy to get caught up in the seriousness with which we take ourselves. Chairs and participants should take time to lighten up if committee works becomes locked up with emotions and personal concerns. Likewise, we may need to tighten up if we get too loose and carefree. Balance is the key. Spending time and money to set up management systems that 'promise' to help at some future date might best be left off. 'More will be repealed' is a phrase that might help some find comfort in the machinations of group conscience by unskilled or inexperienced service workers who have not yet realized the nature of the people they seek to govern. How would such culprits enforce their sanctions against a tribe of gypsies? Addicts are peculiar people and while we may appear to be asleep, we have ways of watching. Still, this is not to condone or permit such disruptions. Enormous energy may be required to set a simple matter straight.

Working together in an atmosphere of love, we share our troubles and the solutions. There may be times in our recovery when we feel our character defects have the upper hand over the spiritual principles we desire to live by today. At these times, we take a few seconds out to ask our higher power to help us deal with what we are faced with spiritually.

With the guidance of our higher power, we may have the opportunity to postpone dealing with situations until we can do so spiritually. Ego is the real issue behind all contentions and appearances. We view issues in terms that favor those we 'like' and leave out those we either dislike or simply do not know. While you will sooner or later hear someone actually say, "Don't give me that God stuff!" Do not settle for that. The 'God stuff' guides and provides for all we need in recovery.

When members gather to act in the name of Narcotics Anonymous, they place themselves in a special position. If they are surrendered and sincere, the spirit of desire for recovery will enable them to do their work as part of our group will. If they have not learned the lessons of the Third Step, they will experience difficulty and lack strength and guidance. Even with great resources, they will fail. The first lesson of service should be that God works the miracles not us. The instant we begin to take personal credit for God's miracles, forces are engaged to reduce divine intervention to the merely human level. The service structure sets the stage for some of these miracles, but can take no credit for the spiritual forces that are engaged and God does all the 'real' work. When we forget this and that the structure is merely an extension of the conscience of individual NA groups, the structure begins to take on a life of it's own and can set itself up finally as the enemy of the group.

Along with this lesson is the fact that all our service disorders trace back to the disease of addiction. Most, if not all, of our service conflicts involved members who are knowledgeable about NA recovery, our Twelve Steps and our Twelve Traditions. The sad thing is that in these conflicts, neither side will communicate with the other. Nor will they subject the basic areas of concern or disagreement to the creative spirit of open discussion. Personalities align with personalities and soon there is no room for that God Stuff. There is little members of goodwill can do

on such occasions except tend the wounded and wait for the battles to die down.

LEARNING DAYS

One way we keep down our disorders is to hold "learning days." These are occasions where members can learn or re-learn the basic lessons that keep us free and effective. Speakers who have successful experience share on topics of interest such as chairing a meeting, chairing a service committee, the various things we can do to help a group as a treasurer or secretary. The lessons we have learned from the Twelve Traditions are gone into in detail. Social ineptitude is a requirement for most NA members, and so good manners and orderly behavior can be acquired without being put on the spot when the group is enjoying a presentation on how to be an effective group leader without reverting to 'old ways' to enforce conformance. A chairperson can seriously tire an assembly of addicts who come to serve NA and are forced to listen to someone demonstrate they have not read the service guides that apply to their service body by asking long winded questions. A good chair can politely interrupt and tell them to write out their questions and refer to the service guides for clarification. A learning day makes it ok to ask questions and get answers in a positive setting.

DISORDERS

Our Society and Fellowship has faced disorders within our membership since addicts first began to get clean in NA. Many of our problems have to do with getting NA started somewhere. Today, we have the problem of surviving our bigness. It seems that when we are small, we are

Careful. When we are big, we get wasteful. We do not quite treasure each and every member with the same intensity many of us received when we were new. It is easy to be distracted by the competing demands of our daily personal life. Gossip and rumor may still provide a convenient way to appear informed without thinking. If we come to love those around us, we notice their pain hurts us. Betraying personal confidences, criticizing others, making ourselves look good by making those around us look bad; these are ways that fail to give us what we want. We may feel badly if we find ourselves doing any of these things but that is not the question we ask ourselves. What we ask ourselves is this: is this the best I can do? There comes a time when we can do better, and we get to go on then.

Our Second Tradition defines the roles we play in service. We lead by example, not by authority of our service position or our position in a power grid. In our spiritual service structure, we have no power grid. All are directly responsible to those we serve. We are elected to serve in these positions by those who feel we may be good role models but their are not guarantees. The lure of money, property and prestige will always be there to tempt us into joining forces with those who see the world as surfaces because they are not yet able to compass the divine quality of our program. Praying for the God of your understanding to remove your self-will and ego and give you the strength and guidance to do His footwork is the best start point for you to serve NA. Without conscious contact people can easily forget to be directly responsible to those they serve. They will attempt to lead by personal power, bluster, manipulation and methods of control.

The dream of love and kindness among addicts who have survived total hell only to wind up contending over useless issues and mental conflicts is how recovery ends for those of us who fall into that trap. We who have hurt enough renounce these things. True there are problems; there

will always be problems. We will use these problems to work out creative, loving solutions, not ongoing political battles and never ending conflicts. WE CAN LEARN from our mistakes!

Wherever there are members of goodwill, there are no service disorders. Where there are members who are glad they are clean today, there are no problems. How are things doing today? Fine, everything seems to be in working order. Those who are at peace are finding peace. Those who are bound by power, property and prestige seem to be getting just those things. Those who remember where they came from are glad to be somewhere else now. The real power still rests in the care of our Ultimate Authority who may express itself in our group conscience. Be careful where you put your mind because the rest of you will surely follow.

We cannot do it without each other and one of our basic understandings is that we are each and every one of us, important. NA is not a business or a financial institution. We deal with these aspects of our existence because we must; yet our real focus remains on our gratitude and our practice of spiritual principles. Without these, even our abstinence wears thin. Spirituality is not an option for us. We must feel something good spiritually to survive the rigors forced on us by life and our disease. Certainly, NA has been much more successful than the various help agencies and medical approaches in making the clean life available and possible for the largest group of addicts ever to get clean together.

Sometimes addicts try to 'graduate' from recovery seeking to transpose their recovery experience into something trivial, insincere and flawed with human imperfection. All the countless hours of patient listening, caring, the meetings, the phone calls, and countless small acts of kindness seem to disappear from consideration. It is the members who

love, keep coming back and practice the NA way of life who keep this Fellowship alive.

When too many new members get into service with too little clean time among them, complaints are heard about service burn out. This is not service but it's opposite. When people say they are tired of the politics, they are not saying they are tired of loving, caring and giving. Something has gone terribly wrong and no one is courageous enough to do anything about it. It is taking instead of giving. If your service does not help recovery it isn't service. It is selfish and playing a role to gain personal attention. This is not giving but taking. Service is freely given and freely received. It was some members loving service that gave each of us hope in our early recovery. Only our selfishness would make our caring and sharing seem negative. If we no longer have the capacity to care, we should resign our office or let go of our committee commitments until we can regain our sense of serving. Members need to find the positive option at any given point and be able to step out on faith and do it!

It has been said, "There is nothing spiritual about service work." NA is constantly being reborn as new members get involved and form new groups. This steady influx of positive interest and enthusiasm has kept us growing as a Fellowship, offsetting many times outbreaks of personal contention and infighting. While combatants are preoccupied with their wounds, the newcomers are setting up house! Actually, the real disorders seem to be mainly at the world level and of those, mainly where business concerns attempt to override spiritual concerns. We can hope this settles down one day. When that day comes, we can delete these lines but until then, we hope to speak with loving clarity and precision about the necessity to keep the worldly concerns from dominating how members feel and how they express themselves in group conscience. The service

functions tend to get done and with little recognition, many basic routines are carried out in a fine and exemplary manner. The more we appreciate our members in service, the more encouraged they are to serve us well.

Competitiveness can be interesting as long as members keep their eye on the ball and remember that God works the miracles in NA and that the best we can hope for is to be servants worthy of trust. To be effective we have to have enough understanding and agreement to have function. We do not have to agree totally on every question. We may have to be reminded at times that each of us has funny little prejudices and odd attitudes we picked up from somewhere as kids or young people out of the raw mix life threw at us before and during our active addiction.

One half dozen and six may have the same meaning but we better agree on which one to use so that we, and our listeners, will have some idea what we are talking about. Needless disagreement and useless argument is good for nothing. Apparently simple terms otherwise become a matter of philosophical debate if we do not emphasize the ties that bind us together over our differences. This can shut us down functionally if we are not careful. Anyone who has been in service five years or more should know what is being addressed here.

When our Area Service Committees find themselves struggling, many of us become distressed because we feel attached towards, and dependent upon, our service structure. By 'struggling' we mean an area service committee that cannot pay its bills, fill its trusted servants positions, conduct business, uphold the Traditions in all its affairs or be directly responsible to those it serves. This state of affairs often causes a ground swell of support among concerned members who want to save Area Service and prop it back up. Such attempts, however well intentioned,

are equal to putting a band-aid on a severed limb - its not going to work. We find that, just like a relapse, the roots of the apparent symptom are linked to a history of disease. Group conscience is not what I think or you think, it is an approximation of what we all think on a given topic or issue. If we do not get down to it, our decisions and policies will wobble or be impossible to enforce. As a spiritual fellowship and non-profit organization, we tailor our means to suit our ends because we must feel good about what we are doing as we do it. This goodness counteracts some of the pain of our pasts. Helping others slips into the realm of impersonal altruism until we have someone screaming for help in our personal space, our car or our living room. Realizing we are all part of something that gives that help is the big deal and we surrender if we want to participate. This goes for the loftiest trusted servant to the lowliest elected representative.

One truth comes slowly. For decades, our Fellowship wallowed in the shallow water just off shore trying to avoid wetness before setting out for the other side of the river. To cross, either start swimming or take the boat! We have found the spirit of a loving God present in all our service meetings. The concept of addicts meeting together and sharing ideas without anyone being harmed is evidence of this loving God. We will not ever come up with the perfect system. Fortunately, we do not have to be perfect to live long, happy and useful lives! Service is a visible test of our surrender, faith and devotion. Nobody can mash our buttons like another addict.

Twelfth Step work does not always come easy. If we have disbelief intact, an inability to say we have made a decision to let our God care for our lives, our defects of character in working order and a reluctance to make amends, our 'service' may be limited. If we pattern ourselves after someone who has been in recovery long enough to know what to do and

why, chances are we will feel the joy of giving right away. If not, we will almost certainly fall back into our patterns of hatred, jealousy, rivalry and insecurity. In other words, we will begin to act on our defects. This is not our fault. It is just the way the disease of addiction works in recovery to attempt to restore us to insanity.

A side effect of our rapid growth in certain areas has resulted in some cases where so many addicts get clean; clean, they water down the message and fail to grasp the continuity of giving that is embodied in what we call service. Where this happens, the activities involved in carrying our message can seem like a business to some and a power struggle to others. Of course, struggling for power is something we should deal with in our first step. Addiction really is a killing disease and it will always seek a way to make us feel worthless and hopeless.

It might help us if we understand that results are not all we are after in our service work. Sometimes the most important person who gets served is the trusted servant themselves. Are they not members? Do they not then need help in learning how to live clean? Does not service by its very nature create opportunities for us to grow that would not otherwise exist? Helping others validates the process. Fear has often justified falsification of minutes, prearranged elections, and resulted in incomplete or misleading reports. Group conscience processes are meant to filter out what does not work by putting in a position of control only people who care about NA and are not subject to the strains and pressures of conflicts of interest.

Some of us feel we are so imperfect and our flaws so deeply hidden and embedded that we can never achieve happiness and recovery at the same time. In this pain, our desperation causes us to sabotage our recovery and create hatred and disorder to justify what we want to do. It is understood

that we addicts create clouds of confusion to cover up our games and separate agendas. It is helpful to remember that we can no more kill desire for recovery in another addict than other can make us have that desire in the first place. So, it is a waste of time to savage NA. The deep wells of our love and gratitude will endure. We will be here to welcome you back when your sad cycle brings you our way again. This passage is not directed at the newcomer. It is for the unfaithful with clean time that choose to waste it, forgetting their own hard won lessons.

ALTERNATIVE SERVICE STRUCTURE

When members feel they cannot be honest about difficulties within their committees, simple problems can get really bad. When we can not talk about certain problems or talk with someone who has successfully dealt with the problems we are facing, we can really feel stumped. Some of our most devoted members can fall away from the Fellowship putting their terrific energy into fighting their fellows or leaving NA. God! This is unacceptable. We are all such miracles. We should be able to sit around and disagree all we want to with the understanding that when the talking is done, we really love and need each other. The shock of a real or imagined service disorder arouses deep resentment and anger when it comes. We all live under certain assumptions. One person put it this way: all can prescribe what all should do, but no one has a right to demand that another shall do what he does not do himself. When we feel this has been violated within our Fellowship or its structure, our very surrender is a stake. Many members use this sort of thing as an excuse to get loaded. We have to remind ourselves that the getting loaded part may be working to produce the perceived wrong doing the same as it does to produce physical pain if it thinks it can get dope that way.

In fact, have not we all had enough emotional pain relating to unfairness

and inequity in the world to be just a little tougher? Can we afford to let another's wrongdoing threaten our lives through relapse? We are better able to help each other find solutions based on personal experience than ever before in our history. Often we only see our faults and problems in retrospect. Are we enabling another by accepting the problems as is or are we allowing them to grow through the problem? Service disorders can and do affect NA as a whole. When are we operating on self_will and when are we operating on spiritual guidance. The answer is often apparent.

Isolation is such a strong part of our addiction; we have much to learn about true self-government. Almost every one of us has deep distrust of what other people will do to us if we drop our guards. This fear and distrust can make for funny problems when we get together to do some of our committee work. In general, as long as the service is very straight forward, there is little trouble. The more complex projects require time and something spiritual, yet close to management technique. The trouble comes when some of us actually try to apply real management techniques to their fellow members. It is easy to do and can even seem justified in terms of results.

ALTERNATIVE MEETINGS

Do we as NA members have the right to meet in the name of NA and yet avoid contact with the 'service structure' of NA? If you think of NA as a set of principles, it is easy to answer this question. If you think NA is a corporation based in California, it may be harder. If these groups do not contribute funds to the service structure that would go to pay for services performed by the corporation, non-payment for services issued becomes an issue. On the other hand, if there were perceived abuses within the system, then withholding funds would be a way of showing displeasure

with the system. In terms of their belief, to contribute to a system that goes against the basic beliefs and purposes of NA would be contrary to the 5th Tradition and 7th Tradition of the group. While we can leave the answers to these questions to others, we can at least acknowledge the questions exist.

One of the proofs of the spiritual validity of a meeting is shown when a group exists over a period of time. Members will not attend a meeting for long unless their spiritual needs are being met. Examination of some of the groups in existence may prove useful.

ESSAYS FROM THE SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP

The following essays need to be read as written. These offerings may provide support and guidance for members whose feelings involve issues and real concerns to our Fellowship. We are growing upward, outward and inward - all at the same time. We need to recognize conflicts of interest and personality clashes and deal with them effectively since they cannot be avoided. It should be emphasized that we are using principles to deal with life on life's terms. Service disorders have to do with the insanity of our disease. Our recovery process must generate the answers.

UNLEASH THE ENERGY

Can NA leadership skills be taught? Our leaders are but trusted servants, directly responsible to those they serve so how do we train people to exercise kind, caring and effective leadership? This is a question/problem that seems very prevalent in NA - there is often a core of concerned, hard-working NA members in a community, but they have trouble recruiting others into service. They are very good at doing things

themselves, but they are not very effective at recruiting others to help. This greatly limits their ability to carry the message!

Experienced NA people do not always pass on their service experience. Many have had the chance to make mistakes and learn from others. There are many, many people with talent and energy in NA, but they'll stay out of service unless they are approached in a certain way. By the way, this is exactly the way I like to be treated, too!

We've all seen the committee chairperson who 'knows' the right way to do things, and then complains that they can not get any helpers. It is like an obsession - these leaders who see exactly how the 'finished product' should look, and then try to use people as tools to carry out their vision. This rigidity clouds people's minds.

Take your average NA member, elected as H&I chair. The first thing he does is to call a committee meeting. He gets a few people, sure, but not many. The chair uses the meeting to start talking about the needs and problems of the hospitals and treatment centers in the area and how there are one or two faltering H&I meetings. Some issues are discussed, and maybe there's even a vote. Mainly, though, there's talk about getting more people involved! Next meeting, same thing . . . the chairperson gets frustrated. He 'knows' what should be done in those hospitals and other places, but no one seems to want to help! Puzzled and disheartened, he tries to do all of the area's H&I meetings himself, with maybe one or two helpers. He gets very tired, and can not understand why other NA members will not lift a finger to help!

Please consider a completely different approach: take the H&I committee and figure out what the overall goal is. Do we want to give every treatment center patient an introduction to NA once during their

stay? Do we want to give all patients a weekly NA meeting? Is it enough to make literature available, without actual meetings? We have to have a rough idea of 'where' we are going! This becomes the 'goal' of the whole committee. It is discussed among the few people who come to the first few committee meetings.

The committee's overall goal must be concrete and definite - so that success or failure can be measured - but nothing should be said about 'how' the goal should be accomplished. Methods will be decided by each committee member.

- Divide the Work -

After the committee's main goal is agreed on, then it is divided up into lots of smaller goals. Each of these goals will equal one service position. One goal could be to introduce patients at the local St. Mary's Treatment Center to NA at least once during their four weeks there. Or, another goal could be to give any willing patient at the Central Treatment Center a ride to the Wednesday night NA meeting . . . When, say fifteen of these goals have been identified, the recruiting begins. That is one of the main jobs of a committee chair - recruiting! The other is supporting and encouraging the other committee members. A good chairperson does not get bogged down in the details, but instead works on finding good people, agreeing on the goals of their position and then turning them loose with full support. He/she monitors everything by talking in a friendly way with people, and offering them help (in the form of more money or more people). A good chairperson lets others take care of the details and decisions.

When recruiting people, the chairperson should always have a job in mind. "Tom, would you be willing to be IN CHARGE of bringing an

NA experience to the patients at St. Mary's? You'd be FREE to do the job ANY WAY YOU WANT." Tom hesitates, and says, "Well, I dunno." At this point, the committee chair says, "Thanks for not saying No right away! Please take a week and think about it - you would be completely IN CHARGE of NA at St. Mary's - I'd support whatever you decided to do there. I'll talk to you again in a week and see what you think."

Recruiting like this is easy. Visiting meetings all over town, approaching active NA people. Of course, many people have been burned by NA committee work and say 'NO' to more service. But there is a 'strong' attraction to being IN CHARGE of something - the chance for a person to put his or her personal stamp on a project! Eventually, you'll find people who'll say, "Yes" and that is when the challenge 'really' starts. That is also when "in charge" needs to be explained as using spiritual principles to accomplish the goal - otherwise we create a tyrant.

The challenge is letting people do things 'their' way in accordance with the suggestions of service, instead of the way you 'know' is right! Yes, you have experience and do not want other to make the same mistakes you did. Yes, NA's reputation must be protected and we shouldn't waste a lot of time, money and energy. But it is like the difference between babysitting and adoption.

If you give your baby to a 'babysitter', you expect that person to follow your plans and procedures - you have the right to give them suggestions and directions. "No! Hold the baby's head more carefully. That's it." In contrast, if you give your baby up for adoption, you loose any right to give directions. In fact, it is not your baby at all anymore!

No Babysitting

Some committee chairs in NA seem to expect other committee members to 'baby-sit' part of the chair's big plan. Naturally, no one's got the time to 'baby-sit' someone else's baby for free - they are busy with their own lives and recovery. That is where I feel like I have discovered nuclear energy - the key is letting people completely 'adopt' parts of a big project. The word 'adopt' is appropriate, because the committee chair must avoid ANY discussion of 'how' another committee member is doing their job. Just as you wouldn't criticize another parent for the way she is raising her child, an NA chair shouldn't criticize or 'even comment on' how another person chooses to handle his part of the big project. That baby's been adopted and the chairperson has just got to live with that person's 'parenting' style!

If you're a committee chair, your new committee members will test you on this right away. They'll look at your eyes and say, 'I was thinking of having a purple watermelon punch as the main beverage for the convention. What do you think of that?' It is so easy to answer, "That is interesting. Are you going to have Coke too? I think a lot of people like Coke: Wrong! That person was just 'testing' whether they were a babysitter or a parent. The chairperson's comment showed that the convention refreshment person was we just babysitting, because the chair showed that she had a definite idea about how the refreshment job should be done.

The 'correct answer' is to say, "Tom, I trust your judgment. Whatever you want to do is OK with me! Uh, if you think you're going to make a decision that will be controversial, you might want to bounce it off some other experienced NA members, but in the end, I'll support whatever you decide to do!" Yes, this is a long speech but it works! Notice, there's no

mention of the crazy purple watermelon punch at all - a good chairperson refuses to mess with details.

If all of this seems easy, it is 'not'! The first time someone in your Public Information Committee asks you, "I was thinking of giving anas interview about NA to the local newspaper, what do you think?" you will not be able to resist commenting. When you see their face after you give your ideas though, their expression will say, "Hell! I'm just a babysitter after all!" It is not too late to apologize though and say, "Hey, don't listen to me - I trust whatever you decide about newspaper stuff." With time, you'll get the hang of expressing this kind of trust, and people will light up! People are happy to get involved in NA service when they are given clear goals and then turned loose to achieve those goals with creativity and intelligence. No second-guessing from the chairperson. No looking over their shoulder and commenting on how things should be done. When people experience this kind of responsibility, trust and freedom, they do not go wild - actually, they become 'very' careful in their decisions. Group conscience speaks through them. Now, it is 'their' reputation on the line! Their pride will not let them fail!

It should be mentioned that there is always the rare case where a committee member completely stops doing his job. It is like a parent who neglects his child - if some friendly questions like, "Is everything all right? Do you need some help?" from the chair does not resolve the problem, then that part of the project can be 'gently' handed over to someone else. This kind of service work is never boring!

One of our members with long clean time shares, "I have lived clean through several difficult periods within NA in service and in recovery. For those of you who have learned spiritual principles to live life clean and pursue recovery, I am posting things that have helped me in hopes

they will help others.

- Pray a lot.
- Do not speak ill of others.
- Be as nice as you can to people.
- Be firm and correct in your actions.
- Help correct errors within your system.
- Be open to the comments and criticisms of others.
- Practice the law of three: what you do comes back three times.
- Don't speak or act when in the grip of powerful emotions or anger.
- Trust your Higher Power to take care of things you are powerless over.
- If in emotional pain, retreat to a safe place and contemplate all you have to be grateful for...

REAL WORLD

A member painfully shares, "Recently my first sponsor resurfaced, he has been out in the "real world" for about three years now. I have had a lot of negative responses to some of his choices thus far and was not very happy to have him reappear to say the least. Last week, he called at a very inopportune time but God gave me the insight that he is lonely and he's reaching out to this Fellowship through me. I recalled some of the things that he taught me when I first got clean and I felt really ashamed that I had become very judgmental of his choices.

"Mostly I recalled how he had sat down with me and gave me examples of situations and asked if these violated anywhich, if any, of our Traditions and if any where violated, asked methere was a violation - what was the best way to deal with it. I specifically recall the example he gave me on the Sixth Tradition. It went: A member shares that after being clean some months that their spouse still didn't seem to trust them

and this was an intolerable situation. They didn't know whether to stay or go. My sponsor posed: I share, "You know, you should call Dr. John Doe. He's real good and fairly cheap." Then he asked what, if anything, I should do if I was chairing the meeting. He also gave me: I share, "I had a similar experience and I had to seek help beyond the Fellowship. Get with me after the meeting and we'll discuss it further." The God that I live with has a terrific sense of humor and I was placed in exactly this situation in an actual meeting and had to interrupt the sharing and direct the meeting back to recovery (with the offender being a family member, no less. It allowed me to be able to see that this works - not only in the rooms but everywhere I go. He taught me the 'rules' of this Fellowship and along with that, he enabled me to be able to do service.

"I see so many people who seem to think that our Traditions are not important to us as individuals and that you'll get it eventually. I know of nothing that I have ever been involved with that didn't REQUIRE learning the 'rules.' The Traditions are the 'rules' in this thing called Narcotics Anonymous within the rooms and outside the rooms. It is only through understanding and application that they work.

"I was overwhelmed last weekend, during a conversation with my ex-sponsor, by gratitude for his taking the time to instruct me in the Traditions - giving me a basic understanding and sharing examples of how to apply them before he allowed me to get into service. Yes, that is the right word. I wanted to get involved and chair a meeting, he said, "Not until I am sure that you understand the Traditions." He allowed me to get into service. The chairperson of a meeting is a servant of our Fellowship - what a concept and what a responsibility. How do you meet the responsibility of chairing a meeting and ensuring that the meeting maintains an atmosphere of recovery if you haven't learned the Traditions and their practical applications?

NA Way of Life - Fellowship Work in Progress
Eighth Presentation Form 2011

"This knowledge is the most valuable tool that I own when I get involved in service in any form, at any level, anywhere I go - within this Fellowship and in the 'real' world as well.

"Thank you again, ex-sponsor, friend and still-suffering addict. I love you."

How It Works: The Twelve Steps of NA

- 1. We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.*
- 2. We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*
- 3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood Him.*
- 4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*
- 5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*
- 6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*
- 7. We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.*
- 8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.*
- 9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.*
- 10. We continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.*
- 11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious*

contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us, and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of those steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

No matter whether you think that you might have a problem or you are able to admit to addiction, we welcome you to join us. We encourage you to try our way of life. There are many benefits from following this simple process. Take what you need and leave the rest. It becomes yours not when it works for you but when you give it to someone who is in need. This is not theory: it is the results of our recovery. We have attempted to write our experience strength and hope in plain language and present it in a certain order. In our efforts to carry our message, we have only one main theme: we suffer from a disease called addiction. In recovery, we discover our disease takes on ‘many forms’ yet remain aware that it is only one disease.

The Twelve Steps are the best way we know of to deal with addiction. The disease of addiction desperately tries to avoid recovery by complicating our simple message. We have learned that it is better to do our best daily and take it easy. We can only make progress when we stop trying to get ahead of ourselves. Recovery is a process and a journey, not a destination. Our aim is not to graduate from the recovery process but receive its assistance in our lives as long as we need it, one day at a time. In recovery, we enjoy a state of continual growth with periodic rest periods. During these rest periods, we gather energy for our next growth period. All of life is this way. In recovery, we again feel that we are a real part of all life.

The Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous guide addicts in the process of recovery. Some members call them 'the pathway to freedom'. We go from complete personal defeat to a spiritual awakening that is specific to our individual needs and disposition. The Twelve Steps, discovered and composed by members of Alcoholics Anonymous, were adapted for the NA program to include language that is familiar to addicts of all types. Although the claim of originality belongs to the founders of AA, NA can rightfully claim its own recovery program. The growing evidence of gratitude and diligence in the applications of principles is visible in our literature. Our growth to a worldwide NA Fellowship is no accident. Although we 'borrowed' portions of the Program, our toil and suffering has made it our own. NA is valid because it is the successful accumulation of gratitude for and the relief from the disease of addiction for an ever growing number of addicts.

No one is too dumb for recovery but many are too smart. We learn to take seriously, the principles that affect the way we feel and the way we act. The quality of our condition becomes our choice as we learn responsibility. As we practice spiritual principles, we become the people that we always knew we could be. Three principles that work from the beginning of recovery are honesty, open-mindedness and the willingness to try. They help us to overcome our addictive tendency to run, hide and take the day off.

For many of us, thinking was superficially checking over anything that required a decision, especially those requiring commitment and potential gain or loss. We seemed unable to function on the deeper levels of comprehension needed to deal with many of life's demands. We fell back on dependent relationships and helplessness became a big part of our life. This behavior resulted in frequent situations where others arranged our lives to suit themselves. Therefore, we may have become

accustomed to exploitation. This may duplicate how we learned to live when we were small.

When we get and stay clean, our heads pop out of the fog eventually and we start to ask questions! This is what happens during some of our closer sponsorship and home group situations. Learning to think in a comfortable manner by including the feelings and intuitive perceptions within our mental environment gives us a much different picture of reality. Where we once felt that we were helpless, we can actually see that our pre-conceived notions overlaid reality and tried to convince us that they are truth. Our thinking no longer has to be limited to an exclusively rational approach to life. Thinking becomes a wrap-around method that we can use to reach a level of understanding that allows us to move through life. We can meet not only the needs of today but also put in pieces that make long-term goals achievable.

We can learn many things out of books and from professionals. ‘Learning’ can mean many things to each one of us. ‘Education’ involves directly, efficiently, and systematically gaining what others know that can help us. We study the people in the Program who have some success in those areas of life where we can admit our need for improvement. We can project what we think they are feeling, doing, thinking about or planning. We then go to them personally to check out what we thought against what they have to say for themselves. The education we are talking about here is learning everything we can about the disease concept and the recovery process.

The members of NA have discussed their disease with one another for decades. They have discussed their desire for recovery from addiction by using these Twelve Steps. Narcotics Anonymous deals with recovery from a disease called addiction as opposed to recovery from a single

‘ism’. We do not identify addiction merely by its symptoms. We know that when we arrest our addiction in one symptom, it usually breaks out in another. So, it is coming from inside us, not from outside forces. We recognize ever more clearly, our similarities regardless of the form that our own active addiction took. We learn that the deceit of a white-collar criminal is the same as that of an armed robber. We begin to realize that the feelings of despair, isolation and hopelessness make us one with every other addict. We have a common bond in our desire for recovery.

There is a surrender before each of the Twelve Steps. Through surrendering, we are able to disengage the forces that used to use us. We can begin to rediscover the real stuff of life. Sometimes, we have a desire even moments before we consider ourselves powerless and it may be some time before we learn to call it powerlessness. We surrender to our need for a greater power in our lives; otherwise, we cannot listen seriously to talk of God. We notice how others get the power that they need to recover and grow emotionally while clean. We surrender again in the Third Step when we turn our lives and wills over to the care of our loving Ultimate Authority. Yet again we surrender in our inventory and amends Steps. Surrender to our honest need for help is crucial and necessary at each turning point. We work the Steps during ongoing recovery the same way as we did in the beginning. The need to re-inventory our daily lives, access our Higher Power more directly and put into action the principles we continue to learn is great. We must apply the Steps in order to get different results that are necessary in making a clean addict feel the growth that we need for happiness.

In order for any addict to get help, we must first personally admit our need for help. As we learn not to act out of fear, we come to believe that a Higher Power can and will meet our needs. In order to receive help, we must be willing to accept it. If we want to feel better, we have to find out

where our pain is coming from. We begin by admitting our defects and become willing to stop putting energy into them. This is one of the reasons this is a spiritual program. We learn to do, think, and feel in ways that promote positive feelings about others and ourselves. We learn to avoid the traps that our addiction would lure us into in its effort to kill us. Although the lures may look good to us, we learn to avoid them. We know too well the bitter pain that comes when we act out of greed, lust and pride. We learn to surrender, admit our faults and find new ways of doing things. We can finally reconcile the negativity from the past by making amends. We go forward with our lives using prayer, meditation and other spiritual principles that promote our happiness and well-being. Finally, as we begin to set our own house in order, we are able to carry the message: That any addict can stop using and grow into a complete and healthy person.

We learn to use our new associations in a healthy manner by acting like those members in recovery that we admire. We don't have to put them on pedestals to do this and we don't have to expect perfection in them. Actually, we may find ourselves disenchanted with the idea that people have to be perfect about anything. There has always been imperfection in the world and the world has somehow survived. Of course, NA membership allows us to go right up to these people in the program and ask them how they do it. How do they feel? How they deal with issues like lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem? Simply watching them and beginning to believe that we can do better opens many doors. Once we catch on to the idea that we can overcome our limitations, we generally go for it. In time, we find that instead of feeling indebted to those to whom we have looked to for guidance, we enjoy the joy and wonder of passing on to others the help that was given freely to us.

When we find that our signals we send are not in alignment with the

responses we are getting, we know we have come to a defective area. Many times, we will find that we make ties between things that have no necessary relationship. We may feel comfortable when someone yells at us because our old lives included getting yelled at by someone. We need money yet we fail to earn it or waste it before it can provide for our needs. We want love but we industriously drive away people who seem to care for us. If our 'anchors' in the form of our associations are improper, we must, as soon as we find this out, make new associations. Involve as many of your senses as possible when doing this. Write down how it has been as accurately as possible and then write about how it might be done better. Read this aloud. Hang it on the wall where you can glance at in the morning and at night. Talk to other people about it. Bring it up to the surface where you can touch it, feel it and turn it around.

Our recovery process has evolved through its actual practice by the hundreds of thousands of addicts who get clean, stay clean and achieve varying degrees of recovery. Our goal is to stop worrying about what the other people in our lives are doing, whether rightly or wrongly, and to get on with rediscovering our own sense of wonder, physical health and mental balance. Recovery is about your health, your happiness and your sense of wonder. We don't want our feelings to get too high or too low in our new life. We learn to be happy and make the most of our lot in life. In our fellow recovering addicts, we find the tremendous resource that we need to make our lives work. Our therapeutic value is in the way we live: we walk it, not just talk it. We become acceptable, responsible and productive members of society as a by product of working the Program of Narcotics Anonymous.

The longer we have been clean, the harder it is to get clean again. And your life expectancy is less. The lesson seems to be: when you quit

taking poison, your life gets better.

Our focus must remain on staying clean and helping others because this is the antidote for wallowing in despair and taking what we need by deception. Together, we discover a new life clean. Suddenly we understand how other people feel as we emerge into recovery with others like ourselves. So very often, we progress in recovery until we get a little money, a job, a substitute addiction or some approval source that is apart from the NA Fellowship that can undermine our recovery. We may begin to find fault with other members, complain about this and that in the meetings and then huff out the door with an air of moral righteousness! Simply put, we have to gain the ability to be comfortable with a certain degree of helplessness. Even the roughest and toughest of us needs love and without the ability to admit our needs, there is little chance that our needs will be met.

An addict shared: "I am powerless over the disease of addiction. I am powerless over the progression of this disease. The disease itself is not teachable but I am. I can learn new things about recovery. The disease wants me to do what I always did before I came to recovery. I can choose to go to a meeting and go against the grain of it.

"There are certain leftovers from my active addiction. The fear, panic, confusion, etc. will subside after awhile if I keep going to meetings. I also associate living with the disease to feeling locked into patterns. If I establish a new routine of going to meetings and doing other constructive things, I won't remain in that confusion."

In recovery, we don't take the first one, whatever happens. Using our drug of choice or some substitute will do nothing but complicate things

and confuse us, especially if we already have some sort of trouble. Substitution and moderation are only counterfeits that attempt to hide the fact we can no longer use successfully. We accept the fact that no amount of dope can satisfy us but it only takes a little to ruin us. With luck, we might make it back to the program but sooner or later, our luck runs out and we must work the Steps in earnest. The progressive nature of our illness allows our sensitivity to drugs in any form to increase, whether we are using or clean. There is no grace period of 'fun using' for the person who relapses. The longer we have been clean, the greater the danger that we will die trying to get high. The chemicals lose their ability to smother our spirits and make us into pleasure_seeking automatons. It is no longer a pleasure when you have to do it, rather it is slavery. The substitution of alcohol or some other drug is no longer an option for us because we now know drugs in any form will reactivate our addiction. There is no safe usage for us. The longer we have been clean, the harder it is to get clean again. And your life expectancy is less. The lessons seems to be: when you quit taking poison, your life gets better.

One of the problems of active addiction is that it makes us feel personally powerful. There is nothing more pathetic than to experience this feeling yet realize that it is nothing but a lie. When we feel that our senses have turned against us in a such way, it leaves us no choice but to hate ourselves and mistrust those most basic tools of human 'proofs': our own eyes, ears, and hearts. The first thing that any addict new to recovery wants - and the last that most will admit to - is a deep desire for personal power. We see around us a world full of people, most of whom seem to have some idea of who they are, where they belong, and where they are going with their lives. We don't feel that way, do we? "When I was born, and they were passing out instructions on life, I didn't get a full set." seems to be an accurate description of how we feel. The

inability to trust ourselves is the beginning of what we experience as powerlessness. The linkage between action and reaction, between intention and result, between cause and effect dissolves and we are lost. We must find help or some way to restore the natural processes during our abstinence. It is helpful for us to know that these injuries are the result of our addiction and that through living clean and learning about our spirits, we can enjoy sanity and health.

Isolation is another characteristic symptom of this disease. One thing that helps us break out of the pattern of isolation is getting to know people. The knowledge that a meeting will be there helps as well. Getting phone numbers from members and using them helps too. These things take away the 'power' that the isolation has to tell us that we should do insane things, like go on 'a geographical cure'. It'll be different for me if I live in another city. Addiction breeds mistrust. We project that mistrust onto people, especially clean people. To enhance our recovery we should tell the clean people from our pasts that we are in recovery. That will help us overcome the issues of mistrust. The only exception might be employers or other people that we feel shouldn't or don't need to know. Sometimes, practicing 'simple anonymity' is best. If we are clean and working our program, time will turn up opportunities to take care of what is needed. Don't rush ahead.

Have we suffered long enough? Do we really want the changes offered in NA? Can we admit openly to other members that our addiction controlled our lives? Are we ready to consider that the drugs have lost their ability to give us what we want? Can we accept the idea that, for us, drugs have become poisons? Can we admit that we cannot predict what we may do, once we start using? Are we conscious of the changes that occur in our personalities, making us into liars, cheats, and thieves? Are we able to accept the fact that we cannot quit using, gain or regain

happiness alone? When we hurt someone, we ask ourselves, "Were we loaded - or trying to get loaded?" We find that only those who have hurt long enough are able to make the kind of surrender that gets results. We cannot cross the river while tied up at the dock. We have to take some hope from the recovery of others to gain the willingness we need to make the dash to safety. Our examples are the living proof that NA works in the lives of all kinds of people, in all walks of life. We had to be broken under the weight of our own pain before we were able to reach out for help.

We avoid whatever goes against our recovery. We recall that we have experienced some degree of personal power at some point in our lives and we have known the lack of it as well. While we might aspire to balance, we continue to seek excess and accept only the little that we feel we're entitled to have. There is a feeling that comes over addicts when we are near or in dangerous places. Looking over a cliff's edge, driving our car too fast, being sexually intimate with strangers, spending beyond our means can trigger adrenaline. They create disorder for us to hide behind and therefore lengthen and intensify our pain. Some addicts in recovery may continue to habitually steal from retail stores and get a sick thrill out of it. In recovery, we must deal with these kinds of habits as soon as possible otherwise the reality they tend to create may knock us into a relapse!

Soon, we realize that the members in the meetings are addicts just like us. We see that everyone in the rooms is a potential lifesaver to us and we began to glimpse the miracle of NA. Attending our first meetings led us to our first friends in recovery. Among these, we will find those with whom we can make the common journey of recovery. As recovery spreads into every area of our lives, we find that we are able to think, feel and intuitively know again while literally coming to life. Recovery

is much more than getting yourself out of the pain and suffering. There is a whole recovery culture consisting of people who are devoted to getting and staying clean. The 'rules' are different among members of this sub-culture from the general culture in which we live. We are resources, even to those who do not like us. We learn that it is okay not to like everyone yet we must love everyone. While we know that almost all mean well, there will be those that we may find difficult to love. Time will teach us their pain so that we can develop the mutual respect necessary to make a living Fellowship. Sometimes it feels like we all have to do more than our fair share. Someone once said if you want a lot out of life, you have to give more than you want to receive. You may never get all you give - but if you give all you can, you just might get what you want.

Having contact with old friends, listening to certain using-associated music, doing almost anything that causes us to remember what it felt like to be loaded and forget the results of our using is dangerous to us. These things can tie us into the mind-set of active addiction and could lead us back to using. This does not mean we have to live in fear or that we can't change the situation. It usually means that we should get out of the situation and into contact with recovering addicts immediately. Once we are safely past the feelings and moods that were enveloping us, we can discuss, feel, ask and develop a way to prevent the situation that threatened relapse from happening again. There is only one rule that applies to all of us: don't use. The rest is so diverse and personal it takes a whole program to help us. They say it takes a whole village to raise a child. If you are an addict seeking recovery, we are your village. We can try going to a concert with clean friends, praying to your Higher Power to keep you clean through the experience. Try remembering your youth when you hear an old song, instead of a prelude to using. New thinking can lead to new reactions. Spending time with other addicts who have

been clean some time and can say, "I used to have that problem, here's what I did about it." allows us to learn from others. Common sense should be used to stay away from known weaknesses. All we need to say here is that in recovery, we can learn how to move in the world without fear or remorse. Until we have found a specific solution to a problem, we just do the things that work in the other parts of our program.

An addict shared: "The most important thing that I have ever done in my life was to get out of my own head, long enough to identify as an addict. My mind kept telling me a million things to disqualify myself but something deep down told me things were not going to change for me the way I was going.

"In NA, there were people who seemed to be truly happy, coping with life, and not using anything. The scary part of that initial admission was that I would have to do something about it. The thought of staying clean and changing my life-style entirely was very scary to me. From my experience, the only way for me to stay clean and change was to stay with meetings, meetings and more meetings. I started to identify with people and concentrate on similarities, not differences although my head kept telling me different. I learned to realize how dangerous my thoughts and emotions were to me. I was just waiting to self-destruct. I began to understand my disease and came to realize the first Step to destruction was not attending meetings and not participating. Despite my thoughts and feelings, I began to share and become part of our Fellowship.

"Until NA, I always acted out on my thoughts and feelings but I learned how not to react. I learned to share with people I trusted and to take some direction. I learned more and more about NA and

things started changing for the better. I began standing up for something that was positive and real; something that I could be proud of. NA has been a lifesaver and has taught me to live for today and not to ignore the future.

"I don't live in that constant state of 'I wish I had done this' or 'I wish I hadn't done that'. I still make mistakes but I know there is a solution for every problem. I guess the most important thing for me is to have an attitude of being grateful for what I have (what's been given to me) and not get caught up in what I don't have. And to remember no matter what, I have a loving and caring God."

Principles of spirituality are principles that have the power to change the way we live - change for the better. There is a common principle that underlies each of the 12 Steps and each of the 12 Traditions. These Principles are in evidence when it works. Most of us have said, "I just didn't want to go back - and I found many longings to go forward." All of us have experienced, at some time, a burst of energy beyond what we thought or believed to be our limitations. Perhaps this happened when someone we cared about was in an accident or about to get hurt. We would risk ourselves to help them. Or we just got caught-up in some sports event and ran the ball further and quicker than we dreamed was possible for us. We may have been alone or in a competitive situation with others when it occurred. We may have been trying to win a competition or enjoying an activity with a friend when we felt it. By thinking of one or more of these times, we can start to flex mental muscles that we never even knew were there. We learn to develop our own inspiration. We want to be able to go beyond old boundaries. Being clean is the stuff of miracles and we can go far beyond our old limitations with a conscious contact. Our friends encourage us and our friends are there to catch us should we should fall. If we just get up and

go to work, we may have an average day. If we get up, do our prayer and meditation, read even briefly and think of someone we are trying to help in life or in recovery, our energy level goes way up beyond our normal. Our performance level goes up with our energy level.

Our writing is our effort to help others discover recovery and to go further down our own paths than we could with fewer recovery tools. This is what we call spiritual. Although desire powers our recovery, the notes, written message, personal sharing and words of encouragement help us overcome our fears and act. Many more do these things without feeling the need to write them. None is better than another. We all have our place in the parade. We share our successful experiences as demonstrated in the lives of our many members and illustrated in our many meetings. One of our common bonds lies in the acceptance of the fact that to us alcohol is just another drug. It takes a lot of love to overcome the disease of addiction. The backbone of NA is in the belief that there is one disease with many symptoms called addiction. There are a host of disorders and human problems that end in '-ism'. Many of these 'ism's' are just addiction in different forms. Sexual addiction, gambling, over-achieving, a host of fears and phobias are all just addiction in one form or another. When we stop using, almost all of us experience our addictive personality breaking out in another area involving obsession and compulsion. A disease carries no moral evaluation or judgment. Our morals improve as we learn to accept, treat and live with our disease. In other words, our health is restored. An old definition and usage of the word 'addiction' is close to the definition of incarceration: i.e., a judge might 'addict' someone to jail. Anonymity frees us from the restrictive labels of active addiction and we proudly claim our right to freedom. As long as we are clean, there is hope for complete freedom.

Step One

"We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable."

The NA recovery process is defeated in its entirety and has the potential to lead to relapse without an absolute understanding of the First Step. While this may not apply to everyone who may come to us for help, it definitely applies to all addicts seeking recovery in NA. Many people have problems other than the disease of addiction and what little help we may have to offer them comes from the fact that we have learned to care for humanity and have learned something about living life on life's terms. We have also learned however, that in N.A. our focus must remain on recovery from the disease of addiction and to stay away from all other matters. Simple distraction has interrupted the recovery process before it is barely started. Like all matters of the heart, the desire for recovery can be a delicate thing. Hope is the last thing that addiction takes from us and hope is the first thing we give a newcomer.

The First Step gives us a way out of the self-centeredness of our disease. No longer must we obsessively defend our errors or compulsively try to handle problems that are beyond our control. There is no question that we were deliberately destructive to ourselves as our addiction progressed. Our disability stems from our inability to recall our own experience accurately or to benefit from the experience of others. This is not because we like the way that we had become but because the disease had rendered us disabled. This form of self-deception limits our ability to be accurate in our perception of reality. Some of us have refrained from making major decisions altogether when we first got clean in order to give ourselves time to recuperate. This can free us at times from many of the pressures that sometimes add to our initial confusion about

recovery. We must take care however, not to continue this practice beyond its intended purpose. From the beginning, we start catching up with what we've been missing due to our disability.

Until we learn to identify with other addicts in recovery, sometimes all we can do is listen to the First Step. We can't surrender until we understand this Step and we cannot understand it until we cross the line into identification with other addicts. We learn to take the suggestions given to us by members with more recovery experience. We begin to read, study, and to ask questions. We share with others in order to rid ourselves of untold reservations. We do everything we can to acquire the knowledge of the reality that we have a disease and that alone, we are doomed. Once we are able to do this, we hear the First Step differently. No longer do we hear others only admit their helplessness and their inability to live happily. We begin to hear, see and feel the 'We' of NA. We can honestly say, "We admitted we were powerless over our addiction and our lives had become unmanageable." We feel like one among the many because this is NA. We don't have to do this Step alone.

Most of our members have experienced a curious fact in active addiction. Many times when we felt our strongest, we seem to have created some of our worst problems. Many of these problems have almost killed us or at the very least, ruined our lives. We were under the illusion that we were powerful, when we actually lacked the ability to do no more than force our own will upon certain situations. At other times, we felt weak and full of uncertainty. During these times when we had lost enough, we were able to admit our need for help on some level and began to regain our lost energy. Finally, putting these two realizations together, we came to the admission of the First Step: "We admitted we were powerless over our addiction and our lives had become unmanageable." Then we were able to begin the recovery process that

goes on forever, unless we interrupt it by becoming 'powerful' and limiting our ability to receive help.

Most of us have said, "Tell me how it's done. Show me what to do. I believe you can do it but I'm afraid to even try." We have discovered, in NA, people very much like ourselves who are doing much better than we ever thought possible for ourselves. We wondered how; if we see ourselves in them, could they do so well? We saw them take on tasks that seemed impossible to us and we could barely hold back our negative comments. We expect them to fail. Sometimes, we didn't hold back and gave them all the reasons they shouldn't even try. They simply looked at us lovingly and continued with these matters to successful completion. As our recovery grows, we become familiar with the fact that the rules and limitations that applied to us while loaded are out of date. We are no longer trying to function in a dazed condition. We have the stimulation of our meetings and of the Fellowship. New ideas and positive values replace our negative expectations.

On the feeling level, we learn to catch ourselves just before we reach the state of obsession. When we feel our minds click 'off' and we move forward quickly without knowing where we are going, we can do the mental equivalent of 'sitting down'. It is likely that no one will be there to see us and won't even know of our experience unless we tell them. We have learned that almost anything, even very important things, can wait five minutes. Cooling off and giving ourselves time to reconsider doesn't mean that we can't decide to continue with something. It just gives us a slight edge over our tenderness and sensitivity to life on life's terms. Very often, we find that there is no need to go any further. We can say, "I think I'll let God handle this one." Then new ideas, people to call and all sorts of solution-directed things start happening. No one knows if these things would have eventually occurred if we had not prayed but all

of us can recall the times when we didn't pray and remember what followed.

We find ourselves surrounded by constant reminders or "triggers" from the past. Sometimes these reminders take forms that we don't generally recognize. A physical anchor or trigger is fear of something that replays past experiences in the present situation when activated by some form of personal contact. Key words or phrases, tones of voice, touch or any other unique sensory input charged with emotional or automatic associations can activate these anchors. For instance, when someone touches the side of our neck while speaking to us, we generally listen differently. Loud or abrasive tone of voice may cause us not to hear the words spoken. The picture of a scolding parent or other authority figure may come to mind and the feelings of wanting to escape punishment may exclude all other thoughts in our minds.

Much potential for our personal improvement is restricted by these 'anchors'. Learning more about our personal anchors and associations can help us step free of reflexive actions that may no longer have a function in our lives. Intense fear, shame or anger for no good reason are indications that you have anchors embedded below your field of view. Surrendering to our disease must spread throughout our lives. Frequently, when we take away the uselessly expended energy, the so called problem falls apart for lack of cohesiveness. We find that the pressure we have been supplying to correct something totally beyond our control provided the energy to power the problem. Without surrender, our recovery would quickly grow stale because we would find ourselves merely reciting yesterday's lessons. Part of surrender is acknowledging our part in limiting our lives. We screwed-up because it was the only way that we knew to limit or prevent the harm we would otherwise be doing. Like an old phonograph record with a bad scratch, we get stuck

repeating the same line. The damage we do is real. Our perceptions are so confused and our appearances so misleading that we need each other in recovery to work our way out of the maze of active addiction. The old timers just smile and say, "Easy does it." Don't they know that 'easy' is hard for us? Remember that you are not unique because this uneasiness seems to come to most addicts frequently.

All our old habits need examination in recovery. We tend to allow the habitual behavior to form and can go on for years without reconsidering our original sources of information. We may not recall the exact goals and concerns we had in mind when we developed this recovery habit. We fail to question how we might be capable of a better response now that we are older in recovery! This is part of our Eleventh Step. To begin anew in recovery, an addict must periodically go through and reconsider their 'habits'. This is especially true when faced with those habits acquired or developed while we were in active addiction. These 'habits' tend to reproduce the environment in which they originated. For instance, 'red or blue flashing lights' may trigger evasive behavior if we have ever been on the run from the police, even when we have done nothing wrong. The wonder of recovery is that we no longer need to duck our heads and go the other way.

Like many of our other ideas, we find our ideas about success change. We had other values in our using days and most of the time we were just moving forward to our next using spree or getting over our last one. While we were using our, 'success' was simply a matter of staying out of trouble but not out of drugs! Likewise, success in recovery, may simply mean 'just staying abstinent and going to meetings' for many of us in the beginning. Unfortunately, quite a few of us remain at this point for an extremely long period and find ourselves trapped in a state of complacency. Defining clean as 'not using' allows the concept of

'staying clean' to remain our first measure of success. Working on our recovery with the Steps should most definitely be included in any list that we make of our successes. Maintaining our conscious contact with the God of our understanding, however, must become the ultimate measure of our success. This allows us to not only to get clean physically but also to get clean mentally, and spiritually. We learn about the benefits of living by the spiritual principles gained because of this conscious contact. We begin to practice honesty, service to others, and learn the meaning of unconditional love, even for those unable to love themselves. Other meaningful goals in life, such as the accomplishments of getting an academic degree, the ideal job or completing a course of study, may also become measures of our success but should never be mistaken for success in and of itself. Material gain is another area some have mistaken as being successful. While these things may come because of successful recovery, successful recovery cannot be gauged by material or intellectual gain. Successful recovery is a spiritual state, free from obsession and compulsion, with a feeling of peace, that all is well with the world.

Feeling a sense of loss over being unable to live up to some commitment or goal may give us new ideas about failure. Curiosity about what our real boundaries are may replace those 'all or nothing' feelings that are so typical of addicts in active addiction. When we grant ourselves the right to fail when we first take on a goal that may seem be too much for us, we free ourselves of the fear of failure. Clean, we have to learn how to appreciate the courage we show simply by attempting to go beyond any of our old restrictions. Unrealistic expectations are too often just another form of un-manageability for us.

Reacting to the emotions and perceptions of others and how they think we are doing, may seem to be a problem. This perception, at times

however, allows us to think things over or to consult others before we take any responsive action. The insight and ability to question our old values is part of our conscious contact with a Higher Power. What was once a cloudy pool of raw emotions and prejudice settles down at some point into a clear stream of awareness for most of us. No longer must we be at the mercy of our old false impressions and undefined perceptions. We have found this to be the keynote of our practical approach to spirituality.

Ego is what blocks us and keeps us from getting the things we want. Whether in the spiritual world or the world of things, we are all bound by spiritual realities that can be learned but must be followed. If we cannot or do not follow these spiritual principles, our dreams and aspirations fail to materialize and we are frustrated. Once we could claim we didn't know better - but it is our own fingerprints on the lock of our chains. We alone hold the key to freedom. By looking to our higher power and surrendering our incessant need to control, we see the way open to us. There are others to talk to and some may comfort, encourage or even explain things to us but it is our surrender - ours alone - that makes the lock fall away, loosening our chains until they are only a memory.

As long as we identify with our problems and fail to see that they are part of the disease, we will lack a healthy perspective. We acknowledge that we are overly sensitive to what is happening around us. Addicts seem to suffer from an inability to leave well enough alone. If you add our desire to know, understand, control and take stands on things, even if we often fail to get our facts straight, then our curious dance with life becomes clear. Our need to control limits our freedom. We somehow forget the confusion that we felt when first we began using drugs in earnest. A noticeable loss of memory, disorientation and an inability to

perform certain tasks is a common occurrence at the beginning of recovery, even if we excelled at them in the past. The lifting of the drug_induced fog is the beginning of our re-introduction to life.

Our sight, hearing and ability to feel are still under the influence of our disease when we first get clean. We hear the slogans: "God is good all the time," "Get God and get going!," "Take it Easy", "Don't leave five minutes before the miracle happens!" and "Keep coming back!," "One is too many, a thousand never enough." These and other sayings help us get out of the self-centered role and allow us to learn ways to re-adjust to life on life's terms.

The recovery environment supports life. It provides for our needs as addicts. Trouble has to do with intruding on the freedoms and rights of others. Most of all we harmed ourselves. Our disease limits our ability to see the connection between our actions and the result of those actions. Recovery is the realignment of our inner reality with our outward environment. Useless struggles fall away and life resumes its movement toward an interesting and productive future. Finally, we can accept happiness because it no longer feels like an illusion. If we are indeed addicts, we can benefit immediately from what has been learned about recovery and living clean in NA.

The disease of addiction has had a long time to evolve and we are among the first generation of recovering addicts in history. At first, it all seems very natural to us and our initial experience is mostly positive. We accept the idea that the people in the meetings really are addicts who have found a new way to live. Next, we may begin to experience doubt and feel that it is all too good to be true. We find ourselves trapped by our fear of change and look for ways to manage without it. Amazingly, at times we forget that the disease generates an attitude of fault finding,

hurt feelings, and tells us that we've grown as much as we can in NA. Each of us has gone through this cycle repeatedly in recovery. We remember where we came from and get on with the process of surrender and growth only to eventually resume some of our old habits. If our desire to stay clean is sincere, we will discover what we are doing in time to avoid relapse. If we lose our desire, even for a short time, we may relapse. Then all we can hope for is to find our way back again to a path of recovery.

Our choice of words and definitions may directly effect our conscious actions. One of the benefits of surrender is that we can suspend having to act on those impulses rooted in active addiction. Going to meetings and spending time with other addicts in recovery allows us to debrief ourselves from active addiction. We can redefine some of our old ideas to fit the reality of the clean life before us. In recovery, we seek a restoration to sanity. In the early days of recovery, we learn a definition of sanity as 'my way didn't work so I've got to try someone else's way'. As time goes by, even more trust is required. We learn that working the program requires total acceptance of others. At some point in time, it has to go even beyond that. We re-define insanity as 'anything that limits us spiritually'. If we're holding onto past bitterness, we have to come to a better definition and application of amends. We must separate the amends that we owe to ourselves from the amends that we owe others. We must be able to come to some sort of inner peace about the past and get on down the road again with Step Two.

This change allows us to get new outcomes by discovering new ways to do things. In the words of one member,

"Today we are grateful for this Step. It means hope, commitment, honesty, and release. The major thing about this Step is its focus

from that of any other 12 step program: it addresses the disease of addiction rather than a substance. Until we understand that, we will never have a grasp on this important focus and will never have a commitment to NA. Spiritual principles are universal. NA is the only program we know of that allows us this type of universal freedom of understanding.

"If you have problems or doubts, just call your sponsor or ask another member for help. Try not to get discouraged or believe you're not doing enough. Don't limit your questions to any individual. Talk to everyone, listen carefully to everything. Know that your understanding of this Step and this Program will be yours and yours alone. It must be for it to work. Make it yours like an old favorite pair of jeans or a warm comforter.

"Please trust however, that we wouldn't ask you to surrender in Step One if it were an awful experience. Every Step has wonderful new insights for us and we want you to have the same experience. If you begin to feel angry, depressed, or rebellious, you should talk to someone you trust, your sponsor if you have one already, or go to a meeting. Thank you for being part of our recovery. We love you, unconditionally."

It is OK to pray, even if you are uncertain or doubtful about your belief. Many of us tried praying even though we didn't believe it would work - and it worked.

Many of us looked up words in a dictionary to gain personal understanding. Words like powerless, unmanageable, we, and so on. It was our way of thinking that got us into trouble; we have to change our way of thinking. Sometimes we don't really understand our own thinking

because we don't really understand some of the words we use. Many of us can use a simple dictionary to better understand our thinking, one word at a time. Remember to keep it simple, we want to be sure our thinking is clear.

We wrote about what was going on in our lives, and problems we still faced. We have found that writing about what is going on has helped us reveal our powerlessness and unmanageability. We think back to things we have done to hurt ourselves, considering everything, not just the drugs. If we are still doing any of these things today, we will ask ourselves why? It may be that some of the things that bother us will just die a natural death as we replace them with other ways of doing things, looking at the people in our life and the massive change in our outlook and attitude when we switch over from a fear-based life to a life based on faith in a Loving God to take care of us. Come to believe again! Should we not keep the God aspect out of the first step. This might be the only book of NA a newcomer sees and we should keep it in non-God specific order like we did with the Basic Text. God came in the Second Step and then heavy in the Third.

We may need to ask ourselves, what are "reservations"? If we hold back isn't that a little like jumping out of a fire but leaving out foot in the flames? Surrender may have one definition in the dictionary, but it means different things at different times to different people. We keep asking ourselves, what does it mean to me at this point in my recovery? While members are quick to agree that "social acceptability does not equal recovery", many of us find that our priorities put making money and acquiring 'stuff' at the top of the list. It is easy to do. But for the sake of recovery, we may reach a place where we realize that by getting caught up in things, we let our meetings go and have little time to work our program. We need to embrace the fact that many good things we

enjoy come to us from our surrender, getting real about our need for help and doing things that work for other addicts. If we stop doing these things, we cannot expect to continue in recovery. Recovery may just be getting on with life by getting in touch with our humanity, our higher power and our need to feel satisfied with life. At the end of this Step, many of us feel an emptiness. We fill this emptiness with Step Two!

Writing about what 'control' and 'management' mean to us helps many of us to stay on the clean side of the fence. We know that 'inner peace' can't come from other people but we learn that it can come through them. We each act as instruments of God by showing concern for others. This is how we begin to feel long lost ties being re-established. We feel the need to seek new possibilities as we admit our powerlessness. Running away, we only carry our problems with us. True escape requires active change.

Step One Guides

This change allows us to get new outcomes by discovering new ways to do things. In the words of one member, "Today we are grateful for Step One - it means hope, commitment, honesty, release. This list of 26 thoughts, questions and suggestions may help you focus your writing about this step. The major thing about this Step is its difference from those of any other 12 step program. Until we understand that, we will never have a grasp on it and will never have a commitment to NA. Spiritual principles are universal. NA is the only program we know of that allows us this type of universal freedom of understanding.

If you have problems or doubts - just call your sponsor and ask another member for help. Try not to get discouraged or believe you're not doing enough. Don't limit your questions to any individual. Talk to everyone,

listen carefully to everything. Know that your understanding of this Step and this Program will be yours. It must be yours for it to work. Make it yours - like an old favorite pair of jeans or a warm comforter. "Though we have written out these suggestions for you to write, realize that the option to share any or all of your writing rests with you. We believe trust grows from Step Two and that it's not until Step Five that we're asked to spill all. These pages are our way of giving you feedback.

Please trust however, that we wouldn't ask you to write about these things if it were an awful experience. Every Step has meant wonderful new insights for us and we want you to have the same experience. If you begin to feel angry, depressed, or rebellious, you should pray, go to a meeting, write out a gratitude list, talk to someone you trust, or write it all out and burn it in effigy. If we haven't said it - thank you for being part of our recovery. We love you, unconditionally.

1. Pray for the awareness to understand this Step and to see how it applies to your life. 2. Look up in a dictionary and define in your own words what each of the words in the Step means. (Including: we, our, that, etc.) 3. Write about what's going on in your life, and problems you are facing today.

a) Write about the three components of the disease of addiction: Physical - compulsion; Mental - obsession; and Spiritual - self-centeredness. b) Write about your fear, doubt, loneliness, isolation, confusion and the sense of being lost. How did you and do you feel different? c) Define "drug" and explain why this Step doesn't read: "We were ..."

2. What things have you done in the past to hurt yourself? (List everything. NOT just the drugs.). Do you still do any of these things?

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List them. Why do you continue to do these things? Have you ever tried to stop doing these things? What happened? How have these things made your life unmanageable?

a) Do you want to stop doing these things now? b) What are you willing to do differently this time?

3. Can you do any of these things even once? (Explain)

a) Is there any situation you can think of when doing any of these things would be appropriate or acceptable?

b) Name them and write about "conditions" that might make them "OK."

4. What are "reservations"? (Define)

a) Do you feel like you have any? (HINT: We all have some type of reservations at some level)

b) What are they? (HINT: Check your answers in question 9, a, b.)

5. What is surrender? Is it an event? (Define) We are not responsible for our disease, but we are responsible for our recovery. Write about what this means to you.

a) Define "Responsibility." b) What is your responsibility in this Step?

6. In "How it Works," it's written that "We believe that the sooner

we face our problems within our society, in everyday living, just that much faster do we become acceptable, responsible, and productive members of that society..." What does this quote mean and how does it apply to this step? Note the word "that" in relationship to "society" and explain why it's in this quote. (HINT: pay close attention to "our" as related to "problems" and "society".)

- a) What is recovery? (HINT_Basic Text _Chapter 5, "What Can I Do?" read the second paragraph after italics)
- b) "Social acceptability does not equal recovery." What does this mean?
- c) What do you think being Socially Acceptable means?

7. Write about "control" and "management" in relation to your life.

- a) Can you control a substance or behavior?
- b) Can you control other people?

8. What is willpower? Does it work with our disease? 16. What does "life on life's terms" mean to you?

- a) Describe "Life."
- b) In what ways do you feel that "your life" is limited or unlimited?

9. What did you tell yourself to justify your using? How do you eliminate those justifications? (Beware of scolding yourself!) 18. "We have found we had no choice except to completely change our old ways of thinking or go back to using." What does this mean?

- a) What is change? (Define)
- b) How do we change in NA?

10. What is "acceptance"? (Define)

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a) What have you had to "accept" about life? b) What have you accepted about the disease of addiction?

11. What is "willingness"? (Define)

a) Write about what you were "willing" to do in order to use?
b) Are you willing to go to those lengths for your recovery?

12. Step One means that we do not have to use, and this is a great freedom." What does this mean? Define "use" and "freedom". (Tradition Three and the last page of "Why are we here?" will help.)

13. It is not where we have been that counts, but where we are going. Make a list of your goals and how this Step relates to those goals?

14. We do not just say the words of this Step, we learn to live them. How will you know when you're "living" the Steps?

15. What is "hope"? How have you found "meaning and purpose in life"?

16. In a dictionary, look up the meaning and define (in your own words) each word in the Serenity Prayer.

17. Call your Sponsor!

Step Two

"We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

The inability to recognize the millions of blessings in our lives is characteristic of our addiction. We can stare at one area that does not measure up to 'our standards,' but the reverse is also true. We can become so enthralled with counting 'our lucky stars' that we may ignore the cliff's edge that is right beneath our feet. We addicts seem to view life through one of three types of spectacles. Rose-colored glasses distort our vision toward the positive that can be harmful unless we remain vigilant. Dark-colored glasses tint our world and cause it to appear dismal. Our disease bombards us with other negative senses that insure our misery. When we wear clear lenses, we can look at reality and see what it is without our diseased perceptions causing us additional discomfort. Clear glasses allow us to see and seek balance. They allow us to see both good and bad and we learn to respond accordingly. 'Seeing things as they are' is truly a gift. We learn that we can choose our footing without that paralyzing fear of disaster with which we are so familiar. We find that living either the gaily colored or dull, plodding existence is not how life actually is. The way out is in. There is something like a doorway in each one of us and our job is to find the key - this is what our 'higher power' means to us.

'Repeating old patterns while expecting different results' is a hallmark of the disease of addiction. Until we consciously change our old behaviors in the attempt to obtain new results, the insanity of our disease will remain in control. It is by 'trusting the process' of recovery enough to simply try something different that we come to trust that overall change is possible. We do something different and we get a different

result. The power of this process of our recovery experience is that we are finally moving in a forward direction. Learning what 'real' life has to offer us allows us to move towards sanity.

Our disease would have us obsess over everything, one way or the other. The process of 'coming to believe' gives us the ability to see for ourselves what is real. Our logical minds can only take us so far on this spiritual journey. Our personal insight, which we call our intelligence, requires adjusting so that it will match our outward experience. When the working order of the integrity of the pair are not in alignment, we suffer for it. Therefore, it becomes important to do daily maintenance in this area of recovery. Belief is the result of trusted experiences.

Faith is trusting without the benefit of experience. Belief can include the results of experience alone or a combination of faith that is tied to experience. Historically speaking, people who were subjects of a king used the phrase 'By your leave' to indicate their submission to a person of importance. Sometimes we might use a phrase like, 'If you don't mind' or, 'If it's okay with you,' but the fact that we submit to others is still part of life. We each have many people and things that we submit to. Since we regularly submit to those people and things in which we believe, we want to examine and re-examine our belief, now and throughout the process of recovery.

This is one area where 'choice' as referred to in recovery becomes clearly visible. We realize early in the recovery process that we can choose not to submit rather than continuing to submit to things that make us feel negative about ourselves. We learn to define sanity for ourselves. Utilizing this choice takes some practice. Many of us never thought of our submission as something we could change. Indeed, it never occurred to us to even try to resist. Submission seemed unavoidable.

‘Believing something’ is an act of surrendering to a proposition or attitude expressed as a statement. Belief determines how we feel on the inside and how we act on the outside. We expand our viewpoints by finding out more about how others feel and react to life. We compare notes with others about how we live. Isolation kept us apart and prevented us from doing this.

Clean, we become students in a school called ‘life.’ We don’t have to do it alone. We compare notes (share experiences) and we can use our books to pass our examinations (survive situations) without using. Coming to believe allows us to shift away from certain people or things that we used to habitually submit to, give in to, or allow to dominate our lives. We continue to ask ourselves, "Is this the best result we can get?" Taking a good look at who we are, where we are, and what we do on a daily basis may help us awaken to reality. As we begin to focus more on today, we begin to forget to consciously worry about yesterday and tomorrow. Usually, the parts that you don’t like are not sane. We would not choose to do them today. We can find ourselves involved in losing relationships with life whenever we fail to be satisfied with what we receive in return for what we give.

The ‘sanity’ that we seek in recovery must satisfy our real needs on a daily basis. The confusion that we feel is simply a natural part of personality change. When we feel disorientated or emotionally upset for no apparent reason, it is only an indicator that we have succeeded in altering our relationship to life in some way. Other members, sponsors and our Higher Power can help us adjust to these changes even if we haven’t worked all the Steps yet or haven’t progressed very far in recovery. One of the things we discover about recovery is that we have people in our lives today who are able to be here for us as we are for them. An exception to these general truths may occur when we slip into

our old ways and try to get over on our program or other members. We must remain vigilant and not barter our 'being clean' for better treatment. We don't have a right to be offended when people don't treat us with extra consideration in light of our 'condition'. We may demonstrate this type of consideration for one another at times and that is fine. The key is that we do so by choice expecting no reward because we only want to help, be considerate, or be useful. What we do willingly by choice is different from doing the same thing under the influence of compulsion, social or otherwise. Membership, being 'a part of,' requires the mutual respect of one member for another.

Some say, "Religion is for people who are afraid of hell. Spirituality is for people who have been there." Most of us define faith as the gift we receive for the price of acceptance. If we have trouble with the Second Step, we may need to take a closer look at what we consider important or valuable. If we feel like we're 'doing without' some of these things or we get poor results in general, we may want to change. Finding and using some extra power to improve our results is what the Steps are all about. Belief grows as we come to recognize the things that we most value, as well as those that we despise. Belief helps us obtain what we hope for in the future. Powerlessness and desperation drives us to set values to escape pain and avoid negative issues. We begin to value love, caring and doing God's Will but may continue getting negative results because we remain focused on our old values. Changing our value systems and developing new ones in accordance with the positive changes that God offers, helps us 'come to believe'.

One way that many use to get in touch with our hidden, inner self is to try to verbalize or write about what we would like to see in the future. It helps us acquire a belief system that will lead to the ends that we would hope for ourselves. It changes our entire perspective just to realize that

clean, we have potentially, an unlimited potential future. Many find it extremely helpful to keep a journal or a clear set of memories of whatever visions we have had for ourselves in recovery. It helps us to recall what we wanted when we first got clean, and we may be delighted later on to find that many of our dreams have come true. As we grow in recovery, other visions come to us. When we share these visions with one another, we strengthen our spirit and accelerate our growth. Sometimes our visions will help others even when they don't seem to apply to us.

We expand our perceptions of the world by acquiring the benefit of what others have learned through personal experience. We broaden our freedom to be an effective part of the world around us by adding to what we know by training, study and application. A part of internal change is being able to enjoy the effects of these changes as they reflect themselves in all parts of our daily lives. It helps when we can surrender again, this time to our 'lack of a belief' in God or a Higher Power that is strong enough to give us what we need. These ideas may be incomplete, unconsidered or out of date. Most of us are at least mildly surprised to learn that we can change in this way. The wreckage of our past is much more than the obvious scars, severe legal, medical, or social problems. One of the biggest difficulties with our thought processes is that our information is faulty. This reflects a computer age saying "Garbage in, garbage out." Running scared has prevented many of us from feeling that we were free to carefully review these basics of thinking. We became accustomed to thinking certain ways and expecting outcomes that may have no basis in reality.

This projection, based on our old thought processes, builds up from those experiences we had when we were loaded or simply because we look at life from an addict's viewpoint. Healthy relationships are a major

structure on the pathway of life. These structures allow us to have relationships with people, places, and things that are stable and lasting. As we change, we may feel overwhelmed and discontent by the way these relationships change. Remember that our evaluation of uncomfortable may not be an accurate indicator that something is 'wrong'. We must continue to bounce our stuff off of other recovering addicts to make these evaluations. There is no way for us to get the 'personality change' that we need without a shift in these structures. Discomfort usually occurs during the interval between our perception of the change and our adaptation to it. Belief is the word we use to describe the structures that are 'real' to us. These structures change as our beliefs change. A reverent and sensitive attitude helps us identify the new viewpoints and insights that our insufficient beliefs obscured.

Sometimes creation is merely discovering what we felt to be true all along but unable to act on in any real sense. Addicts seem to be sensitive to truth no matter how often we abuse and deny it. Spiritual growth lets us see that we are creatures of our own creation and shows us how this affects others and ourselves. Spiritual maintenance is holding us in line with our new beliefs, allowing them to firm up and work themselves into our new way of life.

Those things that didn't work for us have to be given time to go away but simply sitting idle and waiting for this to happen may not work. It is much easier to go looking for a belief that may have interested us for some time. We can try to find something that we can feel good about and try to learn more about it. Many of us will find that the belief of our childhood suddenly works for us. We realize the confusion brought on by our using may have prevented us from giving our belief an honest try. We find that our new belief is not only worth going after but that it is far easier since we will begin to get the results we want. The need for a

working belief that we understand and feel good about becomes more important than the fears that hold us back. Once we find what works for us, it will tend to last and we won't have to go back and redo this Step in every situation. Our obsessions were merely efforts to get what we felt we needed regardless of the cost. Major problems occurred once our need had become too great for us to meet. Unfortunately, our obsessions were more about supplying a feeling than with actually meeting needs. This is where much of our insanity becomes visible. Every time we loosen an old fear, our freedom and responsibility increase. As we let go of old fears that no longer apply to us, we find our faith growing. This state of faith gives us more energy and allows us to take maximum advantage of available resources. We are clear-headed and emotionally relaxed.

The acronym F.E.A.R., False Evidence Appearing Real or Fuck Everything And Run, was a real important lesson for many of us. We may have heard it at a convention or at a meeting. Fear prevents us from acting in a manner that we feel goes against our best interest or that we feel will cause pain. When we are in our right minds, fear simply helps us establish boundaries that we can live with ourselves without discomfort or feelings of being in jeopardy. As addicts, much of what we knew was only figments of a deranged mind. In many other cases, what we think we know is actually incorrect, yet this fact apparently makes little difference. Many things are in the middle between these extremes and make a difference some of the time. Sorting all this out is quite tedious and troublesome; therefore, it requires daily attention. Freedom in recovery is what we gain when we compare our new way of living against what our addiction took from us. The longer we are clean the more these things will matter to us and this is the reason we keep working the Program no matter how long we have been clean. While using, we lived in constant fear of discovery and may feel the same way

in the beginning of recovery. What was our real secret? Could it be that we each built our own cages of fear? The principle with which we want to replace fear is faith. We begin to work the Steps and this process teaches us how to go through the pain without using. When we see the insanity of the old, all too familiar and paralyzing fear, we develop a healthy F.E.A.R., Face Everything And Recover.

As we grow into this new way of life, we test our feelings and share what is going on in our minds with our sponsor, home group members and other members with whom we have become close in NA. When we drift away from good sense and the general recovery path, we will hear about it from our friends. We must practice something before we can get results. Repetition allows us to gain faith in ourselves and our beliefs through getting what we feel to be positive results repeatedly. If we are having trouble in this process, we may be able to locate the parts of our belief system that are not working for us. Once we have found our belief and gotten adjusted to it, we settle into it in a reasonable time. Confirmation of our belief is another way that we express our adoption of a belief or a system of beliefs.

Energy is what it takes to live and experience life to any degree. One of the problems that we encounter from a lack of a positive belief is that we can be very active with little or no noticeable achievement. Time and energy seem to mysteriously disappear as our needs become greater. When we start learning how to live, we have less wasted motion and we begin to gain the ability to work towards several goals simultaneously. Accessing parts of our minds that had become dormant in our active addiction, we find ourselves able to do things easily that had seemed impossible before. Belief in a loving, spiritual power is not something that only relates to one part of our life. It is a wrap-around, through and through kind of experience. In truth, most who have experienced this

kind of spiritual breakthrough agree that it goes beyond what words can express. We feel somewhat restricted in sharing in this area, because we can only make comparisons. We try to share what it has been like for us, but we know that each one of us has come to a place where we have to find what works for us personally. Change is noticeable almost immediately when we gain a working belief. Release from our insanity guarantees results in the areas that are important to us. We make goals of what we care about and can achieve while learning to identify and let go of obsessions that we thought were goals. If we don't believe that there is a power that will help us, we are imprisoned in the classic trap of addiction.

There is a saying that goes, "If you argue for your limitations, they are yours forever." Our potential and capacity to respond will expand only if we want them to and give ourselves permission to do so. We will always be capable of messing up things by not trying. The concept of a Higher Power involves having faith in something that will take us beyond what we can do on our own. Recovery restores to us many of the things that our disease took away.

We work the Steps in order to recondition ourselves so that we will be able to enjoy some of these benefits. Otherwise, we begin to feel the inadequacy that comes with the restoration of responsibilities and duties that we cannot easily accomplish. The further our addiction has progressed, the less we recall that sanity is the 'natural' state for most people. It doesn't mean greater, superior, better, or less than others. It is our healthy state of being alive and free.

Sanity is also acting in a reasonable manner. When we first notice that our feelings are out of line with reality, we begin to change. The First Step is a catalyst that instigates an initial instability. The shift towards

change pushes us to sort out the rest. In this Step, we get to the level of beliefs. We realize that the beliefs we operated under were faulty as well as life threatening. These beliefs were insidious and spread throughout our personality. We have no choice but to reach out for help to overcome the structure of our self-created, self-destructive, and self-centered old beliefs. We finally realized that we couldn't keep doing the things that we chose to do and call it sane. We felt that we became one with the things that used to seem so separate to us. Our experiences and perceptions of reality change. We feel ourselves more as part of what is happening and no longer need absolute control over everything.

Just as in learning to surf, we quickly learn that we and the wave can come crashing down together. The energy is still there; we have just learned how to stay on top of it more often. Exploring our options allows us to choose the one that will work for us rather than feeling lost in a maze of pathways. By living a spiritual life we maintain our unity within, we take less power away from our spiritual growth and have more energy to improve.

Step Two is about belief. We come to believe in a loving, caring power, greater than ourselves that can restore us to sanity. We never believed that we could live free from our obsession and compulsion to control people and situations around us, because we feared that if we just went with the flow, we would miss out on something we needed. The pain of the unknown had been too much for us to manage. Realizing that we, in and of ourselves, are not the source of our pain, we are open to letting life go on around us. The knowledge of our powerlessness, trust that we can change, and walking through the pain can help us with this realization. When we stop denying our addiction and gain a belief that a power, greater than ourselves, can help us, we begin to relax. Our ability to believe in a Higher Power that can restore us to sanity makes us feel

at one with the forces of that power and the process of spiritual growth.

We also need to allow others to develop their own beliefs so that when the going gets tough, they can survive on the faith achieved by their own development system to survive in ongoing recovery. For the first time, we have a vision of a sane life through the example of others who are just like us and who have benefitted from taking the leap of faith. We learn that our reality is made up of what we believe, and that when we change our beliefs, we ourselves will change. We grow to love ourselves enough to believe that good things are possible for us and perhaps more importantly that we deserve them. We owe it to ourselves to do the footwork that will lead us to the life that we have always wanted for ourselves but were unable to believe was possible for us.

Step Three

"We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of the God as we understood him."

Our first experiences with any kind of power greater than ourselves may have been in a meeting. We may recall where we were when we suddenly felt that what had happened before in our lives might not apply to us any longer. This might not have been a conscious thought in our minds. We may have only sensed a curiosity and, amazingly, found ourselves able to listen to others in a way that was different for us. Our newly found identities appear to give us strength, when in actuality it only reduces that power that we have been putting into keeping our walls up. As our trust grows and we start to experience God's care, the inner walls of fear crumble.

This spiritual power starts to flow into all areas of our lives. The inward aspect of the Third Step is visible in the way that we can become humble. We begin to relax many of the defensive mechanisms and efforts that we used to control others that left us tired and without the energy to take care of ourselves. After we realize that our way doesn't work, we decide to choose another way. Our addiction had smothered our senses so much that we could not care for ourselves in a healthy way. The decision we make here releases the tension that we hoarded in our futile efforts to maintain control.

As we become more familiar with our Higher Power, we begin to realize the magnitude of the Spirit. We move outward to connect with that energy. We can decide to turn our will and life over to the care of our Higher Power yet we are powerless to make God take it. It is the depth of our sincerity and willingness that enables us to accept this. Our

decision frees us to fix ourselves, not the rest of the world. Our decision establishes a new direction in our lives.

The Third Step requires a surrendered attitude of spiritual growth if we want to keep the good things coming. Our will is a simple way of stating what we want. Our wants direct our lives and if they are not in alignment with what we need, we have a contradiction to overcome. Turning our will over to the God of our understanding removes the burden of contradiction. We find that some of the things we wanted come more quickly when we let go. Other things cease to be interesting to us, and it is even hard to recall what they were. Having dealt with surrender and a new belief we look outward to turn our life and will over to something far more powerful and loving than ourselves. We entrust ourselves to God's care. This is a big change from our attitudes of fear and distrust. We become part of the whole. We are putting action to what we learned in the Second Step. We made a decision to trust God's care of us. We do what is necessary and the outcome simply belongs to God. We are not as powerful as the God of our understanding. We are indeed powerless. In recovery, we grow but not to the point where we can afford to stop praying. We have to maintain, and sometimes renew, our decision to actually let God take care of us. We try to remain open and aware of His guidance through our prayers, meditations and the people in our lives. The decision to trust God's care releases us from the need to try to control what we have no real control over.

This decision opens the way for new possibilities. Many of us find that the real power of this Step comes with total surrender. When done on a daily basis, our prayers can incorporate this principle. Letting go of our role of authority is a gift that makes us wonder why we ever wanted all that control in the first place! It is a struggle to continue to let go on a daily basis. Whether the simple processes of everyday living or the main

courses of developing a career, raising a family, or somehow contributing to the human race, our life is too important to leave to chance. Getting all the help we can, we invite this greater power, which allowed us to admit our addiction, to enter our lives and supply the missing parts. Active addiction eroded or twisted these parts into an unstable state. Making decisions is an action that is a product of recovery. Commitments and their subsequent responsibilities are things that most of us avoided in our addiction. We determine that we deserve the best that life can offer and we believe that the best will come from aligning our will with that of a loving God. Then, we make the choice and turn our spirits toward this task.

We think about and try to imagine the caring that an all-powerful, all-loving God could have for us. It seems that it must be a stepped up version of this 'free caring' that we experience with one another. Nurturing someone who is in poor health and needs to recuperate resembles the active caring that we show the members who have become our friends in recovery. While we may relate well to all members, a few can really arouse our affections. Most of us are willing to go to extraordinary lengths for these members. The freedom to find a God of our individual understanding emphasizes our belief that the Twelve Steps will work for us regardless of our personal orientations. Far from feeling as though others only tolerate our beliefs, we are actively encouraged to find a belief that will work for us. This is stressed time and again because so many addicts assume that they are permanently cut-off from achieving a real relationship with God. Somewhere, sometime, each one of us earned the right to experience the bliss that occurs when we make contact with a loving Higher Power. It is more than part of human potential; it is part of what restoration to good health and well being holds for us. Denying ourselves simple happiness is part of our self-destructiveness.

Open-mindedness allows us to learn about things that may seem either unimportant to us or invalid merely because we don't know about them. As our understanding grows, we can see relationships between things. We may have suspected but never really grasped these relationships in any useful manner before. Getting past our pride and arrogance enough to see the lessons that God brings before us, we are more able to fulfill our potential and many times find the answers that we have sought right in front of us.

It is hard for a human being to envision something that has no beginning or end. Ordinarily, our minds are set up to deal with things that have existence in a measurable sense. Going beyond these boundaries requires quieting the mind and focusing on attainable goals. For the most growth, these goals can be set at least a little beyond our present capabilities. The care of a loving God through this process makes a powerful difference. The worlds that we discover within ourselves by working the Steps have been there all along and part of our minds may have been vaguely aware of it. That may be one explanation of the fact that many of us are so angry. We sense infinity yet we find ourselves preoccupied with our limitations instead of realizing our dreams.

The Steps enable us to sort who we are and what we really want. We learn in Step One that we suffer from a disease that is destructive and forces us to destroy ourselves against our will. In Step Two, we learn that many positive powers are available to us - meetings, sponsors, literature, fellowship, service, etc. With these powers in our lives, we may be in a position to recognize ourselves as distinct from God or the disease. We gain the awareness that we are beings capable of making decisions about to where and how we will focus our time and our energy. With the discovery that we are lovable and really didn't want to self-destruct all along, we are free to choose and walk toward sanity.

This discovery grows when we continue with the Steps. With the acquired knowledge of ourselves and with the confidence contributed by other members, we can continue to make this decision on progressively deeper levels.

How often have we thought that there was something wrong because we expended so much energy with so little results to show for our efforts? Many of us believe that the Steps, in a simplified definition, eliminate the wasted efforts by allowing for the non-injurious removal of parts of our character that no longer work. These parts of ourselves have taken up time and energy for years without producing much that was desirable or useful. Our decision to give ourselves into the care of a loving God opens the doorway to these changes.

Overcoming the limitations of our eyes, ears and mental processes is one way to describe what happens when we decide to let God take care of our lives. We are finally able to tap in directly to a major changing force for good. That force is so loving and gentle with us that most of us only see the changes in retrospect. All the fear of pain that accompanies our personality change seems to be futile in hindsight. It is only human to fall back on our sensory perceptions. Without the preceding two Steps and the close association of others who have been living our way of life for years, it is certain that recovery would be more frightening. It might require more faith and might even be harder. Our progress has been hard won! We have learned to trust the God of our understanding as a practical and proper way to go about seeking and effecting the changes that we need to be happy, prosperous people.

A member shared about his Third Step, "When I did my Third Step, I told my sponsor about all the different books I had read about understanding God's Will for me. I thought that if I was to turn my will

over to the care of God, I must find out what His Will for me was. My sponsor asked me if I was trying to find God. When I said, 'Yes, he told me not to try to find Him because He wasn't lost. 'It's an inside job,' he explained. He told me to go into the bathroom, get down on my knees, and ask God to come to me. It was a decision that we made and I went into the bathroom and asked God to take my will and life into His hands and guide me in my recovery."

Recovery involves the ability to manage a certain degree of personal power. By establishing and maintaining a conscious contact with a Higher Power, we can subjugate our ego. This may prevent many of the abuses and personal excesses that we would indulge in if we felt like we were personally powerful. The mind can be a good servant but it makes a poor master. It will feed us wrong ideas about who we are and what is real. By focusing on our Higher Power rather than our personal preferences, we begin to make this transition. We must remain aware of our relationships with people around us or what our Higher Power wants for us. There seems to be a connection between feeling the illusion of personal power and moving towards relapse. As our luck returns, learning to befriend and utilize the spiritual forces awakening within us is what we define as practical spirituality. As we realize the extent to which God has been helping us all along, our capacity for surrender increases.

There is an old program slogan about emotions being 'ego in motion'. While there may be some truth to this, obviously emotions are part of our response to the things we experience. In many cases, we may not want our emotions to automatically determine our responses, yet we would be unwise not to consider them. Some emotions can be the result of adrenaline, jealousy, fear, guilt, worry, hunger, or other simple phases of the human condition. Others may be complex and spiritual because

they may be deep but hard to describe. We survive our emotions and begin to let them function as part of our personal guidance system. Active addiction made this all but impossible. As we begin to explore our new life, we gain the ability to trust our feelings and emotions because they are a functional part of reality.

Surrendering to an all-loving and caring Higher Power becomes easier. If it continues to be difficult, we may wish to review our belief. The Second Step is not a matter of rehashing or re-labeling our old beliefs. It is finding a new way to believe in God that helps us go beyond what we knew before. The same excitement that we felt when we learned that we could really learn to live clean should be present if we are getting the message of this Step. Often decisions have been a problem for us because our way was blocked by a disabling fear. In the Third Step, only the decision is up to us. The consequences and responsibilities of that decision are in the hands of our Higher Power. We have looked at this Step and asked, "If I turn my will and my life over to the care of a Higher Power, how can I be in control?" The truth is that we won't. We can't have control because we simply never had control in the first place. We only thought we did. We will have ways forward with a positive Higher Power that we never had with our personal limitations. We decide to free ourselves from the pain of control and the misery of being our own prisoner, locked in by our fears and disbelief.

Pain and awareness of the dead end that we have reached helps create our desire for change. This desire, not the pain, is the basis of recovery. As long as we are looking, listening, and trying we will continuously find ways to grow. When we feel that we have no further need for divine love to support and guide us, we have begun to relapse. This is why our interdependent personal contact in N.A. fellowship is so important. It provides people who can catch us before we go too far. These people

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cannot keep us clean but they can help us keep the flame of desire burning.

Step Four

"We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

Embarking on the Fourth Step with a spirit of willingness was the first glimpse that many of us had of the possibility of a personal major change. Our reluctance towards change overcame the strong fear of using again. For the very first time, self-examination became a reasonable possibility. The pain of living in our old patterns was no longer feasible. Just before the Fourth Step, many have found it helpful to stand in front of a mirror and realize that we are looking at our shell. We may have some difficulty in looking ourselves in the eyes. We may have become a non-entity - a person who has lost touch with their inner selves. We felt like we were poised on the edge with our feelings entrapped. We were at a turning point in our recovery: to take the leap of faith and change or return to hell. We may have felt as though our spirit wanted to emerge, but we didn't know how to let it. The Fourth Step provides a release and gives us the potential to change. Taking a fearless moral inventory of a bankrupt spirit is a miracle in progress. For many of us, it was at once a demolition as well as a construction zone. The inspection and removal of the way we used to be was the demolition of the creature I was and the construction is the emergence of the person I am to become.

The courage to go ahead on faith is something that we need to write a Fourth Step. Without courage, we will never pick up the pen. It takes some of us a long time to gather enough courage to even sit down and pray to gain the willingness to do this Step. When we start writing this step, courage means putting aside our fears and writing about what we feel is moral and immoral in our personal character. Some of the things that we have shared in Fourth Steps are things that we would have sworn

we would take to our graves. Through prayer and a lot of guidance, some of us feel a suspension of our inhibitions the majority of the time that we are writing our inventory. Our tendencies toward certain behaviors don't always go away but we learn to find different, less damaging ways to right our wrongs and meet our needs. This means that there will probably be much less confrontation or need to contend. Some say that the good sense to go forward with our recovery at this stage is much more than good sense. Many of us believe that there is a courageous feeling that results from stepping-out on our newly found faith for the first time.

We try to bear in mind that our Fourth Step will help us gain freedom in recovery - not our sponsor, our loved ones or anyone else can do this for us. We must remember the pain and miserable feelings that made us want to write in the first place. If we're not honest at this point, we're only creating future pain! When we have written honestly, we've surrendered for that moment. For many of us, that brings an incredible feeling of peace and healthy self-satisfaction. Feeling the repercussions of dishonesty is very painful and is uncomfortably similar to active addiction. The disease goes so deep inside almost any thought of complacency can destroy years of hard work. So many times in active addiction, we as addicts copped-out on our actions with much dishonesty. Copping-out is getting someone else to do what only we can do. Now, in recovery, being responsible for our actions is something we must learn. The struggle of continuing to be dishonest in recovery can cause great pain. When we are in pain, giving up seems to be the easy way out, but it only complicates our growth in recovery. One truth stays the same whether we are in pain or not we are addicts. We make mistakes and we must accept the consequences and learn to change. When we practice honesty, we can have the courage to change.

If courage seems to be ‘the key’ to this Step for you and you define courage as risking failure in an uncertain enterprise, it may be a sign that you need more surrender. Feeling you are risking failure may indicate that you don’t really feel comfortable with your decision to turn your life and will over to the care of a loving Ultimate Authority. A closer examination should reveal that once we have made the decision to have God take care of us, we can look at life from the standpoint of someone who has new resources. No longer do we have to cling to our desperate ways and the brutalities that have helped us ‘get our way’ in the past. Today, we look at life differently. We find that the need for animosity and personal abrasiveness is unnecessary within the security of our new lives. Deceit and trickery are not honest tools of recovery. Some people associate the word ‘courage’ with going places they haven’t been before. This kind of courage is a key part of each of the Twelve Steps. It is a lack of fear and a result of our faith.

Some have said, "E-G-O means Easing God Out." Experience indicates that perhaps, ‘ego’ in recovery may simply be our personal sense of self, nothing more or less. It is healthy to develop and enjoy a positive sense of self. We also find a basis of identification with a greater sense of ‘being a part of’ that might have to do with our experience of having a relationship with God. This larger sense of self should help us be in accord with our personal selves rather than leading to the conflicts of our pasts. It might be an interesting exercise to consider how we could possibly function without an ego. With no ego, we would have no personal focal point. It should be fine with God and the universe if we like cottage cheese. If, on the other hand, we despise cottage cheese, that is fine also. Why should all people have the same tastes and preferences? So, in many ways, our differences develop our individual programs and breathe life into the general statements about what we have found in recovery. It would be a shame to have come so far on what we believed

to be the path of spiritual progress only to find ourselves in the position of being the means to the ends of others.

Like any process, once we reach a point of decision it is best to go forward in the manner prescribed, attempting to follow the road map left by others to the destination. Ours is a path where we don't need to take detours or to explore side passages. Working the Steps to the best of our human ability is enough with the help of a loving God to keep us on this pathway. Only when we have fully turned our life and will over to the care of the God of our understanding, can we expect to feel free enough to examine ourselves totally and without concern for finding fault within us. We know that the faults are there - we've always known. It just seemed easier for us to throw our lives away because we couldn't distinguish among all the contradictory things that seemed to be us. The last obstacle that addiction can throw in the path of the recovery process is that it may hurt or embarrass us! Today we move forward fearlessly while looking at our lives with joyous personal improvement in mind! Imagine that! Today, we know that we can survive being hurt or embarrassed.

The truth is that we'll continue to retain the parts of our personality that hurt and embarrasses us, in other words, our defects. Recalling our admission of pain from the First Step, the joy we felt from the Second Step, and the faith that we discovered in the Third Step, we're ready to let go of those defects! They must go if we are to be happy. Taking stock of our personal characteristics is the beginning of the end for the idea that we cannot recover. Even when we find that we have started repeating things that we have on our list, we realize that our defects cannot go on forever. We have to be patient and continue doing something right by working the Steps. Writing it all down in black and white seems like a potential threat but actuality confirms what we may

have suspected for a while: that our defects are absolutely limited and definitely changeable. We discover that our defects are merely the results of our best efforts to live without conscious contact. Most began at a period of our lives when we were at our worst. Clean and seeking of spiritual growth, we want to be free of all things that would hold us back, in spite of how familiar some pain can seem.

Moving through a series of growth experiences, we begin to feel our accomplishments. We have all experienced a real feeling of being finished with certain things. Many have experienced the sensation of movement in recovery. We have gone from feeling like a newcomer and sick, to feeling not so new and still sick, and finally being an oldtimer and knowing that we are still sick. What we learn from this process is to be there for one another and that not one of us has all the answers except the God of our understanding. That's why we work the Steps. It was a turning point for many of us to accept that the word 'moral' even could or did apply to us. We thought ourselves permanently immoral. We feel that we have to guard against wounds of the heart because they are amongst the hardest to heal. These wounds have to do with our addiction distorted sense of right and wrong. If we feel that an un_righted wrong exists in our life, we experience the wildest urges to 'correct the error'. If we can't avenge ourselves, we risk going into depression and other self-destructive behavior. We must remain vigilant lest we begin to excuse the most basic lapses in our recovery because that quickly leads to a general breakdown. We addicts tend to wear our hearts on our sleeves and would do well to walk with a little more dignity, especially if we want others to take us seriously.

An addict recalls, "While riding in my car to an NA meeting Saturday night, a thought hit me: 'I have no reason to go on living.' With two years clean, I had reached a state of complete spiritual

bankruptcy. I needed help desperately. My actions resembled those of a dying person. And the Fellowship of NA, upon whom my life depended, knew nothing of this. All they knew was the Greg, who dressed nice, always came to meetings, had a good job and always had a smile on his face. I was a lie.

"Honesty is necessary for my survival. The truth is that I am powerless and I am very scared. I do not know how to live and I need a lot of help. I need to learn how to be a human being, how to live life on life's terms.

"My latest realization about honesty is that I do it for myself. It is no longer okay for me to jerk myself around. It is not okay just because no one else knows. Taking an action that is not okay with me, that does not jibe with my spiritual beliefs, is blatant self-manipulation. I use myself when I do this. I do not practice these spiritual principles so others will look upon me as a glowing example of humanity.

"I have lived that way. Presenting myself as the model of successful recovery and then going home to gorge on food, purge myself, kick the cats, beat myself up, isolate, dwell on the negative and basically mentally masturbate. This used to be satisfactory as long as no one but me knew but I work and practice these spiritual principles so that I do not have to live this way. Although I love and need you all as long as I am only within myself, I do not really care what others think. What a change!"

The word 'moral' describes a sense of correctness or completeness that allows us to perceive beauty. The way we keep score is the least of our problems. Morality has to do with balance and fairness, things about

which most addicts claim to care. Nevertheless, we have some trouble living up to the standards we set when we are safely criticizing another person. Sometimes it can help to work on our inventory or at least look at it during some point in our day when we feel especially awake. Our attention can be sharp or poorly focused. WE want to evaluate our own moral character, not our parents or our sponsors. How well we are doing with living is based on standards in terms of the God of our understanding. We set aside our fear of acceptance by our fellows and honestly look at our moral worth. The need to nurture ourselves may be the last feeling to hit us before we sit down and write out our Fourth Step. This need can surmount the terror that always held us back. Desperation kept us coming back but we needed more at this point to fuel our efforts to recover. If we delay too long, it will come down to a life and death struggle again. When we look at this Step as nurturing, surrendering to the Fourth Step can feel safe and warm.

One addict's reflection on wants: "I want what has been showing itself in the lives of others. I feel as there is a freedom from my fears that cannot be obtained by doing the necessary footwork. Peace of mind and serenity that I long for is available by examining all of my assets and deficits. I have tried to avoid this Step and for a while, I was able to maintain but I have reached a point where I know in my heart it is time to continue my journey of recovery. Some confusion exists in the English language between what is a need and what is a want. Americans regard needs as essentials and therefore non-negotiable. Wants involve non-essentials that might be nice but never necessary. So in America we say, 'You may not always get what you want, but you get what your need.' In Canada, these words mean just the reverse. And in Canada, recovering people say, 'You may not always get what you need but you get what you want.' Still, addicts get them mixed up

wherever they find themselves. As a key point in recovery, we find ourselves squandering our gifts on useless pursuits. Recovery is knowing what to do next. We can get this information from others and it may work for us. Setting goals is one way we can benefit from healthy interaction with others. Some people believe it is more important to have a plan than to reach the goals. It may be the beginning of personal responsibility."

Honesty takes effort on our part. Years of conditioning make us fear discovery and judgment when we commit to paper the exact nature of our wrongs. This paper should be hidden and guarded against someone finding things written down that could go against us in a courtroom, or in certain personal issues. Anyone working this Step should take care to guard their inventory if it contains anything that could be upsetting or harmful to others. Another reason may be to assure ourselves privacy. We generally will not give ourselves permission to express these things without holding back if we have concerns over who will read it. Fear of honesty places many reservations in our program. Not knowing 'how to be honest' was easier than 'wanting to learn how to be honest'. Running from ourselves and our pain placed a great barrier between us and being honest. Despite many years of clean time, we may find ourselves being dishonest on a daily basis and wanting desperately to run again. At the same time, we may desperately want to practice rigorous honesty. The basics are the starting point. Admission of dishonesty is the pressure release valve. Actual practice of honesty is the freedom.

The fear we have of the truth is similar to the fear many of us have of our Higher Power. It's important to save our written Fourth Step materials even if we don't think it is good, helpful or honest at the time. Even if it is just another dry layer, it still helps us peel back our shells and peek inside. Most of us agree that the disease of addiction tries

everything it can to get us to continue or resume our self-destructive behaviors. Our disease rears its head in many ways that confuse or frustrate us when we need or want to write the Fourth Step. We fight back by praying often for the clarity and direction to write. If we remain open-minded, the honesty is revealed to us. One other way we can keep ourselves honest when we write is to review what we wrote on other days. Another way is to pray to have strength to be honest every time we sit down to write.

Not using drugs and no longer having that crutch is a major change for most of us. How many times in the past have we rationalized away our behavior with the reply, "Oh well, I was stoned. I really didn't mean that." Without drugs, we still find ourselves doing things we don't want to, but now the crutch is gone. Now, recovery must begin. The desire to try new ideas and change the things we do is real. We can't be perfect, but as long as we honestly try, a change in personality is bound to happen. Major change is something we feel when we start working the Steps. Change is the key ingredient to living an honest and better life. Without the fearfulness to hold us back, we can see where some of our defects can become assets when toned down and brought into balance with the rest of our lives. Getting real about ourselves is necessary to find out what we would like to change and what we would like to keep. Our blindness and deafness allowed us to survive the part of our lives where we had no way to change or get better in terms that mattered to us. This is a crucial part of the paradox of spiritual growth: that we give over our will only to receive what we really wanted all along. It is how we find ourselves. Thinking that it was different for us only kept us sick. Thinking that God's will was an unattainable or impractical goal only glued us more tightly to our pain. Truthfully, almost all of us were afraid to take a closer look at ourselves. We already felt really bad inside and closer examination only threatened to bring out more pain, shame and

guilt. Now, with our desire to be free, we discover just what it is that had bothered us in this Step and begin to move toward being free of it.

Instinctual needs are part of our humanity. Yet, humanity has always had a hard time coming to terms with instincts as if they were unnecessarily animalistic or embarrassing. Instincts are a problem only if they conflict with other important needs. In a way, all of our needs are instinctual. Our thirst for knowledge is at times, as strong as our need for food or rest. Balancing and becoming adept in meeting our needs without creating conflicts either with others or within ourselves is the basic idea. As our addiction subsides, our freedom to be with others increases. Freedom involves responsibility and this includes being considerate of the other people in our lives. We are each obliged to meet our instinctive needs. Defects of character make this obligation difficult and most of the time, we go lacking. Our behavior is a reflection of how we feel about ourselves. It is a sign of just how well we are working our program. By working a Fourth Step, we are getting rid of all of the negative feelings that have kept us living in the wreckage of our past that are reflected in our negative behavior towards ourselves and others. If we don't go ahead and work a Fourth Step after working the Third Step, we can easily fall back into the negative behavior patterns that our disease dictates to us. When we fall back into that self-centered type of behavior, we can once again begin to blame everyone and everything else for our misery.

Actions that we take without thought or consideration should be workable, otherwise we should try to eliminate of reflexive responses. If we are prone to anger whenever someone disagrees with us, even if the area of disagreement is trivial, we may make the mistake of viewing this anger as something inconsequential in our inventory. It may stem from something in our childhood or during our active addiction. Because of our seemingly inability to focus our minds easily, it became easier to

hide behind anger or hostility that put others off balance and seems to get us what we need at the time. Today, clean and without that level of desperation in our lives, we find these once somewhat functional angers merely irritating. We learn that anger is no threat without the capacity to carry through on our threats. Most of us are unwilling today to do the things we would have done to other people during our active addiction. We might have a reflexive instinct to give in to the demands of others that is an equally inappropriate behavior in our new lives. That's why inventory is between us and our Higher Power. We each have to find our own areas of balance. Meeting our real needs leads to fulfilling ourselves. It is the opposite state from always being in want. Recovery might be described as the process of 'adapting to plenty'. We will never finish this process because the nature of life is to move on to new things. But when we live fully, we don't repeat the past endlessly. Allowing useless defense mechanisms to rule our habit patterns is reliving the worst things that happened to us.

Bondage describes exactly the state in which some of us coming into recovery had been living. We come in feeling so bound up with guilt, shame and being terminally different in our minds because of the things we had done. We were not only bound by the things that we had done but the things that we were still doing, wanted to do, and thought we needed to do. Many times our bondage issues are sexually related and we may wake up, scared that we might not be able to stay clean or find recovery. Our days, weeks or months of clean time might seem like an illusion and we feel that no matter how long we stay clean we will eventually use again. We feel so helpless. Because of our desire for recovery, we may see how our behavior and needs are as much or more of our disease than the using. We begin to identify addiction, as we understand it in NA. This lack of understanding kept us in active addiction because it prevented us from admitting and accepting that we

were indeed addicts. Denial kept us from surrendering and without complete surrender; we could not begin to recover. Denial enabled us to believe that everything was okay no matter how hard it really was. While we were in deep denial, we could continue to live in the fantasy that our disease allowed us to create. The Fourth Step has made us take a good look at ourselves and accept that we are addicts.

Besides all the fear that we may have felt at this point, we knew that we needed to get to a meeting, share, and ask for help. We knew that we needed to open up about our secrets as well. Recent understandings of fears may be weak compared to lifelong fears and limitations. It takes real courage to overcome the effects of a harsh and deprived childhood. Although determined that we would never tell another soul, desperation gave us courage. Finding others, who don't reject us, encourages us to go further into the recovery process by writing out our feelings about things. If we can get at what's been bothering us, we may get free of it as well. While many complain about the embarrassment and guilt they felt while working a Fourth Step, some of our members share a quite different experience. They feel they are lightening up as they write about what has been troubling them, often without having let themselves share any of it with another human being. We can become so used to pain that we come to rely on it. We have adapted to being continuously hurt. Beyond shoddy living habits, poor mental conditioning and spiritual restriction, some of us go out of our way to create and maintain pain producing structures in our daily lives. We all encounter situations at work or in our social lives where we dare not express ourselves. Some actually enjoy the tokens of bondage and use them to tease and challenge the spirit that dwells in each of us. We are free to go on with life if we wish - other people have other chains. If these things chain us to the past and prevent growth, they are probably part of the general enslavement of our addiction.

One addict relates, "Any confidence that I experienced while using was false. Until the fog lifted and feeling became possible, I could not embrace the experiences that breed confidence. Once the drugs were gone, I was open to walk through experiences and feel them. When more encounters occurred, both positive and negative, a basis for confidence grew. God's will: To me, God's will is very simple and straightforward. He wants all good for all creatures. Man is the only creature given the freedom of choice and we must use this wisely. If we don't, we suffer greatly."

We have to go to meetings to remember that we didn't do some of the things that help us in recovery. Our disease is so strong that even in ongoing recovery we can forget the life-affirming and life-giving effects of the NA 12 Steps. Through study, application, and experience any sincere person can discover and begin to live God's will for themselves in the Twelve Steps of NA. The further we are from God, the more God seems to be our enemy. The closer we come to God, the more we realize God was our only true friend all along. We addicts have been known to complain and whine that we're just not getting it when it comes to spiritual growth. We may need to remind ourselves seriously that it is up to each one of us to give our permission for God to come into our life. We know that the flow of spiritual energy is restricted – not because it doesn't come to us but because we refuse to act and pass it on to others. In this sense, we need to feel the sensation of personal liberty and the curiosity to allow this passage of spiritual energy without worrying that it will get away from us.

The miracle of sponsorship provides us with the ability to listen and be heard perhaps for the first time in our lives. We are no longer invisible or inaudible. Eventually, someone else asks us to sponsor them and a new confidence is born - quite often in spite of ourselves. We become

someone with whom people can share and we are part of a circle of friends. Positive reinforcement in recovery can come in the form of people loving us first and teaching us to love ourselves like they do. Ideas in our head made sense for the first time. Service in NA in an invaluable source of confidence building, like other experiences clean. Only reading and talking about it is half-stepping. We have to step out and do things for ourselves to build up our confidence. Making a point, arguing, disagreeing, taking a stand and being passionate about issues have enabled us to have confidence. Being courageous, willing to change and getting past the doubts we harbor are all part of the process. There is no equal for commitment and personal involvement in gaining confidence for the first time. It is precious and personal. No one can take it away from us. A spirit is being born that cannot be broken. Writing a Fourth Step on our journey is necessary for building confidence. We become willing to rid ourselves of old patterns and to try a new way of life.

Real ability and confidence take the place of false pride and egotism when we stop dodging the fact that we are insufficient in some areas and begin to learn and grow in our abilities. The ability to understand along with applying that understanding in some useful way is greater than any possession that simply represents the results of our ability. Possessions get old and take more and more energy to maintain. Ability is how we get more of what we want when our minds clear and our passions subside. The Fourth Step is not as big of a deal as those who have not worked it make it out to be. Think of the relief that comes from being able to do things we have previously been unable to do, rather than the short term discomfort of removing obstacles to our happiness. Like it or not, we all pay a heavy toll for our defects. The price we have to pay is less and what we get is more desirable as we discover that we are less defective. One of the tactics our disease utilizes is the idea that somehow

dealing with our shortcomings is going to take more out of us or hurt us more than staying in our damaged condition.

Our desire for recovery makes our voluntary efforts to help locate defects and turn 'off' the inhibitions that keep them hidden from view. If an outsider even suggested that we had the very same defects, we would switch instantly into denial. We may have shielded ourselves so long that we are in a perpetual state of shock over some past pain. This shock has so imbedded itself in our lives that it doesn't occur to us to change, much less that we are free to do so whenever we want. Nothing else could make us feel so open. It is self-destructive to ignore or nullify our gifts and personal advantages, especially when we feel overwhelmed with good things in our lives. We addicts are so ingenious when it comes to breaking up the miracles that God so patiently sets in our paths. It's not our enemies or disgruntled friend that we need protection from, it is our own personal limitations, bad thought processes and out-dated living habits. Nature has fostered and sustained life on this planet for a long time. No matter what our religious belief or orientation, we should be able to grasp the concept of getting along with nature.

As one addict shares, "The most difficult aspect of practicing rigorous honesty is overcoming the fear of exposure that such honesty brings. When I am being totally honest with myself, I become aware of aspects of myself that are uncomfortable. Honesty also brings a fear of rejection.

"I think about how others may perceive me, or if they will judge me. Honesty and vulnerability go hand in hand. I cannot do one without the other. Usually when I am dishonest it is because my will is in control. I often wonder about the difference between being totally honest and being totally self-justified. It is easy for

me to justify my dishonesty except when I know on some level what is going on. When I am honest, I gain a great freedom because I know that I am not pretending or hiding any aspect of myself.

"To many of us, recovery is about to facing ourselves, no matter how frightening that may be. My experience has been that people who are not in a recovery program are very uncomfortable with honest people. I, like most recovering addicts, find that honesty is easiest to practice in meetings. With spiritual growth comes the ability to practice spiritual principles in all my affairs. It is other recovering addicts who give me the courage and faith to be honest with myself."

It may be that defense mechanisms and avoidance behavior are the worst offenders of personal freedom. They reduce what we can say and do. We can set goals for ourselves with only the promise that some past pain will not repeat itself. It is important to examine some of our basic assumptions about life in our inventories because we may otherwise be tricking ourselves. An unwritten law of human nature is that if you criticize you friend, he may correct himself and if you're very lucky, he may forgive you. So, if we are to get better, it is better to inventory ourselves, even if we do so harshly than to wait for someone to point out our flaws. If the criticism comes from an enemy, our disease tells us to ignore it because its only purpose is to hurt us. If it comes from a friend, we feel crushed and our disease tells us that it is betrayal. If it comes from a stranger, our disease says, "What do they know, they are uninformed." It is a logical conclusion that if it comes from us, we may need to look at it. We have to go to meetings to remember that we didn't do some of the things that help us in recovery. Our disease is so strong that even in ongoing recovery we can forget the life-affirming and life-

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giving effects of the NA 12 Steps. The more we get 'stuff', the more our disease will try to tell us that we did it all on our own! Our suffering and pain can seem distance and the old songs call us to The 4th Step moves us forward in recovery to the point where we can share our inventory to at least one other person. We share it with ourselves when we write it down and we share it with God when we become willing. After all, our higher power is now caring for our lives and will in response to our willingness in Step Three. We can go forward to Step Five knowing that we will soon feel the release of all that stress and tension resulting from our active addiction. Step Four is not a fearsome Step, it is a freedom Step!

Step Five

"We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

Our inventory does not automatically deliver us from the bondage of addiction. There is a long way to go, but it certainly begins the process and gives us continued hope for the future. We gain acceptance of our natures with hope for positive change. We are often very surprised to find out exactly what we wrote when we share our Fifth Step. We often feel a great sense of freedom after doing our Fifth Step. We may still find fault with ourselves and despair that we'll ever really recover.

Addiction surrounds our entire life with walls of fear that have kept us prisoners much of our lives. Working the Fifth Step exposes all our negative feelings and begins the demolition of these walls once and for all. We will finally be free to begin building a whole new life based on a solid foundation of truth, self-honesty and trust. The 12 Steps have helped us to find and trust God, ourselves and another human being, often for the first time in our lives. We cannot do this alone. Remember, this is a 'we' program and together, we find courage, hope and faith to share our inventory. We have to be vulnerable - it's a chance we must take. We learn that perfection is a unrealistic, fear-based idea. We don't have to be perfect.

Through writing and sharing we find forgiveness and acceptance. The Fifth Step can be upsetting for some of us. The bondage of our addiction has had a physical hold on us. This Step will be a positive affirmation of our new feelings of trust in our Higher Power and another human being.

One member shares, "Before I even began my 4th step, I had

shared with my sponsor my fear of even admitting to anyone even some of the things I had done in my walls of fear. Whenever I think about working the Fifth Step, I think of the walls of fear that have kept me a prisoner of my own life. I think about working this step and ridding myself of all of the negative feelings that have ruled my life. These walls will finally be knocked down and I will be free to begin to build a whole new life based on a solid foundation of self_honesty, truth and freedom from fear. My entire life has been lived inside walls of fear. Negative feelings kept me back in the prison of my disease."

For some of us, building bonds of trust is one of the hardest things we have ever done. For as long as we can remember, we would never allow ourselves to trust anyone. To trust someone meant you had to get to know them and let them know you. Trust is an empty-handed leap into the void - we cannot prepare ourselves for trusting. There is no way to defend ourselves against the risk of acknowledging who we are and letting other people and the God of our understanding into our lives. To get to know them meant letting them get to know us and we always believed that once they got to know us they would reject us. The experience of sharing the contents of our Fourth Step inventory awakens us to the reality that we can change from the people we were into the people we want to be. Some of us heard when we were kids, "confession is good for the soul." Confession defined as 'telling everything' has nothing to do with the Fifth Step. Indeed, we seek to unblock the channel to God, to our own spirits, and to the rest of humanity that has been clogged up by our fear, denial and ego. Admitting who we are and what we've done doesn't amend the record, but it puts us on the record for owning our past decisions. The principle that we learn here is integrity and we must first accept that the disease had corrupted our personal morals.

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By looking at and sharing our inventory, we seek to restore our the fractured lives by trusting the healing process of the Steps. We find it easier to admit our wrongs because we no longer fear their return. We aren't the people we were but we aren't fully recovered either. For come, the fear of returning to our old ways motivates us in recovery but as we re-integrate our lives, Higher Power becomes a greater motivator than fear ever was. Trust comes from acceptance; remember that we learned this in the Second Step. With the self-acceptance we gain through the process of our Fourth Step inventory, we come to self-trust with the admission of our role in our difficulties of the past and our personality problems in the present.

Further, we act on our acceptance of a loving, supportive God and grow to trust our Spirit in all areas of our lives. Best of all, the mutual acceptance that we experience from sharing our Fifth Step becomes mutual trust, as we grow to love and respect ourselves by loving others. That is what we mean when we say, "God, grant me the courage to be searching and fearless". The members of our Fellowship teach each other to care and trust. What we think we know about trust is flawed. Trust used to be an immediate thing in our active addiction: We trusted each other to an extent because we each got high. Today, we learn to let the process happen. We open ourselves to others knowing that trust is something that we need to practice. We give them the benefit of the doubt and see what they do with our trust . . .

No matter what the other person may choose to do with the things that we entrust to them is why we say, "Trust is earned and rightfully so." The way we earn it is by being ourselves so others know what they are dealing with. The fact that all addicts suffer from the same disease helps us build trust bonds.

There are no unique addicts. We have differences as people and degrees of sickness but underneath we have similarities that are far more remarkable. Acknowledging this helps us begin to trust one another. Our powerlessness and our defective personalities are a common bond. As we increase our understanding of ourselves, we understand others and our compassion grows. We don't have to get it right from the start. Sharing involves some skills and practice improves our ability to enlarge our world by sharing. Once we establish trust with even one person, we may have difficulty until we know what the 'rules' are.

Being able to give and receive with trust builds a bond between us. We gain much from this Step. Through prayer, willingness and our ability to share on this Step, we gained trust. We begin to feel like we aren't alone. We see some of our worst fears removed. There were things we opened-up and choked-up and got out that we never thought we would share. We feel the benefit almost immediately afterward. We feel freedom through simply releasing the wreckage and garbage that we had kept pent-up inside. We found the willingness to share our deepest, darkest secrets with another human being. We gained insight to push aside the fear and walk through that opening.

A member shares, "The meaning of courage has changed as I have grown in Narcotics Anonymous. At first courage was an illusion that I put on. I never knew the exact meaning, only that the opposite of courage was cowardice. I remember how much of my life was full of fear, how I felt like a coward but could not let anyone know how terrified I was. I always put on an illusion of how courageous, uncaring, and ruthless I was. I always considered courage a physical quality. Today I am aware of the spiritual and emotional aspects of courage. I have learned that it can be easier to run away to avoid life's trials and tribulations but true courage is

walking through the fear and learning to work through the pain and the problems. Courage today is walking through the fear, putting one foot in front of the other, working towards the solution, and having the courage to let fellow addicts help and guide me."

Paralyzing fear is a reality. Progress comes 'step by step.' We learn to trust ourselves and become vulnerable enough to walk through the terror. We had always thought that the only antidote to fear was courage. Not so! Fear dissolves under any spiritual principle! Spiritual principles are based on Faith and Faith kills fear. Sharing our inventory with another human being opens the door to sharing with others. This is a basic building block in our reconciliation with the human race. Human beings would have died out as a species if simple errors were ordinarily fatal. Most of our errors have the effect of curbing or preventing our growth, restricting us to limited pathways where there is seemingly little fear of failure. Fear of failure can 'lock us up' in permanent isolation and ineffectualness.

We need to reconcile ourselves with this reality if we are to go on with our lives as healthy people. Before we admit the exact nature of our wrongs, they still have great power over us. When the truth is out, we know the first moments of freedom. It is the end of our struggle to continue denial. It is resuming our emotional development that was stopped when the defect first appeared. Our inability to come to terms with something arrested our growth in that area. For recovering addicts, it may be helpful to say to ourselves, "It happened while I was using and that's not how I am clean." Our decision-making ability, our ability to see or hear clearly, our ability to react accurately to life in general, all these were hampered or disabled by our active addiction. Even today, our disease will try to make the pain of our recovery seem greater than the continual pain that we carried with us. Like the odd twist that allows

freedom to come from surrender, when we are able to make ourselves vulnerable we will know an increase of life. To be vulnerable is to expose ourselves to the reality of another person. If they hurt us, it is on them and we will be able to go forward. We are not as fragile as our disease makes us feel. While we may experience failure repeatedly in finding those we can trust, God will reveal them to us as long as we continue to practice our part in trust. Our spiritual courage is a signal to others like ourselves.

We may feel a spirit when we share our Fifth Step. This is part of what changes our lives. Heightened awareness, sensitivity, interest and a sense of the miraculous may infuse us when the pain inside is set free. While our Fifth Step is a spiritual and emotional reality, it has the effect of demolishing the walls we have erected to conceal our fear and terror from others. So strong is the hold of our pain that we fear to take action as if it will tear our flesh when we pull it away from the injury. We don't work the Steps to lose at life. We work them to win. The gains can be terrific but the ones that mean the most to us are the simple, everyday abilities that used to be beyond most of us. The blockage that has held us back so long has resulted in structures within our personalities that echo past pain, real or imagined. The pain replays itself in a similar situation and we react as if injured whether we are or not. The failure to respond accurately to our environment is one phase of insanity and the defects have to be relaxed and ironed-out to regain functional ability in that area. Peace begins when we find a way that allows us to feel safe enough to stop fighting. Forces that seem to have been working destructively in our lives slowly change into sources of strength rather than conflict. Our addiction set us at odds with the world around us in many ways. This is not to say the world is perfect and that all living problems dry-up when we start living life clean and working the Twelve Steps of recovery. It is through the Fifth Step that we re-unite with the world and the people

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around us. Who and what we are takes form as we share with others. Most of us are full of unshared feelings, hopes, fears and aspirations. When we are re_connected, this flows out of us and we regain a sense of purpose and balance.

Step Six

"We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."

Surrender is the initial part of working each Step. Surrender prepares us to ask God to remove our defects. Respect and honest humility are keys that open doors to powers that are so great that they dare not approach us when we are exerting our wills. The loving higher powers do not want to hurt us, and going against our un-surrendered will would definitely hurt! We have a blessed tendency to not violate certain basics of humanity. If we betray, exploit or manipulate others without their knowledge or permission, the shame and guilt can exact a high price. The Sixth Step gives us a chance to actualize our disapproval of the way we have been living our lives. The danger here is that our illness of addiction tries to make us forget that we are tapping into a greater power that enables us to work our way back to health through the Twelve Steps. We find that submission calms us and allows us to do our part by being willing and open to change rather than letting us be hurt. But we have to keep going with the Steps! By the time we get to this Step, we have begun to see that addiction only feeds us contradictions. Some experienced NA members have said that we need to clearly define what is bothering us. We want to make sure we really are suffering from a defect and not merely confused by our disease.

This is a step of preparation for the next level of our personal recovery. This is where the readiness and the willingness have to work together so we can get the complete freedom the 12 Steps promise. Over a long period of time, many members have noticed areas where we all have trouble. These consistencies lead to us using the six P formula.

1] Perspective - These are old 'survival skills' that no longer work for us. At one point they did, but now they recharge our unmanageability. H.P. wants more than survival for us today, so we can let them go.

2] Pain - When clinging on to a defect or survival skill becomes more painful than our fear of letting it go, we have become entirely ready to surrender to a higher power.

3] Prayer - God removes the defects, not us addicts. Our part is to pray for openness and willingness. So, God shows us the defect, and we do the footwork of listing, sharing and becoming willing to have God remove the defects in the 7th Step.

4] Patience - God is in charge of the outcome, and chooses how and when our defects are removed due to our lack of humility.

5] Process - Becoming entirely involves a process, like a grief process, where we walk through our denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and work toward surrender and acceptance. Each defect goes through this process, and they can be tough. At the end of this process we write each survival skill, create a good bye letter, thanking it, but letting it know that it will no longer be required.

6] Payoff - When we are struggling with a defect, we need to see what quick fix mechanism is being fed. If we are having a hard time letting it go, what is so good about it? Are we being self-righteous, unforgiving, proving that only we know what's best? Are we justifying, rationalizing, or any number of the usual suspects? Write about each situation that keeps a defect frozen so we can become entirely ready.

One more thing we need to see here is that every character defect is also

a characteristic. Take out the addictive urge, add the spirituality, and you can find assets in each one. So all our defects have a God centeredness potential when we check them out. If we drop the negative self- will, and pray for God awareness, we can see how we were spiritual, even when we weren't practical. We can act our way into spirituality, by watching for negative will.

We addicts require gentleness when we deal with areas of sensitivity caused by past pain. A light touch will do to communicate our needs and our readiness to a loving and attentive God. Gentleness soothes our tendency to relate change with hurting or losing. It gives us maximum capability to pay attention to spiritual principles that may require all our attention. Harshness and abrasiveness make it hard to envision the freedom we seek as near at hand. A loud voice may make us unable to hear at all.

The disease of addiction seems to find a second wind so to speak as we approach this Step. We may want to 'take our time', having 'come so far.' Many have found themselves thinking that if we were to have all our defects removed, we would be unable to survive. Remember here that the purpose of addiction is to mislead and confuse. All that we are seeking in this Step is a growth in our trust and faith that our loving Higher Power will meet our needs. In doing this, we gain the ability to turn loose of harmful defects as we continue with the Steps. We will not be able to go further in recovery unless we trust God to do for us. We have to ask for help from our Higher Power and mean it for the Steps to continue our forward process. Defects do not benefit us. Defects will continue to create countless problems for us and those we love long after we have stopped using drugs. We retain even in recovery the illogical obstinacy and resistance to change in any form. We may even speak well of the Program of NA and the Twelve Steps of recovery and yet we

continue to hold back from asking God to remove these defects. There are things and places over which we now have some control. We maintain those things in the best way we can. One of the lessons that we will learn again and again in recovery is to keep to our place. While we stress personal responsibility, we get better at choosing what is our business and what is not. Feeling bad over things that went wrong where we really had no say is ridiculous and is only another way the disease will work to make us miserable when it can.

With an increase of trust and faith from this Step, we give ourselves permission to move forward. Our permission is evidence of our surrender and our willingness to change. So far as we know, God has never forced goodness on any of us. We are all free to mess-up forever. If we want to see what 'better' is like, we must let God come into our lives and remove character defects which have blocked our path. Misplaced fears often cause many of our members to slow down when they get to this Step. This is like hanging around outside a restaurant when you're hungry. We addicts feel so brave about things that don't matter to us yet we can be so meek and timid when we face change or improvement. Recalling the early fears that we might have had to overcome in early recovery may help us snap out of any illusions that we might have that the Sixth Step is a resting place in the quest for spiritual growth.

Step Seven

"We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."

Many of us view 'shortcomings' as acting out on a defect of character. A defect in our character makes us fall short in some way in our lives. Another way to look at it is to look at defects as actions that are wrong and shortcomings as things we want to do but cannot. At first we pray after we act out. Later we can catch ourselves acting out and pray to our higher power to help us stop. It is when we catch ourselves before the defect becomes an action that we begin to realize the benefits of this Step. One of those benefits is the beginning of true self-acceptance. We ask the God of our understanding to help us not act in ways which are unacceptable to us. This Step begins to align our behavior to fit our values.

In the Sixth Step we became entirely ready for God to remove all these defects of character. In the Seventh Step we stop feeding these defects. Just as we needed abstinence from drugs before we could begin to recover, in the Seventh we gain abstinence from acting on defects. As long as we feed the defect, it will never be removed. If we refrain from acting out, we notice the defects beginning to be removed.

This Step is the beginning of real change for us. We identify our defects in the Fourth Step and become willing to live without them in the Sixth Step. The Twelve Steps allow us to move on in life so these defects stop determining our behavior. We begin to experience life without the burden of defects. We experience a new level of freedom.

Some of us found the Sixth Step to be very difficult because as addicts we tend to associate change with trouble ahead. It is at this point in our

recovery where we often come face-to-face with our self-centeredness. We have found that our defects of character no longer work and that they have no place in our new lives in recovery. We may realize and accept that these defects are no longer effective yet we struggle with gaining the willingness to have God remove our shortcomings. Some may write a daily journal; focusing on our defects and the pain they cause us. Others may seek the willingness they need through prayer and meditation. One thing is certain. In order to grow and change we must take this Step. We discover that our defects are nothing more than our reactions to fear. This can be the fear of rejection, the fear of abandonment, or the fear that you won't like us. Fears are a manifestation of our self-centeredness. We learn that we can no longer use our defects to avoid facing our fears. Now what do we do?

Defects are behaviors that we still do that cause us problems. We hit to the left or right of the target but just can't hit the mark we are aiming for. Shortcomings are behaviors that we do not do that cause us problems. We meant to pay the bill but just forgot to mail the check.

Some of us begin by listing our defects and their opposites. Lust versus satisfaction, dishonesty versus honesty, etc. We discover the personality traits that we could replace our defects with. We may meditate and imagine what our lives would be like uncontrolled by fear. We begin to see the difference between being God-centered and self-centered. Ultimately, we become willing to have God remove our shortcomings. The Seventh Step can feel like jumping off a cliff hoping God will catch us. Few of us will ever jump from an airplane but all of us know we could if we had to in some emergency. If our desire for a new life is as strong when we work Step Seven, as it was when we first came to the program, we will definitely feel excitement. Since we are clean, we know we can change. Just not using is a big change. Recovery is a fact,

not a theory.

We need to think of all the times that we threw ourselves into our addiction with no idea what would happen. We throw ourselves into recovery the same way with a major difference. Improvement seems as scary to us now as getting worse did in our active addiction. Any change that risks pain is scary to addicts. We must bridge this gap in our thinking. Many of us believe that the Seventh Step is the drug addict's dream since it allows us to become the people we want to be. Our defects have killed our dreams and denied us the relations with other people we long to enjoy. The Seventh Step is our chance to renew visions of bright, happy and enjoyable lives. This Step allows us to see that our pain has more association with our past than our present. Because of working the Seventh Step, we find specific dreams from our past that just didn't happen. These dreams died when we started using. Furthermore, we come to believe that these dreams may return to us now. We can use these dreams to help motivate ourselves to make a lasting break with the past. We demonstrate the Seventh Step by stepping completely into the future. We do this by asking God, the God that has loved and taken care of us at our worst, to remove the obstacles to our happiness.

In addition to our willingness, we have the power of the God of our understanding to provide the strength and guidance we need to leave the things we do not care about and move on to those we do. It may help us remember that God works the Seventh Step only when we are willing enough to ask for help. While we know that recovery is real, we are often held back by our fantasies of what will happen. In fact, we don't have any idea what our lives will be like after we work this Step. How could we? That is why it takes real courage to go forward from this point. Life goes on and has for a long time. Our addiction set us apart

from life and continues to try to cut us off from the feelings that God gives to all people. Addiction forces us to move in small circles. Recovery opens these circles up to ever-widening spheres of growth in all directions. If we were to work this Step earlier in the recovery process, we would probably flip out. The energy we are capable of using in our daily lives is enormous compared with what we have been wasting. For this energy to move through us we have to work the Seventh Step to remove obstacles that would block the flow of energy. When this debris is out of the way, we can feel the chains of the past slip away and we will experience an awesome wonder. This is nothing to be embarrassed about. We should feel embarrassment if we don't feel something like this. We deserve our sense of wonderment at the freedom from life-long slavery to the disease of addiction. We remember many overnight successes have worked toward a goal for years.

We only need a little power to help us concentrate and keep our part of the bargain with life. We can usually earn our way with comparative ease. Other forms of hunger make us think it will take a lot to satisfy our needs. We are hungry for companions, financial security, peace of mind, appreciation and all the human needs. Spiritual hunger sometimes makes us forget the resources we have to work with at practically any point in recovery. Addiction wants us to forget our joy and miracles. Being grateful today - consciously thankful - is part of what readies us for the good things tomorrow. Sheer force of habit make us focus more often on what we lack rather than be thankful of what we already have at present. Some of us can remember when we first started pulling back from life. Addiction is necrotic and eats away at our lives: our minds, our bodies and our spirit. We knew on some level that if we were to continue, we would seriously hurt someone or permanently injure ourselves. We have all sustained some form of permanent injury, therefore we believe that our limitations keep us within safe bounds. Clean, we can expand our

lives to find new and larger boundaries of our 'safe zone'. Many of our former limitations no longer apply to us. They served a purpose at some point in time but have become a hindrance. It's just like someone who has broken a bone and has had to wear a cast to allow the bone to heal. Now after healing, we can take off the cast because it becomes uncomfortable. The cast becomes a block to our healing. It may feel funny at first so we have to take it easy during the big changes. Soon though, we will have our balance and look back on our confinement with a sense of sadness mixed with incredible joy now that we are free.

Without self-examination we are basing our lives in part on snap judgments made at a time in our lives when we weren't able to see or think clearly. We often jumped to rash conclusions about who and what and why things were happening. We carry the judgments with us now. Some of these judgments may be accurate but the ones that are wrong hurt us by basing our lives on incorrect information. Corporations spend huge amounts of time and resources to acquire accurate information upon which to base their positions and plans for the future. Even so, they are wrong sometimes and go out of business.

Expressing our willingness relaxes our willpower and prevents conflicts between wanting to be free of defects and wanting to hang on to them. Character may simply be how we deal with life on life's terms. Life on life's terms makes demands on us that we can meet or that we cannot meet. Defects are "holes" or flaws in our character. Where there should be a planned reaction, a learning from someone who loves us or a successful way of responding that we have worked out ourselves, there is a resentment, a bad idea or an unworkable habitual response. If so, it is a logical conclusion that as our character improves; the rest of our life improves. Flawed, scarred, broken, misshapen, and damaged all describe the parts of us that do not work. Defects are defective. They aren't fun,

interesting, enjoyable or effective. They don't help us make money, get along with the opposite sex or cope with the world effectively. If they did, they wouldn't be defective. With God's help we begin to remove the defects to free the energy we have been forcing into them that will be available to us as we heal. Pain from the past creates ripples that continue even now. 12 Step recovery stops the ripples from creating trouble in our present and so frees our future. The light within each of our hearts was so dim that only a little light could come through. We didn't want to do too well too quickly.

Thoughts, memories, habits and everything that makes us 'us', are carried in tiny bio-electrical charges within our bodies. A computer engineer stated in an article that they could make magnetic images stronger but it would make them hard to over-write. In recovery, we change what is written in our hearts and minds to produce changes in the way we feel and live. Our surrender to the fact of our addiction and our belief in a willingness to align ourselves under the care of a loving and caring Higher Power allow this to happen. Suiting up, showing up and doing what we can while God does all the rest is all we have to do.

We didn't want to change what other people would expect and then demand from us until we were sure we could live up to our new capacities. As the blockage clears, we give ourselves permission to follow up on a good idea or impulse. We gain the ability to communicate that idea to others around us. The most amazing thing is having some of these ideas become realities without the negativity we have come to expect. These emanations may come from deep within us and be in fact the will of our Higher Power coming out through us. Much of our pain results when these deep dreams cannot manifest themselves in reality. Working the Seventh Step is a leap of faith because we don't know exactly what will happen when we take it. It is opening ourselves to the

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possibilities of what will happen when God removes our defects. It does more than allow us to move beyond our former boundaries of competence and ability. It allows us to set our sights on things that we really care about and stick to it until we reach our goals. It also lets us be happy where we are. If happiness and attainment is perpetually in the future, how will we ever attain happiness in the present? The leap of faith of the Seventh Step may first be stepping into the here and now.

Step Eight

"We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all."

The destruction of our active addiction has left lasting scars and limitations in our lives. The purpose of the Eighth Step is to find freedom from these limitations in the present and for the future. As with many things, we have a fear of looking too closely at the pain of our past. By recalling where the parts of our leftover pain began, we can cut it out by the roots. The first associated memory may provide a clue. Sometimes, we will find our amends lie in directions that are far different from where our fear and imagination had placed them. We addicts seem to love familiarity. We become familiar with feelings, both good and bad. We become too familiar with good feelings and push our luck trying to feel more ecstatic. We become familiar with bad feelings and hold on to them, wallowing in pools of depression. Hasn't anyone ever told us that we don't have to hold on to bad feelings? We develop a better understanding of the nature of harm after a while. We finally own that we have harmed ourselves. Do we still want to carry a load of guilt around? Maybe we do, but that's only because we think there might be some future benefit from it. We must remember that there isn't and there never will be!

'Listing' is merely writing down names of those people to whom we feel we might owe an amend. We can make separate lists for those we are willing to make amends to right away, those who we have harmed but don't feel we owe amends, and those we may have harmed but never want to have contact with again. Our sponsor may help us determine who to make amends to, especially where making amends may be harmful or dangerous. We may later decide that no amends are called

for. The key at this point is that we have to exercise our freedom to write down the names no matter what the outcome may be. As we ask God to remove our defects of character, we set forces in motion that lead us to consider other people. We acknowledge and accept the limitations placed on us by unfinished business from the past. When we feel hemmed-in or restricted by fear or guilt, we can remove it by positive action. Amends allow us to correct what is out of order. The wreckage of the past often leaves us with a desire for revenge or a fear of the revenge of others. Either way this imbalance makes it hard for us to live fully in the present. We worry about past problems and future retribution instead of being free to live in the present. Working Step Eight helps us restore our balance and resume the everyday functions of life clean. We no longer have to look over our shoulder. We can walk free of shame as our load of guilt is lifted.

To be part of the human family, we need to find harmony in our relationships with others. When we lose our humility, we make ourselves targets of envy or victims of pride. The world helps the person who is open, relaxed and attentive. The world fears the proud and arrogant because they don't appear to care about people. We may think of the earlier Steps as mending our own being. To continue the recovery process, we must heal our sick and damaged relationships with other people. We do not knuckle under, making ourselves into doormats, or inviting attack with our vulnerability. We are mending links and building bridges to other people. When we come around to a place where we don't fear others and we sincerely want to help, it creates a change in others. The person they meet in us is the difference. If we are hiding something or keeping a secret agenda, other people will pick up on our dishonesty. It is not a failing in them that they can detect our game and protect themselves from our intrusion into their lives or our taking of their goods. When we learn the art of giving, they will come to

us to receive what they need. They, and we, will have no need to fear.

A person not familiar with spiritual principles may have problems determining the amount of commitment or application they have to apply before getting visible results. Reservations have way of canceling out our spiritual actions in the same way a wire that is broken will not allow your television to switch on. To get results our amends must be strong and connected to an impulse of restitution or restoration to those we have harmed. Expectations of positive results is important, as is the willingness to take the necessary actions, and the ability to concentrate on what you're trying to do. These abilities combine with belief to trigger the spiritual shift or miracle we're praying for. It may help to bear in mind that we are seeking help where all other efforts have failed _ and we are getting results! This is why NA is known as a spiritual program. The NA 8th Step frees us from others being able to push our buttons, thoughts of revenge or fear of revenge, fear of discovery, acts of sabotage, recrimination, justification, endless blame assessment, and incarceration, legal actions and physical harm. Unless we are totally willing to make the amends, we will feel no relief and experience no positive change from the Eighth Step. The measure of our willingness is up to the individual for who can know the heart of another.

Step Nine

"We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others."

The Ninth Step is an action Step. It is a Step in which our commitment to our new NA way of life needs to become evident in our daily living emphasizing the focus on our current personal relationships. We need to start treating the other people in our life today with compassion, acceptance and love. What we are looking for the results we want from working the Ninth Step in our life today are nothing short of gaining a greater new confidence and a certainty that this new NA way of life that we have chosen to live by is really true and effective. That is we "amend" our current behavior the result can be a greater "peace of mind" which will then help us to better apply Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelfth.

As we heal in our social and spiritual relationships, we are in touch with more people that we can get along with. Recovery lessens our fear and reduces the number of people that we try to avoid. Through working the Steps, we invite God as a spiritual force or being to move in and exert a force in the direction of our personal betterment and health. A surgeon may sew an open wound together but only the spirit of life we call God can actually make the separated skin, muscle and tissue grow together again. Healing is a miracle. For some of us, amends are like stitching the wound together so that the healing can take place. We know it is getting better when old wound starts itching as the new skin begins its function. The word heal is an important focus to our recovery process. There is so much out there in the world to discourage us and force us to pay prices for stuff that we did when we were out of our minds.

We discontinue our errors and replace them with positive alternatives

thus accomplishing a healing. How we earn our living, how we look at other people and how we provide for those who depend on us must all change in time. Helping others to heal gives us a steady flow of unforeseen breakthroughs and self-awareness. Areas in which we need help that might have been invisible to us for the rest of our lives, will often snap into focus if we see someone else making a similar mistake. We may say, "Oh, no!" when we see them doing what we do, but our whole lives begin to change. Perhaps we should say, "Oh, yes!" Many times these are the little life lessons we should have learned as children but we missed out on them while we were in active addiction. While other people were experiencing life, we were out to lunch. Healing for us is filling those areas we missed out on and moving into those areas where we've never been before. It is the increase of our life on a solid footing.

Spiritually experienced persons are called 'adepts' because they have studied, discussed and applied spiritual principles enough to have some ability. This means that they are adept at practicing spiritual principles. On the other hand, many of us feel that we missed out when we were born and they were handing out the instructions on how to live. The 12 Steps of recovery turn this around and give us a refresher course in life. The spiritually inexperienced person may perceive the process to be an illogical bunch of hocus pocus. Fear and superstitious dread play a role in preventing our growth. We dread change and have trouble believing change will be for the better! As a member of NA, we each have the important right to our own belief systems. We accept, appreciate and fully understand that if we don't believe something, it will not work for us. If you think you don't believe - yet find something working - one possibility is that we have an unconscious belief that is strong enough to produce results.

Much has been written about putting closure on past harm done to others. Putting closure on past occurrences that don't involve real injury but just misunderstanding can heal and repair past acts that are continuing in some way. We complete them first in our minds by admitting the truth and communicating it where possible. A phone call, email, a letter, a personal visit or just our willingness will do what is needed to complete the act and keep it from casting a shadow over our present. Without making amends, our past will produce our future. What we change today, changes the balance of our lives.

This may be difficult to recognize especially when we lack some of the sensations that other people might experience. Our best move is to focus on our belief and let it become more clear over time. Sometimes the belief of another we love and trust can help us get started. But we have to walk enough of the mile alone to call it our own experience. Otherwise, our foundation is not based on experience and may crumble and fall. Prepare for it like any other journey. Start praying and expecting results. Focus forward on your newfound belief and not back to the unworkable past. Clean and healthy, lots of things get easy! We encourage one another to be sensible and keep spirituality simple. What is simple may grow more complex as time goes by, that's to be expected. It is better to stick to that which is true and works than to subscribe to a belief that for the most part remains unclear. Recalling our own pain and difficulty, we are sensitive and don't hammer away at painful areas. We know the time will come when each of us wishes to expand the peace we begin to feel inside by canceling out elements of our past by making amends.

"An anonymous addict once related a Ninth Step story to me, relating to an amends that they had once made. This amend was of a grievous nature that might boggle the minds of many of us.

"At about six years clean, he had reached a point in his recovery to where he knew that he could no longer stay clean unless action on a more personal level was taken to address the wrongs that had been done to others as a result of his actions. Within our Fellowship or Society of recovering addicts, he was able to seek out a sponsor, someone who had been there, done that and survived to help walk him through this amend. And with the sponsors help under the all seeing eye of a loving and caring God working in his life he was able to make direct amends and enough time had elapsed that the person to whom the amends was owed was able to accept his amends with knowledge of where he was coming from because they had sought help from our 12 Steps.

"This story is being written because of belief that no matter how great or how insignificant we may imagine the harm we did in our active addiction, we now want to be free to go on with our lives. The Ninth Step offers us freedom from our past when done properly with our God of our understanding and utilizing the guidance of a sponsor."

Practical spirituality emphasizes our spiritual experiences. As our experience grows, we increase our capacity to share. On the Ninth Step, we only put people on our list when we gain the awareness of our need for freedom from those 'bad feelings' that we cannot otherwise resolve. We aren't looking to complicate matters so we don't go looking for trouble. We simply need to wipe out some more of the leftover pain from our active addiction. The Twelve Steps deal with these internal issues and help us establish a solid spiritual foundation. In Eighth and Ninth Steps, we move out into the world around us and begin to clean up some leftover messes. Some of these may be relatively minor problems

that are more felt and imagined than potential hazards to our health or threats to our life. Where a serious problem actually exists, common sense generates a prudence that cautions us to go slowly and ask others for help. We should consult our sponsors instead of plunging wildly ahead. Many have made the decisions to go ahead alone and some have paid a dear price. Remembering the slogan, "Easy Does It" is most appropriate in this Step.

NA says "Take it Easy" because when we push things, we break things. Some of us use the concept, "When in doubt – Don't" and call our sponsors or get to a meeting to get a reality check. We continue to apply ourselves until we get the relief we seek.

The Tenth Step grants the power to change the past. While this may seem incredible at first, clean time is very convincing about removing the images, feelings, memories and lessons drawn from our past. Reconsideration of what happened, who was involved, were we loaded, how did we feel when we 'came around?' When our ego is quietened and we can see clearly, everything changes. We can surrender and immediately give and receive help. Our NA way of life stresses spiritual growth and helping others. As our ability to see and hear more correctly, our intense need for defense subsides. The day will come when you realize that your past is changing - not only the content and context of what happened, but some memories will simply surface out of nowhere. Others will just fade away and stop causing us pain.

We change the future when we change ourselves but we also change the past: what it means, what we think happened, etc. Some of the changes are minor but we will be pleasantly shocked to find real freedom in change. Think of it this way: we are angry, confused, frightened and there is a car crash. We feel responsible and involved. If there is major

injury, we are overwhelmed with guilt, fear and remorse. If the same accident occurred and we were clean, clear-headed and thinking about one of the twelve steps, we are a different person. Just as we would have handled the situation of the crash differently, we handle the situation in front of us differently. It may be that we were the cause of the wreck but sometimes it was brake failure or the other car. Nothing we could have done would have prevented it. We take Steps Eight and Nine seriously in NA. And if we were at fault, there is no evasion of our blame or guilt. But it changes - and the changes may create a whole new picture of what happened and what it meant.

One members shares, "I knew a man in the program who ran down a drunk on a fifty-five mile per hour four lane highway. He was eaten up with guilt. But talking to him later, I found out the guy was in some kind of fugue state and had been staggering in front of cars for some time before he finally got hit. Other drivers stopped and came over to make sure he knew this. Even so, his remorse and guilt may have killed him, even though he didn't do anything wrong." This is a sensitive area and you are not asked to believe these statements right now. But you may remember them and think on them later. There is a miracle behind every cup of coffee in NA!

Some of us have said, "I am going to put all that behind me. If ever an opportunity shall come to set what has happened in the past in a better light or be honest, I am willing. It serves no one to allow my pain over what cannot be undone to cloud my future or my present. I would hope these errors will never repeat themselves just as I wish they never happened." If you know of someone who may be experiencing pain or confusion from past events, situations or circumstances that you know something about let them know. So long as it causes no further harm to anyone, including yourself, it may alleviate someone's suffering. And

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that will give you a lift. We have found we can't go forward without breaking these ties to the past.

Step Ten

"We continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it."

It seems as though after we come into recovery, we have this illusion that everything should fall into place. We think that the bill collectors should stop harassing us just because we're not doing drugs any longer. We believe that our immediate family members should trust us as though nothing had ever happened. What we fail to see is that the past incidents we created while using have destroyed many bonds of trust and love from others. Through working the 12 Steps of Narcotics Anonymous, we can slowly start to clean up our side of the street. There is no guarantee that we will be accepted as we were before. We will face many roadblocks in our recovery but as long as we abstain from using, we can face each problem with a clear mind and conscience. This ability insures that just that much sooner can we resolve these issues and move on in life. When we realize we are going against our inner spirit, we stop right there - as soon as we know! To live in the light, we learn to deal with things that make shadows in our lives.

When we were in total desperation, we were unable to admit fault or to make amends to those we had injured. This inability to risk loss by admission was only a pronounced symptom of our powerlessness. As we begin to adjust to plenty, the fear of loss lessens proportionately. The time that we take to consider our inventory and admit our faults promptly, releases us from feeling bound by the tension that others have when we are at fault. We are only being considerate when we take this time to do an honest evaluation. If we are at fault, how can we pretend otherwise? It is 'not knowing' that has caused us much of our problems. Trying to cover up our wrongs and misdirect the attention to others only

leaves us holding the bag. Taking a daily inventory and making amends prevents the build-up of undone evaluations and opportunities to set things right.

'Balance' demands that we do something to make up for the human errors that will occur in daily life. Addicts are fearful by nature and it's harder for us to realize that most mistakes are not big deals and frequently people just want to keep it from happening again. Our disease restricts our ability to live life on life's terms. Therefore, instead of letting our friends know what we did wrong, we hold back and the wrongdoing enlarges. We don't tell our spouse and unwanted pain comes to them from our fear of responsibilities. Generally, much of this is due to our simple awkwardness and unfamiliarity with spiritual principles. For instance, we have a problem at work where something breaks or goes wrong and we attempt to cover it up. The difficulty lies in the fact that we may not yet realize that we are someone and our being a 'witness' is part of reality. Blocking the truth out of our consciousness takes more energy than simply confessing to the error and promising to do better!

Being able to stop the daily build-up of unmade amends allows us to recover the time and energy we would otherwise waste. We are free to put this gift of life's time to better use. How we feel is dependent on what we are doing, how we do it and why we are doing it. This is where the intense interaction among members in and out of meetings is so crucial. No substitution exists for the honest observations and corrective positive caring that we can get at close quarters from someone who understands and likes us. The Program works for us in many unspoken ways. We begin to feel better as our general sensibility increases along with our ability to do things to please ourselves without injuring others. Our hope, energy and enthusiasm spills over into everything we do. A

sad addict is depressing but a happy addict is like a bonfire in the darkness!

Honest means focusing on the present reality. Becoming honest means becoming vulnerable. Letting ourselves and others become aware of how we are feeling is a risk that we have to take. Recovery and clean friends in NA give us resources to risk error or embarrassment without fear of getting in over our heads. We have the power of choice. When we become honest with ourselves, we have the choice to accept, deny, justify or rationalize every single situation in which we find ourselves. To 'accept' is to love ourselves and know that we're okay. Denial occurs where we are not ready to deal with the past. It's ok to feel this way, it will pass. To 'justify' or 'rationalize' means to continue our suffering by making excuses and blaming others for our feelings. It seems like a simple choice but for an addict, it is a hard one. Daily honesty is being true to the things we believe in which is a large part of being true to ourselves. We know that if we are not totally honest with a given situation or are honest in only part of it, we will still feel miserable with ourselves, to some extent. Dishonesty also makes our self-acceptance issues that much harder to recognize. Once we begin to practice honesty with ourselves, we get a sense of release from our disease. We will start to have a more positive outlook on life as we continue to be honest. More people will learn to trust us. Eventually, they may ask us to share our experience with them.

Amends and paying old debts may seem to be simply methods of freeing us from the effects of our past. The whole point of recovery is to achieve freedom from active addiction, including its side effects - not to indulge our disease by immersing ourselves in seemingly endless, unrealistic, and assumption of guilt. Most of us, especially when new to recovery, tend to overstate our wrongs in areas we don't care about and pass over lightly those things that we really feel badly about. Sleight of hand

doesn't help us fool others or ourselves. To be free from active addiction, we have to be receptive to the spiritual principles of the Twelve Steps. The world would be hopelessly immoral if we didn't have a way to make amends. If harm is real injury, then it only stands to reason that recompense must be possible. When we are guilty of harming someone, we restore to the best of our ability that which we took from the injured person. We must act in order to reach some point of peace.

An addict reflects, "Today, honesty is about what I really believe and I believe in what works. It doesn't matter if it is 'socially acceptable' or seems silly. If I am comfortable and the process works to help me in my recovery, it is honest. I need to accept it, square my shoulders, plant my feet, quiet my mind and face life head on.

"It is important to honestly accept my responsibilities for my recovery and lovingly leave your responsibilities and recovery to you. 'Blaming' is a self-centered mindset in which I set myself up as judge. Feeling like I have power leads me only to pain. Honest surrender leads to peace. I need to learn to recognize and ask for what I need. I need to give myself permission to have what I, and all addicts and humans want - love, nurturing, prosperity, freedom and joy. Honesty and love are no longer acceptable justifications for my intentionally hurting or manipulating another. I must clearly understand my motives so that I can proceed gently, lovingly, and spiritually to share what was so freely given to me.

"Sometimes the most honest thing I can do to help another addict is to shut-up and listen. I must always remember that my moral standards are not theirs. My specific rituals or beliefs are not

universal. The principles contained within and the processes by which we apply these principles are indeed universal and eternal. I must be true to the principles and process and let the specifics change by being honest and recognizing what I can change. Honesty with a sponsee may be simply being lovingly patient while waiting for them to become willing. To force her growth may cause her unnecessary pain and will certainly strain my tolerance. I have great difficulty in being 'H.O.W.' (short for honesty, open-mindedness and the willingness to try), when face-to-face with anyone who is not accepting and loving. I must always remember this especially when dealing with other addicts. My disease convinces me on a daily basis that I honestly do not know how to cope with 'happy, joyous and free' but recovery says, 'Try!'"

The key word in this Step is "promptly." This means "asap: as soon as possible," not at the end of each day or even each hour. The speed with which we catch ourselves still acting out on old behavior is all important here. Also, the one who we 'admit' to is ourselves. The concept of no longer tolerating excuses for us to continue to live the 'old way' is all important in this Step. It is our responsibility, in order to honor my commitment to our new way of life, to try to adopt as close as possible to a 'zero tolerance' attitude towards my behavior from one minute to the next.

The ideal result from working this Step would be to become so aware of our behavior that we may be able to live a spiritually directed life. In order to continue or to work an effective 11th Step, we commit to accept complete responsibility for all our actions. In other words, "no more excuses." We surrender our life and our will to the care of a loving God of our understanding and that God gives us a way to deal with errors and

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mistakes in a loving, gentle way.

Step Eleven

"We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us, and the power to carry that out."

In a program with a first Step involving surrender, it is not out of order to underscore the quiet surrender of meditation. Just taking time out to quiet our restless minds, still our bodies for a while and take a good time out. The longer we are clean, the more we can see how people act to produce the problems in their lives. Just by leaving off unnecessary decision making, practicing total abstinence and going to meetings suspends much of this 'problem making process' from the beginning. Taking time with others and working the Twelve Steps distracts us more from making new problems. Meditation is the only thing a person can do that takes nothing but quiet and the time to sit and gives such tremendous pay offs.

Most people have some moments of quiet reflection. A lady pauses over washing dishes to think about a child's schooling, how her husband is doing and other main things in her life. Just a taking a moment's pause, now and then, helps us stay on track with our dreams and inner reality. Another person works on their car and listens to the radio. Another man working on an assembly line in Detroit practices meditation while performing a repetitive task for his whole shift. As he works, he drifts off into meditation. Some people turn off the radio on the drive to work or going home and meditate then without calling it meditation. Scholars take hours of reflection after all their classes are done. It can take years for them to solve out how best to present the results of their decades of intense learning and training. So much has to be taken into account. When we say meditation is the most practical science in the world today,

it is the individual broadening and deepening of this experience. We addicts know how important change is to all the rest of our lives. Changing ourselves changes the rest of the world. A little meditation for most people is enough to power the rest of their lives. What if by taking out a little more time for meditation would increase and cleanse the rest of our lives. Our dreams, our potentials to achieve and accept expand as we grow spiritually. When the student is ready, the master will appear. Are you ready? Did you take time today to meditate?

When we sit, relax physically, breathe and focus, we unleash the powers that live inside us. We gradually explore our own hidden reality, the things that power and drive us. Issues can be resolved and conflicts within our being resolved like patiently uncoiling a rope that has become twisted. Is it possible that this is part of what happens when we sleep? Is that why we feel rested and ready for another day? If we give ourselves the gift of repose has anyone told us what that restful awakens will bring us? We base our lives on decisions made with insufficient information. We think we know people. People have unknown oceans and star systems inside them. Things are going to happen we cannot foresee. This is why we need conscious contact with a higher power.

Spiritual adepts are sometimes called 'seers' because of their ability to 'see' meaning into past present and future events. Any of us can improve our ability to 'see.' We admit our limits as well as our willingness to grow in this area. In other words, we must literally 'seek' the ability to clearly 'see' the spiritual reality. We ask for God's help in every area of life while we are learning to use greater powers to better ourselves and make us more nearly fit instruments of a loving God. We learn to assume the attitude of someone who is sincere and believes that prayer will produce results. A myriad of different groups practice meditation outside of Narcotics Anonymous. Nearly all these groups practice a

particular religion or philosophy. An endorsement of any of these methods would be a violation of our Traditions. It would also clearly place a restriction on the individual's right to have a God of his/her understanding. Many of us stick to the definition that meditation is simply getting still, quiet and listening for our Higher Power's guidance. This definition allows us to develop spiritually in our own way. Meditation allows us to reconsider some of the things that didn't work for us in the past because they might work today. We can also envision possible futures in time to make changes for the better. We can catch errors of judgment brought on by the new choices life offers us and our inexperience at dealing with life in favorable situations. Some visions go way beyond what can be put into words. We study and learn 'heart math' to follow the vision before us. Before engaging the 12th Step process, defects tripped us up at every turn. Meditation replaces medication. Meditation helps us clean up our body chemistry so that the flow of endorphines, serotonin and other body chemicals play a healthy role and we don't go off into internal chemistry binges! A drug is a drug and that includes body drugs.

BEE KEEPERS SECRET

Meditation has always been a subject that has not produced much written experience within NA. While including some generalities about meditation in the Basic Text, much can be shared that is not commonly known. There is a major example of the 'power' of meditation in the case of people who can collect honey from a bee hive without being stung. It so happens that people who exhibit an unusual calm can do this. Others would be stung badly. One man in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee was able to collect honey in this manner only when not drinking. The insects pick up on the 'spiritual condition' of the person collecting the honey and do not sting those who are in a meditative

trance, mood or state of mind. This is intriguing in a world that demands quantitative evidence.

Over the years, we may have heard it stated many times that meditation would allow us to 'see' the path to follow. We amazingly seemed left in the dark as to how to choose the paths to follow and how to go about this. Most assuredly, there is as wide of a range of meditative techniques as there are people. In NA, we do not promote just one method of meditation above the others nor urge all of our members to follow one particular method, just meditate! This doesn't mean that we cannot outline any variety of practices that we know. We have that freedom and responsibility. 'Meditations' open the inner self in order to obtain a higher spiritual nature. To create unity between the two is, broadly speaking, the purpose of meditation. In the following material you will find concentration exercises that will help train your mind in order to start the meditation process..

Concentration exercises

1. Meditation using a quality or ideal. We take, for example, 'the strength of tenderness' as the focal point of quiet thought. We reflect upon its deeper meaning and after a while we might mentally picture those people that we know who embody 'tenderness'. We try to get an empathetic feeling for the way they look at life. Next, we may move on in our thoughts to the saints or sages in the history of humanity. We may think of the great people that we have known in our life and see the similarities of character. We ask, "How is this quality visible in their lives?" We may then imagine ourselves in the presence of a great spiritual teacher. We pause and feel the strength of their tenderness in us. We pause again, take a few deep breaths and retain these feelings when we exit our meditation and go to do other things. We should repeat this

exercise regularly in order for it to enrich our link with the 'qualities or ideals' that we want in our lives.

2. Meditation by listening to a piece of music that you find uplifting because of its gentleness or power. Get comfortable; allow the music to enter through every pore in your body through its vibratory nature. Let it wash through you, cleansing and invigorating you. Remember, when your mind wanders off the music to a worry, duty, future event or memory you bring it gently back to the music.

3. Concentrate our meditation by choosing two or three verses from 'inspirational literature' that are powerful and beautiful to you. Reflect upon them meditatively and repeat them with the intention of using the principles involved in your daily life. Do this in spare moments throughout the day until they become part of you. Such verses evoke and encourage all that is best in you and gain power to motivate you through the years. Whenever you are facing a difficult situation or making an important decision, reflect upon how this verse relates to what you are about to do.

4. Concentrate further by observing your 'thought processes' as you sit comfortably with your eyes closed. Don't suppress your thoughts; simply take note of each one as it occurs. Some examples are, "Concern about an upcoming activity, recalling an experience, distractions in your immediate environment, a mental conversation with someone, or the awareness of physical discomfort." You should take notes of general categories of thought and let go of specific thoughts. You are like an empty cup. Your life fills the cup. You can change what is in the cup.

5. Concentrate by using 'Invocations', as an invitation to your Higher Power to enter you life. Each morning, noon and evening set aside two

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minutes to center yourself and to repeat an invocation such as one of the following. Try to have your will focused fully and feel the energy of the invocation's meaning stream into you, through you, and out of you. Invocations such as these, when used over time, can become powerful tools for our new way of life. We offer these two invocations in the hope that they may be of some assistance to members who wish to practice this method of concentration.

"May the blessing of _____ flow to _____.

May she/he be comforted, strengthened and guided."

— or —

"May I be an instrument for your will to be done.

May your strength and guidance pour through me to _____."

Please share any experiences that you may have with meditation to those asking for help in this area. Sharing an experience, giving it away, is how things become real for you and extends our own progress. Usually, there is a calm certainty that accompanies the constant, supportive feedback that we associate with having knowledge of God's will. Frequent obstacles, unusual delays and supportive criticism should cause us to pause and consider whether what we're doing is spiritual or self-willed. This is not to imply that 'doing God's will' is always easy. Sometimes all we can do to go on and the dream or vision of what God wants us to do remains visible. We want a practical and tangible way to implement these visions just like with many of our attitudes regarding spirituality. If what we're attempting to do seems to be too troublesome, frustrating, or awkward, maybe we should look at alternatives and ask

others for suggestions. If after we question what we are contemplating, and continue to feel uncertain inside, we may need to pray for additional strength to carry out God's will for us. As addicts, we have a problem with taking on too much, often more than we can handle.

We learn to work with surrender, faith and the ability to act without going against our true spiritual nature. We discover that when we don't go against our own nature, we don't go find ourselves in useless conflicts with others as often. Our sense of what is right and wrong shifts from the confusion of addiction to something more sensible. While the past may remain confusing for a while, our present becomes clearer to us. Many of us discover, perhaps for the first time in our lives, that 'moral' is a way to experience 'more.' Moral is not just a judgement against us. Spirituality gives us new ways through which we can experience reality. We can get more done in our lives as we discover that spiritual principles are tools for shaping our lives just as we can get more done at work with the proper tools and supplies. Along with meditation, we may find other words useful. Contemplation and reflection describe two internal processes that have the power to release or direct our spiritual energy. Contemplation is, in a simple form, when we just sit and stare while wide awake. Many of us use this technique to still our mind while keeping our eyes open. When we 'tune out' enough of the external chatter and shove our basic desires out of the way, we may discover thoughts and feelings we had forgotten. We know that these will only go away when we give them the time and attention they deserve.

We can test our ideas, thinking patterns and feelings by meditative reflection. This reflection involves no great mystery, trick or single technique by which we can do this. Just by sitting quietly, we can eventually reach a level where we can discover our mistakes, gain enthusiasm or change our mind without the pain and embarrassment of

‘failure.’ Many of us became accustomed to feeling jerked along by life that we couldn’t pause and settle down within ourselves before feeling forced to action. A principle of living clean is that by taking care of what we can do, we gain momentum to make other improvements. Reflection might be another word that some substitute for meditation but it may better describe the process of sending out thoughts or trying on feelings without the necessity to act on them. The basic difference between these terms seems to be indirect visions or reflections as compared to the direct insight of meditation. Directly dealing with things is most the most desirable method. We should do this wherever possible. Recovery allows us to step out of the bleak, desolate landscape of addiction into a changing landscape where unfamiliar abilities, responsibilities and demands continuously appear. Being able to explore these things privately without the risk of ‘being wrong’ brings us an advantage in reality. Reflection is a clear headed and simple way in which we can envision something and think it through before we commit ourselves to action.

One simple way to begin reflective contemplation is to focus our attention completely on any bright point of light that is convenient to where we’re sitting. As our attention becomes riveted on this point of light, we find ourselves awake and feeling intensified in a manner that most of us call ‘regaining our senses’. Many have asked, "Is self-reliance a safe practice for an addict?" Some may answer, "No." How does this relate to Tradition Seven, "being fully self-supporting"? What about simply trusting our feelings? Can we rely on our feelings to guide us? Why would we have them if we couldn't? Did God create these feelings just to confuse us? Of course not! The disease of addiction would have us believe that God is our primary source of confusion, maybe even our only one. God is the source of our clarity; He gives us the ability to see things as they really are. We can begin to sort out our feelings and our

thoughts as we attempt be more God-centered. We learn how to trust these God-inspired thoughts and feelings. We know that when our feelings or thinking gets confused, it's the disease attacking us. When our thoughts and feelings are clear and we are at peace with them, it's God. Telling ourselves this is the way we learn to trust ourselves. We begin to see that God is working in our lives. We need to act out on these inspirations and affirmations by sharing our feelings and thoughts.

We have found our faith and courage by the grace of the God of our understanding. When we do God's will, our self-will pales in comparison. God shows His love, patience and tolerance by carrying us when we cannot carry ourselves. Each of us has received a different gift with which to carry the message and with God's guidance; we have many tools available to us. God may have given some of us the natural ability of carpentry. We are all given gifts. When we are humble enough to 'see' God's will and courageous enough to follow His guidance, we come to believe that all things are possible, even for us. We have found that hope without faith is vanity in its most destructive form. Praying daily and accepting life on life's terms brings profound changes in our spirit. Sometimes it seems that even the pain that we have experienced was God's will because of the lessons we have learned. While spiritual answers differ between individuals, we do share some common ground. Some of these common truths are that "God's will for us is to practice love, honesty, surrender, faith, acceptance, and acknowledging His presence in our lives." "God's will for us is to use the talents that He gave us to help others." "God's will for us is to carry a message of hope, love, understanding, and life." We receive the inspiration and the strength that we need to carry out each task that the God of our understanding gives us. Our knowledge of God's will like all of our concepts change over time. As we become more capable, we must make a greater effort. Through prayer, asking God for direction, and

meditation, listening for His response, we have learned to identify the difference between our will and God's will.

"Well, my NA brothers and sisters, here we are on Step Eleven. It is now time to put your recovery into high gear. So far we have been taking this inventory and that inventory. making this list and that list but now, in Step Eleven, we must make that greatest of all commitments to this our new NA way of life. We must take action to seek and improve our conscious contact with God. Here we are also told the vehicles we must use in order to achieve this lofty goal, prayer and meditation . This conscious contact when achieved will provide us two great boons, knowledge and power. Not just any kind of knowledge and power but those that can only be granted us by god. This is not a game. This is not just another intellectual exercise, it is an experiential reality. Once granted them, they must not be squandered, we must incorporate them into our daily existence to be used in the service of those who still suffer. Great pain and suffering will follow if we don't. I won't get into the specific practices only to say that those of us who have made this commitment to surrender the ego at this level will no doubt find the proper instruction that will help us make these practices bear fruit."

One member's experience with Meditation:

Meditation is the science of God consciousness, God realization. It is the most practical science that exists in the world today. Most people would want to meditate if they understood its value and experienced its beneficial effects. The ultimate object of meditation is to improve one's conscious awareness of God and to improve the connection of the meditators' spirit with the reality of the God of their own understanding.

Here are simple instructions for meditating:

Sit with a straight spine on a chair or cross-legged on a firm surface. With eyes closed, gently focus your gaze and concentrate your attention at the point between your eyebrows. This is the seat of concentration, and of the spiritual “third eye”, or divine perception in the human being. With the attention fixed at this center of calmness and concentration, practice the meditation you have chosen. Meditate until you feel that the concept on which you are meditating has become a part of your own consciousness.

This process showers on the person meditating the infinite amount of Peace of Mind, Power and Wisdom that comes from God.

Meditation uses concentration in its highest form. Concentration consists of freeing the mind's attention from all distractions and focusing the power of the mind on any thought on which the individual might be interested in. Meditation is the special, highest form of concentration in which the attention of the mental stream has been liberated from all restlessness and is focused only on the God of our understanding. Therefore one can say that Meditation is concentration utilized to get to know God.

In response to our love for Him, God manifests himself in various forms. Like truth, all the divine qualities that are present in every human being, in the creative power and beauty present in nature, and in the spirit of every human being. Therefore meditation on any of these concepts can bring to the meditator a deep awareness and direct knowledge of the God of their understanding.

Prayer and meditation is sending and receiving communication with

your personal higher power. We ask for knowledge of God's will and the ability to know that will. It is how we go beyond the 'little life.' Also, and more importantly, prayer might be a way to get in the mood to meditate, express gratitude or process what we learn after meditation. Meditation might be a state 'in the middle' between us and God. It might be like looking through a porthole into our interior to see the dominant themes and stare at our internal life. Then, we might be able to move our focal point into the midst of what we have otherwise been looking at so that we are inside and can reach out and make changes. It is possible that meditation is similar to a waking equivalent of the REM phenomenon that occurs while we are sleeping. It is a deep form of sleep wherein the eyes move rapidly behind our closed eyelids. REM sleep is the phase of rest that heals and nurtures our bodies. There is no wrong way to meditate. It is hard for some people to accept that just sitting quietly and comfortably for fifteen minutes can produce such amazing effects as decreased susceptibility to illness, longer life span, an absence of stress, and accidental injury. Wouldn't it be wonderful of an all-powerful and all-loving creator to give us a simple way to improve not just the quantity of our lives, but the quality as well. We will live longer and better if we include meditation, sitting quietly and not thinking about anything in particular, just letting our minds come to a point of rest before going on with our day.

One of the most astounding notions to surface in the last few years is going back to explore and re-experience our childhoods or earlier lives and to take the full power, love, courage, and understanding we presently have with us. By vividly experiencing memories of past pain, we may draw different conclusions and effect different outcomes, especially in the life we are yet to live in the future. This may take the sting out of past pain and eliminate the event as an injury from our futures. All this and with God's help, we can pray for extra strength and

guidance to make our inward journey and if necessary go back in with friends to deal with problem areas we have trouble resolving by ourselves. This kind of intense reality alteration with the help of an all loving, all powerful creator can take personality change to a new level of importance in our recovery. In order for Step 11 to be fully effective, prayer and meditation must be practiced on a continuous basis.

Use your home group as a spiritual community. We share in NA an organized system of beliefs to learn about the application of spiritual principles. God will send us guides to help us throughout life, and this Step is where we focus on the kind of growth. Ministers, philosophers, writers, teachers have studied the subjects of this Step and share their knowledge with you through books, recordings and other media. Also, while this Step is about your understanding of God's will for you, getting closer to God also means getting closer to people. A spiritual community, like a church or other spiritual meeting place, is a good place to practice these new social skills that you may have only practiced in NA. Take advantage of what the world has to offer you to further your conscious contact with HP and HP's Will for you. Just remember they may know nothing of the disease of addiction and take pills, smoke pot or take prescribed meds. As a clean addict you can check these things out, being careful to protect your health and recovery all the while.

All NA members are encouraged to practice prayer and meditation according to their beliefs. We reach out spiritually and learn to focus ourselves in meditation in order to receive or listen. Do this daily on a regular basis and meditate for twenty minutes three or four times a week. Keep track of yourself in all of this. Keep in mind the amends you've made to yourself – caring for yourself physically. Eat well and sleep enough. Consider how the questions that follow involve all the aspects of your disease – physical and mental, as well as spiritual. Consider

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“Just for Today.” While you’ll be more tempted than ever to dream about possibilities, consciously apply the principles of focus and gratitude in this “new way of life.”

Step Twelve

"Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

"What a promise! What a gift! My spirit is awakened from the deep sleep that it had been mired in all these years! I am able to recover my true nature as a spiritual being as a result of practicing these spiritual principles in my daily life. If I am successful in practicing spiritual principles in every aspect of my life, as the Tradition put it in 'all our affairs,' then every person that God puts in my life will automatically be influenced and benefit from the message that I carry." from an NA member.

Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of working these Steps, we may find our lives changing in matters of personal conduct. We may discover that instead of concentrating our efforts in lost causes, we are now mainly focused on being available to the still suffering addict by freely giving that which was freely given to us: experience, strength and hope. As we grow into our long delayed adulthood, we learn to see that our needs are met. We acquire the skills of supporting ourselves, providing for the needs of others dependent on us, our health, and all our social interactions in a way that does not harm others. It is part of our awakening that we get to do this. Spiritual growth can seem non_sensical to someone grounded in fear, pain and guilt. But real spirit comes from learning how to live in a way that brings out the good stuff without all those nasty side-effects. 'Spirit' is another name for the good stuff.

Spiritual achievement has a plain side. If all spirituality was good for

was peak experiences, that would be a severe limitation on the broad range of human needs and occupations. Spiritual laws apply to the valleys and depths as much as the hills and mountain tops. It is because they key into a reality that is ever present and every where. It is never 'not there.' Our passions, our moods and our preferences allow us to focus but they also blind us to other parts of what is there, right before us. The extremity of our willingness, usually inspired by great pain, makes us able to see beyond the present pain brought on by our poor choices. There is random calamity in the world and we acknowledge that. But we have no power over calamity. We have terrific power over our individual, personal lives. When we totally surrender and learn to live better, it is we who immediately feel the relief. The calamity will have to go on without us.

We have all experienced at one time or another the simplicity of spirituality in action and wondered why it couldn't always be that way. What is it that happens that spoils a beautiful day? We are sitting in the park, in the sunshine, listening to the songs of birds, thinking how beautiful that they should find such sounds with their small beaks and lungs, to express the joy and excitement of their small moments. Suddenly we think of someone who has wronged us. A cloud appears, just over our heads. We begin to plan some revenge or hatefulness to the person who has wronged us. Now there is lightning and thunder. We decide who we will go see and tell a certain version of how we have been wronged and get that person fired or in trouble with their mate. Now the storm is in full flood. Where did the birds song go?

Recovery may be similar to just growing up. Principles can seem irrelevant. When we are in pain, principles can seem intellectual. We may need to hurt a lot more before we come into focus. One who has absorbed spiritual honesty or comprehended hope can use a range of

spiritual principles to avoid painful traps or deal with unanticipated problems. As recovering addicts, we learn that each of us has a grace period in which we can learn about spiritual principles through working our Twelve Steps. This is where we get our strength. We need to take seriously all that we have learned especially when there is no crisis. Read, read, read. Go to meetings and bring up topics you would like to hear discussed. Spiritual principles will always help us in unexpected ways far beyond the energy and time it takes to learn them. These principles are what our surrender to our need for help and our desire for recovery open us to learn. They are the building blocks of our new life. When we hurt today, we can trace that pain to its source and eliminate it. Poor thinking and erroneous conclusions lodge in our lives like a bit of food stuck in our throats. We won't feel right until we can get it down. Relaxing, taking deep breaths may help. Someone squeezing our chest and helping us expel the food may help. We have to get help.

Honesty, open-mindedness and willingness are the basis of other principles that affect our spirit or connection with our Higher Power. We may need to practice contrition and supplication rather than our strong, domineering personalities. A great many of us are absolute wimps and need to counter-balance this side of our nature with more aggressive abilities so we can access courage or the ability to take up for ourselves and others who need our help. We have to learn when to step in and when to step back. Where we find ourselves lacking in the ability to be tolerant, we should look at it as a real disability. We're hurting and missing out on something if we are not complete characters with the usual array of traits and potentials other people have at their disposal. These characteristics are things that we can change. We can practice applying principles as if we were lifting emotional weights. We can work out to develop our emotional muscles. Selfless service can be being the anonymous voice on the other end of the phone. Anyone who

thinks they know it all is cruising for a bruising.

Helping others sets us free several ways. While we accumulate the beneficial effects within, we are also meeting our indebtedness to others. All this is a polite way of saying that the help we've received from others shouldn't enslave us and the help we give to others shouldn't enslave them. Sorrow and embarrassment require respect from someone who would help without adding insult to injury. It's essential for us to remember that unsolicited help is most frequently mistaken for insult by the person receiving the help. The individual feels, "They think they are so smart. They think they're so hot! Even though they are helping me, they are making fun of me while I am down. I'm going to get them back! Wait till I get on my feet!" This is one reason we wait until someone really asks us for help! Is it any wonder that often they retaliate and feel totally justified in doing so?

This is true especially if our belief system and the values which we live by tell us that a perceived deficiency in ourselves gives us the right to move ourselves upward by bringing the other person down. This is reasonable in a certain primitive sense. Most people notice that this approach leads to various troubles that reduce not only the quality of their lives but also the doors open to them. This, unfortunately, is the big stumbling block for a certain number of professionals and religious people. They get paid for being in the know. Protecting their ascendancy is protecting their livelihood. Our needs and our need for personal growth transcend what they have to offer. We remain alert to the watchfulness in our newcomers. They have been many places and most often are underestimated and mistreated, like being a newcomer is a deficiency. Helping them requires demonstrating a certain good sense and exercising proper caution. Don't let the drowning swimmer pull you down. Hand them a life jacket, let them realize they are not going to

drown and when they settle down, help them to shore.

We don't discourage our members from helping others - that would be absurd. But don't let them take on the problems of others so that they get drawn into trouble again. We do not send our members on Twelve Step calls by themselves. The presence of one or more experienced members brings the program into play and keeps the disease from taking over. We acknowledge that some benefits of recovery require time, effort, and practice on our part. We utilize a system of procedures and policies within our Twelve Traditions to avoid all but the worst problems. Some will occur again and again, all will yield eventually as long as we contribute our presence and our new way of thinking and doing.

We must learn to distinguish between pain-motivated changes and the desire for recovery so that we can more effectively carry the message. Many addicts come to us in pain, start to feel better, and then, wander off. Only those with desire will find recovery. This is not our choice but others will try to make it seem so. It is natural for people to try to justify themselves. After all, if they need to correct themselves, they may be put to some trouble. It is also natural for us to take up for the magnificence and wonder of our recovery. That we are who we are and able to again enjoy the benefits and happiness of a healthy life without falling into habits of squander and ruin is a miracle. Freedom from addiction is freedom from obsession and compulsion and goes way beyond not using drugs. It is not our place to set others straight. Let us proceed in our way quietly and be grateful. All addicts have moved towards a lifestyle that exploits personal pain as one strategy to get an edge or leverage on others. Recovering addicts are different simply because we admit and gradually come to terms with our pain in the course of our recovery. Helping others discover this method, we have to look unceasingly for those with desire and clear minds and hearts. The disease will find a way

to hurt us and make us suffer, even if we're "in the right!" If addiction played fair, recovery would be a far different process and addicts might have begun to get clean a long time ago. We know this is not the case and have had to deal at close quarters with the worse sort of backbiting, ingratitude and wrongdoing. It can feel strange to be the exploited instead of the exploiter. With practice, we can take up for ourselves without having to attack our attackers.

One addict recalls a session with a sponsee, "I suggested that he go over his understanding of the body and the mind, listing the ways in which they are similar and the ways they are different. Look at how parts of the mind and body might equate with one another. Such as the mind has intellect where the body has hands. Each can grasp and examine subjects, looking at the same object from different directions to get a picture or understanding. Next, look at the mind in comparison to the spirit. Study how the mind takes in the physical perceptions of emanations or vibrations and makes them 'real' to us like sight or sound. Think about how the spirit perceives reality in ways beyond the mind and body. What IS intuition?" Non_addicts do not tend to talk this way and sometimes we upset them in our quest for growth. But after all, we are addicts. And if it is good we naturally want as much as we can get! Intuition is knowing without words.

Spiritual power is toxic to the disease of addiction. To practice our spirituality in the presence of someone who is spiritually starved, is very similar to a person who has great wealth spending time with a poor person. The tendency to talk too much, appear to have all the answers and lord it over the impoverished is harmful and offensive. People want to know how much you care before they care how much you know. Over time, bit by bit, the habits of thrift, eliminating unwonted expenses and

being firm about getting paid, pay off. Just the same way, a person new to the life of the spirit has to take plenty of time to learn the new ways of meeting their needs and taking care of their personal affairs. Much of life is just the situation we are in at the time. Disaster happens to everyone. Addicts are certainly no exception. It is our ability to cope that is damaged by our addiction so that it is harder for us to get real and face our problems. We are used to poor substitutes for reality. But clean, life can become our friend again. Being gentle, taking time, remembering how it was for us in the beginning, we practice patience, humility and tolerance and - we never get enough practice...

Prayer and meditation might be like sending and receiving. We ask for knowledge of God's will and the ability to know that will. Also, and more importantly, prayer might be a way to get in the mood to meditate, express gratitude or process what we learn after meditation. Meditation might be a state where we find ourselves between this world and the world of God. It might be like looking through a porthole into our interior to see the dominant themes and stare at our internal life. Then, we might be able to move our focal point into the midst of what we have otherwise been looking at so that we are inside and can reach out and make changes.

One of the most astounding notions to surface in the last few years is going back to explore and re-experience our childhoods or earlier lives and to take the full power, love, courage, and understanding we presently have with us. By vividly experiencing memories of past pain, we may draw different conclusions and effect different outcomes, especially in the life we are yet to live in the future. This may take the sting out of past pain and eliminate the event as an injury from our futures. All this and with God's help, we can pray for extra strength and guidance to make our inward journey and if necessary go back in with

friends to deal with problem areas we have trouble resolving by ourselves. This kind of intense reality alteration with the help of an all-loving, all-powerful creator can take personality change to a new level of importance in our recovery.

In our personal recovery experiences, honesty is a process of seeking the truth about our self-destructive thinking patterns. Our disease knows it works and sometimes we do not want what works until we hurt bad enough. Pain is a motivator and is responsible for much of our growth as we go through this process moving towards self-acceptance. Honesty is probably one of the most deep-rooted and personal tools in recovery. Without basic honesty, all of the structure of our personal growth is not taking a firm hold on a good foundation. Some of us feel that honesty is deep change from the very beginning. We have a desire to change and as time passes, the desire to change seems to be not quite enough. Then the 'honest' desire to change takes hold. Then, we realize that we have to be honest in every aspect of our lives. A member shared, "My lying, cheating, and stealing kept me looking over my shoulder. In recovery, lying, cheating and stealing will still keep me looking over my shoulder. I have no growth or no real recovery if I am not being honest. I am only a junkie without drugs."

To be effective in carrying our message, we all become 'the oldtimers' as a result of clean time and service experience. One of the important areas to understand has to do with the Second Tradition. We all run the danger of setting ourselves up as 'leaders' in the roles thrust upon us by other group members with the best of intentions. None of us know it all. "There are no big shots or little shots in NA, one shot and we're all shot." If group conscience participation is taken away from our members, they are cut off from seeing to the business of NA. While they always have the final say - they can just walk away - it is not ok to make membership

a disposable item by our service structure.

Many times in the past members have made up reasons to break the rules written out in our service guides - reading them as suggested when they didn't find their direction suitable to their preferences. This has happened most often as the result of a period of sharp increase in membership where those who know the 'NA way' are relatively few in number and the numerical majority is both new and uninformed as to our history, our methods and our 12 Traditions. In this state, they will vote almost anything they are told to support. Unspiritual structural changes and the intrusion of business concerns into our spiritual Fellowship has caused many members to pull away from NA or stay away from service. There is no escaping what has happened or to get away from the realities unpleasant though they may be. We either learn from our mistakes or look up one day and realize that the power derived from group conscience process is essential to our recovery. Part of Step Twelve is being a peace maker and a bridge builder for those who do not know the NA way of life as well as we know it. If you take out spiritual principles in hopes of building a more efficient service body, you have missed the whole point.

Efficiency at the expense of our atmosphere of service and recovery is counterproductive. The illusion that we can orchestrate group voting to suit our version of what should be or how to do things is short sighted. Once the members involved realize they have been duped, they no longer want to support the NA program or its many activities. Being clean is more than not taking habit forming drugs. Being clean is about living so as to avoid pain and experience joy without harm to others. Leaving people out and using unscrupulous tactics to get your way are not effective in a spiritual fellowship. Efficiency is sacrificed in favor of individual opinion in a spiritual fellowship. This is because there is no

hold on people beyond their desire to stay clean and help others. If they see their 'leaders' making a mockery of the guidelines, Traditions or methods of openness and inclusion, they can just leave. This not a victory for anyone and an injury to all concerned. They are not employees or incarcerated. They are free human beings seeking help with their addiction. It is not just a few things dependent on their volition. Every thing is dependent on their volition.

Group conscience is the end result of a group of people taking the time to become informed on a subject by study and discussion and taking a simple vote. If the vote is a tie or evenly divided it is a sign that they group has not had sufficient time to study the question at hand. Because all people have deeply set opinions and ideas of how things should be and they will respond if properly approached. A heavy hand or abrasive attitude will defeat the process where human qualities and sensitivity are called for. This is not a fault of the system. People don't throw away their computers just because it is hard to learn how to use them. They take time and study the programs and hardware needed to do the job they have in mind.

NA is not a business or a marketing group. Our primary service is not selling literature. It is people in recovery taking time with people who need recovery. Putting book sales ahead of caring and sharing is just bad business because it ignores the realities of our situation. Our caring has to be real to really work!

Gratitude stems from the fact that today we can calmly appreciate our lives. There is nothing that guarantees and enlarges recovery like helping another addict. At those times when nothing else really seems to work, and we are ready to give up again, a suffering addict comes to us for help. It is like magic, as we give of ourselves, we get out of ourselves.

We become a conduit for the healing power of God working through us and as this happens, we heal too. Carrying a message of recovery may teach us objectivity. From the general truths, we find specific application.

We are not the authors of the principles of recovery, just the couriers. We take a gift from God and translate it into language that a hurting newcomer can relate to from the start. The newcomer might not know how to pray or what to pray for, but he or she seeks our help. We are the answer to their unuttered prayer. If he or she but knew what to ask for, they would ask for someone who knew exactly how they felt, to explain how we had managed to deal with their problem, survive, and prevail. Carrying the message implies the egoless, willingness to let God use us as a tool. This takes nothing away from us personally but our limitations and our short-sightedness. We see God's will live in all things through carrying the message. We lose our fascination with old problems and become fascinated with what is possible from here on out!

Why it Works: The Twelve Traditions of NA

"We keep what we have only with vigilance and just as freedom for the individual comes from the Twelve Steps so freedom for the groups springs from our Traditions. As long as the ties that bind us together are stronger than those that would tear us apart, all will be well."

Traditions and the word violation don't belong in the same sentence. A special love powers this Fellowship. When we feel hatred or tension, a quick look at the Traditions can sometimes identify the cause. Imposing one's will on another in the grip of a powerful emotion is likely to be faulty in some important regards. Screaming at a newcomer not familiar with our ways of doing things and our sometimes special word definitions may feel powerful, but we lose our atmosphere of recover along with our control. Best to pray. Spiritual strength is usually accompanied by a sense of calm. More than most people, we need to remind ourselves that God is the real worker of miracles here. At best, we are but instruments of our Higher Power. Seeing the Fellowship as the extension of some officialdom is a threat to our freedom. What we 'recover' is our potential to be a loving and caring human being. We put recovery and our spiritual needs first. We can tell if something is right or not by looking into our heart. Narcotics Anonymous is the spiritual moment that an addict discovers within themselves the strength to stay clean one more day. When we share this with even one other addict, we activate the spirit of Narcotics Anonymous. This moment is what we share together in recovery and it is the heart of our program.

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on NA unity.

2. For our Group purpose there is but one ultimate authority _ a loving

God as He may express Himself in our Group conscience, our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern.

3. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using.

4. Each Group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other Groups, or NA, as a whole.

5. Each Group has but one primary purpose__to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.

6. An NA Group ought never endorse, finance or lend the NA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every NA Group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Narcotics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our Service Centers may employ special workers.

9. NA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10. NA has no opinion on outside issues; hence, the NA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Recovery is an adaptation we make to the reality of our addiction. Recovery has to be learned and doesn't come easily. To protect the groups, whose primary purpose is to carry our message, we have evolved certain customs and ways of doing things that satisfy both our individual need to deal with life on life's terms while carrying a spiritual message. To succeed as a Fellowship we seek to avoid the entanglements that plague countless organizations and structured programs. We keep it simple not because it is easy but because that's what works best for the most people. The atmosphere of recovery is too important to leave to chance. Newer members have to learn how we invoke and maintain the caring yet sensible mood that prevails where the NA spirit is strong and attractive. Too often, where we have grown too fast, we have lost this special quality and our meetings and our message suffered. We learn again and again to put our recovery first, as members and as groups.

Traditions characterize a spiritually fit group of recovering addicts who find recovery in Narcotics Anonymous. When Traditions are violated, we have learned that fear has in some way gained a foothold. These fears justify wrongdoings. The only other possibility is simple ignorance. Violating traditions hurts the people involved. The fear makes it seem reasonable and proper for those doing the hurting to feel justified despite the evidence of their eyes and ears. This may be the essence of our insanity, an inability to believe our own witness. If other members are hurting or behaving badly, they need extra love. If we are the ones who care, we are the ones who must pray for the extra grace and opportunity to help them in their difficulty. Newcomers are watchful and they can catch flaws in old timers as quick as some of our NA scholars can spot a

Tradition violation. "If it ain't practical, it ain't spiritual" is an old NA saying that shows how we deal with a good idea if it doesn't appear to be working. To retain a place in the NA program, everything spoken or written must prove its usefulness in the actual practice of recovery. If love and caring are in evidence on the surface, it may indicate love and caring below the surface. If hatred and anger are on the surface, we may need to pray or meditate. If we can't do this, it's a good sign that our spiritual condition is broken and must be regained before we can go on to anything else.

We do this by going to our sponsor and home group and admitting our need for help. We try to recall what we did as newcomers to get back in touch with the basics that worked for us before we knew what living clean was all about. As we recover from our obstinate opinions, we regain flexibility and spiritual balance. Solutions begin to appear and again we realize that we are once again safe in recovery. We need to instruct each other in the Traditions. Sometimes we tell the newcomers to only focus on the Steps. However, for someone who is suspicious of the program and uneducated in being a part of a functional group, learning about the Traditions also provides relief. Our Traditions give us information about our structure and explain the guidelines to principled behavior. We are careful to avoid using our knowledge of the Traditions as rules for others. We lead by example rather than authority. The usefulness of the Traditions is in learning to guide ourselves and make the right decision for the right reason. We can share our feelings and experiences with others without seeking to dominate or control. Because recovery is an inside job, the principles of the Traditions deal with the outside issues. They help us find ways to be useful as instruments of a loving God and avoid conflicts with others among ourselves.

Anonymity helps us look at the reality of a thing instead of the labels. So

much in life comes to us promising one thing and delivering another. Authentic and real, life presents itself to us as it is. The trick is in being of sound mind and being able to believe the evidence of our senses. Since we are anonymous, we go by self-evident truth rather than authoritative truth. It is what happens and not just who did it. Traditions describe a reality. Awareness of this reality allows a group to relate to other groups effectively and maintain good relations within the group. When we say, "It's good enough" too often, we'll come up short in our Traditions. While Tradition violations may be hard to see at the time, the results are visible when a group becomes dispirited. When a group loses its spirit, no one feels like doing anything to help the group. Words are not kept. If you miss a meeting, you feel like, "So what..."

Due to the nature of our illness, we need special rules to underlie our meetings and services. These rules are implicit in our Traditions and enable the principles of our Steps to be applied more consistently. The first rule of recovery is to not allow ourselves to be divided by apparent differences against our many real similarities. We identify these similarities and let go of comparisons that would emphasize our differences. The second is to share what we feel from our higher power when considering or discussing what we do in NA. The third is to include the members of NA by open information and direct participation in any process having to do with NA. Personal commitment in these areas alone will eliminate many of the problems that seem insolvable once they get started. People feel left out, fear is generated, facts get distorted and soon we are at war with our brothers and sisters. We learn to treasure certain values. Among these values are:

1. Trust bonding addict to addict.
2. Loyalty: Acts of contribution and protection.

3. Submission to the Spiritual Life
4. Courage to Change
5. Caring and Sharing
6. Spiritual Humility
7. Courage to Try
8. Sincerity: Honest Intentions
9. Integrity: Honest Actions
10. Perseverance and Good Faith
11. Conscious Contact with our Higher Power
12. Living Clean

Vigilance is paying attention to what is going around you and accepting responsibility for your part in everything. This does not mean that, for example, if someone talks too long in a meeting, then you interrupt them immediately. Show a little compassion. Our rooms are full of people who used to talk too long. We may learn to pause and consider why it's such a big deal. Ask yourself questions, like: "Why do I care? What is he doing that annoys me, and what do I do that is like that? Do I feel I am a failure if someone in my proximity doesn't do well or as much as I expect of him or her? Do their shortcomings really reflect on the me or the group?" It is our experience that we have trouble accepting in others the aspects of our character that we are unwilling to accept or change for

ourselves. Further, when we accept or change those aspects of our character, we will likely become detached or uninterested in those who display those aspects _ unless they want help or are sharing their experience with us (this is when fellowship outside the rooms comes in handy).

A member shares, "For example, my issue with gossip is not that it violates the last tradition; it is that I can't stand it when people try to con me or get the facts wrong. I hate it when people con me because I was such a con - and I was so good at it. When people don't do it well, I want to challenge them to one more round of 'The Game' so I can show them that I will win. Fact is, I lost the last few rounds...

"I also get very annoyed when people call me up to bitch at me for something I didn't do - and won't accept that someone lied to them about what happened or didn't have all the facts so that they jumped to the wrong conclusion. In my recovery, people stopped gossiping around me when I stopped judging other people and when I stopped talking with anyone but the person I was trying to learn about. I know that people still gossip about me, but it doesn't bother me. All of my friends know they can tell me about myself to my face or can disagree with me - because they have.

"I have learned along the way to say, 'I was wrong' and 'I don't know' and 'you'll have to ask him.' Anyone who is not involved in my life and anyone who bases what they think about me on the past is dealing with the disease - theirs and mine. I have changed. If they judge me without the facts or stay away because they are afraid to talk to me, they are limiting themselves - not me. I will continue to recover, grow and change in the atmosphere of love

and acceptance that my home group gives me because of who I am, not in spite of who I am. Yet, the first step is that I have to accept who I am. I have to admit it, accept it, ask for help if I want to change it, and move on through life.

"A key thing here is that not all the things that people say and not all the things I have trouble accepting are 'defects,' 'shortcomings,' or 'bad.' I have had more trouble accepting that I am lovable than any other aspect of my existence. Similarly, I had a lot of trouble accepting that I have a good sense of humor; I am sweet. I still don't know what that means, but I've accepted it. I am attractive, and that I am an aggressive, powerful, intelligent, well-educated, well-bred woman.

"Most of those things have been pretty obvious to everyone I've ever known in my life, but, by the time I got clean, I was ready to club anyone who dared mention any of it. I was angry, serious (check Webster for the definition of 'sober'), scowling, dressed in drab clothes that would hide an evidence of gender, self-effacing and actively doing anything else that would convince any sane person to avoid trying to deal with me. The contradiction was obvious and off-putting.

"Fortunately, I found NA, where they recognized me as one of their own, and I found a way to change. For me, it wasn't enough to quit using. If I was going to be the same person, I would have kept using. It was the loneliness and the depression that drove me to change and recover, not the need to be acceptable to the courts or to my family. A major portion of my recovery has been based on being stubborn (read 'vigilant'). I kept coming back and kept working on myself. When people pissed me off or I couldn't deal

with something in my life, I'd search the Basic Text for clues to the path of change. When people did things to hurt me (it wasn't all self-inflicted pain), I re-examined my role.

"For example, I learned to pay attention to what attracted me to men and realized that the key aspect of character that I found (past tense) attractive (read sexy) was street smarts: power, violence, and manipulation. If he could make me believe anything, then I would get involved because I thought 'you're special,' when directed to me, would always be a lie. Eventually, as I learned what about me was special, I became less interested in men who lie well and became more interested in men who share the interests and qualities I enjoy. Another aspect of vigilance has to do with the typical addict's difficulty with accepting the positive or productive. Normally, 'we keep what we have only with vigilance' is interpreted to mean that we must be cautious and wary, policing meetings, and service committees, and slapping the hands of those who stray outside the guidelines. A more positive interpretation is to find the meeting that is warm, loving, and where people are changing - and support their group.

"In my recovery, I have joined groups with the intent of 'saving' or 'fixing' by making sure the traditions are followed, getting only 'good' speakers, and drafting friends to attend by constantly reminding them of the meeting's lack of support. Those meetings didn't change much and neither did I. I found my Home Group when I'd missed the meeting, and two other addicts asked where I had been. They said they missed me. I decided to change my Home Group. When I told my old group, they complained because they had just spent money on my anniversary cake. Guilt, shame, blame, judging, manipulation, and moralizing didn't get us much

when we were on the streets - it won't get us much in the rooms either.

"My 'new' Home Group consisted of me and one other addict who joined at about the same time. The people who had missed me relapsed and disappeared for a while. The two of us held every position, everything got done, and we didn't announce anything about lack of support during other meetings. We did invite sponsees to join our meeting. We did welcome newcomers and made sure they had phone numbers. We did make plenty of coffee and spent a lot of time outside the meeting sharing our recovery with each other and anyone else who wanted to join in. Anyone who bitched about how it 'should' be done was invited to accept responsibility for service in that vein, and we patiently (read quietly and gently) supported them as they learned or when they disappeared for a while. We did love and accept each other.

"Vigilance is as much about attraction, loving and caring, as it is about strength and persistence. Our Home Group one year later had about 15 members, with at least 8 present for any given group conscience. In my personal recovery, when I see someone who has something I want, the first things I do are introduce myself and tell them what I see. If they seem open to sharing what they have, then I ask for their phone number and when we might be able to spend some time. They may be defensive, if they haven't yet accepted their positive qualities.

"I ask direct questions and about specific things, like: How do you keep from acting out when you're so horny that you can't see straight? (Don't be around members of the opposite sex, be honest and share about it, accept that it's ok, get lots of hugs from

everybody, look for other things that might be triggering me to act out with a 'fix'). I don't expect them to read my mind, explain to them everything I know and have done about the issue because if they have what I want, they'll know, and I'll bore them to tears. I don't argue with them. I don't get angry with them for being happy, joyous and free - or in a healthy relationship, or working a great job, or whatever.

"Another way to be vigilant is to read everything about NA that you can get your hands on - and read it again. I still often see things in the Basic Text that I didn't see before. And I may find some answers in a service manual or another addict's sharing in writing that I wasn't even aware I needed. In regard to personal issues, I check with my sponsor, read, and share at meetings. If that doesn't bring me peace, I write about it. THEN I start calling everyone and babbling. (Of course, I learned this from trying to do it in opposite order for a few years.)

"In service, I searched for answers to current service issues by studying the Traditions. Next, I ask for help from others who have gone before me, and try out what I've learned. Thing is, by then, I'm usually enthusiastic enough to have a lot of energy to the work, and I've attracted a few other addicts who want to help. I've learned that 'should' and 'could' mean it's not time or it's not necessary. 'It should be this way' or 'they could have' is blaming and judging. This is not vigilance rather it is blaming and judging. People do what they can and learn lessons by scraping their knees and elbows. They have to suffer if they want to suffer - trying to get in the middle of it means I'll probably suffer too. Yet, vigilance (and loving) means I will be watching, on the ready, and taking the first opportunity to help when they are ready to accept help."

We know that addicts will test our love and spiritual strength. We also know that many addicts who haven't reached the same level of desire will exercise their pain within our ranks. It is up to the members with the desire for recovery and the ability to admit the need for help to provide the strength and love required in order for the recovery process to work. It is easy to underestimate the experience and courage we have developed as a Fellowship. Many people think spiritual principles are just words on a page, meant to sound good without practical value or useful application. Nothing could be further from the truth. The truth we share has withstood all the assaults the disease of addiction could throw at us. We learn three things:

1. Our learning is based on real experience, not great ideas that sound wonderful but don't seem to work well in real life.
2. Our Traditions are only useful when applied with a loving and caring attitude.
3. Loving, caring members use the 12 Traditions to help themselves understand what is loving and best for all concerned and behave accordingly.

While we come from all backgrounds, we have in common our pain, despair and hopelessness. What holds us together is our common desire for recovery. Narcotics Anonymous is the applied love, experience and hope of a Fellowship that has been succeeding against all odds while the disease of addiction rages and tears apart any who fall into fear, disbelief or manipulation. Our honesty is no luxury - it is a necessity. Those who abandon the Traditions, abandon themselves from the help that gives them a new life on a daily basis. Reality enforces the Traditions in terms

of the way things are. Many come to get clean in NA. We have found a place for every addict with a sincere desire for recovery. Sometimes very damaged and disadvantaged addicts are able to achieve ongoing recovery while others better educated and smarter in ways are unable to make their surrender. There is no way for the program to work for us unless we want it to work. The openness of our hearts to change is controlled by our desire and others respond to our need on an instinctual level. They help provide whatever they can to help someone who is honest about their need, willing to try what works for others and is open_minded enough to listen to our message. We need all the help we can get. Usually our need for help is to deal with life as things begin to get better for us. We have become so good at dealing with disaster, we have to learn and relearn to accept and enjoy life when things get better. Many of us continue to create trouble in our lives long after the drugs are removed. These are the reasons we cannot drift off into a dream of normalcy and have to arrange to offset our fear and disbelief everyday.

Our emphasis on giving, service, and helping others allows us to move into new roles we may not be used to playing. It makes us open to change by giving us first hand experience of help roles and that makes it easier for us to accept help from others. When we give a lot, we are more open to receive. It is easier to believe there are no 'strings' attached to the help we receive in recovery when we realize we are giving selflessly. Our meetings are learning centers where we model what we have learned and practice being our real selves in the company of others who have our disease and will help us reach the goals we set for ourselves. To a great extent, our Traditions control the social and spiritual rules that govern group behavior in NA and make our special way of life possible. It is not that we are against individualism; we have learned that our individual breakthroughs need to be constantly shared and processed by our friends in recovery to maintain the spiritual

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support we need as we grow. Getting out of touch with reality cuts our lifeline. If we can pray and meditate, we can seek to be used as instruments and await the strength and guidance that always comes when we pray for it.

TRADITION ONE

"Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on NA unity."

Common welfare is what we share in common. Our NA commonality of purpose and spirit gives us the positive lift and attitude that won't say "no" when an addict is asking for help. Being part of something is very important. Active addiction made us different and robbed us of our identification with our fellow human beings. Being accepted as we are makes us feel welcome. The common welfare we are all striving for is the ability to stay clean, just for today, and this unites us all in our common good. We are vigilant to remind our new members that they are in the right place. We can be an example to others by applying the principles of the Twelve Steps in our personal lives and living in recovery.

Throughout the fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous, each member is but a small part of a much greater whole. NA must continue to live, for without the recovery born of this Fellowship, many of us would surely face the alternatives of jails, institutions, dereliction, and death. It is in the spirit of unity that we are offered freedom from active addiction by collectively practicing the principles of NA=s Twelve Steps in our daily lives. Our meetings, and our groups, are the forum by which one addict works with another, freely giving what was so freely given to us.

The spirit of unity is born through identification and empathy. Identification is conscious awareness of our common thoughts, feelings, and problems. Identification is our initial connection with NA. Empathy - the emotional insight and spiritual bonding - compliments that connection. They become our primary vehicles of communication where

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words leave off, this is our language. It is with this language that a member can suddenly stop sharing in a meeting, begin to shed tears or choke up, and as the room grows quite, words no longer need be used. In this environment of unique love and concern, our message is still being carried and understood by all members present. Part of the proof of this is when non_members are present and later say they didn't >get it.

One member shares, "The willingness to work this tradition comes as a direct result of the spiritual awakening that I experienced by working and applying the 12 Steps to my life, on a daily basis, to the best of my ability. Previously, I had read most of the Traditions and have attended a few Tradition meetings. Nevertheless, I could not understand what purpose the Traditions would serve, other than some basic guidelines that would at least keep the chaos to a reasonable level so that a regular calendar of area NA events would be possible.

"I could not comprehend the concept of common welfare or unity initially because I could not see past my own personal agenda. My experiences with other 12 step fellowships had been negative. When I began to see and feel what recovery was like in NA, I would hear people speak and share at meetings and say things that were contradictory to the way I worked my program and they were just wrong misinformed people. I would get very upset and I would think of ways to be even more outrageous than they were. I would go to a meeting only to feel alone and different from most or all of the people in the meeting, I felt isolated and unique in some meetings. I sensed that this was a dangerous state of mind. I made a conscience effort to focus on the similarities rather than the differences and that diversity can be our strength. However, lives

do hang in the balance.

"My primary purpose is to stay clean and increase the quality of my life, mentally, physically and spiritually to be happy, joyous and free. I can only keep what I have by giving it away and I cannot give it to myself. Therefore, without the group and its members I am doomed. The groups support NA as a whole. I can well understand why a worldwide fellowship is vital to the individual member's survival. I have attended meetings in other countries and in other states and did not feel alone. NA was there and I was welcomed. I can go anywhere in the world and I have nothing to fear.

"We suffer from a common affliction. More importantly, we have found a common solution; NA. If we truly believe in NA and that our personal recoveries depend on NA, then NA must survive. A spirit of unity on a foundation of goodwill should guide the individual members in their personal conduct, as well as exercising their point of view at the group level or any other NA service position, see past their own personal objectives, and consider the affects on the group and NA as a whole.

"I apply this Tradition by slowing down in the moment and ask myself is what you are about to say in the spirit of unity and on a foundation of goodwill? Is what I am about to say intended to polarize the group and cause people to take sides? On the other hand, am I just trying to make some one that I do not like or disagree with look stupid? Am I considering the addict that has yet to walk through the door here or on the other side of the world? What would someone think if it was their first meeting? Would that person feel unconditional love in spite of whom they are? If I

contemplate these questions carefully before I speak or interact with others, my part in NA unity and our common welfare will be preserved."

Sometimes an atmosphere of dissention prevails in our groups over an atmosphere of recovery. While this sad truth cannot be denied, obviously it is not what produces our common welfare. It is an instance of people being people instead of members showing gratitude. Unity, group purpose, is the idea of 'we feel' as opposed to 'I feel'; 'we want' as opposed to 'I want.' For many of us this subjugation of our personal wants is frightening. Certainly, for those of us who have suffered greatly at the hands of others, this may be too much to ask, at least until working the Twelve Steps grants us the freedom to participate. It is frightening to be a part of something we cannot control or manipulate. It may take a while to get the idea that God is in control. This is not a theory, but the experience we hold in common. Surrender doesn't require a loss of individuality. The results are found in the furthering of our group purpose and that is simply carrying our message that we do recover.

There are times when we may disagree with a group conscience decision and we may have to surrender to the majority. We can still feel unified with the whole as long as we don't let issues divide us. It is every member's duty to support the group's conscience. We may present our concerns and ask the chair to recall the vote but in the end, group conscience is to be respected.

In Narcotics Anonymous, individual welfare is held nearly as important as our common welfare. Though our common welfare comes first, we continue to enhance our individual welfare by offering each member as much dignity and respect as any other. Unity comes from understanding and maintaining a similar sense of surrender and humility. This ideal is

found when we place ourselves rightly in respect to God and the people around us, thereby creating a Fellowship. The word Fellowship, by its very nature, implies a body of equals, none of any greater or lesser value in NA. This equality may be the key to our unity. We don't like bosses, especially when they have done nothing to earn or maintain our respect. We have found that the spirit of recovery resides equally in all who can share their pain and desire for recovery.

Each member, by their own conscience, will bears both the burden of labor and enjoy the fruit of harvest. We have no rulers, governors, or managers; no member can be punished or expelled. A group of members is neither greater than the individual, nor is any individual member greater than a group. This concept is complimented by the simplicity of having only one membership requirement. Our Ninth Tradition protects us from having rules for conformity. Sharing our pain and desire for recovery is what makes us surrender - and surrender makes us members. Tradition Two removes the threat of appointing people who rule by title to enforce such rules. Our leaders lead by example. Our unity is simply maintained from the understanding and application of all Twelve Traditions, here each tradition compliments the others.

Individuals are strengthened by the answers they find in NA to their living problems. The support exchanged with other addicts in recovery supplies just what is needed, when it is needed, if we have lowered our defenses, specifically admitted our need for help and allowed ourselves to become part of NA. Many of our answers seem to come 'right on schedule.'

Our common welfare depends on NA and group unity. So often when people let personalities and opinions get in the way we stray away from

our primary purpose. Many say, "It hurts when I see people attend their home groups and not have the commitment to fill trusted servant positions." It is very important that the groups stick together and stay focused on our primary purpose. We cannot keep what we have unless we give it away.

When a newcomer walks into a meeting, it is confusing enough as it is. Recovery is not an option to be found elsewhere for addicts who qualify for NA! It is of the utmost importance that the group maintain an atmosphere of recovery. We need to be committed to the program that saved our life and continues to help us live clean. It is imperative that the newcomers see this. We all need to remember that we are the same and our common welfare comes first. We cannot carry the mess, but we can carry the message. No addict need suffer any longer and a newcomer should feel welcome at their very first meeting.

Generally, compliance or noncompliance with any principle in NA is left to the conscience of the individual, as influenced by his or her understanding of God's Will. Major disruption or causing harm to fellow members is not allowed. With this in mind, we are free to practice acceptance, patience, and tolerance towards one another. The unity called for in our First Tradition can be threatened when our principles are compromised by fear of diversity. Our diversity is our strength, the broader our base, the higher our point of freedom. Because of the nature of our disease, we are vigilant to keep our meetings safe for addicts seeking recovery. Each group has its own conscience.

Many times it will seem like all the members in the world stand on two or more clearly separate sides. If you're aware of something like this happening, you can serve by seeking out the third and fourth sides to the argument. Coming from isolation imposed by addiction, we may not

realize that many people get steam rolled by powerful personalities, even if they have knowledge and experience that would help in a given situation. They may never get to share and hold back from sheer politeness. There are always more than two sides to a question and if internal tension and strife is too much for the member, he or she may have to find other members with common interests to work their Twelfth Step. We learn to look for the alternative viewpoints when seeking a solution or resolution of a group problem.

The Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous, as implemented in the lives of each of our members, are often viewed as his or her personal recovery. Our spiritual connection with each other's personal recovery creates one of the strongest ties that binds us together as a spiritual fellowship. Eventually, every member who has suffered the horrors of addiction understands the need for and importance of finding and developing a spiritual way of life. As this awakening of the spirit occurs and flourishes, it is reflected in our unity. As we apply the Twelve Steps in our lives as a design for living, we open the doorway to humility. Our need for false pride and ego is replaced by skill and ability.

The concept of group unity plays an important role in the 1st Tradition. The value of strength in numbers is evident throughout NA. Support among addicts helps us to better understand that some individuality can be detrimental to our recovery. Although we may be destructive independently, we are able to gather strength and healing from cooperation. Isolation for addicts leads to dissension, as we separate ourselves from our group, we are actually weakening the group and hurting ourselves at the same time. Each member of our fellowship has something to offer; as he/she separates, one less offering has been eliminated. This cannot destroy the group effort, but it does nothing to add strength. From strength in group unity, we gain momentum, building

stronger foundation to lean on in times of need. For newcomers, this is important. Becoming a part of a group effort brings addicts out of their shell, while at the same time, raising the possibility of adding positive support to the fellowship of NA.

Surrendering to our false belief of self-sufficiency, we begin to recognize that we need people. We need each other in order to grow. After a period, we see that "dueling egos" and disunity damages us emotionally and spiritually. Surrendering to the WE of group conscience enables us to become more unified. Unity not only assists the group to become more functional, it assists the member to grow. If personal recovery depends on NA unity, then NA unity must depend on personal recovery. This is why members feel, "I am hopeless every time my disease drives me into self-centeredness. I suffer alone in my own mind. The awareness of the need for my efforts to be based on the common welfare always brings me out of self and out of pain." Surrendering me to NA is a process that underlies all my work in the steps and traditions.

"I can not count on anyone. I am alone. I must do it myself." This is what our disease tells us. WRONG! By daily practicing dependence, our trust, faith and hope grow within us and become a part of our personality. Then we can freely give these things to those who reach out to us. Addicts are plagued with communication disabilities. What we may think of as the 'good of all' may be true within certain bounds yet untrue in a larger context. In recovery, we constantly double check our thinking and update our inventories."

Tradition One asks us to overlook the differences that may divide us and focus on our common identity as unified and equal members of a greater whole. It is through this commonality that one learns that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Each part has its own uniqueness, a

difference necessary to fit exactly where God had intended it, just for today.

What we share is what others have gathered to help us meet our needs. It is not 'ours' in the possessive sense, only ours in the sense we can access it by remaining humble and respectful to those who came before us and interested and helpful to those who replace us as the most important people as we grow into being those who can help. Intriguing stories of how members pick up unexpected benefits without seeking them or even thinking of personal gain abound in our Fellowship. Other stories tell a different tale of wonder. If we slip back into selfishness and calculate our surrender so we don't lose touch with our old ways, we can stay sick a long time. Insanity in terms of the first tradition is thinking we own what we have been freely given. We are custodians with the special added attraction of being able to increase what we receive so that others can receive until they discover the strength to give.

Any organization exists to provide something important for its members. Without our people, we would have nothing to do. While we do all we can to keep the program truthful and attractive, we have to provide sufficient guidance to insure the spiritual integrity of our way of life. It is hard to remember that there are addicts hurting beside us and behind us as well as ahead of us. It is time we go slowly and take the time necessary to express our real caring and sharing. Sometimes prayer just gives us the power to slow down.

Sometimes the Fellowship is sidetracked by rhetoric and misleading information. Our disease seems to inspire this sort of thing. Responding with counter accusations would only serve to further confuse matters. Going slow and trying to do God's will on a daily basis will always win out in the end. Short cuts and trickery will never get us what we want: A

clean life, free from the obsessions and compulsions of active addiction in any form it may take. Being real and honest about this is how we find our way through the temptations and illusions of daily life.

As long as choices are made by a well-informed group, all is well. How often is this the case? Are we not often too biased towards doing things our way, to allow for contrary views? Many definitions of the word political are functional having to do with group processes. The definition that applies to dysfunction relates to partisan politics, where competition becomes more important than contribution to the general welfare. How do we insure communication does not break down between groups and other service entities? The answer is we do not, cannot, assure this without installing the machinery of government and that would destroy our spiritual unity forever. Instead, we do what we can to spread goodwill and sensibility among the members with whom we come in contact and stay clean ourselves.

We must be courageous in presenting ideas that may appear to not be acceptable or popular. We might have the perception that clears up or unifies everyone else's thoughts. Different is not wrong. Different is just different. Acceptance of what our courage generates comes next.

If our strength is in our diversity, it is crucial to avoid any illusion of sameness. Addicts are and always will be enormously creative in their many approaches to getting what they really want. No one style of recovery is correct. We need our philosophers and our anti-intellectual. We need our socially flamboyant members and our staid conservatives. Most importantly, we need you.

The Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous is a society, or culture, like few others in the world today. There are no masters or rulers demanding

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obedience, only leaders and servants inviting respect. Though some are organized by economic, or geographic boundaries; ours is based on the actions we take today. NA is made up of people with a common problem - addiction, and a common solution - The Twelve Steps. Unlike the members of other societies, NA members need no human authority to maintain order; the punishment we would give ourselves through a relapse is far greater than any government could ever administer. Each member will eventually begin living the principles necessary to ensure their daily reprieve.

Our common welfare hinges not so much on our ability to impose uniformity as it does with every individual member's willingness to surrender any defect standing in the way of unconditional love and acceptance of our fellows. Unity is love, family, and the NA way of life. Working together to love one another, we have a better chance at helping the next suffering addict stop using, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live.

TRADITION TWO

"For our Group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience; our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern."

Each of us has been, because of our common malady, unable to govern ourselves. Our un-manageability has become apparent, not only to others, but to ourselves as well. This is often understood as a First Step toward recovery for the individual and initial point of unity for our fellowship; each person must first realize his or her powerlessness and un-manageability. We seek to do what we have committed to as well as we can with the freedom to ask for help. Neither we, nor any form of society with which we associated, could control our insatiable desire to use drugs and abuse our surroundings. Family, friends, governments, and institutions, none of which had any long lasting success with controlling or disciplining us addicts. Through being controlled by others, our need for self-government seems further evident. We are people who have grown very sensitive to authority.

It has been our experience, though we cannot be governed, we can be led or inspired toward what feels right in our hearts. This feeling of rightness or goodness is what many of us associate with the spiritual awakening we begin to experience in the fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. It is in this context that the concept of our Second Tradition becomes more obvious. Our only real Authority rests with God, as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Both power drivers and rebels can better work together in this context to carry our message, since neither is expending their energy foolishly fighting amongst the other.

Dope addicts are funny people. While many of us claim to hate authority figures. It is with some surprise that we find out that we actually are rather quick to give ourselves over to authority without thinking about it. Because we are not in charge, we believe we have no responsibility. In active addiction, our dealers were authorities along with various representatives of the organized world like cops, judges and doctors. We feel a need for freedom that we don't associate with illness or addiction. This is responsible freedom. We are unable to cope with every day reality and the ordinary demands of life may slide beyond our reach. Authorities are the ones we associate with the word "no."

"I do not know where the courage comes from most of the time, but today I find that I am a leader in NA. It takes courage to lead. It feels great for me to be so passionately involved in something that regardless of consequences, I will stand up and speak about an unpopular or controversial position. At the other end, I am able to carry and speak pro to a group conscience decision that I disagree with personally as long as it doesn't force me to act against my basic principles or beliefs. I am able to get myself out of the way and become an instrument that carries a group's conscience in a way that engenders humility and selflessness in my personality."

The simple fact is, most of us believe in the Twelve suggested Steps as a design for living clean. Many of us began this process because we had to, but later continued because we wanted what this way of life began offering us. Just as the individual conformed to what felt right in their lives, the group often follows a similar path as expressed in its conscience. Group conscience holds no rigid shape; it is flexible, shaped by the ever growing and changing conscience of its members.

Free members of a voluntary nonresidential self-help organization like

Narcotics Anonymous are ungovernable in any conventional sense. The techniques that may prove effective in government or business will quickly turn off a person who is only doing something because they feel it is right in their heart. It has to do with sanctions. Sanctions are rewards or punishments. Do some things, you are rewarded. Do others, you are punished. In NA, we do what we want to because we care. If someone starts yelling, bossing or criticizing us openly, as volunteers we are totally free to drop our tools in place and walk away with a clear conscience.

Many of our trusted servants forget this simple fact and get drawn into exploring their fantasies of what administrators and representatives do. Instead of learning how a spiritual Fellowship works, they try to impose their idea of order and the proper way to do things, assuming that those who have gone before have not done their home work. This may be so but there is no way to make it better without study, discussion and reflection. If we believe with all our hearts that all politicians are crooked and that the roles we play in service are political due to the titles we use to describe them, we will eventually become crooked. After all that is what politicians do and justify their actions as somehow necessary because the average person is too simple to understand. This is what we call a self-fulfilling prophesy. God seems to run the universe by making reality fit in with what a person expects to happen or see in a given situation. It is when we step out on faith that the boundaries we have been artificially setting for ourselves disappear. The role our choice of belief plays is incredible. Why didn't someone tell us! If boundaries are set by our own personal beliefs, we will want to carefully reset those boundaries so we can have more fun and get more positive results. Recovery is not a concentration camp!

This is a good time to take our inventory and replace our old ideas with

something better. We cannot get better if our beliefs are negative or unworkable. If we don't set higher standards for ourselves than normal people, we would be better off being normal and not aspiring to do anything better. What happens is a few people populate our service structure, we have a growing number of members who are just watching. Many of these members with experience pray and meditate on how we can solve some of our problems of self-government. One thing many members agree on is that NA processes should always be democratic in nature and that members should be consulted on things that affect them. It is an old addict game to lay off our problems on some one else. In NA, we are responsible for our own recovery and our service boards and committees are directly responsible to us. Group Conscience is how we run things in NA. It may be hard to see during a difficult period, but sometimes we have to let others run their course before they will be open to solutions. Personal experiences vary and few claim any knowledge or experience at running a spiritual Fellowship. It would seem that God, in some fashion as miraculous as our personal recovery, is constantly in charge and running things. Just when we think "This is it!", God pulls a fast one and things turn out differently than we had planned. We are human and we can only seek strength and guidance from a divine source.

In our service structure, we try to make some allowance for our members to have a basic conflict between two extremes: 1) needing someone to tell us what to do and 2) wanting to do things our own way, in our own time! Despite the tallness of this order, we have worked out what we call our service structure and certain procedures that seem to work for us most of the time. When there is difficulty, we all have the choice of staying and helping or backing off and letting nonparticipation simplify things for us. Our leaders are simply the members who try to respond to our needs. We listen to some who may have the answers that

stand up for the moment and only a few will stand against the test of time. We don't suggest a group inventory unless a majority of members involved are well beyond their own 4th Step inventory.

A group conscience works best when the spirit of a loving God is invited into each decision making process. A simple group prayer coupled with a period of meditation can offer previously unforeseen guidance or even tranquility in the midst of chaos. Mindful of our individual surrender, we are more often agreeable and open to what concerns other surrendered members of NA. The process of a group conscience can vary widely depending on the circumstance. There can be evidence of a conscience consistently apparent during a meeting, or as a regularly scheduled, organized consultation of its members, most often held before or after the meeting it represents. Although some groups find business discussions happening during meeting time, most members rather the meeting time be focused on carrying our message and furthering our primary purpose. Most business meetings take place immediately after a recovery meeting to deal with group business.

However, the only thing a meeting needs is two or more addicts, a message of hope, and a place to gather; opportunities of service begin to present themselves as a group grows. Positions of trust are established to fulfill these opportunities; leaders, secretaries, treasures, and other representatives are elected to serve so that stability can be accomplished and an atmosphere of recovery can be established or maintained. For a group to survive it must stand the test of time; nothing so much ensures this success so much as the quality and integrity of our servants. A working knowledge of our Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and regular meeting attendance, coupled with a willingness and desire to serve are qualities for both selecting and holding these positions of service.

These are only positions of service, entrusted to those whose duty is only to serve. A group's servants derive no real authority from such positions; their responsibility is primarily to perform the day-to-day chores of the group. Even in attempts to preserve or cultivate an atmosphere of recovery, this Tradition strictly limits the ability of any trusted servant to decide, dictate, rule, or censor the individual member. We must always remember that membership, in itself, ought forever be the highest position attainable in Narcotics Anonymous. All else stems from surrender and our desire for recovery.

Lest we become victims of our own incomplete learning experiences, we should try to focus on the primary purpose of our groups when we are talking about leadership and trusted servants. Our purpose in carrying our message to the still suffering addict is direct and to the point. If our group purpose is kept in mind, it will ground out some of our excesses. Most of the stuff that concerns us in NA is very simple, rather like baking a cake. It is important to have certain ingredients and certain utensils on hand with a ready oven and some sort of timer before we begin. While these points are simple, they are not dispensable. Sometimes we get so caught up in how we are going to do something, or who is going to do it, that nothing gets done!

Policy: What and How

There are two sorts of questions to be decided at any given point: what we are going to do and how we are going to do it. 'What' is like are we going to have a help line or take a panel of recovering addicts into a jail. Members directly involved must be prepared to spend time and group money to do what is needed and their vote is how we assess their willingness to support a group undertaking. 'How' we do things concerns our procedures. Sometimes we have to create a service board or

committee to get a service performed on a regular basis. Ad hoc committees are formed for temporary tasks and disband when that task is completed or no longer required.

If we feel we have to lie, manipulate, or knowingly deceive, we need to back up to our 1st Step. Dishonesty is a form of powerlessness which comes from a lack of contact with a loving Higher Power. What conflict exists between unity and group conscience? Some members have thought that an individuals' conscience has to be compromised for the sake of unity. Unity can become a double-edged sword if it requires deception or misrepresentation of facts to get a motion carried.

Worldly concerns about money, property and prestige will always appear imperative, immediate and definite. Spiritual matters, principles and values will often appear as flimsy or unreal to those caught up in the heat of the moment. Only by stepping past the illusions of 'us and them', 'money', and justified deceit, do we get to discover what's really important. In NA we sometimes do foolish things through habit or mental laziness. Inner calm helps us see through the haze of appearances to the heart of things. Our conscience can be our best guide if we quietly consult it without predetermining the outcome. We discover there is frequently a big difference between what we are willing to go along with and what we honestly feel when we think about it. By using the conscious contact that works so well in the rest of our lives, our groups can rise to the level of spiritual principles. When we abandon spiritual principles and fall back on ordinary law, kangaroo courts or mob mentality, we are no longer spiritual.

The Twelve Steps as well as our Twelve Traditions consist of the unification of spiritual principles; this is the essence of Narcotics Anonymous. With this in mind, spiritual interpretations of our Steps or

Traditions will always compliment one another. Moreover, the true spiritual conscience of a group will never run in conflict the spiritual principles of our Steps or Traditions. If conflict appears, it is best to stop and study the issue or concern more before going forward. When too many items get swept under the rug, the carpet gets lumpy.

While individuals have a tremendous freedom to follow the God of their understanding, certain spiritual terms stand on very common ground. We are patient, tolerant, humble, grateful and other things that reflect interior progress. If we find our minds telling us to go one way and our spirits urging us to give our attention to something else, we learn to pay attention to the spirit. Only by giving our very best can we expect results beyond what simple thinking can give us and the best that comes from God..

A sense of devotion to God's Will gives our groups the power that allows them to carry our message. Where that power fails, we go inward to renew our spiritual resources. Acts of desperation, justified wrongdoing and harsh treatment of individual members is never sanctioned in real Narcotics Anonymous. These things only occur where our members are inexperienced and are unaware of what had been learned by those who have gone before. A loving God is our only Ultimate Authority and is expressed in the conscience of our groups. It is not like "Do God's will or else!" It is more like do God's will or limp along as best you can...

We ask questions when participating in group conscience. We pin down members presenting important motions and try to get all the information we can. On serious matters, like departing from guidelines, we take time to talk over the item with our sponsors, group members, friends and pray for guidance. We may come up with additional questions. When all is

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said and done, we take a few breaths; make a decision and surrender the outcome to our HP. Quite often there are several good paths forward and all a person or group has to do is move forward. Other times, we miss the boat and have to back up to a faulty decision before we can take a new direction.

For the first time in many of our lives, we have become willing to try something other than our own way. We have been inspired by the joy, happiness and freedom of members who have come before us. Along with this inspiration comes hope that we can also begin to recover. We have no official leaders, but all of us may lead a newcomer to our way of life by the power of example and being available to lend a helping hand. When we allow God's will to be expressed through us, our own recovery becomes stronger.

We addicts can make anything hard. This Tradition serves to remind us that when it is all said and done, the final say must accord with our inner connection with a higher power we call 'conscious contact.' This is our protection against the games of manipulation and control that we all slip into from time to time. Our perfection is in our desire for improvement with spiritual help and guidance. We never arrive at a point of perfection where no further improvement is possible. It is the struggle that makes life meaningful. We can not afford to rest secure in our observations and opinions without concern for the feelings of our Fellow members. Being right should not condemn us to isolation. Again and again we will be forced to realize that we can only seek to do our part well and help the others when opportunities present themselves.

If you are an addict who has recently begun to live without using drugs, your feelings are coming back. It may hurt our faces to smile and make facial expressions. Some feelings are pleasant and others unpleasant. We

have an internal guidance system that works when we are clean. As we become more accustomed to being able to trust our instincts and perceptions again, we use our feelings add depth and dimension to what our eyes see and our ears hear. We begin to assemble what can only be called an inner knowledge or certainty about what is right and what is wrong. The Twelve Steps of recovery are in tune with this reality and that is why we have to spend so much time talking and listening among other recovering addicts. We can literally hear what rings true and what doesn't. Many times something we have been doing will first seem faulty when shared by another addict. As we examine these things more, we are encouraged to pick out the things that have no place in our new lives. As we grow, our inner knowledge comes out in many forms and one of these forms is the group conscience that we use to guide our groups and service structure.

Surrender to group conscience begins with anonymity. When we ask ourselves the question, "What is right?" instead of, "Who is right?" we begin to remove the personality issues from group conscience. Many times groups who experience disunity through personality conflicts when an uninformed group conscience is manipulated by an individual personality. It is very difficult for us to surrender to a loving God if we do not carry an informed conscience. We trust our servants in this capacity. If they are faithful, they will experience great joy. If not, they will simply persist in the idea that recovery and service don't really produce results. When we gather as recovering addicts and pray for the knowledge of God's will, it changes what is possible and what is going to happen. Our conscience becomes directed by a loving God.

We depend on our loving God to carry us when uninformed consciences begin to disunity us. Gut feelings may not lead to real solutions that can replace the games of anger and manipulation. We practice holding fast to

the basic principles and values we learned as new members. We continue with vigilance to stay honest, open-minded and willing to surrender to our loving God. Many of our long time members have had to suffer during times when our service structure became overwhelmed by business concerns but they stayed clean.

Often without meaning to, our trusted servants relax their learned roles as spiritual servants. They forget they are carrying out a role not available in the outside world. It is easy to drift into the mind set that allows us to think that the spiritual is unreal and that our Fellowship has gotten 'so big' that we have to tighten up and do things the way they are done in business, religion, medicine, the military and government. We may forget that all these methods

We are not saints and it takes some courage for most of us to share spiritually. Expressions of a spiritual nature bear a special meaning and we will not share these things in hostile or intimidating circumstances unless we have the experience or support to do so. When adverse conditions prevail, all we have to do is wait and stay together. Time, courage, and sincerity will heal the worst of wounds.

One addict shares: "I had to have my own personal experiences with a loving God as the ultimate authority in my own life. I needed a full range of experiences over an extended period of time. Most of the time it is only after reflecting on my reactions to a specific situation that I may uncover my true motives. Whether they are positive or negative motives. I needed to see the type of fruit that grows from the seeds of self righteousness and from the type of fruit that grows from the seeds of selflessness. This Tradition warns me that if I violate any of our Traditions I will meet with a disaster when I am selfish or self righteous.

"Only when I could see beyond my initial reactions and motives could I get to the exact nature and operate in a true spirit of unity, considering the greater good or higher purpose, as well as the fact that I may not be right.

"I cannot focus on my personal opinion, a person's perceived status, number of tapes or my feelings about the individual or individuals. We are equal in NA. What I can do is be an active participant in my home group. And listen for a loving God expressing himself, forming a group conscience. Just what is conscience? It is my internal spiritual compass or innate sense of right and wrong. My reliance on a loving God and the ability to put this reliance into action is how I arrive at acceptance of a situation. Sometimes I think I may know better than God. NA and its groups are in the care of God.

"At times, I can clearly see that God is not expressing himself in our group conscience. It is easy for me to trust God when things are going the way I think they should. Based on my own personal experience, the true test of faith and trust is the ability to maintain spiritual principles in the darkest part of the night, when there is no light on the horizon.

"An individual or a group of people do not have the spiritual right to violate any of our Traditions by using their time (time abstinent) or popularity to influence the group conscience in a way that would divert the group, service board or committee from its primary purpose. And then hang their nonsense on God. There is a vast difference between a simple majority and God expressing himself in the form of group conscience. In any case, unity guides me so

that I do not make attempts to polarize the group and to trust that a loving God will prevail.

"Our leaders are trusted servants which to me implies that our leaders are trust worthy. Addicts by nature are not trust worthy people. Therefore the leaders that this tradition is referring to must have undergone a fundamental transformation by working and practicing the 12 steps. No matter what is done or undone our leaders are giving their time and effort. Even if I sometimes disagree with the results I am grateful for our leaders, service boards and committees. The 2nd tradition reminds me to work the 12th step and highlights steps 3 & 11.

"I do my best to be supportive and encourage our leaders; as they are people just like me, trying to do the best they can with what they have or are working on. I am part of the solution today; not part of the problem. I continue to work steps, practice spiritual principles, make new mistakes and change. I love and guide the people I sponsor through the 12 steps in the same basic way I was, which is really all I have to give."

To underscore that those who act on behalf of our groups play a special role in a special way, we call them 'trusted servants.' Obviously, not all our members expected to serve in this way are able to fulfill the group's expectations. Worse, some feel they must be more forceful than a mere servant could be. The nature of appearances versus deeper meanings makes it inevitable that conflicts will occur. Staying true to your spirit and close to those you serve will see you through. It is perfectly correct to resign if you cannot fulfill group conscience. Indeed, sometimes, this is the best way to remind a group that has fallen into feeling 'powerful' in the diseased sense. If you are sincere, you will be guided to your next

thing. If the circle you have been serving in falls away from its spiritual underpinnings, you will benefit from moving on to another, better formed circle.

The idea of group conscience is that where members are considering something that will affect them, they have a right to gather relevant facts and voice themselves before any action can be binding on them. This is particularly true since no action can be enforced against the will of our groups. There will be times when immature leadership or trusted servants required to act with insufficient information will make poor decisions. Our disease magnifies the likelihood of these problems. It is terrifically important that we develop our capacity for patience, forgiveness and tolerance if we aspire to serve NA. In NA, we have survived the worst kinds of abuses and yet we flourish. The good comes from the loving and caring.

A member shared, "God was there but he was not involved in my life. Then I experienced Tradition Two and I knew God was in my life because he was in the group and I was in the group."

A group conscience is not a democracy, yet it does utilize democratic principles of openness, the right to question and the principle of inclusion. We can function within NA and receive the benefits that come from membership. To reach a group conscience, each individual must be open, honest and willing. Each must become aware, that is, informed about the facts and sensitive to the movement of the Spirit that is our Higher Power.

Another member shared: "In a home group, decisions make themselves and directions unfold as, simultaneously, a few or several of us begin to do things in a new way. An example is in

saying the Serenity Prayer before our group conscience meeting: our group, to a person, began to use the "we" version. This was not discussed, it was observed after the fact. Another example is that none of the Home Group members chose to "celebrate" their anniversary by calling on "special" members who have helped them in recovery or important family members during a meeting. While we celebrate our anniversary on or soon after our clean date, our anniversary meeting is little different from other meetings held throughout the year. We celebrate with fellowship after the meeting. Our group conscience dictates that we remember our primary purpose every day of the year."

Our servants are trusted, trustworthy and service-oriented. They serve our trust. Trusting them means that we ask questions because we are curious and interested, not because we are suspicious and critical. We cannot become informed simply by listening. We cannot support what we don't understand or know about. Our servants are gently guided by other more experienced members, group conscience and principles. No one member will accept responsibility for decisions on behalf of the group. Each member accepts responsibility for the decisions made within group conscience and for the actions of our trusted servants. Trusted servants have to be responsible to the group. Some dictionary definitions of 'service' are: to comply, to be of use, to benefit, to make ready, to wait on, to furnish or supply, to treat or act toward in a specified way.

We cannot afford to be apart from the whole of NA, or we will be in danger of letting our disease get a foothold. We need to "identify in" wherever we can. Because of this, the people who take on responsibilities cannot be merely servants, nor can they be trusted governors. They must be trusted servants. As gently and loving as we

can, we tell them what we want done and they do it. They may advise us according to their experience or perspective, but the final choice belongs to the group. No individual tells our group what to do and no individual is left alone to make a choice for us. In part, to govern means to control, to direct, to influence, to determine, to punish and to restrain.

Our Higher Power is limitless in love, power and creativity. To subject the possibilities of our recovery to rigid rules and regulations would only serve to cut us short of the reality. In the nineteen seventies, there were only a few hundred NA meetings. In the early eighties, the Basic Text was published, and in many states and major cities, the first meetings were started. Before the Basic Text these meetings would fail if a few key members relapsed. After the Basic Text, the group grew strong because they had a written source of encouragement and guidance. Since then, thousands of addicts have overcome the slavery of active addiction. This was all done by group conscience without management or control beyond our service procedures as embodied in the NA Tree and the NA 12 Traditions. To allow any one of us the authority to define or regulate our recovery seems an absurd notion in the face of the kind of cultural revolution our lives in recovery represent.

Never in the history of man have addicts seen what we live on a daily basis. Addicts were written off as hopeless derelicts and died painful, lonely, slow deaths. Today, we live, thrive, change, grow and prosper. In the past, addicts were considered dangerous and were not allowed to congregate. Weekly, our meetings gather to celebrate our newfound family in a spirit of love and support. In this perspective, it seems simple to trust the creative action of the Spirit to continue to guide us as a group. As our Higher Power guides us through the Steps to a spiritual awakening, our Group Conscience guides our group towards growth, recovery and mutual prosperity. Together we do what we could not do

alone.

Part of our experience in NA is to watch groups come and go in our area. New members are very creative and strong willed, and often see a need for a new meeting time or place. It has been our observation that those meetings which were started with spiritual willingness have thrived. Those started in self-will have folded. The power of willingness and love is insurmountable. In our personal recovery, we have learned that once we surrender and become willing, the doing seems effortless. Often the biggest struggle is in becoming willing. And once we are willing, things seem to just "fall into place." With our groups, then, we need to become willing and God-centered. The rest will "fall in place" as our Higher Power takes care of the details we fail to even see. And God will easily solve problems we think are too big for us: a new member moves into the area highly qualified, experienced in performing the service we require; a coffee pot is donated...

How does Group Conscience benefit the individual member? When we share our ideas, problems or thoughts with others, we gain a different perspective. Sharing with addicts who care about our welfare allows them to care about us. When we go to a meeting, talk about something that is bothering us and listen to the experience of other members, we are taking a Group Conscience. As each NA member shares experience, strength and hope on that topic, a loving God speaks to us through the collective message. We often leave such a meeting with the answer to our problem, yet it was not just one person who told us what we needed to hear. Instead, the shared experience of everyone provides our best solutions.

The principle of Tradition Two tells us to treat others in a loving manner. That's how a loving God can speak through us. As one member puts it, "When I talk to others I do so as if I'm speaking to God and when

I listen to them, I listen as though God were speaking through them. This is practicing the Second Tradition."

What about being a trusted servant? Tradition Two teaches the principle of selfless service. It is one thing to do good deeds for the purpose of gaining power or recognition, but that is not our goal. Performing humble service for the good of others brings spiritual rewards. When we strive to be of service to others in all that we do, our lives are enriched. We now have a noble purpose and we pursue it with vigor. By focusing on helping others, we are in fact helping ourselves. We are keeping the miracle of recovery alive by giving it away.

Tradition Two defines an ultimate authority for us. We no longer have to assume that awesome responsibility. Being "boss of the world" and "master of all we see" is not only impossible, it is dangerous for recovering addicts. It is a short journey from inflated, self-important thinking to relapse. Through an active 11th Step, we are reminded that we function better as our Higher Power's trusted servant than as a Higher Power.

TRADITION THREE

"The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using."

The desire to stop using is our only requirement. This does not refer to chemicals, people, food, sex, etc. Using refers to the way our addictive personality manifests itself in our daily lives. We live to use and use to live. We do not separate ways of means of usage nor do we focus on our use of drugs. We focus on freedom from active addiction. This freedom begins with putting down the most obvious, our addiction to drugs first. chemicals allowed us to recognize and identify our disease. As we begin to recovery, we may begin to see other ways we actively use. Identifying rather than comparing helps keep us focused on our desire for recovery. we must carry a clear message of Narcotics Anonymous recovery to enable newcomers to see what we have to offer and how we can help. When we cloud our message, we become inconsistent and this confuses the newcomer. membership is open for those with the desire. We sometimes carry our message by planting seeds with addicts who may have potential desires for recovery. As long as the still suffering addicts know about NA, we have carried out our primary purpose. We may not be able to keep a using addict clean, but we can give a struggling member a choice and a healthy environment for growth.

Though we have found that imposing conformity does not work, we do have the power of example. Unable to spiritually control the thoughts, feelings and actions of our newer members, we can rely on our faith in a loving god that they will come to their own understanding in their own time. Eventually all addicts will conform to the principles that guarantee their survival. If not, they sicken and possible die. These are the sad truths drawn from our experience.

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One member shares his experience, "I have been a member of 12 step fellowships before. However, I have never experienced recovery. Recovery as it applies to me, is total abstinence from all drugs, in conjunction with an active change in ideas, attitudes and behaviors. Membership requires a commitment to making meetings, having a sponsor, using a sponsor and practicing spiritual principles.

"This tradition insures that recovery is available to all who seek recovery in NA. It does not matter who they are or where they come from. A persons sex, race, creed or religion cannot exclude them from the right to recover in NA. There are no classes of membership in NA; we are all equal in NA.

"Initially recovery begins by not using drugs. For me drugs are any mind or mood altering substance. There is no particular substance that a person must use to become a member. NA focuses on the disease of addiction and its affects on a persons mind, body and spirit. Rather than affects of a specific substance on a persons being. Membership is open to anyone, no matter what someone has used or not used.

"No member can quantify another members desire. I have no right to judge another persons desire to stay clean. This at times, can be difficult for me. When I examine my recovery track record, up to 2003, all of the evidence would have suggested that I would not recover, this did not discourage the people in NA. The people in NA believed in me even when I did not believe in myself. I was encouraged and I was made to feel welcome in NA. Looking back, I felt like gasoline and matches were thrown on my desire and that fire still burns today.

"I show newer members that recovery is available in NA by the way I conduct myself before, during and after the meetings. I believe in a solution orientated recovery, focusing less on my feelings and the problems. When I have a casual conversation after the meeting or if I am speaking at a meeting I do my best to live what I speak about. I am enthusiastic about my recovery and I enjoy my life. I saw these qualities in the people that were recovering in NA and I was attracted by the way they were living and the information on how God changed their lives.

"This tradition helps me in working with others and in accepting other people right where they are, not where I think they should be. Tradition 3 tells me that I am not great or good enough to get anyone clean. An addict will not stop until they are ready stop; this was the case with me. Therefore, as long as I use a literature based approach and my personal experience with the literature in my work with others, I cannot beat myself up if people relapse or take credit for their recovery. All I can do is my job and let God do his job. In the end I believe it is the love that heals us."

Willingness is an action word. this program is for people who want it, not for people who need it. We have to reach a point of total surrender before the willingness comes. The breakdown of our personal world is part of what helps us get clean. It helps us remember what the last one did for us. We thank God for this Tradition because if it was not there, we could not be here. The desire to stop using is the only requirement for membership. It does not matter how much or how little, just that we want to do something about our using. In order to have the necessary desire for recovery, we had to reach a boiling point of desperation. On a deeper level, we began to actively seek a new way of life.

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Desire and willingness are the two most important prerequisites to recovery. In order to recover, an addict must have the desire to stop using and in order to stay clean, an addict must have the willingness to follow suggestions so that they will continue to recover. There is not a "must " we impose on them, it is descriptive and acknowledges their power to give recovery a try. Pain doesn't make us members, this is why it is important for us to share our pain, so others can respond to us and give us the beginnings of membership. If this sharing doesn't make our desire for recovery clear to others, we can hurt a long time in helpless confusion. We can even blame others for not treating us with the respect and affection we think our agony buys for us. We may see recovery as a contest of pain where the person who hurts the most gets the most help. It is the person who lets the group know they are open to help by asking for it. Our own personal acquaintance with pain initiates our recovery. Before this, we were only re-experiencing our past hurts and injuries in memory or repeating past failure. Desire implies a future and a change.

Our new members are the lifeblood of our Fellowship and our service to these members becomes the heartbeat of NA. Today, grateful for our lives as protected by a loving God, we become willing to venture into the darkness where they are and demonstrate that we truly do care and understand. We know the way out. We can welcome them to join us as they are, since we have faith today that they can no longer harm us, no matter what their situation, where they came from, or how they got here. We can allow them to become a member when they say so. Any addict, regardless of any other problem they face, is welcomed to find their home in NA.

Narcotics Anonymous is a Fellowship which is all inclusive with respect to any mood-changing, mind altering substances. All that is required is that one thinks they have a drug problem and has a desire to stop,

nothing more, nothing less. As for membership in NA; our position ought be one of unrestricted and inclusive participation. If spiritual progress was our goal, how could we claim such progress if we were to erect even the slightest barrier between ourselves and the still using or suffering addict? More often than not, these addicts will come to us as nonconformists, whereas many of us can identify with such a position. Therefore, we ought neither insist nor suggest that they conform, not even that they meet us at the halfway point. These individuals are often too sick, weak, and frightened to overcome any hurdles. In erecting them we may be sentencing our new members if not to death, to many more years of dereliction and institutions.

A member shares: "It is very important that the newcomer know that the only requirement for NA membership is the desire to stop using. I have heard it said that it must be an honest desire or a sincere desire, but I know that is not true. You only have to have a desire to stop using _ any kind of desire. When I came to my first meeting, I had no idea what was going on. I knew I was not very honest at that time. If I was told I needed to have an honest desire to stop using, I would have never come back to another meeting. I took me three months to finally get clean. I guess my desire to stay clean was greater than my desire to use."

While NA clearly rests on the principle of "complete abstinence, we do not use this principle as justification to exclude an addict from membership status. To deny any addict's full privileges may lead one to believe that "desire" is not enough. If we are to seek an atmosphere of recovery in our meetings, such an atmosphere will also compliment each spiritual principle embodied in our Steps and Traditions. The practice of acceptance, patience, tolerance, and unconditional love support our aim of equality, which in turn prevents us from creating a "second class" of

membership. It is understood that our membership is a rough mixture of people at different levels of disease and recovery.

Using refers to using drugs in one form or another. It may start with an individual member's drug of choice but desire for recovery can end all of that. The more we learn about the addicts we find in the meetings, the more we can discover similarities to what we have gone through and still experience daily. When we find we have enough in common with addicts in Narcotics Anonymous, we have shifted our identification from lonely scared addicts in a world where we cannot recover, into a world where being an addict first means we cannot use drugs and live successfully and further that we can regain our health and a degree of good sense.

There is no "wrong" reason for coming to NA. Many of us came to escape jail or other institutions. We may or may not have found a desire to stop using because of this. Those who have are free to begin a new way of life. Those who do not have the desire return to their old way of life. We have learned through personal experience that no one can make an addict stop using other than the addict himself. Being ready to stop regardless of how apparent it is to us that the individual needs help. However, we can pray for that person and be ready and willing to help if that person decides to ask for help. The benefits of membership cannot be bought, sold or given to someone who has no desire. It can threaten their life or make them insanely jealous to have contact with a clean addict before they are willing to surrender until they want it. We can make ourselves available and stay in touch.

Desire is also a quality which is necessary to understand. Desire is often quite personal to each and every one of us. To some, this word brings forth emotions ranging from extreme fear, to intense hurt and nearly unbearable anxiety. To others it may not be so severe. Each of us have

traveled different paths in our lives and has unique experiences in respect to others. It does not matter what got us here but that we accept each other as members.

Membership is the key to our personal recovery. We feel comfortable with and part of the group. Along with membership, certain responsibilities come into play. We provide an atmosphere of recovery to anyone seeking it. Membership should not be taken lightly, it is a privilege. To serve is not a chore but a choice. We have found growth and freedom from membership and should freely give these things to others who are seeking.

When we finally make the decision to stop using, we take certain actions in order to begin the recovery process. We make a commitment to attend meetings regularly, to get a sponsor and work the Steps and Traditions. As we continue to recover, other actions are taken in order to insure ourselves against complacency. These include carrying the message to the addict who still suffers as well as a commitment to service. It is partially through these types of positive actions we attain spiritual growth.

Membership in NA is something that is often taken for granted because the program works so quickly. In our disease, we may fail to value the peace and comfort that is coming our way. We have to adjust to living without crisis. Struggling and grasping is not the only way to get things. Life always has its little surprises around the corner. In recovery, these surprises are usually pretty good! As with many other groups, with membership comes certain obligations. we cannot just assume that meetings will automatically be there for us when we need them. we get involved, attend business meetings and make a commitment to service. We give back what was so freely given to us so we can recover as

individuals and as a Fellowship.

Our recovering friend continues, "Although I have abstinent for years and attend NA meetings on a regular basis, I am 'not' automatically a member of NA. A lot of the time I have no desire to stop using. At these times, even though I am clean, I do not consider myself a member because membership provides action. I can 'desire' all I want, but, if I do not act to make that desire a reality, it means very little to me. This is a 'grow or go' program. It works if you work it. When I am sitting in limbo, not using, but also not taking an active part in my recovery, I am not a member. Membership implies participation!

"The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using.' This is a passage in our literature that I have heard many times at the beginning of NA meetings. I have considered this an important issue facing our Fellowship in the future as more and more people desire to stop using. I remember the first NA meeting that I attended. I was asked to leave because I would not say that I was an addict. In as much pain, anguish and despair as I was in at that first NA meeting, I was asked to leave and attend an open meeting. I cannot hear thee words now and not shiver. today, I am an addict in recovery and I think back in that first meeting where the bondage of denial kept me from saying I was an addict. Today, I know that I can only call myself an addict and I can only judge my own desire to stop using. So, when I see a new face in our meetings, I say to myself these very same words. As our Fellowship grows, new controversies arise such as singleness of purpose or one disease, one program. I do not apply myself to these controversies. for no addict seeking recovery whether in denial or acceptance should be denied recovery the way I was at

my first NA meeting."

It does not matter what, or how much any person used. Using is a term relative to each member as well. Neither excessive consumption nor sporadic maintenance changes the status of our membership. Each has paid the price for membership with their pain and each deserves the same chance at recovery as any other addict. we have learned that the disease of addiction knows no boundaries and holds no hostages. any addict, regardless of the drug they used, duration of usage, or length of abstinence is subject to the same misery, dereliction, institutionalization, and death as the next member. Just as any addict, in any of these instances, deserves the same dignity and respect as anyone else. This is how the equality and inclusivity of our membership compliments our unity, which in turn works to develop a Fellowship whose only goal is to help one another find recovery, just for today.

TRADITION FOUR

"Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole."

For the purpose of this tradition, "autonomy" can be thought of as a group's right to independence and self-government - with respect to its own affairs. Just as there is no human authority to govern our membership, neither is there a bureaucracy to supervise our groups. Group autonomy is an extension of the freedoms offered us in NA. The Twelve Steps help us gain freedom from the horrors of our addiction, the perils of our past, and the defects of our character. Autonomy, united with other traditions, helps us maintain our freedoms of membership and expression, collective diversity, and spiritual independence.

So long as we continue to rely on the power of a loving God to influence our decisions and their outcomes, we need not establish any codes of conduct for either our groups or our members. This is where the spiritual conscience of a group becomes indispensable. Group conscience authenticates true autonomy, and autonomy works most efficiently when this principle is inclusive to the spirit of our collective Steps and Traditions. Experience has shown us that when adversity strikes a group, and our focus is placed on the solution of our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, the problems solve themselves. In this way, we express our faith in NA as a self-correcting program.

Though group autonomy does not justify a disregard for other traditions, neither does it justify retaliation, if perceived that the group has deviated. In this instance, it is imperative that we understand this important concept - complimenting each groups' autonomy, is each groups' right to be wrong. If our traditions were enforceable, they

would no longer say we “ought,” they would say you “must.” There are no musts in NA, in any absolute sense of the word. Even our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are only suggestions that neither the individual nor the group must strictly adhere too.

Many have argued that this philosophy may spell disaster for both the group and even NA as a whole, but they are later astonished when this was not the case. Though some groups have strayed from NA tradition over time, once it begins to affect their members’ personal recovery or NA as a whole, either the group will wither and die, or group opinion will snap it back in line. Even in such a case, a groups’ autonomy is held inviolate.

“So then,” you might ask, “can a group decide to do absolutely anything they please?” The answer is, restrictively, “Yes, as long as it is in respect to its own affairs.” There is only one exception to the near unlimited liberty afforded a group through our tradition of autonomy. The exception is, that their liberty may not be exercised at the expense of severe consequences to any other groups or NA as a whole. It is for this reason that we have developed a service structure encompassing the principle of consultation. Such consultation will often consist of a discussion encompassing all involved, in order to solicit other opinions and reach a fellowship conscience, a conscience which supports both our unity and our primary purpose.

The spirit of consultation is not meant to undermine the principle of autonomy, but to be a safeguard against its misuse. If we invite the guidance of a greater consciousness, check to ensure our motives are inventoried, and strive to maintain open-mindedness as both autonomous groups and consulted service bodies, we believe we can then place our trust in the process as we seek viable solutions. Consultation is a

method by which we cultivate new thoughts and ideas which can compliment our enthusiasm for helping others.

Questions have arisen with respect to how far the principle of autonomy can be exercised in our fellowship. The answer is simple, it is expressed in the wording of this tradition; the freedom of autonomy is limited only to the groups. Our groups, however, have organized service boards and committees to facilitate tasks, which intern frees them to carry the message directly to the addict. These service boards and committees are not NA, as such. They exist solely to serve the groups and neither do they derive authority from their service, nor do they inherit the sovereignty of the groups' autonomy.

In the end, so long as the autonomy of our groups is focused on carrying the message of hope and freedom found in Narcotics Anonymous and our efforts are exercised within the boundaries of our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, the spirit of this tradition will always ring true. As our groups grow and find new and effective ways of helping others, our diversity is then strengthened, broadening our base, and raising our point of our freedom.

TRADITION FIVE

"Each group has but one primary purpose _ to carry the message to the addict who still suffers."

Though each group is welcomed to their diversity through autonomy, there is also a spiritual consistency throughout NA meetings all over the world: this is our message of recovery. NA offers a vision of hope and a promise of freedom from active addiction to any addict who passes through our doors. An addict, any addict, can stop using, lose the desire, and find a new way of life. Carrying our message is the primary purpose of our groups.

We have found it best that we do this one thing supremely well, which is to carry our message. Being all things to all people we would quickly lose our focus. If we engaged in many related multitask, our ability to carry out our primary group purpose would suffer. Mental health, treatment centers, politics, and legislation all help people in their own right but in association, they would quickly push aside many areas of sensitivity essential to NA recovery. Narcotics Anonymous only seeks to cooperate with professionals to the extent that they will be aware of our recovery program as a possible resource to their clients. We are careful that we never affiliate in any sense of the word.

When it comes to the personal matters of our members, we must also exercise restraint. Our purpose is to share, as individuals, groups, and as a Fellowship, how we found recovery through Narcotics Anonymous. Legal, social, medical, moral, and ethical issues, as shared by our members, are welcomed in our meetings. We do, however, want to make sure that our groups take no sides on these issues outside of NA's collective experience. Such actions could lessen our ability to carry our

message. With so much at stake, we keep our focus on recovery.

The best way to keep our groups safe in this regard is to keep our meeting formats simple and focused. When our formats become overridden with issues outside the scope of our Fellowship's experience, Steps, and Traditions, they begin to lose their effectiveness. Our group members, on the other hand, may have personal familiarity in these issues; they will do best by sharing their own experience with these matters, trying not to affiliate such issues with Narcotics Anonymous or incorporate them into their group formats.

When we allow ourselves to be used as conduits of the love that originally attracted us to recovery, we are on safe ground. when we forget our role as care givers and instruments of a loving God, we are drawn out of our area of experience. We keep in mind the supreme, all powerful, all loving creator of the universe who is the one that is really protecting all of us. Going with God, we cannot lose. we are reminded where we come from and how much we wanted recovery in the beginning. We can forget the pain of withdrawal the same way women forget the pain of child birth. to stay clean, we help others who both remind us of our own pain and help us hear the solutions we ow have to offer.

In the active addiction, there was much pain and misery in our lives and the lives of most everyone we came in contact with. Many of us found it was the selfish, self-centered fear driving us into an isolated death of mind, body, and soul. It became evident that fear, manifested in our thoughts and feelings, created many of our problems. It was our lack of faith, not the drugs; using was only a symptom of our dilemma. We should always be vigilant that our decisions as individuals and groups are the expression of our faith. The atmosphere of the group, and the

message we carry, ought always reflect the commitment we have to the principles embodied in our Twelve Steps and Twelve Tradition.

For our groups to be an effective vehicle for carrying the message of recovery, it is thought necessary to develop an atmosphere of recovery in each meeting. All of our Steps and Traditions are comprised of spiritual principles just as NA is a spiritual program. We have found that we can exchange the phrase “atmosphere of recovery” with “atmosphere of spirituality,” and agree that this is the message our groups should emanate. Complexity is not the key to doing better. We have seen many people new to recovery run around and try to fix all the things that have gone wrong with their lives. Simplicity and surrender offer us a better platform on which to rebuild our lives. This is particularly applies to helping others get the help they need at our meetings. We care, we share, we know it works for us. We are the living proof that the program works. We pass on what has worked for us out of our own experience. We carry the message by living in the solution to the best of our ability. we welcome the addict to our group and we try to live, through our caring and sharing, the message of hope so the newcomers can say, "I am being accepted until I can accept myself. I am being loved until I can love myself." The message that we carrying says, "We love you. You are not alone. We will help you. You too can recover."

Ideally, the practice of spirituality lies in the application of spiritual principals. If true spiritual principals are never in conflict; any or all ought to fit the phrase “atmosphere of recovery,” and define it accordingly. We can take an instance where the phrase “atmosphere of recovery” is sought and introduce a series of spiritual principals in place of the word “recovery” (i.e. an atmosphere of acceptance... an atmosphere of patience... an atmosphere of tolerance... of unconditional love, open-mindedness, willingness, surrender, compassion, empathy

etc). In this way, a group's inventory will best reflect the spirit of our program without the vulnerability to our old ways of thinking.

The still suffering addict is also an important focus of this Tradition. These addicts can be anyone inside or outside of the group. Our members would do well to insure a consistent application of anonymity to each member, allowing them to express themselves in an atmosphere free from judgment. Even a member with many years clean can be a suffering member of a group. Just as possible is the member who usually displays themselves in accordance with spiritual principles. Devastation knows no boundaries and desperation takes no prisoners. The suffering addict might be the one who was absent, or who has yet to show up. Our purpose is to help those that need us, even to seek them out if need be. This tradition actuates the collective application of our Twelfth Step. As we seek to help others, we strengthen our recovery and insure against relapse at the same time.

The message we carry as a group is the practice of principles toward these individuals, however troublesome they may be. The new members begin to admire our demonstration of acceptance, patience, and tolerance, and begin learning from the start that spiritual growth comes from within. It has been said that if we do not see a leader in the room we strive to be one. If we do not hear the spiritual message of recovery we try to carry it. If the suffering addict cannot share their pain, we share ours for them. If we do not carry the message to the still suffering addicts, NA will wither and die. Without NA, none of us has any chance to recover. It is said, time and time again, that the newcomer is the life blood of NA. Therefore, it is no coincidence that one of the main themes throughout our literature states, "We can only keep what we have by giving it away."

TRADITION SIX

"An NA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the NA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary purpose."

Our principles help us avoid certain problems by giving us guidance where we may not see the possibility that we might be making an error. We addicts are so good at getting caught up in our undertakings, we can glide right past the barriers normal folk would be able to see. The reason we don't allow conflict of interest to enter into the picture is because we can justify anything. We can put the making of money beyond the feelings and emotional needs of our Fellowship Members need to be involved and feel the weight of responsibility. Responsibility keeps us spiritually fit as a fellowship. Without this reality, we would weaken into flabby complacency. Our responses to cries for help would wane into ineffectuality.

The insidious nature of our disease makes us abnormally susceptible to distraction. The NA Society stabilizes the Fellowship by ongoing associations going back to the roots of NA. We can slip out of a prearranged direction of effort into a justified detour with the best of excuses. diversion from our primary purpose is similar to what we as members go through in our daily fight for recovery. We all know about drifting into concerns, worries and preoccupations that threaten our recovery. This leaves no time for meetings, Twelve Step work or interactive recovery with other addicts. Only our strong desire keeps us focused on recovery.

We cannot move in two directions at once. A spiritual fellowship sets spiritual goals. If we were to set worldly goals, we would quickly

become worldly and the spiritual would seem inconsequential and impractical. Anyone who has been around the Fellowship will sooner or later come up against a situation in conflict with spiritual reality. It is hard for most people to realize the nature of spirituality is more real than worldly concerns. we learn to choose the spiritual as the eternal, lasting reality over the transient apparent reality that looks so good to begin with and caves in under the pressure of time and events. This is a metaphor for all spiritual growth.

The insidious nature of our disease makes us very vulnerable to the disasters that can occur when we stray from the Sixth Tradition. We are addicts and therefore suffer from low self-esteem and have fragile egos to begin with. Therefore we are easily corrupted by the temptations of property and prestige and can soon forget about the danger of placing personalities before principles.

The insidious nature of addiction allows us to rationalize all sorts of behavior, such as endorsements of outside enterprises. Since some of these enterprises may actually help us reach the still suffering addict, they are sometimes considered in line with the 12th Step of carrying the Na message. This is a trap. If people were rescued by a military group, part of the rescue is letting them return to their homes and not live in a prison camp.

Doctors can help identify other problems we may have. One doctor has spoken, "Addicts do not necessarily have any other primary illness requiring treatment of any sort." We don't take drugs just because doctors tell us to do so. It is our life at stake and many doctors are not informed about addiction. Be careful!

Our inherent self-centeredness can make us easy prey for the notoriety

that comes with doing endorsements. This is why the 7th Tradition was written and is so very important. It protects us and NA as a whole from ourselves.

After finding recovery and practicing a spiritual way of life, we begin to search out fellow addicts who are like us. It is a sense of trust that is allowed to transform us into productive members of society. The world might be a more loving and caring place if the population was made up solely of recovering addicts. There would be more honesty and compassion but unfortunately that is not reality. recovery is about dealing with reality. Many would take advantage of trusting addicts surrendered and preoccupied with working their Steps. A negative account of an affiliation with an outside enterprise could destroy years of the kind of credibility we try to achieve. Much of society still thinks of addiction as amoral delinquency instead of a disease.

The clear, pure message of NA is an antidote to addiction. The disease tries to dilute this message. When a group endorses another 12 step fellowship or treatment center, it is giving praise to the disease. It is saying in effect that NA alone cannot work, that we must also go somewhere else. This can really put us behind an eight ball if we happen to work in a treatment center. It keeps many addicts from making that final commitment to work the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions of NA. This can be deadly to some suffering addicts. NA is the only program of recovery that works for us. If we are curious or have an opportunity, we can take our program with us into any area of life or learning.

The disease of addiction is progressive. as our recovery progresses, so does our disease. When we compromise our Sixth tradition "one time," we lose our integrity as a Fellowship. When we become involved with

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selling our name, we must begin to pay the price for selling our dreams. We are all capable of living in our active disease. we must not allow money, property or prestige to enable us to take the focus off our primary purpose.

Service work is a privilege and an honor. we must not allow ourselves to become involved in service work for profit. It may seem more desirable to collect money than to sit up with a newcomer, but when the newcomers are ignored, we die. Nothing in NA except NA. We carry our message, not force our opinion. We surrender to our purpose knowing that we respect our Fellowship and that we respect ourselves. Compromises extract a toll from our lives we might not be willing to pay if we could see how much, and how often, we are charged.

TRADITION SEVEN

"Every NA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions."

NA is not a business. NA is a spiritual fellowship. In those instances where we must collect or disburse funds, we have to minimize the cost to the Fellowship. Churches and other spiritual assemblies have problems maintaining their focus because money can be divisive and result in unpleasant conflicts between those who seem to have too much and those who most certainly have too little. Our service bodies are nothing more than holding companies for what we share in common. It is hard in some of the committees to remember that while the illusion of power can come with a title, service positions are nothing except opportunities to help those who may otherwise die or suffer. It is easy to see ourselves as more than we are because of this. Nevertheless, we surrender and pray for a loving God to help us remember our contribution to what we have been given only allows us to increase our being by more giving . this is how we fill the hole the gut.

The Seventh Tradition speaks about being fully self-supporting. In this Tradition, bully means completely. We decline all outside contributions to avoid influences that would change NA from the miracle that it is into something else. Many laces would like to give us free meeting rooms. We insist on paying rent. This helps to insure our autonomous groups. We also refuse donations of money, material and services from outside our Fellowship. we send back the money with a note of thanks and a friendly explanation. we cannot afford to be obligated or even to feel obligated. Our sense of obligation may affect our actions and decisions as recovery groups. Our own experience and that of others teaches us that the only way to deal with issues of integrity is before a problem

occurs. After the damage is done, all you can do is hope to survive.

Integrity is bringing all parts of something together to form a cohesive whole. When an organization or fellowship takes money or other forms of support from an outside source, it becomes to whatever extent dependent. This is why NA declines outside contributions. To effect personality change, recovery has to strike close to a person's heart or soul and this is delicate. It goes beyond the outside world to the reality of a person inside. Our program is grounded in spiritual principles. To drift away from the honest caring and sharing begun in our tremendous growth period in the 1970's is to betray the spirit of NA. After all, it is the promise of freedom from active addiction that attracted so many addicts to our program in the first place. The vast numbers of incoming members assures us that our members who already know about recovery and principled living will be outnumbered. It takes principles and courage to interact with the newcomers and help them keep pace with the demands placed upon them. This is a big job and we run a severe risk of developing teams of followers, but we just have to pray and do the best we can. Our need for prayer and meditation is greater when we have the support of a great number of people - because we may, on occasion, be wrong! Listening to the inner voice may be our only chance of getting it right! This doesn't mean we act against the majority, we just bring our Higher Power into the picture. If our inner voice says something worth hearing to us, it may be interesting to others.

We also need to look at the less obvious effects of this Tradition on NA as a whole. If our service boards and committees become dependent on sales of NA materials to outside enterprises, for income, how does this affect our motivations and the development of NA recovery materials? If pressed to decide between something that is helpful to our members and something that will appeal to the treatment community, which way will

we go? Our Fifth and Sixth Traditions become interrelated here. Our primary group purpose comes first. These are issues we have faced in the past and continue to face today. Money can't buy what we have to offer.

In our addiction, we were never able to be self-supporting. If we made plenty of money, we may come to realize how dependent we were in other ways. We were always dependent on others. That is why it is so important for us to be self-supporting in our recovery. It affects how we feel about ourselves and how other people regard us. By simply being self-supporting we owe nothing to anyone other than our group and the Fellowship. Dependency had become a way of life. In order to begin to recover we must break that chain and a way to begin is by supporting our home group. Money is the least part of our recovery program and self-supporting means a lot more than throwing a dollar in the basket. No one can say you owe me. One rule of life is that if you take someone's money, you take their preferences. We begin to stand on our own two feet and take pride in our independence. This doesn't mean we can't ask for help, it means we do our best to pay our way. This is part of our freedom in recovery.

Financial and emotional support from our members gives us a solid base in recovery. We have no other goals to take into account or people whose aims we must satisfy. Our sincerity protects us when things could go wrong. It would be easy for us to accept free rent from centers that would like to promote themselves as having our services available to their clients. We must not allow this so as not to become dependent upon them for meeting halls and to allow them to possibly bend our message to better suit their needs. This might be a blind spot to them. We would have no warning before the harm was done. We stay away from sliding slopes where if we get too near the edge, we will start sliding. By the

time we are sliding, we can't stop. They would commit our services to their clients and that would be a lie. We in NA respect the treatment community and wasn't the respect from them needed for us to function. Our spiritual integrity is at stake here.

An addict shares, "Giving of myself is a new concept in my life. In the past, I would always try to buy your attention, friendship, etc. The self-support this Tradition talks about has a lot more to do with home group members giving of themselves in service than it has to do with the money we put in the basket. The commitment of sharing 'myself, ' 'my being' with you is one of the most effective antidotes to self-centeredness and egocentricity that I have found.

"I have had confused feeling when it comes to giving. am I giving enough? I would spend much more than this if I were using. should I make up the difference when I think the basket is short? after all this Fellowship has given me so much and I contribute so little. the amount must be an individual decision. Contribution through service and monetary means are necessary for our Fellowship to survive. Once I decided on an amount and made a commitment to it, I try to donate it regularly, not just here and there. part of the change for me is consistency and willingness to stay consistent."

We experience the concept of responsibility through our group. Our group teaches us that we need to take care of our own. We refuse money or anything else from outside of NA. Our members donate at the group level. The group, in respect to the fund flow and their autonomy, usually decides to donate to the area. If a group decides to follow the fund flow, they pass along surplus basket money to the area, the area to the region and the region to world services. they may also make books free to newcomers or do various other things to carry the message. addicts can

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choose to donate in their home group or in many groups. Many addicts get confused and believe the Seventh Tradition applies to service boards or committees. service boards or committees are not NA they the Seventh Tradition does not apply. They utilize funds from group donations to provide services as directed by the policies of the funding service committee. Groups are self-supporting and money after bills goes to support the service effort. We may on occasion throw a fundraiser to meet additional needs if they occur. Service boards and committees carry our group conscience with money from the groups. As we begin to respect our Seventh Tradition and begin to make healthy decisions in our lives we become self-supporting members of society.

Much of recovery has to do with awakening to the interrelationships that were invisible to us in active addiction or early recovery. We demand respect when someone intrudes on us yet express amazement when others accuse us of intruding on them. Addiction isolates us. We are not used to living so close to others. The Seventh Tradition helps us maintain some separation from their groups and purposes to preserve our focus on recovery. In gratitude, we seek strength and guidance to carry on in the Spirit of NA in many ways. Direct contact with addicts who are learning to live clean places special demands on us to keep faith. We value the confidence and trust they place in us. This requires distance and separation from outside groups and the purposes those organizations would have. We dare not alter our identification as addicts recovery in Narcotics Anonymous. Other purposes would creep in and while most would seem to have little impact, they would accumulate until we were applying for funds and preoccupied with the concerns of bureaucracy rather than meeting the service needs of NA groups.

TRADITION EIGHT

"Narcotics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers."

Applying this Tradition to our service boards and committees has been difficult. We agree that special workers being used to answer phones, maintain correspondence, do clerical work, print, warehouse and ship literature is within the terms of the Eighth Tradition. Special workers and must be paid for our Seventh Tradition to be self-supporting but what about editing and writing literature? Doing Public Information, Hospital and Institution work, etc? Should paid workers travel and assist in the development of NA in these other areas? These are questions that have arisen in regard to the Eighth Tradition. We need to look at the concept of "special workers" in light of our Steps and Traditions. While we may employ people to do day to day tasks in our service centers, 12th Step work or "carrying the message" should result from our gratitude and spiritual awakening, not from desire to do a job or make a living. Our motivations are important. We only keep what we have by giving it away. The strength of our spiritual message is as much in the giver as in the message itself: the message has to be consistent with the spirit in which it is given.. This Tradition helps us to divide the spiritual from the material. The Eighth Tradition can keep us from sacrificing our spiritual principles for the sake of material efficiency.

Keeping the NA groups nonprofessional allows all members to recover as equals. Many addicts have become fed up with dealing with professionals and are drawn to NA simply because it is a strictly nonprofessional organization where addicts recover on an equal basis. There is no one person better than another. It is one addict helping another. Many of us are intimidated by or are resentful of professionals

and are unwilling to deal with them. They do not want to feel as if they are being told what to do. In NA, no one can tell anyone else what to do. We deal in suggestions only. It is up to the individual addict whether they take it or leave any specific suggestions. Too many addicts equate professionals with authority figures. In NA groups there must be no figures of authority. If there is one thing more than anything else that may drive newcomers away, it is the thought of dealing with authority.

Special workers are employed by NA service centers to do jobs as directed by group conscience. They do things that would be unfair to ask of a volunteer on a regular basis or go undone. Service volunteers give spiritual, caring services and may work without pay on a provisional basis as needed. When their job becomes a regular service, they must be paid for us to be self-supporting. Service centers are directly responsible to NA but they are not NA. Many of our special workers may not be members of NA. Conflicts of interest may put a member in a compromising position. Money can be a problem. We respect our members and we would not want to add further difficulty to anyone's personal program. Our service centers employ people to answer phones, file, fill orders and other tasks to enable our centers to be more efficient. We need to keep in mind that these people, not being NA members, should not be volunteers. NA members are free to volunteer possibly as part of their Seventh Tradition. Also, being non NA members, we need to define the special workers role as specifically working in our service centers, not writing or editing literature, not doing PI work and not becoming involved in carrying a message to institutions. These are responsibilities of NA members who are willing to serve the fellowship. When we hire professionals outside of NA to become involved with our literature, our public information or H&I work, we are cheating ourselves out of carrying the message. This creates problems with the possibility of service work for hire that we will never condone. Things

like this damage the integrity of NA as a whole.

We trust that group conscience will direct us, rather than any individual member. We must trust in this group conscience while each share our experience, strength and hope, and let our higher power's will be done. It is important for each individual to be honest when sharing their feelings in order for the group conscience to be accurate.

Care must be taken to keep our spiritual integrity by maintaining a close focus on recovery and carrying our message. Many other activities that might have some bearing on the goals of NA and be in some way related to our message fall outside the perimeter of our competence. We are good at getting clean, staying clean and helping others directly and through some group efforts at putting members in position to directly carry our message while maintaining anonymity. Beyond this, we do not go. Other people will own and run hospitals. Others will run the governments and administer and enforce its laws. Others will conduct the media and do the many things possible in a complex society of individuals like ours.

Keeping our services nonprofessional helps us prevent conflicts between paid and unpaid workers. Without clearly understanding the conflicts we build into our service effort if we allow our special workers to control portions of our group conscience process, we will unwittingly subject our Fellowship to misleading and unreliable information. Our ability to think clearly, discuss fully and collect enough general information to make an informed decision through spiritual deliberation can be defeated. A spiritual person does not put a bag over their head.

The Eighth Tradition as it applies to our groups very simple. Our groups are nonprofessional, PERIOD. Ideally, service in our groups should

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result from the spiritual awakening our Steps bring us. Our Text says, "Proper service is doing the right thing for the right reason." Personal motivation is a factor in why we have an Eighth Tradition.

Addicts seem to have an innate fear and hatred of conflicts of interest. We probably carry this to unfair extremes. It is for the protection of our new people that we hold ourselves so far back from even giving the appearance of exploiting our members need for help by overcharging for our events, our literature or anything else pertaining to recovery. NA is not in the publishing business. We grant limited rights to our world service components to retail our literature under control of the Fellowship to insure our purposes never become exploitative.

Responsibility calls for us to remind our special workers that NA is run by a Loving God as expressed in group conscience. This means the bills are paid on time. If our unity is strong and our members are focused on recovery, they can provide additional help and support if needed. We are careful to keep other goals out of the picture. Being sensitive to members needs and attentive to their instruction is more than simply keeping faith with spiritual law; it is also the law of the land.

Committee officers frequently forget that their terms don't last forever and that recovery is the more important thing. Substitutes for recovery are always sought by addicts and we may try to cover this up through denial because we think we are the only ones. Go ahead, have a good laugh. You've earned it - or you will someday.

As a spiritual fellowship, we maintain our proper position so that our time and attention is available to do what no one else can: help addicts seeking recovery. In this way, we keep faith with those who helped us and make way for those who will in their turn help others. If those who

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helped us had been distracted, many of us would not have made it. If we are distracted, we may not notice those who die at our doorstep.

TRADITION NINE

"NA, as such, ought never to be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve."

Narcotics Anonymous is a spiritual program and we put our spiritual purposes first. It is important that we don't get so caught up in the business side of our group directed functions. Those boards and committees we create are admonished to maintain directly responsibility to the general membership: those we serve. We get two sorts of direction from the Fellowship. First, what we do in the way of providing a service. For instance, we may decide to start a help line or a service project at the world level. Second, how we proceed in setting up or maintaining a routine service. What we do it is decided once, how we do it may be updated from time to time. Or we may decide we can no longer provide a given service. In the past members have often had trouble separating what we do from how we do it. Both are policy items but they require different considerations. What we do depends largely on the strengths and weaknesses in a given service area. No sense in committing to H&I panels if you don't have members who can service them. Also, if we commit to put out meeting schedules and flyers at probation offices or other places where addicts can get them, it requires a certain amount of money and has to be done on a regular basis.

No service boards or committee should be allowed to govern the Fellowship. In selfless service, members may choose to become involved with committees our service boards. But since they are not NA, opinion and manipulation has no place, just group conscience as explained in our Second Tradition. Members may trust specific members to carry their collective conscience but this does not make this member a leader, governor or an organizer. It simply makes that person a trusted

servant. No one has the power or authority to make decisions for NA. NA as a whole makes decisions for NA as a whole.

Our sanctioned events and service efforts are done by trusted servants. All are addicts seeking recovery at times and all are members who act as resources to those who suffer at other times. Surely, we will all fall short at times. But if enough of us are mindful of Tradition Nine, we can offset any harm done. The basic problem seems to be when the business aspect of an event makes our members uncomfortable. Our policy of openness and service is conducive to good feelings about service and trusting our trusted servants. If our servants can't trust us, who are we to trust them?

Special words require our attention. It can be a mistake to assume we know why these terms are special. Like many 'addict words,' ordinary definitions may or may not apply. This can prevent our going that one extra step that could lead to much more useful knowledge and understanding. Organizations are functional systems and they work to preserve these functions. An organization is built around beliefs held in common. The means to enforce adherence to its rules and goals is generally inclusion or exclusion. Businesses are organized from the inside out. NA is organized from the outside in. We invert the structural pyramid, with Members at the top and service positions at the bottom. Our group conscience processes blend ideas and suggestions from many sources so that we include a maximum number of viewpoints and people. We don't submit well to authority figures. We can surrender as part of our programs and our service yet it is entirely voluntary. If we are not given trust and respect, we know something has gone wrong.

In NA, we deal exclusively with the disease of addiction. NA "as such" referred to in this Tradition applies to our meetings where recovery is

shared. This may include two members sharing on the phone in the middle of the night, a regular meeting or a convention meeting. All else is "not" NA. NA is not a business where business practices can take precedence over spiritual values. Many times, business concerns and issues have been used as an excuse to be secretive, manipulative and deceptive. Through the years, this has been a matter of some debate. It will always be a matter of debate because we will always have people moving from a rational, worldly viewpoint to a spiritual. It takes some time to realize that the worldly takes care of day-to-day functions but the spiritual takes care of every moment. All our luck and good feeling depends on the spirit. Ideally, there should be no conflict but it takes time and experience to learn to live the NA way without conflict. New people or people in new situations will always need our love and understanding if they fall into some trap or area where they can't see what to do clearly. We all need patience and tolerance.

The Fellowship creates its service boards and committees. This is important to understand because in the course of things it may seem to us that our service efforts 'create' the Fellowship. It works one way and not the other. This keeps our committees and boards oriented to serve members and groups. It helps them to not get so caught up in what they are doing that they forget their allegiance to the Fellowship. If they do not, they may begin to govern. Power, like anger, is a potent drug. We create these and they are our creations but it takes care and training to serve NA without falling into well known traps! They didn't create us, our desire for recovery did. We recovering addicts are not their creatures.

Direct responsibility does not have to concern us with what other service boards and committees think. If we serve well those who benefit from our efforts and generally support others working to do the same, all will

be well. Addicts make poor legislators. We may hate to admit this fact. We are frequently tied into our own viewpoint so totally, that others exist only in our peripheral vision. Keeping our service simple and just doing our job takes a lot of surrender and sincerity on our part.

Structurally, this Tradition is a warning to keep faith with the members of NA at large. It is the nature of bureaucracies that much can be made of little. Interactive service boards can pat each other on the back and drift away from being directly responsible without ever noticing it. Like a bullfrog in a pan of water on the stove, they can boil to death without noticing the water getting hotter. They surely think all the feels warm is good for them. All service positions require knowledge of the Steps and Traditions. This is because we need to have surrender, faith, morals, and the ability to say we're sorry if we're going to function well with other addicts in service.

What is trusted service? Trusted service may be commitments that we may take on unconditionally on a group, area or regional level. These commitments may vary, but one thing does not change: The unselfish desire to give back what was so freely given to you. For many of us, this act of unconditional love may take the form of something simple on a group level. That something that allows us to show our gratitude and feel a part of the greater whole. As our understanding of the principle of NA becomes more apparent and our spirituality increases, we may get involved in the committees that are directly responsible to its members. Not all addicts in recovery choose to get involved in trusted service. Many are content with what they seem to have. Others complain of principles being violated or personalities in conflict. For us, trusted service implies action.

It can be so easy to sit back and complain about how poorly another

member may be fulfilling their commitment. It can take the focus off ourselves. Why not get involved and either take on a commitment or help with others. No one commitment is more important than another. If service were a management system or a corporate effort, this might not be as true as it is with us. Service is part of our general giving or a part of our twelfth step. In either case, it is important for us to give and to keep faith within the Fellowship's trust. Performing our task well or poorly is almost another matter. If we're clumsy or awkward, someone will notice and find a way to help us, if we are sincere.

One purpose of our Ninth Tradition is to separate and distinguish NA as such from our service boards and committees. 'NA as such' is groups of addicts holding meetings for the purpose of recovery from the disease of addiction. Their primary purpose is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. Service boards and committees are created by these groups and are not NA as such. They have many other purposes and may become besieged with rivalry or competitiveness. This is an important distinction as many members confuse our service structure with NA. Our structure does not speak for NA but should allow NA to speak through it. Our boards and committees should not lead NA as such, but should be led as outlined in our second tradition.

Separating our service structure and NA is vital to our spiritual growth. When we blur the distinction, service disputes and controversies enter into our recovery meetings and affect our personal recovery. No member should be isolated or feel isolated from the fellowship because of service issues. This Tradition talks about direct responsibility. It is up to NA groups to insist on this. Although our structure is separate from NA as such, we expect it to work within the principles established by our Steps and Traditions.

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Somehow, over the years, our service boards and committees changed direction. They changed from being "not a part of Narcotics Anonymous" to being "solely to serve the fellowship." This cheats the newcomer members from the concept of the Ninth Tradition. This may not be a direct change but indirectly an implication of service boards or committees being NA can confuse people and bring conflict upon ourselves. Service boards or committees serve the Fellowship not direct the Fellowship.

We can trust NA service boards and committees where they are guided by a loving God in their choices. Individuals may become obsessed and view dissenting members as the enemy, but surely, our combined love and determined effort for the common good will prevail. It is not the job of our service boards and committees to provide things we don't need. We don't need people to tell us what to think or approve what information becomes available to us. Responsiveness is the hallmark of genuine service. When members ask questions, they really want to know. Responding to their needs allows them to get past problems others have successfully faced. They go on to break new recovery ground for NA.

TRADITION TEN

"NA has no opinion on outside issues; hence the NA name ought never be drawn into public controversy."

Having an opinion is having an opinion. It doesn't matter if we fight for what is "socially acceptable" or unacceptable. Any type of opinion, used in conjunction with the words Narcotics Anonymous creates public controversy. In this case, it does not matter who is right. It does not matter what is right. What matters is that it is none of NA's business. It is difficult for addicts not to share our opinions. We must respect this Tradition and do this in our own NA family in a way that does not become available outside of NA. We do not encourage our members to wear NA shirts at political rallies, public or commercial events or occasions involving the press or media. This would indirectly make a statement. We need to encourage respect for our fellowship. Sometimes a member in a tee shirt or with a sticker on his car is the only thing society sees. If we allow ourselves to express an opinion while carrying an NA logo, this endangers NA as a whole. Perhaps only a little bit, but that little bit can make a big difference. Already our combined goodwill, ability to keep Fellowship commitments is helping us carry our message into areas where we just weren't welcome that long ago. Sometimes it is hard to see the benefits of doing the right thing, but as we come to ourselves, we begin to see patterns forming in our lives to take the place of ego, pain motivation, suspicion, greed and all the other self-limiting strategies addiction had rooted in our lives. You can't get a job at the bank if you steal money. We must surrender to this Tradition in our personal lives for the benefit of the integrity of NA as a whole.

One addict shared what many feel, "I am grateful that NA isn't involved with the politics and other issues of society. NA is a

spiritual way of life and I feel this would be severely compromised if we let our opinions or non-recovery issues effect the groups in any way."

In order for us to recover, it is imperative that we be able to "focus" on recovery alone. The disease is always trying to defocus us so that we cannot concentrate all our energies on recovery. We suffer from a disease of spiritual deficiency and in order to achieve integrity the atmosphere of non-duality must be maintained in our groups.

The Tenth Tradition is vital for our growth and spiritual well-being as a Fellowship. We cannot afford to be categorized or labeled by taking positions on outside issues. Public positions may attract some, but they would invariably alienate others. By remaining neutral on outside issues within the larger society, we are accessible to the broadest base of addicts. We do it this way so that no addict seeking recovery need ever die. As lofty and distant as that goal may seem at times, we can have it if we are willing to pay the price, don't back off and don't get side tracked.

The Tenth Tradition warns us about public controversy. Public controversy is to be avoided because it always damages us as a Fellowship by diverting associations away from recovery for addicts. When someone out in the world thinks of NA, we want them to think of caring addicts who live clean. They don't really need to know our politics, our income level, our associations, and most important, our opinions on everything. Year after year, we have to let new members working in the sensitive areas of Public Information know they are not to use their last names with the press as NA members, not to address outside issues and not to respond to a reporter outside our area of responsibility. By being responsible, we make it possible for others to find out about NA, get to our meetings and achieve freedom from active

addiction.

Internal controversies have been with us from the beginning of our Fellowship and are not necessarily negative. NA has often grown and matured through controversy. The Tenth Tradition distinctly applies to outside issues and public controversy outside NA. It is not meant to be used as a means to avoid involvement in our Fellowship. Many problems will not go away until members are willing to make a stand.

One member shares, "When our world office chose to launch a lawsuit against an individual member in 1989, it was viewed as an inside matter. Members reported overhearing lawyers discussing our 'case' during a commercial airline flight. We have not invisible to the outside world. To a certain extent, we are on candid camera. To pretend otherwise is fantasy."

This Tradition refers to "outside issues." Recently, many members have wanted us to take medical and socio-political positions on issues of racial prejudice, tobacco smoking and treatment for addiction. We must be careful. Stating opinions on these issues in the name of NA can be dangerous. Even the safest generalizations can be harmful. Are we doctors, lawyers and experts? If we are in our own right, let it be kept apart from our membership! It is so easy for an addict to be gulled into making rash statements on the air or to the press. We just have to repeat the warnings until they are heard. And, most importantly, members have to be trained and instructed in these matters by us; there is no one else to do it. When we don't do our job, we insure failure and confusion for Fellowship events and projects. When we have taken our turn at running things, it is all too easy to back off and let others rush in and take over. If they fail, is it their fault if we didn't set it up with a strategy to pass on what we had learned before turning the effort over to them? Think about

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it. Pray about it. It is your Fellowship.

What about "inside issues?" These are expressed as our experience, strength and hope on recovery, in our group conscience literature process. Our opinions on service and Traditions are expressed the same way. The word "conscience" is more accurate than the word "opinion" to describe this because it includes the spiritual component.

TRADITION ELEVEN

"Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films."

Spiritual integrity is at the heart of this Tradition. Anonymity rules out self-aggrandizement. In NA, we deal with energy and avoid areas of powerlessness. One of the major ways we stay within bounds is not to try to claim responsibility for other people, what they do or what they think. Standing out, alone and on our own, is necessary for us to carry out our Fifth Tradition and carry our message. When people think of NA, they think of recovering addicts who help one another. Any departure from this focus hurts our ability to carry our message. We applaud and enjoy our personal attributes as we grow through the 12 Steps. When in service to NA, we set aside our personal preferences in favor of group purpose and this Tradition enjoins us to keep this spirit alive.

We addicts at any point along life's way, have some things to learn. Staying on the subject is hard if not impossible for many of us, especially in early recovery. We may not expect to actually get better. Service workers who specialize in Public Information services, study guidelines developed by members within the Fellowship to pass along what has been learned about creating and maintaining a public presence without violating our Traditions. Please refer to public information guides to get what is most current and helpful at present.

To keep our program attractive, we avoid promotional images and postures that would suggest we were other than what we are: A program of recovering addicts who help one another to get help themselves. This

is attractive to addicts seeking recovery who would be turned off by professional approaches or treatment programs that may not have worked in the past. While we find many of our members are better able to benefit from treatment due to the radical change recovery makes in a person, we have many members who have gotten clean and stayed clean on NA alone.

Promotion would be out of place for a program of recovery based on spiritual principles. Promotion implies the need to add value to a product or proposition with intent to sell or market. We try to be sensitive to prospective members who may still be in pain from having been promised help by some other organization or program and felt let down. We are what we are and we are grateful. Our recovery should speak for itself among addicts in pain from active addiction. Until an addict is awakened by their very own custom designed 'pain', they are notoriously unlikely to respond to any offer of help. So, promotion would not only not work, it would make real addicts think we were somehow insincere pretenders and therefore avoid us when they become serious about recovery. In this way, it would run people off who we should be welcoming. Terms like 'hype,' 'bill of goods,' and 'sensational' may help us understand this point.

The greatest treasure of all recovering persons is being able to live free of the labels of active addiction. We may break our own anonymity privately for any reason, yet we do not grant the right to do this to break the anonymity of any other person, even if they have reason to think it will be OK with us. In this world, we never know when our good-naturedness will cost someone their job or result in other problems that would not occur without our interference. We develop habits that allow us to live with other people without injuring or discomforting them.

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Initial attraction to our Fellowship happens in many ways. The continued attraction that keeps us coming back may often stem from our honesty living the spiritual principles of our program in our daily lives. That is what continues to attract the still suffering addict to us: The fact we live in the spiritual solution and our willingness to share ourselves unconditionally.

TRADITION TWELVE

"Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities."

Here in Narcotics Anonymous we have one promise - "freedom from active addiction." Members who were a part of the writing of the NA Basic Text can affirm that some other promises were considered, and eventually discarded because we felt we did not need to make any other promises. It was time to let the truth about recovery be known. The point was made that freedom in recovery takes many forms and but all these forms are dependent on one thing: freedom from active addiction. In the process of recovery, what these words mean grow to mean freedom from all the avenues that addiction can take, even if we are totally abstinent from all chemical drugs. We come to acknowledge our powerlessness in other areas of our life: sex, money, prestige, fame, obsessions, gambling, anything we do to excess that creates problems for us by distracting us from reality.

Principles involve hope, surrender, acceptance, caring and sharing, honest, open-mindedness and other positive elements that help us build a new life. Personalities involve personal attack, selfishness, gang mentality, rumor, gossip, character assassination and close-mindedness. Principles revolve around what is being done to benefit others. Personalities revolve around who gets the credit and how it will affect us directly in some way. Amazingly, 'principles before personalities' has been used to justify personal issues because that is the way they appear to us when we are obsessed. It is up to our friends and sponsors to help us see through our illusions.

How does it work? "Those who keep coming to our meetings regularly

stay clean." Directly or indirectly implies anything else would be promoting NA. "If you want what we have to offer, and are willing to make the effort to get it, then you are ready to take certain steps." If our meetings are not surrendering to the Steps and Traditions, there is no atmosphere of recovery. This is not attractive. By allowing newcomers to see our recovery, we become attractive.

We do many things to promote unity within Narcotics Anonymous. Occasionally, by promoting unity we begin to promote our Fellowship. We need to be personally responsible for the way we allow society to see us if we choose to let society know us as NA members.

Customs and routines give us positive ways to handle things that come up from time to time. Our use of the word 'tradition' goes slightly beyond the dictionary definition. We apply it to mean that the interconnected group of principles reinforcing and combining to give us a whole much greater the sum of individual parts. Our Traditions are really a spiritual network that helps us get along with each other while fulfilling our mission to stay clean and help others.

Spiritual guides for addicts seeking recovery must be well worded and have sustained a certain amount of pressure. We cannot afford to play word games or sound good 'just for effect'. If our principles do not work for us, we are in serious trouble. Personalities are neither good nor bad in and of themselves. They become one or the other through usage. If our actions and reactions produce useful, interesting and positive effects, we are sure to be honest, open and willing to a degree.

Stepping out of the labels is the spirit of anonymity. What gets done or goes undone becomes important instead of accessing blame and passing out guilt. While bringing a problem to someone's attention is still an

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option, the burning desire to make someone feel badly subsides. Cutting this negative habit in half is part of the change, we experience through anonymity. If our differences take precedent over our similarity, we may find ourselves stuck in a cycle of useless conflict. This is bad in as much as it wastes time and energy and fails to satisfy our desire for personal improvement. And as long as we think the problem is with the other person, we're not apt to do the things we can do to help.

When It Works: The Twelve Principles of NA

The seeds of the miracles in NA are found in the following principles.

- 1. Hope gives us something positive to look for and move towards. We can admit our need for help as we begin to share in our common welfare.*
- 2. Surrender to the things we cannot change through our own power is a way to get on with our lives. We seek a Higher Power of our own understanding and that becomes our ultimate guide and source of strength.*
- 3. Acceptance allows evasion and denial to give way to reality and peace. With the care of God, we are granted the power to welcome new people and new ideas into our lives.*
- 4. Honesty is the ability to match up our insides with our outsides. It allows what we don't care about to go away and what we really want to appear and develop in our lives.*
- 5. Open mindedness is our bridge to the experience of others. It is the passageway out of loneliness into the life of the Spirit.*
- 6. Willingness to try is the beginning of doing our part. However grand or humble that might be, it is a state of readiness replacing depression and anxiety.*
- 7. Faith is the evidence of our trust in God. True faith is the result of surrender coupled with experience that God can and will do for us if we ask for help.*

8. Tolerance is knowing the other person has the same spirit in them as us and being curious about what that spirit is trying to do.

9. Patience is taking time for things to move into place without force or breakage.

10. Humility is knowing the importance of doing our part well and being open to the many forms of help required for a full and abundant life.

11. Unconditional love is given where we sense our spirit in another human being.

12. Sharing and caring is the active and passive forms of love that keeps us alive and allowing God to use us as instruments.

Principles are the language of miracles. Increasing our language ability helps us make the right choices. Our minds often play tricks on us, due to our disease, and we use spiritual principles as guidelines to escape our old ways. These principles can be mimicked but unspiritual people lack certain characteristics associated with spiritual growth. Love, caring, patience, peace of mind are hard attributes to fake! We each have to reach a point of surrender to enter the state we call 'recovery.' In NA, we have our own spiritual awakening and this gives us our own evidence of the reality of the God of our Understanding. We have to have our own miracles for spirituality to be real to us. Without principles, it is easy to fall back into our comfortable rationales where most of the world is wrong and we, poor isolated victims, are lost in a world of fools. We learn or create words to describe what is going on in our hearts so others can help us and so we can help ourselves. Recovery is getting back with humanity.

Spiritual growth is discovering ways to put principles into action. To grow spiritually requires three things: surrender, learning and practice. We have found that maintaining our spiritual condition is the best safe guard against relapse. Our spiritual condition determines the quality of our life. Regardless of our station in life, it is possible to achieve a great state of mind and spirit. Many of our members spend a great deal of time in our meetings and functioning as part of our active service structure. Others go about their business in good faith and show their gratitude for recovery through personal service. Personal service is helping addicts seeking recovery.

As we grow in recovery, unanticipated differences of viewpoint develop from our newly acquired information. When we begin to apply it, we discover ways to reconcile what we have learned with what we have known before and the situations around us. Pretending that these differences don't exist will ensure that they dominate us. Secrets have great power. We see this happen in any area of our lives where we are not free to openly discuss our feelings. While it may be a simple matter to resolve in open discussion, when we won't even admit something is wrong it takes on the enduring quality of stone. Until we found recovery, the inability to come out into the open with living problems has kept addicts in prisons of their own making. Just the fact that there are others who share our concerns, sets us free from feeling that we are alone.

The Twelve Principles listed under Step 12 in the Fourth Chapter of the Basic Text, Narcotics Anonymous. They are the keys to joining the Steps with the Traditions. It is easier to avoid the pitfalls that come with practicing a spiritual way of life against the strains of everyday reality. Too often good members have been pitted against one another where they have common cause in staying clean and helping others. Many times, simple misunderstandings have grown into grave conflicts entirely

disproportionate to the original issues. Stubbornness and close-mindedness prolong the conflict. Communicators must intervene lest nature take its course.

In keeping with our growth as a Fellowship and the spiritual nature of our program of recovery, it must be noted that we cannot serve two masters. We are spiritual first and everything else second. We cannot allow the forces of worldly concerns to erode our spiritual love and caring. We want to maintain our sensitivity and sincerity as our worldwide Fellowship grows. If we are to survive the incredible and emotional strains of our growth, we will always have to look to our roots to remain on sound spiritual ground. These roots have to do with the memories we each have of the excitement and happiness we felt when we finally realized that NA could indeed grant us a new life. These experiences put us all on equal ground in service as well as in recovery. They are our reference point for understanding what and why we do what we do the way we do it.

One thing that will doom us to stagnation in recovery is an attitude of indifference towards spiritual principles. When we are young in recovery, the world is full of uncertainty and discovery. We are forced to summon our inner reserves to learn about getting clean and staying clean. We are really trying and really listen to what others have to say. We read spiritual literature and expect to find new answers to help us reorient ourselves to the clean life. When we think we know the answers, we float into indifference. We know we don't really know all the answers, but we have been clean a while and there is no one to tell us to get real anymore. Intolerance is when we do the same thing to other people. We discount the fact that they are clean and trying, even in difficulty, to make sense of their lives and find their way out of their traps.

Instead of floating in a sea of uncertainty, we can begin moving forward in directions of our choice. Many lost dreams have only waited in the darkness of our memories. Many times, we will find ourselves waking up to rediscover forgotten feelings and lost goals that had become impossible in active addiction. Principles are what guide us around the pitfalls and away from the thin ice where reality cannot support us. We get on an honest footing with reality and it supports us. If there were really something terrible out there, waiting to get us, it has surely had its chance. We find that we have to act on the opportunity in front of us on a daily or a moment-by-moment basis to be able to see ahead to the next opportunity. If we do not do what's in front of us, we feel ourselves falling behind. If this happens, all we have to do is ask the God of our understanding for help to get back on the recovery road. We do what is in front of us, then the next thing and soon we are so busy living clean, we have trouble recalling what was bothering us! It is amazing how well this simplicity works. Even if we feel discombobulated, we can do the right thing. The power of positive action and attitude is greater than the negative.

Principles give us words to describe functional parts of our new reality. They all come from a spiritual focus inside our being. Without this focus, the principles fall back into being mere words without the spiritual force, like a candle without a flame. It is scary to experience this.

We all find we need help. This is what we do in our meetings when we get beyond withdrawal and the obsession to use is lifted from us. Most all NA members can remember times when the program seemed unreal, unsafe and uncertain. They got past the crisis and continued going to meetings and found their objections were just one more effort to return to active addiction.

Enrichment describes the way members bring their current personal experience into the rooms of NA to share what they are finding with others. This stops short of endorsing outside issues but valid experience is what keeps NA alive and growing. We carry our program with us into any area of our new lives. What we discover is brought back and shared with other members and may become part of the spoken or written body of the material we all draw in recovery. This way any experience any of us has that encourages or enhances an addicts chance of staying clean or living a better life gets taken into our meetings and shared out to those who may find it useful. This does not mean that we tell members to go to our therapist, our church or another support group. We can share what we learned there and how it interested us or helped us in our recovery. The process of twelve step recovery is amazingly resilient and absorptive of this sort of input.

From the computer field we hear, "Information overload equals pattern perception." A member might share some pain and anger from childhood that came out in a group therapy session. It is absurd that this member wouldn't say where the event took place. We can share these things without endorsing outside enterprises or expressing opinions on outside issues. The world is our preserve in recovery. No door is closed to us, why then would we shut ourselves in unless we were fearful, once again, of losing control.

The Principles we explore in this chapter relate both to the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions. There was an old idea that behind each NA Step and Tradition was a common principle. The idea is that the individual expression of the principle is in the Step and the collective expression is in the Tradition. Admission of our addiction and the foundation of our common welfare both rest on our Hope...

Spiritual Principles Pamphlet Introduction

The spiritual principles in this informational pamphlet are a gift. They are given to an addict, any addict willing and unwilling alike, who through grace is given freedom from the bondage of active addiction. It has been our experience that members who get a sponsor and work the twelve steps are able to receive this gift.

Although we acquire these principles over a period of time, it is crucial that we start with some fortune from our higher power. It is not an accident that we find ourselves at our first meeting of Narcotics Anonymous. It is usually at this meeting that we are introduced to the spiritual principle of hope for the first time. This is why it is crucial to make the atmosphere of recovery match our primary purpose. We must make absolutely certain that our groups make the newcomer feel welcome within the first few moments that they enter the room. In Narcotics Anonymous, we save the lives of other addicts by making sure the same atmosphere that attracted us to the rooms is present for the next newcomer. The essence of NA is making the group suit the needs of the newcomer. The reason why we say the newcomer is the most important person at the meeting is because they are.

After walking into our first Narcotics Anonymous meeting, we hopefully hear the lifesaving message shared by various members of the group. During this time, we might actually spend a few brief moments forgetting about our obsessive desire to use. This is the first time we experience the spiritual principle of hope. After listening and watching other addicts who have stayed clean for some time, we begin to think that maybe we too can stay clean. For the newcomer, seeing is believing. When we see other addicts staying clean, we can believe that maybe this too can happen to us. We soon discover how these addicts have been staying

clean and finding a new way of life. We hear for the first time that the answers are in the steps. We hear that the twelve steps of Narcotics Anonymous are the key to finding this new way of life.

We must also experience the spiritual principles of surrender and willingness if we plan to get on the journey with the rest of the members that are clean. We must ask a member of Narcotics Anonymous to be our sponsor so we can be guided through the twelve steps. If we do not take this crucial step, we will eventually go back to where we came from. The spiritual principle called surrender must be present if we are to ask for help. We must be open to the idea that we can not stay clean alone so we must seek help. We must also be physically willing to go up to another person and ask them to sponsor us. Our journey towards freedom from active addiction begins when we surrender and find the willingness to get a Narcotics Anonymous sponsor to guide us through the steps. It is through this process that we can acquire the remaining principles mentioned in this IP. Our purpose for writing this IP is to give more information on the spiritual principles we are trying to obtain when working the steps. We have come to understand in Narcotics Anonymous that we are powerless over our addiction, however, we are not powerless over what we do to recover. Knowledge is power. We hope to provide addicts with more knowledge on the spiritual principles mentioned in step twelve of our basic text.

As a result of obtaining some of the spiritual principles embedded in the steps, the addict starts to handle problem situations with integrity. They take the spiritual principles obtained and apply them to their life. This process allows less time to be spent on the problem and more time to be spent on helping other addicts and enjoying life. Applying the spiritual principles discussed in this IP does more than just helping the addict, it helps everyone the addict associates with. We begin to feel bad when

addicts are speaking negatively about another member. Instead of chiming in, they share their experience, strength, and hope about the pain they felt after speaking negatively about another addict. They share that usually the same character defect they were accusing another addict of having happened to be the same one they were struggling with themselves. They begin to tell the truth even when it makes them look bad. They start to feel the program of Narcotics Anonymous in their heart.

Another result that comes from living the spiritual principles in our lives is ability to love another addict unconditionally. The addict starts to develop empathy towards other addicts that are having a difficult time. The miracle of empathy happens when an addict feels the heart of another sick and suffering addict in their own. Empathy is demonstrating the love for another addict through action. Instead of just feeling love for another addict who is sick and suffering, we use the principles obtained through working the twelve steps and take our love a step further. We demonstrate through action that they too can get clean, loose the desire to use, and find a new way of life. We hug the addict and tell them that we love them. We stay after the meeting and discuss things that helped us stay clean. We exchange phone numbers so the addict has people to call if they need help. We review the meeting schedule so the addict knows the next place and time a meeting is taking place. Most importantly, we let the still sick and suffering addict know that we are there to help in anyway possible. It's no wonder that as our understanding and application of the twelve steps grows, so does our understanding and application of the twelve principles mentioned in Step Twelve of our basic text and discussed in the NA Way of Life. We start to understand that all of the spiritual principles discussed in this pamphlet are used together to help make more dreams come true. The spiritual principles acquired in Narcotics Anonymous help move addicts from the

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problem into the solution. The following spiritual principles can be used by addicts to help their dreams come true too. With a continued commitment to working the steps with a sponsor, the spiritual principles mentioned in this IP will start to become more than just a part of an addict's life, they will become the foundation for a new way of life beyond our wildest dreams!

PRINCIPLE ONE - HOPE

"Hope is to faith as desire is to willingness."

Since our origins as a program and Fellowship, one common principle has been binding our spirits together: Hope. Hope for recovery. Hope that the obsession will someday be lifted. Hope that the program is for real. Hope that things will start making sense. Hope for ourselves and others. When an addict attends an NA meeting and hears a message of hope, their ability to admit their need for help begins. Hope is catching, in a sense, and can be transmitted by spiritual interaction. "When the voices in our head are screaming things like, "WHY DON'T YOU GIVE UP!" and "YOU KNOW YOU CAN'T DO THIS!" Hope whispers, "Try one more time..."

Hope is the one spiritual principle that can be given away. We found this happening in NA when newcomers listened to other members share their experience, strength, and hope. Some addicts experience was so strikingly similar to their own, they identified with the story and for the first time thought that maybe they too could get clean. This thought, driven from the heart of another sharing addict, was their first experience with Hope. They left the meeting feeling different than when they came. They left with the idea that this way of life might be possible for them too. For a brief moment in the meeting, they even forgot about their obsessive desire to use. They left the meeting with a strong desire to come back and discover how other addicts have been staying clean. Hope is Hearing Other People's Experiences.

Hope is to desire something reasonable and attainable. The desire for recovery was unreasonable and unattainable for us until we found NA. Those who have gone before us had this desire and it is the same desire

for recovery that makes us members today. Hope keeps us alive and vital as a Fellowship. Hope wards off negativity and apathy. While hope may seem intangible to some, its effects are profoundly visible. You can tell by looking at someone that they are hopeful. It is at the head of our list of spiritual principles because with hope, problems don't seem insurmountable. Anticipation of things getting better can be the beginning of fulfillment. (note: this was already added in the 1998 version)

We know when we feel hopeless; solutions are apt to appear distant and unlikely. A lot of us in NA learn to give and receive hope from one another at the onset of our recovery. When we feel hopeful, our sense of security, optimism, and self-reliance eliminate many of our concerns and help us deal with the rest. On the other hand, hopelessness breeds despair and the simplest things can seem overwhelming. As a principle, hope becomes something to be treasured. Like any treasure, there are those that would steal what they could have honestly. As a fundamental part of our recovery, NA members are asked to avoid any act that would threaten to dampen or extinguish hope in the hearts of our members.

Hopelessness has its hallmarks too. Dejection, despair, desperation, despondency, and discouragement can result in an incapacity for hope. When we feel these things in recovery, we learn to realize spiritual principles are being violated in some way that affects us. In this way, principles may guide us out of our hopelessness. Attending a meeting might just allow us to hear another addict share exactly where we are while offering a simple solution. We have come to understand these coincidences are really just God's way of remaining anonymous.

Policies insuring every member is capable of having a voice in NA have been a part of our Traditions and Service Structure since we first began to

grow as a Fellowship. In the early seventies, dreams began which were realized by the creation of our World Service Conference in 1975. Even in our earliest days, the efforts to begin and carry the NA message were almost entirely dependent on the hope that a better way was possible for addicts. The value of the hope offered by these 'open door' policies was made apparent by a series of efforts where the 'door' was closed to all but a few. The failure of these efforts and the feelings of hopelessness among the many waiting on the few, proved a severe test for our Fellowship.

We can withstand some adversity because it is familiar ground for most of us. To have our sense of hope and assurance threatened not only dampens our spirits but can lead to a sense of utter abandonment - a dangerous place for recovering addicts. Hope allows us to take our first Step, though it may be so small as to go almost unnoticed. Hope allows us to make the surrenders we each must face if we are to grow in recovery. Hope is also the basis of our First Tradition. We would have no common welfare without hope.

As our trust, confidence, and faith grows, so does our sense of hope. Exploitation of our members, falsification of minutes and reports, and controlled elections and manipulations of group conscience have caused many of our members to lose hope. In this sense, hope as a principle may give some of us the clarity we need to avoid doing these things when they may seem desirable or important. Blindness to the effects of our actions on others makes talk of God and hope seem unimportant and unrealistic at the times when we need help the most.

There are at least two ways to learn this lesson: give in to the temptation and violate spiritual principles or avoid violating our structure and its principles. It is easy to do one and while great faith is needed to do the other. Where we fall into error, a public Tenth Step among our

membership, is the best way to stop the disorder and gain the forgiveness we need from others. The Tenth Step puts closure on the harm done. Rule breaking always risks harming others and should be avoided by earnest study and meditation.

We need to remember that there is a solution to all of our problems in Narcotics Anonymous. The solution is the 12 steps of Narcotics Anonymous. Embedded into our journey through the 12 steps is Hope. When pride, ego, greed, hatred, and anger (character defects) enter our minds, we must turn these defects over to a loving and caring God of our own understanding. The only way to be able to do this is to be working the 12 steps. Being in a 12 step fellowship without working the steps is like getting into a car without turning the key. How can we expect to go anywhere spiritual without doing the work? The 12 steps allow us to change our spirit from diseased thinking to that of a loving spiritual nature. Instead of controlling situations, we begin to let go, trust the process, and ask for help. We begin to have hope that any given negative situation be turned into a positive one when we apply the 12 steps on Narcotics Anonymous. As hope arrives, the simplicity of the program will reveal itself.

Where hope and a sense of purpose prevails, we addicts begin to learn feelings long lost to most of us through our active addiction. At times, we may feel almost too buoyant, too enthusiastic. Our aspirations may exceed what is possible for us - yet often in recovery today's dream is tomorrow's reality. Without a dream, we may have no tomorrow. A sense of hope allows us to discuss matters that may be unpleasant or make us uncomfortable. When disorders occur, we suffer until we get back to the NA way: Steps, Traditions and Principles. Hope helps us surrender to the 1st Step and allows us to start the journey through the twelve steps that brings freedom from active addiction and a sense of personal well being

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that is beyond our wildest dreams.

One addict shares simply: "Hope is a small word but a big thing and if it wasn't shown to me through NA, I think I might have died."

PRINCIPLE TWO - SURRENDER

*"Surrender to the things we cannot change
through our own power is a way to get on with our lives.
We seek a Higher Power of our own understanding and that becomes
our ultimate guide and source of strength."*

Surrender is giving up on our old way of life and getting some help to start a new one. We surrender when we admit we can no longer live life on our own. We surrender when we can no longer make our own decisions and get positive results. We surrender when everything in our life seems to be bad. We surrender when the pain is so great it seems we are dying inside. We surrender when we have no hope! We surrender when we have finally reached a place where we are willing to try a new way of life!

When we make the decision to surrender, we get relief from the pain of making our own decisions. Surrender is positive for us because we have hope. Surrendered, we open opportunities for other addicts to help us with our problems. Being clean does not solve all of our problems. New members have gotten the impression that just being clean will fix their disease,. Unfortunately, they end up using as soon as something does not go their way. We need to carefully explain to newcomers that our 1st Step means we acknowledge we cannot use regardless of events or the actions of other people. Surrender is a personal event. It is the beginning of a personal responsibility. Surrender is the first step in moving towards total freedom from active addiction.

In keeping with our NA 12 Steps and 12 Traditions, it becomes obvious that the recovery process of Narcotics Anonymous won't work without an individual capacity for surrender. Surrender qualifies as a principle in its

own right. Surrendered, recovering addicts are the most tangible part of our common welfare. The principle of surrender can guide us when we don't know what to do. Without surrender to our powerlessness, we are catapulted back into our disease.

When we try to participate in NA services without a capacity for spiritual surrender, we find it impossible to make or maintain conscious contact with our Higher Power. Without our Higher Power to strengthen and guide us, we set about trying to do service as if it were a business. We can't buy our freedom in Narcotics Anonymous, we have to work for it. Working the twelve steps of Narcotics Anonymous is the best decision a surrendered addict can make. Trying to buy recovery like it was retail merchandise would be like trying to buy a girlfriends love through spending money on an expensive gift. NA members build this program, service its needs, and give direction to world services. Service is simple with the help of a loving God. Otherwise, we quickly find ourselves lost in a sea of paperwork, reports, and personalities. Responsibility to other service bodies can interfere with the direct responsibility we all have to our group. Without a sense of responsibility to directly inform, respect, and listen to what our members want, service degenerates into a personal rivalry.

We find ourselves on opposite sides of imaginary boundaries, cut off from those who have helped us, unable to ask for help, and clinging to the struggle to be right. NA is a practical program of working principles. Our addiction can build traps for us, even in recovery. One great old timer remarked, "There are three things an addict needs to live: food, shelter, and someone to blame it on." This is why the spiritual principle of surrender is needed to help motivate us to live in the solution instead of the problem. The problem is our way of life and the solution is the Narcotics Anonymous way of life. Living the Narcotics Anonymous way

of life means working the Twelve Steps. Surrendered, we are able to work the Steps with the help of a sponsor who can guide us through the journey of recovery.

Trying to do service as part of our Twelfth Step without spiritual assistance, we become miserable, confused, unhappy, and resentful. All the beauty and freshness of recovery fades and service opportunities become a series of chores. Surrender allows us to look at the bright side at any given point. The principles that gave us power to escape from our addiction slide neatly into place and things begin to make sense again.

Our desperation fades and we begin to gain hope that a better way of life is possible. Our sense of attachment to obsessive ideas and our personal preferences are once again mixed in with the ideas and preferences of others. The sense of win or lose is replaced with new thoughts, feelings, and interactions with others. We are never alone. As our fear decreases, our sense of purpose and the ability to laugh at ourselves returns. We begin to gain a sense of faith in our lives. Through working the first three Steps, we begin to put trust in our higher powers will four us and its ability to solve our problems. Serving Narcotics Anonymous is one way to work God's will.

Those able to carry their recovery into service can be hard workers, brilliant tacticians, and convincing speakers. Oftentimes, their efforts have provided benefits to our Fellowship that we have accepted graciously. We know as no one else can how the disease of addiction can drive addicts. When we surrender to God's will, we use the energy of our disease for a positive purpose; to help the still sick and suffering addict through service work.

We need only to be loving, kind, and gentle in the face of those who

cannot surrender their self will. We may have to be especially firm about maintaining correct policies and procedures. Those who have yet to surrender in the sense of this Principle do not yet believe God can restore them to sanity and will try to get better results by applying money, willpower, and manipulations into their recovery.

Rewriting guidelines should only be done when there are serious problems with the existing guidelines. Otherwise, it is prudent to follow the guides for several reasons. One is to let people know your service is self-less and you are surrendered enough to follow the guides. Casual rewriting of guidelines is a symptom of a committee without faith. Major rewrites indicate either an inability to study or the presumption that prior committees failed to embed working principles that both get the job done and adhere to our spiritual nature. All our major achievements in NA have been the result of courage, faith, and a willingness to work with others for the common good. Our periods characterized by excessive preoccupation with guidelines have been infertile and indicate an unclear sense of purpose. Concern is focused not so much on what we can do to help addicts but how we go about it. This brings personal preferences into sharper focus than the object of our service which is solely to help others. The resulting conflicts have deadened the service initiative and little help gets through to those we serve.

Surrender allows us to focus on the positive instead of the negative. Guidelines can only point the way for an inspired service body to do something for the benefit of others. Guidelines can never take the place of people. Changes have to be made in a structurally correct manner if they are to be successful in 'guiding' us. Otherwise, they are seen as attempts to make rules for others rather than offer assistance charted from successful personal experience. Service committees cannot function without knowledge of what their contributions will mean and how they

will fit into NA as a whole.

No sensible person can work in a situation where the rules are changed without consultation. There are too many ways to serve in NA for our members to waste precious time trying to serve on a committee that cannot maintain internal order and adherence to the principle of direct responsibility to the Fellowship. Layering is a term to describe committee systems that become cut loose from their roots in the Fellowship. They float and attempt to perpetuate one another through responding to one another more than to the Fellowship. This same thing plagues other organizations of any description. Surrender allows us to be open minded enough to see the other side of any given situation.

We should never allow ourselves to be deluded into thinking good guidelines will replace good people and principled actions. In Twelve Step service, we surrender to the Fellowship's will as we surrender to the God of our understanding in recovery. We have in our early years seen what happens when members proceed on faith and function within their guidelines. Even against great odds, they succeeded. Those who tried to introduce policies and procedures through trickery have consistently failed to please this Fellowship. There always comes a time when the 'cat gets out of the bag.' Committees that have become obsessed with changing their guides have found, or at least shown others, that the real work of the Fellowship languished undone. Without faulting others or casting blame, we NA's finally saw the truth of the matter: That we are miracles and so are our service efforts. In the world of miracles, there is little need for ego and much need for God. For those who have experienced this realization, surrender has become a key principle in their service. Service is based on our Twelfth Step awakening. When we get a high percentage of people new to recovery, we will be inconvenienced for a while. This is not a good time to vote on major changes of policy.

The most important policy is to come to help the still sick and suffering addict.

The best way to do this is to serve the group while simultaneously working the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous. This allows the addict to focus more on the solution and less on the problem.

As soon as the rush for political support and competition for key service positions wears off, we have noticed that the secrets become known. Perhaps members knew all along that their voices were being drowned out. Their body language tells us that they feel defeated. This is when the clean up process begins. Members who have the deep love and dedication will be on hand to help. We pick up the pieces and help members bond into a great and loving Fellowship. Surrender as a principle allows us to go on and do our part. Whatever the service season happens to be, we get all the help we need from a loving God.

We can see clearly that the need to manage and control stems from a fear of losing control. We have seen members get hurt when changes took place too quickly. By working to keep members informed of all sides of a subject, they can be asked to express their will without strain and tension or rushing things. Active listening and clearly formulated efforts to take the fears and concerns of others seriously in a prayerful manner allows us to give assistance when asked. We serve in a loving manner. because the still sick and suffering addict gets more help when they feel the addict trying to help them is sincere.

Those who attempt to govern us deserve our patience and understanding but not our tolerance. If we tolerate improper acts, we become participants in those acts. We have not come through our entire painful struggle to behave as if we lacked good sense. Even if it is uncomfortable

and there seems to be no one else to speak out, take up for your principles and state your views clearly. You may be the one God chooses to use as an instrument that day. If necessary, write out your feelings and request time to read them to the group. Once you've been recognized and had your say with each person who might need to hear it, let go of it and tend to your recovery. Surrender allows us to do what we can do and frees us from trying to do what we cannot.

When we see others in pain that are maintaining their composure and struggling to use spiritual principles instead of reverting to their old ways, it gives us courage. Degeneration sets in as soon as we stop telling the truth and doing the things we need to do to maintain our spiritual way of living. For many of us, pain has become all too familiar and we have to adapt a "happiness habit" to overcome our tendency to be morose and downcast. Surrender gives us the ability to remain open minded to the positive in each experience.

Wherever we need peace, it can come almost instantly if we can apply acceptance. Peace is a state where we remain totally free to do what we can. We don't have to bother with concerns and issues that are in fact beyond our ability. We hope that we'll be ready when things get better. It takes a lot of energy to perpetuate a lie but truth perpetuates itself.

PRINCIPLE THREE - ACCEPTANCE

"Acceptance allows evasion and denial to be replaced by reality and peace. With the care of God, we are granted the power to welcome new people and new ideas into our lives."

We have found that acceptance can not happen without an individual capacity for complete and total surrender. If we are unwilling to get help, we can not expect to get better. In order to be at ease with the way the world is working, we must first receive help from the 12 steps of Narcotics Anonymous. We must first find a routine of recovery to help us reach deeper levels of surrender. Once we are receiving the well being that comes from working a program of Narcotics Anonymous, we begin to understand that we as individuals have no control over the world and how it works. Once we begin to let go and let the spiritual principle of surrender relieve our burdens, we start to experience the well being of the spiritual principle of Acceptance. We have come to understand that acceptance is experiencing a situation without feeling the need to change. Hit Counter the situation. It is letting life's waves break without trying to interfere with their intensity, frequency, beauty, or grace. Acceptance is allowing life to be free of our own will.

Through ongoing recovery, we all find our addiction trying to regain control of our lives through the weakest point in our personal program. We may find ourselves, without warning, caught up in substitution - an extension of our basic addiction. It may be obsessive eating, sex, vomiting (bulimia), gambling, free floating anger, gossip or any number of combinations that would fill the empty void we feel inside. Our first step reminds us that we are powerless over people, places, and things that give us immediate relief from pain. Surrender is a process, not an event.

If we want to accept the way the world works, we must first surrender our will and gain the faith and trust in a loving God that lets us know that all will be well as long as we continue the spiritual process. The only way to do this is to work a thorough third step with a sponsor.

After turning our will and lives over to the care of God through total surrender, we find it easy to accept reality. The freedom we feel from God's will turns our hope to faith and our faith into trust. After trusting a power greater than ourselves, we find it easier to live in the spiritual principle of Acceptance. We constantly strive to accept life on life's terms and avoid pre-occupying ourselves with blaming others. Even if there are others involved, we must find a way to better our situation. The key to doing this is recognizing personal responsibility.

The belief that our Higher Power has taken control of our lives and our wills allows us to take acceptance into every part of our lives. In short, the word 'acceptance' expands through application into something we do almost habitually. Acceptance becomes a working principle in our lives. On several levels, acceptance helps us both in our personal recovery and when serving others. On one level, we know the Fellowship got along before we came and will continue with or without us. Service can be no ego trip unless we want the pain the ego brings with its limitations. On another level, we can feel the spirit moving through us. Sometimes it can be frightening even though we know it is loving - it's so big.! We just accept and do our part while living in faith and trusting the process enough to know that if we don't do the things we are supposed to do, we will have an easier time accepting the flow of the world. This is the absolute best any of us can do.

Acceptance, as a principle, can be a doorway to solutions by applying a small amount of pressure in the place that holds the door shut. Rather

than breaking down or prying open the doors, we use the key that unlocks them non-destructively. Since real acceptance tunes us into reality, we waste less time, energy and emotion trying to do things beyond our personal power. This extra time and energy becomes available to help us do better in those areas of our lives where we find we are able to be effective. Imagine, if you had an extra half an hour to talk with those you love or an extra half-day to do your job. Our capacity for quality increases when we're less concerned with quantity.

As we grow spiritually, we find others will react differently to us. Some may become jealous. Our acceptance may infuriate someone who wants us upset. Many times we confuse being passive with the humility that acceptance brings. We learn not to flaunt our spirituality. We trust that others will find their way. Many times, we will experience the feeling that we have done something wrong only to find out someone is trying to manipulate our emotions. It's amazing what you can see when you wake up in recovery! Many of our old reactions simply don't give us what we need. When someone tries to help us, we accept it. We don't retaliate with negative emotion and violence to cover up the fact that we may need help. They are not trying to put us down or make us feel less than. We learn to just accept the help and be grateful. As we change, the world around us appears to change. We all have certain capabilities. There is nothing that we can do that cannot be undone by simply speeding up until we can no longer do it. At the same time, we could do many things if we just slowed down and paid a little more attention. Recovery allows us the time and opportunity to do this with the help of others who have a stake in our recovery.

Asking for help places us closer to God's will and gives us the opportunity to accept change instead of trying to revolt against it! Acceptance places us in a better position to receive the help that we need

to recover rather than picking and choosing the help we think we need. A phone call from someone who knows we are a member, a coincidental encounter or a person who shows up at an NA meeting, all give us examples of God's will working in our lives. We have realized the vanity of trying to carry our message to those who do not want it. We have also felt the power of recovery when acceptance allows us to go immediately into the solution instead of staying stuck in the problem. Once we start moving with the world instead of trying to always respond to it, we begin to live happier lives.

Acceptance taken to the level of a principle also requires that we check out our facts and pray to make sure we know what we're accepting! While serenity applies to those things we cannot change, it takes courage and wisdom to do the things that help make the world a better place. Many of us ask, "What would God have me do in this situation?" Often, an unsuspected opportunity appears to us. Though the word acceptance may have a connotation of resignation, impotence, compromise, and other meanings for many of us, recovery places acceptance in its positive form. It is honest. For addicts who are accustomed to throwing themselves at the world, it is a new wisdom to be able to back off. It is also a new choice.

As addicts, we seem to have an innate tendency to find closed doors and brick walls to butt with our heads. Acceptance can be a way of going on, and opening ourselves to God's Will when a door is closed to us. For the time being, acceptance can be seen in a far more positive light where we are repeatedly put into positions where we are forced to face some challenge or demand. Many of us grow in recovery to be able to meet these challenges and satisfy them in every way. In our war with life, we often take a characteristic exception to things. Learning to live with ease and comfort may be a process of learning to be more accepting of things.

Accepting newcomers as members whether they act right to us or not is part of empathy or unconditional love. We accept that if God's truly running the show, many things cease to be our business. Accepting a genuine love of life allows us to get back into our routine of recovery and see things more clearly. Accepting that what may appear frightening to us is as nothing to our loving God. Accepting that others may think, act and believe differently from us and still be good people, is one of the many gifts this program has to offer, not a threat to us. Accepting that, as addicts, we simply suffer from a disease and that daily abstinence and spiritual growth are the most important items on any given day.

Acceptance in time may mellow into gratitude. It seems that without gratitude, or grateful acceptance, we never come to rest and have a tough time going on in the spiritual sense. As long as we are rooted in things, we are tied to them. When we realize that our needs are being met, somewhat regardless of our worthiness, we can take the option to slow down whatever we are doing and do it better.

We have found that addiction tries to attack the weakest point of our program. It has been our experience that following 99% of our sponsor's suggestions gives us 100% of the pain. Like the cancer patient who only receives some of the chemotherapy, the addict can ill afford to work only part of a Narcotics Anonymous program. It would be total insanity for the cancer patient to say no to the only thing that can save their life. Like other diseases, the active addicts end result is death. We have, however, found a way to arrest this deadly disease. Acceptance gives us the ability to enjoy the small moments while on the road to continued recovery via the twelve steps of Narcotics Anonymous. We cannot control the way the world works so we must instead learn to accept it.

PRINCIPLE FOUR - HONESTY

*"Honesty is the ability to match up our insides with our outsides.
It allows what we don't care about to go away and what we really want
to appear and develop in our lives."*

Getting honest and learning to live openly with ourselves, God, and others is such a big part of recovery. It becomes a general principle through constant application. Like the other spiritual principles that guide us in recovery, the principle of honesty tells us what to do in situations that may be turning points. Sometimes minor troubles are merely little acts of a loving God trying to slow us down. The problem areas may be opportunities that require spiritual principles for solution. By applying spiritual principles, like honesty, we automatically make ourselves more trustworthy, a better friend, and a reliable human being. As creatures of habit, we can be honest until it becomes the normal thing to do:. Honesty is acquired through learning and eventually becomes habitual. When this happens, we can move in circles reserved for those who play by the rules. Doorways closed to us open and things out of reach come near. For most of us, our admission of powerlessness over our addiction is the first honesty we've been certain of in quite a while. As we come to realize that we are loved and respected for our honesty, we can come to other truths about ourselves. By becoming honest, open-minded and willing to try, we find ourselves coming into better focus with real values and goals. Dishonesty gives others power over us. Honesty allows us to increase and expand our personal freedom.

Certainly, any addict in recovery is going through a series of struggles to overcome the habits we acquire in active addiction. Those of our members who have achieved long periods of total abstinence and spiritual growth share the fact that each release from the chains of our

disease places new demands for personal, and spiritual honesty. Each person who trusts us is a new chance to betray. That is one reason we take our time in recovery, we want it to last. Like the other forms our disease takes, we learn to make the correct choice. Our choices bring us out of our fear, denial and hopelessness. None of us are perfect yet through the power of the Twelve Steps, we are gradually able to face life on life's terms. We have to learn to correct mistakes and recognize the pain we cause others when we fall back on our old ways. We start to realize that in order to respond spiritually, we must do the spiritual preparation. The more we practice being honest, the easier it becomes. Working the steps with a Narcotics Anonymous sponsor is a great place to start!

Honesty as a principle, is a new habitual tool we utilize to deal with things as they come up. Honesty protects us in recovery and fleshes out the dead portions of our lives. The help of other members, a good sponsor, and a home group eases our way as we become accepted as a new person. The ties that bind us together may be more important than we know. It is characteristic of our disease to take our new friends for granted. We must remember that being around honest people makes it easier for us to be honest. When we surround ourselves with individuals who share their pain and then share the solution that helped them get through it, we feel more comfortable being honest with them when we really need help. On the other hand, if we never hear any heart felt successes and struggles, we will be less likely to share them ourselves.

Many of us have 'traded off' different forms of honesty. If we were sick and hurting inside, we might parade a great show of paid bills and cash register honesty. We divert attention away from our emotional dishonesty and pain. Then we pretend the program has let us down! If we have been more open about our thievery, we may treasure certain rationalizations

about why we do these things, exhibiting great care and dexterity to shift blame for our offenses onto someone else. We only need to do this as long as we are helpless to change. As soon as we can admit our desire for change, we can begin to laugh at ourselves and stop pretending that we didn't know what we were doing. Most of us knew, we just didn't know any better. Our ability to make ourselves miserable with faulty logic is almost incredible.

Honesty, as a principle, tells us to turn away from lies and falsehoods; to turn towards reality and get used to using the new power recovery brings. If we honestly don't like our jobs, we change jobs. If we have amends we need to make, we become willing and make them. We can even pray for God's help to do this. If we're not happy in our associations or relationships, we use the power of a loving God and find a way to become happy.

Awareness in itself is not honesty, but it is a prerequisite. As we slowly become aware of our actions and feelings and their consequences, we become more honest about our motivations. We can fool others, but we can't afford to fool ourselves. As we become more aware of our actions, we begin to realize that self-awareness is indeed the key to our recovery. Awareness allows us to identify with what is going on around us. Our first step is the first honest admission many of us have made in a while. This kind of honesty gives us the ability to question our initial ideas and feelings and look beyond them. By being open-minded, we can allow others to plant the seeds of awareness in us, blossoming our spirit and making honesty so normal that when we are not honest, we feel a tremendous amount of pain.

Dazed and out of step with the world of non-addicts, we began to live private fearful lives. We would not reveal ourselves to others as we came

to expect personal rejection. This prevented our forming trust bonds and increased our isolation. Getting to know someone new or someone who didn't use the way we did was a serious threat. It could land us in jail or cost us our job. If we were a prostitute - male or female - we likely had a whore's wardrobe. To live the new life requires new clothes. If we were a burglar, we had burglar tools. If we were a con-man, we had to learn a new pitch. To live a new life requires new tools.

Surrender is critical for self-honesty. Surrender is to concede without reservations; to unconditionally accept reality. When we surrender, and really get honest, we realize that we are powerless not only over our addiction but over many other aspects of our lives as well. We become open-minded to new possibilities and ideas beyond our self-centeredness. We accept the fact that we have a disease, and that our best thinking got us here. This new attitude gives us the ability to question our initial ideas, and look beyond them. Surrender results in freedom,. It is an ego-erasure and helps us to be more God-centered as opposed to self-centered.

When we come to NA, we enter a society where spiritual principles are valued. As we grow to want what others in recovery have, we become willing to adopt these principles. We have the desire to be honest before we may actually have the ability. Our need for acceptance, and to be a part of what we want to identify with around us, leads us. We are attracted to this way of life. Our approval seeking behavior can help us move towards recovery. Later on, we may get into honesty for honesty's sake.

Desire and willingness must go hand in hand if we are to recover. If we have the desire to change, and we exercise the willingness to do so, then we will succeed. Our desire and willingness for honesty are fueled by our

need for self-love and a nurturing spirit. Our desire to practice honesty grows when we see the direct benefits in our lives. The desire to take risks and be honest becomes less fearful. As we continue to do things that feel right, our desire grows. The willingness to act honestly and responsibly comes when we take action. When we're all jammed up, and we scream, "Help me, what do I do?". We call our sponsors. They inevitably ask, "Are you willing to get real about this?" Getting real means getting honest. When we get real, we get to choose whether we go on as we are or make some changes. It is no longer necessary to live in procrastination. We must have the desire and willingness to get better through the twelve steps or else we will stop growing spiritually and eventually return to our old way of life that guaranteed pain and misery on an hour to hour basis.

Unavoidable pain and hardship may accompany us as we grow. We learn to focus on the growth with gratitude and stop giving energy to the pain. We learn to ask for help a thousand ways and help comes through each in time. Through the Steps, we discover the things we've been doing to cause our problems and are relieved of the necessity to pursue them any longer. We learn the rules of responsibility and try to avoid injuring others through our actions or inaction.

As we experience personality change for ourselves, our goals change. We find money and possessions are meaningless if we don't feel good about ourselves. Sex is not only empty without love, it can be life threatening. A good reputation triggers self-destructiveness if our insides don't match our outsides. Many of us are suspicious that we have an internal witness who punishes us if we violate any of our own beliefs and the rules we set for ourselves.

As these changes take place, we are experiencing revitalization on every

level: mental, physical and spiritual. We don't get involved with plots because we don't like what plots bring. We don't allow authority figures to make us break laws, legal or moral. As we blink our way into the world of personal responsibility, we come to see the futility of scheming and manipulating others. Perhaps others can take chances. If we want the clean life and freedom from guilt, despair, and embarrassment, we will not knowingly do wrong. Sadly, we know if no one else is aware of our wrongdoing, we ourselves are witnesses. And we know how to punish ourselves. It is important to learn how to back out of a bad deal or situation.

An honest mistake, even an intentional mistake where we were temporarily blinded to the negative effects, can usually be amended. Our disease is such that amends making is a survival skill. Amends need to be made quickly once an error has become known to us. If harm has been done, we want to stop the ripple effect. We ask our higher power for strength and guidance. We do what must be done to correct the wrong. We trust and have faith we will be guided. Often, we find ourselves in need of the basics that personally helped us get clean and stay clean in the first place and restore our sense of balance. Being honest helps us get better quicker and keeps us on the spiritual path that continues to give us freedom beyond our wildest dreams.

PRINCIPLE FIVE - OPEN-MINDEDNESS

*"Open-mindedness is our bridge to the experience of others.
It is the passage way out of loneliness into the life of the Spirit."*

Fear and guilt keep us from doing what we can do today. Fear is concern over future pain. Guilt is an echo of knowing we could have done better. Both limit us and prevent us from re-experiencing past pain. Our pain has taught us to avoid situations where we have failed. Are the limitations of the past really protecting us? Or are they merely carry-overs from our active addiction and early recovery? Recovery allows us to lose the defects that cause us pain and gain the principles that make us happy, joyous, and free.

Open-mindedness becomes a key principle in recovery because it is something we can do on a daily basis. It can provide both the opportunity and break we need to grow at the same time. It turns negative situations into positive ones. Open mindedness allows us to move from the problem to the solution. When we become willing to look at our part in the problem, we get to the solution quicker. Many times when our part is taken away, the problem doesn't even exist. A problem is only a problem if we are not willing to experience a solution. Open mindedness opens the doors that have closed our spiritual growth. Once we are able to view the world through other's eyes, we begin to see more clearly. As a result, we spend less time angry and more time enjoying the beauty that life has to offer. We literally give ourselves a break when we check our past limitations by attempting to do things that we have rightfully associated with failure in the past. Not always, but sometimes the impossible has become possible.

The only time we're living in the limited past is when we make the

decision to be miserable. By choosing to be open-minded, we can exert our willingness to try and see what happens. Sometimes, the failure will set in immediately and we will need to draw back. If we find ourselves on thin ice, it is no time to put our foot down. Practice and repetition will surprise us often enough to reward our efforts. We are not the people we once were. Our minds are clearing. Our memories begin to function properly and our ability to act meaningfully increases. This process never stops – this is what it means to be alive. If our range of action doesn't increase as time goes by, we will be one of those who say, "Recovery isn't paying off. I'm not changing!" This very dissatisfaction can be used for positive change. We can snap out of it, and say to ourselves, "OK, I'm going to get with the program and change a few things today,. I am going to change my negative attitude!" Admission of our disease, coming to believe in a Higher Power, and turning ourselves over to the care of a Loving God is a damn good start! The negativity of our self-assessment is gone in the moment of real surrender.

Well, guess who is in charge of your recovery? If we are not willing to step out on faith occasionally, we have no way of changing unless we're hit with dumb luck or good fortune. Fortunately, we even get a little of that occasionally. With open-mindedness, we can sit and think about something without feeling the urgency to jump to conclusions or apply narrow limitations to situations placed on our minds. on what we is surfaced in our minds.

The underlying fear that if we don't keep our thoughts and feelings in strict control we will relapse or go out of control ceases to apply. We mind our own business. We transfer control of our wills and lives to the care of a loving God of our understanding. How else can we experience the miraculous nature of recovery? If we have come this far without consciously realizing the miracles we are given, we are living under a

cloud. Pray for its removal. A great part of our freedom is in our increasing ability to just listen, just read, and just observe. We all get to choose whether we want to add something to our living and thinking, wait a while, or simply decline the matter at hand for the present.

It is our freedom of spirit to be able to do this. Making good decisions based upon principal driven thinking allows us a freedom of spirit we only dreamed was possible. This freedom of spirit is a great treasure in itself. How they are different from the old pathways grown up laden with past pain and despair, pathways that got smaller and more confining as our addiction progressed. Open mindedness allows us to move from life's restraints and into today's possibilities. Today, we can entertain new viewpoints and ideas when they come up. We can search for new information and apply it to help make our spirit happier. Open-mindedness is willingness put into action. It is a way of growing.

Part of the miracle of personality change comes clear to us when in the midst of learning how to do something new,. We find ourselves snapping out of some unpleasant feeling carried over from our using days. New understandings help us see past these painful memories and allow us to explore the present. Another important thing about genuine open-mindedness is being able to hold ourselves in check when we need time to think something through. We keep doing whatever works for us until the new idea proves itself on some feeling level. We can progress steadily. We no longer need to flee the present. Some of our members sit quietly, pray, and meditate. Through meditation, answers to seemingly unfixable problems have been presented to members who are open minded enough to believe in our literature.

An old NA saying, "If it ain't practical, it ain't spiritual," reminds us to keep our recovery real. As we have less guilt about ourselves, we have

less need for elaborate efforts to make up for our past wrongs. We can avail ourselves of use common good judgment and check out our ideas with our sponsor. In matters of real concern to us, we can seek help through NA in many ways.

If we are upset, emotional, or overly concerned about anything, we learn to suspend action, pray, and seek out a member who understands our situation and has personal experience to share with us. It is through our surrender, our faith, and our inventory, that we are able to grow. At many points in recovery, we need to remember these things because we are going to gain the appearance of power over our lives and the lives of others. When we start feeling like we have all the answers, we limit our ability to stay open-minded thus restraining our ability to grow spiritually. We must practice surrender on a daily basis. Ongoing surrender is ongoing recovery.

If we cannot remain open-minded and teachable, we will find ourselves stagnating and reverting to the games of manipulation and control. There is a difference between discipline and control. Control deadens because it offers no choice. and The lack of flexibility in our lives has us giving the same negative response to every situation we experience. Our lack of ability to experience new situations as a result of staying open minded turns our dreams into reality quicker than the one track robotic approach that has been limiting new opportunities in life and killing our spirits. having a say in our lives is killing to our spirits.

Discipline allows us to cultivate our lives by exploring the meanings of words like: Training, moderation, restraint, concentration, caution and forbearance. We are free to avoid the excesses that lead to much of our pain and guilt. We can develop habits of conduct and methods of preparing ourselves before we get into something instead of floundering

from one crisis to another. Caution and discretion will become functional parts of our living rather than elaborate over-reactions to the ordinary events of life. Taking care of our body, helps our mind to settle down and function properly. When the mind takes care of the body, the body chemistry works. When the body is working, it helps the mind.

As order and balance replace the desperation that gave us the desire for recovery in the first place, open-mindedness takes on another important function. We use openness as a form of enlivening our daily awareness. There is always something happening and yet if we are not open to happiness, we'll walk out the door on some sunny day and see nothing but rain clouds. Our addiction will tell us that our hard won ease and comfort is boring and uneventful! Many of us never think of going to the library, walking in the park, taking a nice drive, or visiting the sick or going to see relatives - just to say hi! Sometimes we have to make a written list to remind ourselves of new things we can do. Then, we have to overcome all the 'important' reasons to put off doing them! God, it's enough to make you call your sponsor! If we forget some of the things we should do to stay open-minded, we can always seek our sponsor's help. We need to remember to look at the way our sponsor is living and do the things they do if we want to have the things they have.

We need to must be as able as a newcomer to renew our spirituality on a daily basis. We have to find things to be glad about and express our gratitude for it to have a real effect in our lives. We have to practice being happy. We have to find our errors and amend them to prevent the build up of negative feelings that if left unattended, will fill us with foreboding and worry. We have to step out on faith and do something new occasionally. These things weren't necessary in a life filled with compulsion and obsession. Our disease kept us running. Clean, we have to learn how to be sensible and explore living on a new basis open to the

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new possibilities that life has to offer. When we remain open-minded, we remain ready for opportunities that improve our spiritual condition and allow us the freedom to continue on our journey into a new way of life.

PRINCIPLE SIX - WILLINGNESS

"Willingness to try is the beginning of doing our part, however grand or humble that might be. It is a state of readiness replacing depression and anxiety."

Willingness is vital because it allows us to get a grip on the fact that before change can occur; we have to give our permission. We have to stop holding aback inside. We have to relax our personal will, with all its preconceptions and preferences, so we can look at every alternatives. When we want to select something new in our lives, it is our responsibility to make a decision. Without our willingness, we never get to make the choice. We remain tied up in many of our past limitations, illusions and habits.

The drive for any form of personal gain is based on a fear of being unable to satisfy our wants or needs. Eventually, this drive becomes obsessive and can create problems. In our pasts, we were always losing things. Replacement was a persistent problem. Our constant efforts to find and get more of the chemicals pushed us into a world of betrayal, deceit and treachery. Addiction had enslaved us. As clean addicts, we begin to learn the living skills we will need in recovery.

When desperation born of obsessive need for and compulsive usage of drugs is removed, what is left to drive us? How do we manage? What is important enough to us now to keep us going? When our lives are washed clean of the more conspicuous aspects of our addiction, what do we do? Do we become addicted to people, places and things? Do we substitute cravings for money, property and the good opinion of others in place of the old obsessions? Do we trade one obvious form of addiction for another that may be harder to detect as a living problem? We can be just

as enslaved by work, gambling, and all other mood changers. Recovery is about changing ourselves not our moods.

Many of us have done this. Recovery from the disease of addiction hasn't been around long enough for all the repercussions to be taken into account. One thing seems safe enough to advance at this point though: swapping addictions won't work. Real freedom consists of being able to live without fear and pain. In NA, we stress constantly that spiritual principles are necessary for ongoing recovery.

A lot of us grow complacent after the initial thrill of being drug free wears off. We want more. We isolate ourselves and hide our feelings from others _ perhaps through a misguided fear of disapproval or maybe we're letting our addiction guide us into another pathway the disease is known to take. At times, something needs to shake us into remembering that to recover. We go deeper and deeper into the spiritual principles, beginning with surrender. Again, and again, we surrender to our need for help. It This opens the way to growth.

The capacity to do our part in severing the ties to the past, our personal defects of character, brings us to the threshold of a new inner freedom. All we can do on our own is become willing to let the God of our understanding take over what is otherwise impossible for us.

Games of acquisition, control, manipulation, sabotage, projection, worry, revenge, resentment, blame assessment and character assassination are no longer necessary for those in the care of a loving God. The willingness to live in His will frees us from these defense mechanisms and so much more.

Our willingness is really an extension of our initial surrender. For us to

'come to believe' in a power greater than ourselves who can and will take care of our wills and our lives, we have to gain some understanding. Our old defenses grew up in the isolation, loneliness, despair and feelings of worthlessness that are the progression of our disease. A new life comes from learning new ways.

We will learn the infinite power of the truth. Truth is powerful because it fits in with reality. We will base our actions and goals on the miracles we find in recovery. Most, if not all, recovering addicts can remember numerous occasions where the principles of NA and recovery just didn't seem adequate. We went forward on faith and found our prior fears unjustified. Crisis after crisis failed to get us loaded or rob us of our inner faith and growing convictions. Even where we were forced to pay for crimes committed while we were still using, many of our members have been able to stay clean through incarceration. Severe medical problems have failed to assure relapse where our members were able to apply spiritual principles to the obstacles in their paths. They were honest about their situation, asked for help, and let a loving God take of their life and will. It takes willingness to do this.

Money, property and prestige have the power to seduce addicts in recovery. It is easy to mistake the desire for personal gain for a blessing of recovery. Many of us who have sought these things to the exclusion of prayer, faith and meditation share in pain and desperation the addictive nature of these delusions. Instead of making us happy, they turned out to be elaborate, attractive, socially acceptable traps.

Many of us are able to reject these temptations. We succeed through the direct application of spiritual principles and the willingness to allow a loving God to work in our lives. In our hearts, we desire more recovery. We maintain a spiritual way of life.

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Willingness is open-mindedness in action. It is the way we feel before we take actions based on faith. As we personally become able to let go of defects through willingness, we are able to put spiritual integrity ahead of our desire for instant gratification. When we pray for the willingness to do whatever it takes to recover, we know that we never have to use again no matter what!

PRINCIPLE SEVEN - FAITH

*"Faith is the evidence of our trust in God.
True faith is the result of surrender coupled with experience that
God can and will do for us if we ask for help."*

While faith can feel like an invisible, internal quality, the results are highly visible to those around us. They can see our joy, gratitude and contentment. Our sad need for justification, placing blame on others and selfish motivation makes people back off from us. Just as others can see the evidence of faith, they can also see the lack of it. Trying to force out of others what can only be given freely stands in the way of our own happiness. When we realize this, we can begin to reverse the processes that have entrapped us. We begin by accepting ourselves and others as they are. By doing this, we are beginning to get real. In reality, we can find ourselves and make contact with others without resorting to the games we used to play.

As we continue on our spiritual journey, we realize that our growth comes from changes that occur first inside and later show up in how we think, act, feel and speak. Our actions and choices speak of our gratitude. As fear lessens, faith increases. Fear constantly robs us of time, energy and good feelings; faith rewards us with these things. Faith is a subject that is discussed in meetings and is also a part of our daily personal recovery routine. Since our service positions require some degree of knowledge of our Twelve Steps and Traditions, it is worth noting that we are expected to apply spiritual principles to our service. We all know of painful periods when members forgot the spiritual in service and got so caught up in the 'business' of NA, all other considerations were set to the side. It has taken great faith for us to survive these assaults on our spiritual body. Our knowledge of spiritual principles is based in our

spiritual condition and our progress into the Twelve Steps.

Doing for ourselves frees us and enables us to stand on our own. We used to manipulate others into doing for us. The defects that held us back in life are cut away by active surrender to facts, desire for something better and the willingness to do our part. Prayer to the God of our understanding to remove our shortcomings severs our ties with our old ways. A thief only steals that which they lack. When a thief feels they have enough, he stops stealing. By changing our values and filling our real need to feel good and enjoy life, we no longer envy and seek to take what is not ours.

As we increase in personal responsibility, we reduce our dependence on others. By doing what we can and should do for ourselves we are freed of blaming others. Games of manipulation and fear of losing control become troublesome and inconvenient when we learn we are free to act directly. Before faith, we looked at life in terms of past pain and present failure. After gaining faith, we look at life differently. For the first time since childhood, the future may begin to hold some charm for us.

Deceit, falsification, manipulation and plotting are unnecessary for those of us who have come to know ourselves through faith in a loving and caring God. If a person wants their own money, property and prestige, we must first discover that we already have some money, some property and some prestige. These things may exist in such small quantities that it may never occur to us that we could be grateful for them. However, it has been our experience that if we aren't grateful for what we have, we will likely fail to acknowledge an increase and only long for more. Gratitude is the antidote for avarice. Gratitude must be learned if we are to feel grateful. Some of us write a gratitude list every morning to get in touch with the positive in our lives, because focusing on the negative has become habitual. Taking care of and being grateful for what we already

have is the surest way to get more. If we are not taking care of what we have, then the very people who are willing and able to help us will think that we are unable to handle more! As a kindness, they won't give us more than we can handle.

As recovering addicts, we know what happens when we get more than we need or can care for: the answer to our prayers is at first a burden, then a curse. We learn to ask God to remove our shortcomings because we no longer want to fall short. We correctly suspect there are better ways to meet our needs and can see the sense of letting go our grasp on the old so we can reach out for the new with an open hand. Like our other spiritual principles, faith becomes more than a word to us through our own experience and practice.

Unavoidably, we elect people to serve who are in various stages of recovery and this actually means that while someone may be comfortable with surrender to their disease in general terms, they may be absolutely unable to admit fault or gain direction through prayer and meditation. Remembering this may help some members show special attention to others where politics and personal rivalries come into play.

It is vital that enough old-timers stay involved to offset the negativity of personal opinion and rumor mongering that defeat our spiritual aims. Many of us who have gained faith as a result of working the twelve steps expect problems in group's to be solved because the steps have taught us to live in the solution. There are always ways to set things right and go on clean. We just have to use the power of spiritual principles to maintain order and sound procedures. Service dysfunction is rewriting guidelines when we don't understand the guides passed along to us by those who went before. The old custom of electing persons involved with their committee will generally protect us from incompetent chairpersons.

While some of these problems are simple in origin, we have found that with faith we stay in the problem for shorter periods of time while we live in the solution most of the time. Faith is trusting the results without the benefit of experience. We begin to feel confident instead of afraid. We start to believe on a deeper level the importance of faith in our lives. Faith allows the addict to smile even during the worst of times. Faith is hope put into action. We start to do the things that others are doing who are working a program. During the third step, we acquire faith as a result of doing the foot work. If we lose our faith and allow the disease to run our lives again, we're in real trouble. When we keep our faith in times of trouble, we demonstrate our commitment to the twelve steps of Narcotics Anonymous. We finally realize that without doing the spiritual work, no spiritual benefits exist.

Only the calmativ effect of members who have survived some of these situations can point out some positive things, what we're here for and even make a few jokes to relieve the tension. It used to be we had little historical experience on which to base our policies, much less written documents, reports and accumulated minutes going back in some cases several decades.

Today, with God's help, we can again pray, discuss and meditate on things that bother us and gain knowledge without having to go through known problem areas again! We have found that through faith we are enabled to go beyond some of our personal boundaries. Usually, when the facts are finally dug out, simple knowledge of what to do in the situation at hand comes out at the same time. Sometimes, it takes faith just to get the facts straight.

One acronym for faith is: Feeling - As - If - Trust - Heals. Taking these ideas on in many forms, helps us first notice, then adopt, new ideas. By

trusting a loving, caring and forgiving God, we realize that we have been empowered to face life and recover. The fears that had paralyzed us in the past are now small obstacles along our journey. We can overcome them with faith. By trusting our God, we surrender our old ideas and begin to change.

Our new way of living has sometimes been uncomfortable, however through practicing faith it is also very rewarding. Our old perceptions of life changed drastically. Our new perceptions include faith, hope, happiness and a positive attitude toward living. Through our belief that trust heals, we have found that God was doing for us what we never could do for ourselves.

As our faith in our Higher Power grows, we begin to develop a new form of trust. We are able to reach out to the trusting hand of another addict. This can be very hard for many of us and may have been a slow process. Yet, we kept reaching out and giving an addict a piece of our lives that was very personal and private. We came to believe that an addict who was recovering could also be trusted. We finally had faith and trust in other human beings. We finally had friends who loved us unconditionally. Faith in God leads us to faith in ourselves and others.

PRINCIPLE EIGHT - TOLERANCE

"Tolerance is knowing the other person has the same spirit in them and being curious about what that spirit is trying to do."

Saying you care about someone is easy. Taking the time to listen carefully is altogether more difficult. If someone is upsetting you or causing problems, listening is much more difficult. Listening with an open heart and mind is a powerful tool for helping. Imagining that we are writing down what a person is saying is one way to actually hear their voice. Instead of placing expectations on what people are saying, we place love in our heart when we are listening.

We remember caring NA members listening to our problems when we started sharing at meetings. For some, they are being heard for the first time in their life. It's overwhelming how much love silence can bring. An amazing number of people know what their answers are; they just don't have anyone who cares. This lack of attention and caring has been recognized as a killer of small children who are overlooked in orphanages. Their death can be described as a "failure to thrive." It may be that they know they are not cared for. Being social creatures, our need for caring is biological. We need a simple touch or a human contact.

Spiritual growth cancels out the negative in us and fills us with the positive. Many addicts develop aversions that keep others at a distance. We want to be left alone, though we are lonely. When we begin to feel more secure about ourselves, our fear of others is lessened. It takes time to develop calm. We can withstand bad behavior in others without being drawn into their circle. We lose the fear of being like them. A bad idea is just a bad idea, not a total threat to our existence. Standing apart from our old ways, we can look at the world and other people in a more open and

honest manner. Very often, we will find our missing parts lying on the ground around our feet. We couldn't find them because we never slowed down enough to take a close look. When we are in a bad place ourselves, our pain makes us over-react to bad behavior in others.

In recovery we are constantly developing on different levels. Our ability to tolerate others when they are disagreeable is part of coming out of isolation. We learn part of this by developing a tolerance for our own inadequacies. In NA, we find the people who can share their pain and growth. We also find a lot of people who are going through almost exactly the same things we are at any given time. All we have to do is get to enough meetings and share honestly the nature of our pain. Someone may come up to us after a meeting or over coffee and check out what we meant when we were sharing in the meeting. By exploring the reality of others, we gain something in our own reality.

Tolerance, as a spiritual principle, does not force or require us to put up with negativity. It simply frees us to decide what we want for ourselves. We are finally free to act, not react. Often, tolerance seems like it would limit us to merely not reacting to bad behavior in others. Not over-reacting is spiritual tolerance. It means we have more say over our lives and how we live.

Some of our personal wrongdoing may consist of using others without their consent or knowledge for selfish gain. Our Fellowship is a great churning mass of such problems. It is probably one reason why NA works for us so well. It gives us a chance to see ourselves and the games we play in others. A real paradox is met head on when we attempt to be useful without being used.

Where we see people doing wrong, we should act as if we are helping

difficult children who, while we may love them dearly, are capable of great mischief. The loving spirit often provides us with interesting alternatives in response to actual, verified wrong doing. We don't savage them, we find ways to help. Tolerance is not just being passive though it is the principle that frees us from acting badly just because someone else is. The time we gain by this can be spent working towards real lasting solutions.

Our principle of tolerance helps us make sure what we perceive is actually happening. Power is the ability to define reality. Toxic reactions turn to principled actions when we begin to live the principles we're writing about in the twelve steps. If a real disorder is involved, others will see it also. We never have to be alone in NA. Most all problems are repeat performances of past events with new names and faces involved. As a Fellowship, we have withstood such an array of sabotage and disorder that in truth we have little to fear. As individuals, we avoid traps that may threaten or sour our recovery by praying, consulting other members and then acting on faith to help make things better.

Our tolerance level may be too great in some areas. It is important to remember our past and seek positive action than to drift into not caring. We care enough about each other to tell them the truth. Being honest is not intolerance. If you find yourself feeling defeated or alone, it helps to reach out to someone for help. You cut a fear in half when you share it with just one other person. If we politely let someone know how we feel, it may help him. He may be carrying on habits from active addiction without realizing how offensive they are.

Our explosive growth has given us the ability to work on tolerating others. As the density of our meetings increases in any given area, recovery in Narcotics Anonymous is shared by those who have it to with

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those who need it. Service becomes increasingly complex and sensitive. Members must find ways to remain anonymous yet play key roles. This can be problematic if you haven't worked your Third Step and are still trying to call all the shots in your life. Manipulation of others to achieve our ends is invasive and dishonest. It is the way we were when we were in active addiction. There was a time, not long ago, when NA as a whole, was glad to have just one more meeting in a whole state and just one more member in regular attendance. You can tolerate someone you care about and treasure. Tolerance is natural when you feel you need someone or their recovery is important to you. When we are stronger in numbers, we may get weaker in tolerance. This is where individuals can play a big helpful role. Learning how simply caring and paying attention worked to expand NA from a few scattered meetings to a world wide Fellowship is a lesson for us all.

Today, in N.A., we have so many people, so many ideas and varieties of experience that it can seem overwhelming! Even with the commonality of our desire for recovery, we have need of tolerance just to watch it all go by. But we never outgrow our need for the basics of recovery and our need tolerate ourselves until we can do better. Even if we never get any better, tolerance can help us accept our limitations. When we do this, our tolerance for others increases.

PRINCIPLE NINE - PATIENCE

*"Patience is taking time for things to move
into place without force or breakage."*

We didn't get clean overnight and our Fellowship did not start growing overnight. Patience as a spiritual principle may also be called creative waiting. Life will force us into positions where the only good thing we can do is wait. This may not happen often but when it does, we should know that sometimes watchful waiting has to be enough. Our self-will made us want everything in our time. In recovery, our world expands and we find ourselves on God's time schedule. Like in the 9th Step, sometimes we have to wait for the opportunity before we can act. Until then, we can only be willing. Our willingness gives us something real to hold onto while we wait.

Accepting the waiting, asking God to ready us for the time of action, and spending our time well, are all benefits of spiritual patience. We can all recall the many times we acted through sheer force of will, ignoring warnings from those we had some reason to trust. This accounts for much of our pain and trouble. Going off half-cocked insured our failure most of the time. In recovery, we use the maxim, "When in doubt, don't." Almost by definition, the person who fails to consider their resources and acts without the benefit of prayer is setting the stage for disaster. It is not spiritual to commit to action without considering your resources and the depth of the need for what you're about to do. Taking time allows the rest of our mind to come into play.

By utilizing patience, we automatically reduce the pressure we place on ourselves to act, whether we're ready or not. We gain time to check our assumptions about a situation; time to hear from our sponsor and fellow

members. All this reduces our sense of urgency to rush into quick fix techniques. Impatience may be a habit carried over from the way we used to do things.

Some of the landmark events in the history of Narcotics Anonymous only came after a series of quick fix approaches failed to work. When enough members agreed to commit themselves to a solution, solid discussion, planning and action became possible. We had to learn to work together, staying open minded and above the defective trap of pride and ego. This was true of our service structure, our world service office, our Basic Text, and "Narcotics Anonymous." as a whole. Cutting corners, proceeding without consulting the people involved, and failing to appreciate what has gone before, only wastes time. Even good changes will fail if people don't understand them or are not given an opportunity to study and support the changes.

Trust bonds are formed among members who are committed for the duration. These bonds stay bound when we are patiently willing to search each other's hearts and minds to achieve at least a basic level of conscious agreement. This grew into spiritual unity and real results soon followed in most cases. Some of our struggles have been long and hard. Patience has proved itself indispensable.

Addicts continually resist attempts from do-gooders. We have found that each one of us must wait, patiently or not, for the beginnings of an answer to arise from within. Until this process has begun, we remain blind, deaf and dumb to even to the most inspired appeals to better judgment.

The Twelve Steps guide us in these awakenings gently and steadily. So, our growth will be paced with the changes that must take place in our

individual environments. We're often baffling to non-addicts and even sincere well-wishers. This is only a restatement of the need we have for other addicts who have a desire for recovery in NA. All rests on the desire. We do not make amends until we have gained surrender, a power greater than ourselves, and asked that power to remove our defects. Amends come after the defects that caused harm to other are removed.

Sometimes the patience we exercise is coupled with a readiness on our part to act. It may be that having said or done what can be done, we have to wait. "In God's time, not mine," is a phrase we have heard used repeatedly at meetings. Acceptance of this idea is patience. As addicts, we usually want what we want instantly. Our entire existence had centered on immediate gratification when we were using drugs. Many of us find that even in recovery, we seek the rush brought on by "quick fix" solutions.

We want to have five years clean before we get six months. We want people whom we've harmed many times in our addiction to believe that we have really changed and expect to receive their forgiveness overnight. We may have come into Narcotics Anonymous financially destitute and deep in debt, yet after a short time clean we can't understand why we can't get a loan or a credit card. "Don't they know I'm clean now?", we've heard some members ask indignantly. Many times, they don't care and can't even imagine what being clean might mean. We must never forget that we enjoy a special environment constructed patiently by the love, goodwill and positive example of other clean addicts who care about us. They are paying back those who helped them the only way they can; by helping us. We in our turn, help those who are to come.

Eventually we learn to accept that because we live and recover "just for today," that doesn't mean we will get everything back in a day. If our

lives to come are a puzzle to us, we realize we get a piece of the puzzle on a daily basis. We put our best foot forward and do what needs to be done, laying the groundwork for a brighter future. Asking our Higher Power for the patience to see our vision become a reality is part of the recovery process. "It's easy to have patience when things are going my way," said one member with a smile.

We agree, but the challenge of spiritual growth is to "practice these principles in all our affairs", not just the easy ones. We have come to realize that the discomfort felt when things aren't going our way or happening fast enough is simply our egos crying out for attention. The same egos that drove us into the depths of our disease drive us today. In time, a proper, healthy sense of self guides us with the benefit of conscious contact with our higher power. This comes little by little through the 12 Steps. Patience allows us to adapt to the new ways. If we go too quickly, we are apt to fall back on our old ways in a crisis. We even know how to create that crisis when we need one! Most often we are only trying to get back to what we are accustomed to.

Practicing patience takes a surrender of self-will. We come to believe that whatever the outcome, we will be taken care of. We look at our part to be sure that we've done all that we should have today. We ask that our will be aligned with God's will and we let our fears go with love. We rely upon the faith we've gained through working a thorough third step and begin to trust outcomes instead of dread them. Patience is realizing it's going to be God's way anyway!

Our experience has shown that practicing patience doesn't dilute or postpone miracles, it enhances them. We are able to feel serene and be understanding in the most trying of circumstances. The freedom experienced from not having to be in control of the future feels like a

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great weight lifted from our souls. Patience is the practice of peace.

PRINCIPLE TEN - HUMILITY

*"Humility is knowing the importance of doing our part well
and being open to the many forms of help
required for a full and abundant life."*

When we come to our own understanding of our higher power and turn our will and lives over to the care of a loving God, we are relieved of our burdens. Our negative thoughts and destructive habits are removed because now we can see them as defective. We have distanced ourselves from using. This can not happen overnight. As we continue to grow spiritually, a serene calm may settle into our lives. We experience relaxed attention without desperation. We no longer need desperation to spur us to action. We seem to have more time, less fear, less guilt, and a quiet sort of luck. In truth, we are blessed. We have to adjust to living in the grace of God.

Our mind becomes our servant and friend, ceasing its endless rambling. Our needs, our desires, and our wants seem to line up better. Control is less necessary because of our increased effectiveness. What used to be pressing concerns may suddenly seem absurd. Our growing wonderment at the power of a loving God and our experience in recovery leads us into a state of near permanent gratitude, interrupted only occasionally by our disease lashing out to hurt someone. The miracle is that we can find a way to go on living after the pain of active addiction is miraculous. This miraculous shift from despair to hope and then eventually fear to faith is possible because the individual addict is willing to work the twelve steps to the best of their willingness. We have come to understand that spiritual principles are earned, not given. We share that the only spiritual principle given away freely to any addict seeking recovery is hope. It is up to the individual addict to make the decision to do the work necessary

to get the freedom that humility has to offer.

It becomes obvious when an addict decides to start working steps with a sponsor and actually commits themselves to a program of Narcotics Anonymous. While we are experiencing some of these thoughts and feelings, our appearance to others is totally different from when our faces reflected desperation born of fear and guilt. The profound changes can be seen on the faces of addicts in meetings. This is when others may observe some patient, kind and gentle quality. Many of us experienced a change of expression so dramatic that some of our new friends may think that we are the brother or sister of the person they met when we were just getting clean. We look that different. This exciting peace is a reflection of our new lives. It is a natural state that exists potentially in all people yet is rarely obvious in addicts. Vitality and spirit have replaced loneliness and despair.

A part of our individual humility is reflected in our collective ability to keep to ourselves. We do not dilute our effectiveness as a Fellowship by taking public stands on outside issues. We do make it known that NA meetings exist. We do this through our public information services so that we will not fall into the traps associated with dealing with the media. We have service guidelines to help us. The purpose of these services is to get an addict to a meeting, not to challenge various treatment philosophies. It helps nothing to be set at odds with those trying to help us. We keep to our basics because that is our message. Total abstinence is not an outside issue. Needless medication is a serious problem in some cases. We cannot work the Twelve Steps under the influence of a chemical buffer. Most people do not need to take anything but food and water. In the few cases where someone must take medication, we try to be generous. We can only help those who are willing to find a new way of life. We stay clean, follow the Twelve Step path paved by addicts who

have what we want, and learn to lead a spiritual life. We also are careful to address only the issues relating to the working of the Twelve Steps. We have no opinions on outside issues, especially when talking to someone outside the fellowship.

Just as we avoid the labels of 'addict' in a world that lacks the knowledge that addicts can experience recovery, we also avoid labeling our program and Fellowship by taking public stands on outside issues. Within NA, we sometimes find it necessary to take stands on issues that directly affect our Fellowship and our members. Many individuals have found it easier to revert to old ways when dealing with issues rather than to practice the principles of recovery. It is like they will risk lesser matters to spiritual principles and then take on major items with the justification, "This is serious!" They may not see that casting aside a spiritual principle and resuming old behavior often leads to relapse. It is important to see the relationship between casting aside a spiritual principle and relapse. Many of us don't get a second chance at recovery. We are honest, open, and willing because it works for us.

What we have found in NA is a series of paths that guide us through some of the hazards and allow us to maintain both our spiritual integrity and personal effectiveness. Addicts in recovery 'check out' every possible way of doing things and only settle for a simple solution after the dust settles. We also have a tendency to avoid change and innovation. It took us twenty years to begin to evolve a service structure in 1973, another five to set up a basic World Service Office and five years after that to establish our Basic Text. These observations illustrate the difficulty we have had to overcome to achieve some of our progress. Our difficulty seems to lie in our addiction and the inhibiting factor that makes us cling to the known and avoid risk. Spiritual gain occurs after spiritual work. If we want to be humble and act with integrity with negative situations

present themselves, then we must be spiritually prepared. The twelve steps lay the foundation for our spiritual readiness.

Pressure for change comes from members who see an unaddressed need. When an area needs a new meeting of Narcotics Anonymous, we start a new meeting. When addicts discuss the importance of having the twelve basic spiritual principles as a separate section of our literature, we write. These members contribute their time and resources to better meet the needs of the still sick and suffering addict. While they are doing this, members who have not studied the issues may criticize them. It is important that our spiritual path is followed. Humility allows us to see the importance of every human being. Critics may never understand or see the reason why addicts continue to work to help the newcomer. Still, when we see others doing things we don't understand, we learn to ask questions and become informed before we criticize.

In all of this, individuals can and do play roles. Yet, the importance of their roles is more a function of our common welfare than an individual issue. Part of the principle of anonymity is what gets done is more important to us than who does it. We simply want to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. Many blessings we share in NA had to wait long years before members became willing. Humility is simply doing our part to help.

PRINCIPLE ELEVEN - UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

*"Unconditional love is given where we sense
our spirit in another human being."*

Unconditional love is a spiritual principle acquired by addicts who are willing to work the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous and apply them in their lives. In order to love another human being without conditions, we must first learn to love ourselves. We must first clear the wreckage of our past in step five by sharing the exact nature of our wrongs with another human being. We must get freedom from the defects that have been robbing us of our dreams in Steps Six and Seven. When our defects are removed, we have more room in our spirit for the assets that help us love ourselves and others. Instead of judging others, we accept them. Instead of taking credit for supposed selfless service, we quietly and humbly serve Narcotics Anonymous and expect nothing in return except continued freedom from active addiction. We demonstrate a greater sense of empathy for addicts who are still sick and suffering when we have let a higher power remove our own pain and suffering. Then, and only then, will we be able to receive the benefits of loving another human being despite their actions and behaviors. This is a spiritual process that requires spiritual work. The spiritual work is done with a loving sponsor who is there to guide us through the twelve steps.

Unconditional love, like empathy, goes beyond simply telling another addict we love them. We must actually demonstrate this love through action. We must take the time to talk to members after the group and share our experience, strength, and hope with the solution so they too can get the freedom we feel. We must answer the telephone even when we would much rather be watching our favorite TV show. We must give rides to those members who don't have cars and actually listen to their

problems with a loving heart. When an addict is sharing off topic and complaining about how horrible their life is, we need to remember that we too were newcomers. We too entered the doors of Narcotics Anonymous bent and broken from a life riddled with fear, anger, guilt, and lost dreams. In Narcotics Anonymous, we rely on our members who have obtained unconditional love through the twelve steps to demonstrate empathy towards these addicts. We must love them if we are to continue to experience the freedom we've obtained.

Our Unconditional love comes from our recognition of addictive pain and the spiritual desire we find in one another. Like many of our terms, unconditional love takes on a special meaning for addicts recovering in NA. This principle lets us explore the hearts of one another. We increase our capacity to live by what we find there. increasing our willingness to help still sick and suffering addicts. Not only do we demonstrate unconditional love for the newcomer, but also to old timers and 'inbetweeners' who are simply going through a spiritual storm in their life. Unconditional love means that we do not place expectations or limitations on our love. When we give unconditional love to an addict we are totally oblivious to age, race, sexual practices, religious backgrounds, clean time and looks. All we need to know is that you are an addict!

The spiritual growth we find leads to an elusive empathetic understanding that seems to come just when we need it. We realize that whatever form it takes, our disease continues to focus our attention on externals, misguided attempts to change others, and a lack of effort to take care of our own spiritual condition. We avoid responsibility and stop doing the things that make us feel good. Recovering our shattered selves with spirituality lets us grow anew from within as we start to share and care the NA Way. As our experience and knowledge of applied

spirituality increases, we can more often see into the heart of things. We can more easily 'read between the lines' and utilize our intuition to help someone find what is bothering them. We do this by waiting until they ask for help. It is good to bide spend our time with addicts who are seeking help or else we are intruding and they won't forget our interference. Once they ask, we can help. In many cases, we back off, knowing we're powerless until they ask. In many other cases, we are able to act on faith and play the roles of helpers, caring listeners, truth tellers, principled persons, selfless givers and occasionally take stands that are spiritually meaningful.

To do these things, we turn a portion of our attention inward and begin to ask questions about what we believe and why we do things. Along the way, our understanding passes a point where we realize the love, generosity and help we have received - yet were unable to recognize or acknowledge. After this realization, our attitude towards the needs and suffering of others is more generous. When we realize how much we've been helped, we feel embarrassed not to pass on what others gave to us. The idea of pride, arrogance, or expectation of getting things in return for our work becomes ridiculous. where We can see ourselves as the holders of spiritual truths that came directly from the God of our understanding. We cannot personally control or lay claim God's grace.

Awareness of the loving nature of and the reality that surrounds us doesn't blind us to the ignorance, cruelty, and selfishness that still exist in the world. The roles we play can reflect our new viewpoints and general awareness. We become able to see differently. Our insight enables us to make loving choices within our means and based on extending the kind of love and caring that helped us find the clean life.

The limitations of language obscure the sometimes painful fact that even

'unconditional love' is dependent on certain factors beyond our control. This love may be in our hearts yet unable to find expression. Receipt of this love is usually depends on the openness of someone asking for help. One condition is that the person we would enjoy helping is open to our help. We are all too familiar as addicts with the pain of well-intended intrusion. Sometimes we feel like an exhibit at the zoo. To intrude on someone unasked is presumptuous and more likely to trigger retaliation than gratitude. Our love can only be given to those who are willing to receive it.

Another condition is that the time is right for sharing. We need to understand that a person doing things that are bound to have disastrous results are going to happen regardless of our actions. The person that is causing chaos in their lives might not know how serious there actions can be. view, may think they're in no need of help. Any effort on our part beyond a gentle comment or two may seem insulting and egotistical. If we wait until they're in pain and desperation, they may pass beyond all help. All we can do is share our experience, strength and hope. By praying to be ready and available, we are sometimes there at the exact moment when a person is open to help and asks for it. There are no coincidences in Narcotics Anonymous.

Perhaps one more condition should be brought into this rare and inspiring form of love. It is that we do share from our own experience and not wander into the role of savior. Our spiritual condition is important: God works the miracles and gets the credit, not us. The trap here is that if we see ourselves as the doers, even if we really help someone, we will sustain an injury to our spirits. The love we give does not make us better than create in those we help. It would be a case of our us pushing God away from the controlling role in our lives, canceling out our Third Step of recovery. We will find ourselves seeking greater challenges, isolated

and eventually in serious need of help ourselves.

Also, setting ourselves up as saviors makes us ideal targets for our character defects to come roaring back into our lives. Our job is to help, not to find fault. for the disease in others to find fault with us. We can not expect ourselves to be perfect, but we must consider God's will when helping addicts. Our failure to be perfect can be used by the addictive trait to discredit our recovery! Our only perfection consists of honest and complete surrender. Then, if we are attacked, we can laugh at the strange turn of events and the foolishness that makes it hard to actualize the best of intentions.

The gathering of spiritual knowledge leads eventually to a great and lasting simplicity. We spend less time figuring out when we are powerless. Lack of confusion and wasted effort help our love reflect that simplicity. We may do the right thing just because it seems like the right thing to do!

Love expands our life as hatred restricts it. Through love, we can go more places, meet more people agreeably with an honest smile, and do more things with them that demonstrate unconditional love. Increasingly, hatred cuts us off from others, leads us to avoid certain places, and limits our ability to succeed. If we want to gain the principle of unconditional love and truly feel the heart of another addict in ours, we must do the spiritual work. The spiritual work is the working of the twelve steps with a Narcotics Anonymous sponsor. The solution to all of our problems in Narcotics Anonymous are the twelve steps so it makes sense that they are also the key to eventually grasping the spiritual principle of unconditional love.

PRINCIPLE TWELVE - SHARING AND CARING

"Sharing and caring is the active and passive forms of love that keeps us alive and allows God to use us as instruments."

The spiritual principle of sharing occurs when we our spoken word provides an addict with hope. Each member shares in our a special way from the beginning of recovery. Sharing is the follow through that takes place after caring begins. It validates the NA promise: freedom from active addiction for any addict who thoroughly applies these principles that are embedded in the twelve steps of Narcotics Anonymous. Sharing takes place between addicts with a who have a desire for recovery. They share their passion for the program that has been saving their lives on a daily basis. Through working the twelve steps of Narcotics Anonymous with a sponsor and living the principles in them, the spiritual principle of caring for another addict is the feeling that brings about incidents of sharing. Caring for other addicts should be the sole intention of sharing. We share our experience, strength, and hope so that others can find a new way of life. Sharing with others is demonstrating through action that we care.

Anonymity from Step Twelve is the absence of labeling, possessing the beauty of acknowledging our Higher Power as the primary force in our lives. It creates the environment we need to recovery. We can shed old labels that may no longer apply. However, our personality remains to dilute the experience with the idea that we must of our "having to run the show." With ego set aside, the spirit within us is allowed to emerge untainted by selfish desire. We can experience the miracle of personality change enhanced by anonymity, freedom from labels that applied to us in our past.

Regardless of how far addiction has taken them down, newcomers are welcomed. The only requirement for membership is their desire to stop using..remain clean and live a new way of life. We let newcomers know that any addict can get clean, loose the desire to use, and find a new way of life. Few of us are comfortable judging the newcomer's sincerity. It is when they share their pain brought on by active addiction that they begin to gain our respect. Our terrific ability to mask who and what we are from intruding eyes is an ability we retain in recovery. It is part of our survival skills. Far too often, the assessment between one or two members has been crucial in a newcomer's recovery. Fortunately, it only takes one to carry our message. This is part of the awakening experience of our Twelfth Step, an element of the step's maturation as we grow. Applications of principles are endless. Our need for surrender, hope, faith, trust, unconditional love, and all of the other principles rsbelief, inventory, confiding, letting-go, and amends help us builds healthy lives. Our inability to live such principles is a measure result of our illness.

Among all our principles, we find ideas like inclusiveness, openness, trust, helpfulness, selfless-giving, and caring help offset our addict's tendency to do the opposite. Our self-destructiveness opposes the principles that bring peace and happiness to the willing. These words are from the recovery language within NA. The currency of our program is a language born of deep, applied love and commitment that has endured great pain and hardship.

We become aware that our program results from a huge amount of deliberate, consistent effort on the part of all of our members. As the hours of scheduled meetings approaches, how many thousands of automobiles are started for the express purpose of attending an NA meeting? How many light switches are thrown and chairs arranged to seat our multitude? In a day, how many hours do members share? Travel in

the Fellowship is convincing because we hear the same principles working for other people, far from where we live. Change comes to members exposed to the greater NA beyond the boundaries of their local Fellowship.

Ultimately, if we are passionate about our recovery, we find ourselves staying clean and living the Narcotics Anonymous Way of Life. we find our in our own way. Narcotics Anonymous is the gathering of addicts who desire to stay clean and grow spiritually on a daily basis. Many ideas, experiments, changes, conflicts, polarization and failures are filtered through tests of application that produce our Program. When they work, they extend our ability to apply the NA program. If not, we move on, leaving behind what does not work. With our emphasis on sharing and caring, we have a life. After our needs are met - food, shelter, clothing and solvency - crisis may siphon time from these things yet we discovery we return to them to keep our house in order. Our loved ones needs are reasonable and must come first. After living requirements are met we have the opportunity to selflessly give by sharing. This sharing happens as the fruit of our existence, however restricted or marginal. Our sharing is not a benefit of the material world, it is a benefit of the spirit. Generosity is the nature of our loving God, as we share an opportunity to reflect divine calm and trust.

Spiritual principles can seem tenuous or wishy-washy to those who have little experience with them. Their strength comes out as we apply them in our everyday lives and emergencies. It may be a fixation on reality that makes an otherwise delusional person successful. In secret, this person may also be a great giver. Spiritual principles are more real than the rationales used to justify our active addiction. Many doors closed to us will now open only yield after we apply spiritual principles.

How often have we seen a member in the midst of a glowing recovery succumb to greed, lust, pride, avarice, envy, hatred or anger? However convincingly they justify their actions, they all run into impassable obstacles. Nor can they overcome obstacles by applying more force or arguing the correctness of their position. We share about remaining stuck until we surrender to our powerlessness. We share how the application of this principle works in all areas of our lives. Constantly living by spiritual principles demonstrates an exhibits as awakened spirit. During times of hardship we sit in silent wonder over the beauty in our lives and the company we share. We endure without making things worse, each time discovering an area wherein we lack surrender, discovering a truth in the situation and growing a little freer, while aligning ourselves with the powerful force that works for us. Sharing and caring what is really going on in our lives It is neither defeat nor an end to our pursuit of happiness. It is the way to happiness. This is life on life's terms. When one member shares about their struggles and then comes back the next week with the solution, other addicts benefit from their experience when they too are put into the same situation.

Spiritual reality does not apologize for its ways. Without it, there would be no escape. The delusions or our disease produce defects that arrest growth. Most obstacles would have been simple were we not addicts. Our disease complicated our thinking and or prevented us from learning from after making simple mistakes. a timely, clear lesson. So, instead of learning from these mistakes, we failed to grow up. All those countless days when we could have been acquiring or practicing skills that would equip us to live life on life's terms, we were wasted. The marvel is that through recovery we regain what has been lost. We might not regain Maybe not everything immediately but we do get enough freedom in the beginning enough to be grateful. And As our gratitude grows, our capacity to accept responsibility and be honest qualifies us for more good

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things in our lives. Caring and sharing helps us turn the corner from being a taker to being a giver with a reasonable interest in the well being of others.

Through sharing and caring we gain the ability to do for others what was once done for us. We can each remember the patience and love that kept us coming back. Now, awakened and based in principles, we carry the message of hope and recovery. This is as crucial for someone working a Twelfth Step as studying and grasping the disease concept in the First Step. We cannot remain clean without it.

Personally seeking to make one's mark in NA entitles the member to a series of unnecessary mistakes. Caring and sharing suspends our personal agenda. Through loving service, caring and sharing, and applying the other principles we've acquired in Narcotics , God allows us to grow beyond our wildest dreams. When we care and then share to help the still sick and suffering addict, we add hope to their lives. The miracle occurs when the same addicts who came to the group miserable with a few days clean come to the same group after working some steps and share that they too have lost the desire to use and have found a new way of life! Sharing and caring in Narcotics Anonymous is a contagious action. continue to work the steps. This puts ourselves into the wisdom of a clear, open spirit of goodwill and sensibility. in the service of abiding in the spirit. Our Fellowship will endure. continue to care and share so that others will keep receiving the miracles of recovery!

ADDICTIONARY

A . . .

ABSTINENCE: Not using by choice especially drugs.

ACCEPT: To agree, consider, or hold to be true. To regard as true; believe in

ACCEPTANCE: The mental attitude that something is believable and should be accepted as true. Belief in something.

ACCLAMATION: Enthusiastic approval, without dissent.

ACHIEVE: To get by means of one's own efforts. To attain with effort or despite difficulty.

ACKNOWLEDGE: To admit the truth or existence. To admit the existence, reality, or truth of.

ACTIVE LISTENING: The ability to use all of one's senses to hear what someone is conveying not just hearing .

ACQUIRE: To get especially by one's own efforts. To get especially by one's own efforts or gain through experience

ACTION: The doing of something or something done.

ACTIVE: Producing or involving action or movement. Involving or requiring physical exertion and energy

ADDICT: A person who has an obsessive and compulsive need for

something such as drugs.

ADDICTION: A physical, mental, and spiritual disease that is characterized an obsession to use the drugs that are destroying us, followed by a compulsion that forces us to continue.

ADMISSION: An admitting of something that has not been proven. A voluntary acknowledgment of truth.

ADMIT: To make known, usually with some unwillingness.

ADVERSITY: Hard times.

ADVICE: Suggestions about a decision or action. Opinion about what could or should be done about a situation or problem

AFFIRMATION: Replacing the negative, random thoughts of self-condemnation and limitation with expansive good thoughts that help orient ourselves to a better and happier, healthy life. Usually in the form of short, well phrased sentences.

AFRAID: Filled with fear. Having feelings of aversion or unwillingness in regard to something

AGE: The time from birth to a specified time.

ALIENATE: To cause one who used to be friendly or loyal to become unfriendly or disloyal. To cause to become withdrawn or unresponsive; isolate or dissociate emotionally

ALIENATION: The act of alienating or one who has been alienated.

Emotional isolation or dissociation.

ALTERNATIVE: A chance to choose between things or one of the things between which a choice can be made. The choice between two mutually exclusive possibilities or a situation presenting such a choice.

ALTRUISM: Without taking anything from those who depend on you, giving freely with no expectation of return for the purpose of making the world a better place.

AMENDS: Something done or given by a person to make up for a loss or injury one has caused. To better one's conduct; reform.

ANGER: A strong feeling of displeasure and often with active opposition to an insult, injury, or injustice. A strong feeling of displeasure or hostility.

ANGUISH: Great pain or trouble of body or mind. Agonizing physical or mental pain; torment.

ANONYMITY: The state of having set aside personal considerations of being named or identified for some greater good, practicing principles before personalities.

ANONYMOUS: Not named or identified, equal in status and importance.

ANTIDOTE: Something used to reverse or prevent the action of a poison. A remedy or other agent used to neutralize or counteract the effects of a poison.

ANTI-SOCIAL: Hostile toward society, unfriendly. Behaving in a

manner that violates the social or legal norms of society.

ANXIETY: Fear or nervousness about what might happen.

APATHY: Lack of feeling or of interest, indifference.

APPARENT: Appearing to be real or true. Readily understood; clear or obvious.

APPRAISAL: The act of setting a value on something. The classification of someone or something with respect to its worth

APPRECIATION: The awareness or understanding of the worth or value of something. An expression of gratitude.

APPROPRIATE: Especially suitable. Suitable for a particular person, condition, occasion, or place; fitting.

APPROVAL SEEKING: Seeking to be accepted as satisfactory.

ARISE: To come into existence.

ARRESTED: The state of having the progress stopped, as with a disease.

ARROGANCE: A sense of one's own importance that shows itself in a proud and insulting manner.

ASPECT: A certain way in which something appears or may be thought of. A way in which something can be viewed by the mind

ASPIRATION: A strong desire to achieve something high or great. A

strong desire for high achievement.

ASSUME: To pretend to have or be. To be arrogant or pretentious.

ASSURANCE: The state of being certain or having confidence in one's own self. Excessive self-confidence.

ATMOSPHERE: A surrounding influence or set of conditions. : A dominant intellectual or emotional environment or attitude

ATTACHMENT: Connection by feelings of affection or regard or the connection by which one thing is joined to another. A bond, as of affection or loyalty; fond regard.

ATTEMPT: To try to do something. An effort or a try

ATTITUDE: A feeling or opinion about a certain fact or situation. An arrogant or hostile state of mind or disposition.

ATTRACTION: The state of being attracted or pleased or something that attracts or pleases. The quality of arousing interest; being attractive or something that attracts

ATTRIBUTE: A quality belonging to a particular person or thing. A quality or characteristic.

AUTONOMOUS: Self-governing, free from outside control yet limited within the Fellowship by the Twelve Traditions.

AVOID: To keep away from.

AWAKE: To become conscious or aware of something.

AWAKEN: To awake.

AWAKENING: The state of becoming awake.

AWARENESS: Having or showing understanding or knowledge of something.

B . . .

BAFFLED: Defeated or held in check by confusion. Perplexed by many conflicting situations or statements; filled with bewilderment.

BALANCE: To make things equal or the state of equality. A stable mental or psychological state; emotional stability.

BECOME: To grow to be. Enter or assume a certain state or condition,

BEHAVIOR: The way in which one conducts oneself. The manner in which one behaves.

BELIEF: Something that one thinks is true. Something believed or accepted as true.

BLAMING: The state of placing responsibility on others for something that fails.

BOND: A force or influence that brings or holds together. A uniting force or tie.

BOREDOM: The state of being weary and restless when things are uninteresting. The feeling of being bored by something tedious.

BUGABOOS: Something that one is afraid of. An object of obsessive, usually exaggerated fear or anxiety.

BUOYANT: Light hearted and cheerful.

BURDEN: Something that is hard to take. Something that is emotionally difficult to bear.

BUT: Term expressing a comparison or difference between general theory and personal application.

C . . .

CARING: A heavy feeling of interest, concern, or responsibility.

CARRY THE MESSAGE: To demonstrate with words and actions the benefits of living the program of NA.

CHANGE: To make or become different, alter from a former state. To become different or undergo alteration.

CHAOS: A state of complete confusion and disorder in which one can become physically stimulated. A state of extreme confusion and disorder.

CHARACTER DEFECTS: Those things that drain us of all our time and energy while causing pain and misery all our lives.

CHARACTERISTIC: A special quality or appearance that is a part of a

person's over all character. A distinguishing quality.

CLEAN: Total abstinence from all drugs, no exceptions.

CLING: Remaining emotionally or intellectually attached to something that one believes harmful to oneself. Remaining emotionally or intellectually attached to something that one believes harmful to oneself.

CLOSE-MINDEDNESS: The state of being unwilling to consider the suggestions or explanations of others as possible or feasible with regard to one's self.

CLOUDS: Anything that distorts our ability to see or distinguish reality.

COME TO BELIEVE: The process through which one develops their system of belief about a Higher Power.

COMMITMENT: To pledge one's self to a certain course of action. The state of being bound emotionally or intellectually to a course of action or to another person or persons.

COMMON BOND: Recovery from addiction.

COMMON DENOMINATOR: Our failure to come to terms with our addiction prior to coming to NA.

COMMON WELFARE: Our individual survival is directly related to the survival of the group and the Fellowship.

COMMUNICATE: To make known. To express oneself in such a way that one is readily and clearly understood.

COMPASSION: The state of deep awareness and sympathy for and a desire to help another who is suffering. Deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it.

COMPEL: To make someone do something by the use of physical, moral, or mental pressure.

COMPLACENCY: A feeling extreme calm and satisfaction with one's life or situations that hinders the process of seeking change. The feeling you have when you are satisfied with yourself.

COMPREHEND: To understand fully.

COMPROMISING: To reach an agreement over a dispute with all parties changing or giving up some demands

COMPULSION: Once having started the process with one fix, one pill, or one drink we cannot stop through our own power of will.

COMPULSIVE: The state of acting on a compulsion.

CONCEDE: The admission of truthfulness of something. To acknowledge, often reluctantly, as being true, just, or proper; admit.

CONCEIVABLE: The state of being possible to conceive, imagine, or understand. Capable of being conceived, imagined, or understood.

CONCERN: A caring condition shown by a willingness to help others. Interest in, or care for, any person or thing.

CONCEPT: An idea that is generally accepted. An abstract idea or

notion.

CONCLUSION: A final decision that is reached by reasoning or the ending of something. The result or outcome of an act or process.

CONDEMN: To declare to be wrong. To express strong disapproval of.

CONDITION: Something that is agreed upon as necessary if some other thing is to take place. Something essential to the appearance or occurrence of something else.

CONDUCTING: Choosing to behave in a certain manner. To comport (oneself) in a specified way.

CONFIDENCE: A feeling of trust and belief. Trust or faith in a person or thing.

CONFRONT: To face or meet issues that occur in our lives, simply and without hostility. come face to face with, especially with defiance or hostility.

CONFUSED: Experiencing a mental fog or feeling uncertain. Being unable to think with clarity or act with understanding and intelligence.

CONFUSION: The state of being confused. Impaired orientation with respect to time, place, or person; a disturbed mental state.

CONSCIOUS: The mental awareness of facts or one's inner feelings. Intentionally conceived or done; deliberate.

CONSEQUENCE: The result of an action. Something that logically or

naturally follows from an action or condition.

CONSISTENT: Sticking to one way of thinking or acting. : Reliable; steady,

CONTENTMENT: Freedom from worry or restlessness. Happiness with one's situation in life.

CONTINUE: To do the same thing without changing or stopping. To go on with a particular action or in a particular condition; persist.

CONTRADICT: To deny the truth of a statement. To assert or express the opposite of.

CONTRARY: The state of being opposed or unwilling to obey or behave well. Opposed, as in character or purpose.

CONTRIBUTE: Giving along with others to have a share in something. Give something to a common purpose.

CONTROL: To have power over. Authority or ability to manage or direct.

CONVINCE: To argue with someone to convince them to agree with or believe in certain things. To bring by the use of argument or evidence to firm belief or a course of action.

COPE: To struggle with or try to manage something. To contend with difficulties and act to overcome them.

CORE: The central or innermost part of something. The basic or most

important part; the essence.v

COURAGE: The strength of mind that makes one able to meet danger and difficulties with firmness. That quality of mind which enables one to encounter danger and difficulties with firmness, or without fear.

CREED: A statement of a set of guiding rules or beliefs, usually of a religious faith. A system of belief, principles, or opinions.

CRITICAL: Being inclined to criticize especially in an unfavorable way. Characterized by careful, exact evaluation and judgment.

CRUCIAL: Being necessary to accomplish something. Of extreme importance; vital to the resolution of a crisis.

CULT: A select group of people recognize by its exclusive nature. An exclusive group of persons sharing an esoteric, usually artistic or intellectual interest.

CURE: The complete elimination of a disease. Something that corrects or relieves a harmful or disturbing situation..

D . . .

DAILY: Occurring, done, produces, or issued every day. Happening or done every day.

DANGEROUS: Anything that is able to or likely to cause injury. Being able or likely to do harm

DECEIT: Misleading a person or causing them to believe that which is

false with a statement or act. Deliberate and misleading concealment, false declaration.

DECEPTION: The statement or act that deceives. The state of being deceived or misled.

DECISION: The act of making a choice.

DECLARATION: The act of making a statement as if certain. The act of making a statement as if certain.

DECLARE: To make a statement as if certain. State emphatically and authoritatively.

DEFAME: To maliciously attack the reputation of another.

DEFECTS: Things that we determine are interfering with our process of recovery.

DEFIANT: Showing a willingness to resist. Boldly resisting authority or an opposing force.

DEGRADATION: The state of being lowered from one level to a lower level. Being lowered from one level to a lower level.

DELUSION: A false belief that we continue to hold in spite of the facts. A false belief that we continue to hold in spite of the facts.

DEMOLITION: The act of ruining completely.

DEMORALIZATION: The act of weakening the discipline or spirit of a

person.

DENIAL: The refusal to admit the truth of a statement or the refusal to accept or believe in someone or something.

DENY: To declare something not true or disowning something. To refuse to believe; reject.

DEPEND: Trust and reliance on others.

DEPENDENT: A person who depends upon another for support to an unhealthy degree. Unable to exist, sustain oneself, or act appropriately or normally without the assistance or direction of another.

DEPRAVITY: An act or practice that is morally bad or corrupt. Impairment of virtue and moral principles.

DEPRESSION: Low spirits, a common by-product of addiction common during withdrawal.

DERELICTION: The neglect of or failure in meeting personal responsibilities.

DESIRE: A strong wish made known.

DESPAIR: A feeling of complete hopelessness. Complete loss of hope.

DESPERATION: The state of feeling complete hopelessness that leads to recklessness. Recklessness arising from despair.

DESTRUCTION: The act of putting an end to something or the results of

such acts.

DEVELOP: To make the possibilities more clear and usable gradually.

DILEMMA: A situation in which a person has to choose between things that seem to be all bad or unsatisfactory. A situation that requires a choice between options that are or seem equally unfavorable or mutually exclusive.

DIRECT: Going from one point to another without turning or stopping. Straightforward and candid.

DIRECTION: The path along which something moves, lies, or points. An instruction or series of instructions for doing or finding something.

DISAGREEMENT: The act or fact of having unlike ideas or opinions. A failure or refusal to agree.

DISASTER: Something that happens suddenly and causes suffering or loss.

DISCLOSURE: The act of making known.

DISCRETION: The power of having good sense in making decisions for oneself. Ability or power to decide responsibly.

DISEASE: A change in a person that interferes with normal functioning.

DISAPPOINTMENT: The act or condition of failing to satisfy the hope or expectation of. A feeling of dissatisfaction that results when your expectations are not realized.

DISHONESTY: The lack of honesty or the quality of not being honest or trustworthy.

DISILLUSION: To free from mistaken beliefs or foolish hopes.

DISQUALIFY: To make or declare something unfit or not qualified. Make unfit or unsuitable.

DISSEMBLING: The process of revealing parts of something in a particular manner to give a specific interpretation of the facts. Pretending with intention to deceive.

DISTORT: To tell in a way that is misleading.

DISTRACTING: Drawing someone's mind or attention to something else or upsetting someone's mind to the point of confusion. To cause to turn away from the original focus of attention or interest; divert.

DISTURBING: Making confused or troubling the mind. To trouble emotionally or mentally; upset.

DIVERSITY: The condition or fact of not being the same and the qualities that distinguish our differences.

DIVINE: Of or relating to God or a god. Godlike; heavenly; excellent in the highest degree; supremely admirable; apparently above what is human.

DOGMA: Something firmly believed. An authoritative principle, belief, or statement of ideas or opinion, especially one considered to be absolutely true.

DOMINATED: The state of someone or something having a commanding position or controlling power over one's self. Controlled or ruled by superior authority or power.

DYNAMIC: Full of energy. Characterized by continuous change, activity, or progress.

DYNAMICS: Any of the various forces, physical or moral, at work in a situation.

E . . .

EAGER: Desiring very much, impatient. Having or showing keen interest, intense desire, or impatient expectancy.

EAGERLY: Acting with great desire, impatiently. In an eager manner.

EFFICIENCY: The quality or degree of being capable of bringing about a desired result with as little waste as possible. The production of the desired effects or results with minimum waste of time, effort, or skill.

EFFORT: A serious attempt. The use of physical or mental energy to do something.

EGO: The individual's awareness of self that used to control us in all sorts of subtle ways. An inflated feeling of pride in your superiority to others or your consciousness of your own identity.

EGOCENTRIC: Viewing everything in relation to oneself. Caring only about oneself; selfish.

EMBARRASSED: Feeling confused or distressed. Caused to feel self-conscious or ill at ease.

EMBARRASMENT: The state of causing or feeling confused or distressed or those things that cause confusion or distress. The shame you feel when your inadequacy or guilt is made public.

EMOTIONS: Mental and bodily reactions accompanied by strong feelings. The part of the consciousness that involves feeling; sensibility.

EMOTIONAL: Expressing emotion.

EMPATHY: Having an intellectual or emotional identification with another. Identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives.

EMPTINESS: Containing nothing. Lacking purpose or substance; meaningless.

ENCOURAGE: To give courage, spirit, or hope to another. To inspire with hope, courage, or confidence.

ENCOURAGEMENT: The act of, the state of, or things giving courage, spirit, or hope. The expression of approval and support.

ENDANGER: Risk. To expose to harm or danger; imperil.

ENDANGERED: The state of being or that which is at risk. To put to hazard; to bring into danger or peril; to expose to loss or injury.

ENDORSE: To give one's support to something.

ENDURE: To put up with patiently or firmly, such as pain. Continue to exist.

ENEMIES: Something or someone that harms or threatens. One hostile to another; one who hates, and desires or attempts the injury of another.

ENTHUSIASM: A strong feeling in favor of something. Great excitement for or interest in a subject or cause.

ENTIRELY: Completely.

ENVY: The feeling of discontent at another's good fortune with a desire to have the same good fortune for one's self. To long after; to desire strongly; to covet.

EQUAL: One having the same rank as another. Being the same for all members of a group.

ESOTERIC: Understood by only a chosen few.

ESSENTIAL: Forming or belonging to the basic part of something. Basic or indispensable; necessary.

EVENTUALLY: Coming at some later time.

EVIDENT: Clear to the sight or to the mind. Easily seen or understood; obvious.

EXACT: Showing close agreement with fact, accurate. Strictly and completely in accord with fact; not deviating from truth or reality.

EXAMINE: To question or look at closely or carefully.

EXCEPT: To leave out from the whole, exclude.

EXERT: To put one's self into action or a tiring effort, struggle. Make a great effort at a mental or physical task.

EXHAUST: To tire out or deplete one's resources.

EXIST: To continue to live. To have actual being; be real.

EXISTENCE: The state of being alive. The fact or state of existing; being.

EXPECTATION: A desire that one places upon himself or another to accomplish.

EXPERIENCE: Something that one has actually done or lived through. The effect upon the judgment or feelings produced by any event, whether witnessed or participated in.

EXPOSURE: An act of making something known publicly. The disclosure of something secret .

EXTERNAL: Something situated on the outside of or related to the outside of a thing. Outside of or separate from ourselves

EXTREME: Something as far as possible from a center or its opposite. Far beyond the norm in views or actions.

F . . .

FAILED: Having been unsuccessful. To err in judgment; to be mistaken; to be unsuccessful.

FAILURE: A lack of success or a person who fails. The inability to function or perform satisfactorily.

FAITH: An individual's system of beliefs. Confident belief in the truth, value, or trustworthiness of a person, idea, or thing.

FAULTS: Weaknesses in character. A character weakness, especially a minor one.

FEAR: A strong unpleasant feeling caused by being aware of danger or expecting something bad to happen. A painful emotion or passion excited by the expectation of evil, or the apprehension of impending danger.

FEARLESS: Taking necessary actions in the midst of one's fears. Oblivious of dangers or perils or calmly resolute in facing them.

FEEBLE: Lacking in strength or endurance. Pathetically lacking in force or effectiveness.

FEELINGS: The state of a person's emotions. An affective state of consciousness, such as that resulting from emotions, sentiments, or desires.

FELLOWSHIP: A group with similar interests or goals. A close association of friends or equals sharing similar interests.

FESTER: To become painfully sore. To be inflamed; to grow virulent, or malignant; to grow in intensity; to rankle.

FIRM: Showing no weakness. Not subject to change; fixed and definite.

FOCUS: To concentrate attention or energy or the center of activity or interest.

FOCUSED: The state of being in the center of activity or interest. To direct toward a particular point or purpose.

FONDNESS: The state of liking or loving something. Warm affection or liking.

FOREVER: For a limitless time. For everlasting time; eternally.

FORGIVE: To stop feeling angry at or hurt by. To cease to feel resentment against, on account of wrongs committed.

FORGIVENESS: The act of forgiving or the state of being forgiven. Compassionate feelings that support a willingness to forgive.

FORMAL: Following established form custom, or rule. Following traditional standards of correctness.

FORTUNE: Favorable results that come partly by chance. Fate; destiny.

FOUNDATION: The support upon which something depends. The basis on which something stands or is supported; a base.

FRACTURED: Damaged or injured.

FREEDOM: The condition of being released from or no longer suffering from something unpleasant or painful. The capacity to exercise choice; free will.

FRIEND: A person who has a strong liking for and trust in another person. A person you know well and regard with affection and trust .

FRIGHTENED: Experiencing fear. Thrown into a state of intense fear or desperation.

FRUSTRATION: The feeling of disappointment or defeat. The condition that results when an impulse or an action is thwarted by an external or an internal force.

FUNCTION: To serve a certain purpose. The actions and activities assigned to or required or expected of a person or group.

G . . .

GENDER: Either of the two divisions of living things especially human beings, male and female. Sexual identity, especially in relation to society or culture.

GENUINE: Being just what it seems to be. Free from hypocrisy or dishonesty; sincere.

GIFTS: Things which are given. Something that is bestowed voluntarily and without compensation.

GIVING: Handing over with the expectation of it being kept. To bestow without receiving a return.

GOAL: That which a person tries to accomplish. The final purpose or aim.

GOD: A being conceived of as supernatural, immortal, and having special powers over people and nature.

GOD-AWARENESS: The mental acceptance of or belief in God.

GOODNESS: The state of being honest and upright. Moral excellence.

GRAFTED: To join one thing to another.

GRATIFICATION: The act of, the state of, or something giving pleasure or satisfaction to. That which gives pleasure.

GRATIFY: To give pleasure or satisfaction to. Make happy or satisfied.

GRATITUDE: The state of being consciously thankful for the things in one's life. The state of being grateful; thankfulness

GRIEF: Very deep sorrow. Pain of mind on account of something in the past; mental suffering arising from any cause, as misfortune, loss of friends, misconduct of one's self or others, etc.

GRIM: Harsh in appearance. Shockingly repellent; inspiring horror.

GROUND: To instruct in basic knowledge or understanding. To instill or teach by persistent repetition.

GROUP CONSCIENCE: The process of polling how our members feel in order for our groups to make decisions about the things that affect our

members and the Fellowship.

GROUPS: Addicts who come together to have recovery meetings. Addicts who come together to have recovery meetings and follow the Twelve Traditions

GROWTH: The process of being able to live and develop. Full development; maturity.

GUIDANCE: The act of showing the way. Something that provides direction or advice as to a decision or course of action.

GUIDE: A person who leads, directs, or shows the right way. To instruct and influence intellectually or morally.

GUIDELINES: A written set of rules or principles that provide boundaries and guidance necessary to practicing appropriate behavior.

GUILT: The fact or feeling of having done something wrong that causes one to feel shame or regret. Remorseful awareness of having done something wrong; or self_reproach for supposed inadequacy or wrongdoing.

H . . .

HABIT: A way of acting or doing that has become fixed by being repeated often. A recurrent, often unconscious, pattern of behavior that is acquired through frequent repetition.

HAPPEN: To occur or come about by chance.

HAPPINESS: The state of enjoying one's condition, content. State of

well-being characterized by emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy.

HARMED: the state of having physical or mental damage. Having had pain or loss or suffering inflicted.

HEAL: To return to a sound or healthy condition. To restore (a person) to spiritual wholeness.

HEARTILY: With sincerity or enthusiasm. With gusto and without reservation

HELP: To provide someone with what is useful in achieving an end. To be of service; give assistance.

HELPLESSNESS: Not able to help or protect oneself. Powerlessness revealed by an inability to act.

HIGHER: Greater than average, having more than usual importance.

HIT: Occur. A dose of a narcotic drug.

HONEST: Not given to cheating, stealing, or lying. Characterized by integrity or fairness and straight_forwardness in conduct, thought, speech, etc.

HOPE: A desire for something together with the expectation of getting what is wanted. To wish for something with expectation of its fulfillment.

HOPELESS: Having no hope. Without hope because there seems to be no possibility of comfort or success.

HOPELESSNESS: The condition of having no hope. The despair you feel when you have abandoned hope of comfort or success.

HORRIBLE: Causing great and painful fear, dread, or shock. Very unpleasant; disagreeable.

HORROR: Great and painful fear, dread, or shock. Intense and profound fear.

HOSTAGE: A person given or held to make certain that promises will be kept.

HOSTILITY: An unfriendly state, attitude, or action. A state of deep-seated ill-will.

HUG: Encircling another with our arms, embrace. To clasp or hold closely, especially in the arms, as in affection; embrace.

HUMAN: Of, relating to, being, or characteristic of people as distinct from lower animals. Subject to or indicative of the weaknesses, imperfections, and fragility associated with humans.

HUMBLE: Accepting one's self as one actually is.

HUMBLY: Asking or doing with humility. In a humble manner.

HUMILITY: The state of being humble. Freedom from pride and arrogance; a modest estimate of one's own worth.

I . . .

I: The person speaking or writing.

IDEAL: A standard of perfection, beauty, or excellence. A conception of something in its absolute perfection.

IDENTIFICATION: The act of or state of being exactly alike or equal. A person's association with the qualities, characteristics, or views of another person or group.

IDENTIFY: To think of as being exactly alike or equal. To make to be the same; to unite or combine in such a manner as to make one; to treat as being one or having the same purpose or effect; to consider as the same in any relation.

IDLE: To spend time doing nothing. To move lazily and without purpose.

IGNORANCE: The state of not knowing. The condition of being uneducated, unaware, or uninformed.

IGNORING: Paying no attention to. To refuse to take notice of; to shut the eyes to; not to recognize; to disregard willfully and causelessly.

ILLNESS: Sickness. An unhealthy condition of body or mind.

ILLUSION: The state or fact of being lead to accept as true something unreal or imagined. Perception of something objectively existing in such a way as to cause misinterpretation of its actual nature.

IMPLY: To express indirectly, suggest rather than state plainly.

IMPROVE: To make or become better.

IMPULSE: A sudden stirring up of the mind and spirit to do something.
A sudden desire,

INABILITY: The condition of being unable to do something. Lacking the power to perform.

INCAPABLE: Not able to do something. One who is morally or mentally weak or inefficient; an imbecile; a simpleton.

INCLINATION: A usually favorable feeling toward something. An attitude of mind especially one that favors one alternative over others.

INCONSIDERATE: Careless of the rights or feelings of others. Lacking regard for the rights or feelings of others.

INCORPORATING: Joining or uniting closely into a single mass or body. To cause to merge or combine together into a united whole.

INCREASE: To make or become greater. Become bigger or greater in amount.

INCURABLE: Impossible to cure. Impossible to cure or unalterable in disposition or habits.

INDEPENDENCE: The quality or state of not being under the control or rule of someone or something. Freedom from control or influence of another or others.

INDICATION: The act of stating or expressing briefly. Something that points to or suggests the proper treatment of a disease, as that demanded by its cause or symptoms.

INDIFFERENT: Showing neither interest or dislike. Having no particular interest or concern; apathetic.

INDIRECT: Not having a plainly seen connection. Not straightforward or upright; unfair; dishonest; tending to mislead or deceive.

INDISPENSABLE: Essential. Absolutely necessary.

INFERIOR: Of little or less importance, value, or merit.

INFLICTED: Caused.

INFLUENCES: The act of, the person who, or something that has the power of producing an effect without apparent force or direct authority. The powers affecting a person, thing, or course of events.

INJURE: To cause pain or harm to.

INNERMOST: Farthest inward. Most intimate.

INSANITY: Repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results.

INSECURITY: The state of not feeling or being safe. Lacking self-confidence; plagued by anxiety.

INSIDIOUS: More dangerous than seems evident. Developing so gradually as to be well established before becoming apparent.

INSIGHT: The power or act of seeing what's really important about a situation. Understanding, especially an understanding of the motives and reasons behind one's actions.

INSTANT: Happening or done at once. Occurring with no delay.

INSTRUMENT: A way of getting something done. The means whereby some act is accomplished..

INTANGIBLE: Not possible to think of as matter or substance. Lacking substance or reality; incapable of being touched or seen.

INTEGRITY: Total honesty and sincerity. Moral soundness; honesty; freedom from corrupting influence or motive.

INTENSELY: Having very strong feelings.

INTENSITY: The degree or amount of a quality or condition.

INTENTIONALLY: Acting on a determination to act in a particular way. Done deliberately.

INTENTIONS: A determination to act in a particular way.

INTOLERANT: Not putting up with something that one sees as being harmful or bad. Unwilling to tolerate difference of opinion.

INVENTORY: The act or process of making a list of items or such items. A list of traits, preferences, attitudes, interests, or abilities that is used in evaluating personal characteristics or skills.

INVOLVEMENT: Being drawn into a situation. The act of sharing in the activities of a group.

ISOLATION: The act or condition of placing or keeping oneself apart from others.

ISSUE: What finally happens. A personal problem or emotional disorder.

J . . .

JEALOUSY: Demanding complete faithfulness to someone or something. Painful apprehension of rivalry affecting one's happiness.

JOURNEY: Going from one place to another. A process or course likened to traveling; a passage.

JUDGE: Form an opinion after careful consideration or a person with the experience to give a meaningful opinion. Form an opinion or evaluation after careful consideration.

JUDGMENTAL: Having an opinion or estimate formed by examining and comparing. Inclined to make judgments, especially moral or personal ones.

JUSTIFY: A character defect that is demonstrated in efforts to prove or show to be just, right, or reasonable. Defend, explain, clear away, or make excuses for by reasoning.

K . . .

KINDNESS: The quality or state of wanting or liking to do good and to bring happiness to others. The quality of being warm-hearted, considerate, humane, and sympathetic

KNOWLEDGE: Understanding and skill gained by experience. Direct and clear awareness

L . . .

LEND: To give to someone usually for an agreed time period. To afford; to grant or furnish in general; as, to lend assistance; to lend one's name or influence.

LIABILITIES: Something that works to one's disadvantage. Something that holds one back; a handicap.

LIMITATIONS: The quality or act of having a point beyond which a person or thing cannot go. A shortcoming or defect.

LIMITLESS: Having no limits.

LITERATURE: Written works having excellence of form or expression and ideas of lasting and widespread interest. Published writings in a particular style on a particular subject.

LONELINESS: The state of feeling alone. A feeling of depression resulting from being alone.

LOVABLE: Deserving of love. Having characteristics that attract love or

affection.

LOVING: To feel warm affection for and show it. Feeling or showing love and affection.

M . . .

MAINTAIN: Keep in a particular or desired state. To keep in an existing state; preserve or retain.

MAINTENANCE: All that is necessary to keep something in a particular or desired state.

MANAGE: To achieve what one wants to do. To succeed in accomplishing or achieving, especially with difficulty.

MANIFEST: Clear to the senses or to the mind, easy to recognize. Clear to the senses or to the mind, easy to recognize.

MANIPULATING: Managing skillfully especially with the intent to deceive.

MANNERISMS: Habits (such as looking or moving in a certain way) that one notices in a person's behavior. A distinctive behavioral trait.

MEANINGLESS: Having no meaning or importance. Having no meaning, direction, or purpose.

MEDITATE: To spend time in quiet thinking. To think or reflect, especially in a calm and deliberate manner.

MEDITATION: The act or instance of meditating.

MEMBER: One of the individuals making up a group. One of the persons who compose a social group (especially individuals who have joined and participates in a group organization).

MEMBERSHIP: Participating fully as a member.

MENTAL: Of or related to the mind and specific thought patterns.

MINDED: Greatly interested in a specific thing. To become aware of; notice.

MIRACLE: An extraordinary, rare, unusual, or wonderful event taken as a sign of the power of God. Any amazing or wonderful occurrence.

MISERY: Suffering or distress due to being poor, in pain, or unhappy. A feeling of intense unhappiness.

MODERATE: Neither very good nor very bad or neither too much nor too little. Being within reasonable or average limits; not excessive or extreme.

MONOTONOUS: Boring from always being the same. Tediously repetitious or lacking in variety.

MOOD-ALTERING: That which changes one's state or frame of mind. Producing mood changes.

MORAL: Concerned with or relating to those things that a given society defines as right and wrong in human behavior. Acting upon or through

one's moral nature or sense of right..

MOTIVATE: The act of providing someone with a reason for doing something.

MOTIVE: The reason for doing something. Something (as a need or desire) that causes a person to act.

MUST: A requirement.

N . . .

NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS: A Twelve_step fellowship or society of men and women seeking recovery from the disease of addiction.

NATURE: The basic character of a person or thing. The essential characteristics and qualities of a person or thing.

NECESSARY: Needing to be had or done. Absolutely essential.

NEGATIVE: Not positive. Something that lacks all positive, affirmative, or encouraging features.

NEWCOMER: One recently arrived, beginner.

NONPROFESSIONAL: Members are simply addicts of equal status freely helping one another regardless of personal professional status.

NONSENSE: Foolish or meaningless words, actions, or things of no importance or value. Foolish or meaningless words, actions, or things of no importance or value.

O . . .

OBLIVION: An act of forgetting or the fact of having forgotten. The act or an instance of forgetting; total forgetfulness

OBSESSION: A disturbing or fixed and often unreasonable idea or feeling that cannot be put out of the mind such as resuming the use of drugs to feel better. That fixed idea that takes us back time and time again to our particular drug, or some substitute, to recapture the ease and comfort we once knew..

OBSTINATE: Sticking stubbornly to an opinion or purpose that is difficult to overcome or remove. Stubbornly adhering to an attitude, an opinion, or a course of action.

OBVIOUS: Easily found, seen, or understood.

OMNIPOTENCE: The state of having power or authority without limit.

ONGOING: Being in progress or movement. Currently happening.

ONLY: A single fact or instance and nothing more or different. In one manner or degree; for one purpose alone.

OPEN: Generally refers to a type of recovery meeting at which non-addicts are permitted to attend and observe a meeting in which participation remains open only to self-admitted addicts.

OPEN-MINDEDNESS: Having a mind that is open to new ideas. Having or showing receptiveness to new and different ideas or the opinions of others.

OPINION: A belief based on experience and on seeing certain facts but not amounting to sure knowledge. A belief stronger than impression and less strong than positive knowledge.

ORIENTED: Becoming acquainted with an existing situation or environment. To become adjusted or aligned.

OTHERS: Those people around the specific person that is the center of attention, generally includes one's self. People aside from oneself.

OUR: Of or relating to us, both individually and collectively.

OUTRAGEOUS: Going far beyond what is accepted as right, decent, or just.

OVERPOWERING: To subdue by being too strong or forceful. So strong as to be irresistible.

OWN: Belonging to oneself or itself.

P . . .

PANIC: A sudden overpowering fear especially without reasonable cause.

PARADOX: A statement that seems to be the opposite of the truth or of common sense and yet is perhaps true.

PARALLEL: Having agreement in many or most details. A comparison made; elaborate tracing of similarity.

PARANOIA: A mental disorder characterized by systemized delusions such as grandeur or especially persecution. Extreme, irrational distrust of others.

PATIENT: Putting up with pain or troubles without complaint while showing calm self-control. Capable of calmly awaiting an outcome or result; not hasty or impulsive.

PATTERNS: Those things that are clear to ourselves and others because of their repetitive occurrences.

PEACE: The freedom from upsetting thoughts or feelings. A state of quiet or tranquility; freedom from disturbance or agitation.

PERCEIVE: To become aware of or understand through one's senses and especially through sight.

PERCEPTION: The grasping of something such as meanings and ideas with one's mind or a judgment formed from information grasped. Recognition and interpretation of sensory stimuli based chiefly on memory.

PERISH: To become destroyed or die.

PERSEVERENCE: The state or power of one who keeps trying to do something in spite of difficulties. Steady persistence in adhering to a course of action, a belief, or a purpose; steadfastness.

PERSISTENT: Continuing to act or exist longer than usual. Never_ ceasing.

PERSONAL: Relating to a particular person or their qualities. Concerning or affecting a particular person or his or her private life and personality.

PERSONALITY: The qualities such as moods or habits that make one person different from others. The pattern of collective character, behavioral, temperamental, emotional, and mental traits of a person

PITFALL: A danger or difficulty that is hidden or is not easily recognized. An unforeseen or unexpected or surprising difficulty.

PLAGUED: Stricken or afflicted with disease or distress. A cause of annoyance; a nuisance.

POSSIBLE: Within the limits of ones abilities. Capable of happening or existing.

POTENTIAL: Existing as a possibility. Capable of being but not yet in existence.

POWER: Possession of control, authority, or influence over. The ability or capacity to perform or act effectively.

POWERLESSNESS: The state or acceptance of feeling that one has no control, authority, or influence over something. The quality of lacking strength or power; being weak and feeble.

PRACTICAL: Of or relating to action and practice rather than ideas or thought. Concerned with actual use or practice rather than ideas or thought

PRACTICE: Actual performance. A habitual or customary action or way of doing something.

PRAYER: A request addressed to God. Communicating our concerns to a Power greater than ourselves.

PRECONCEIVED: Already being in the state of having formed an idea of, imagining, or understanding. To form (an opinion, for example) before possessing full or adequate knowledge or experience.

PRELIMINARY: Something that comes before the main part. Coming before and usually serving as a temporary or intermediate step to something.

PREPARATION: The act of making ready beforehand for some special reason.

PRIDE: Too high an opinion of one's own worth that results in a feeling of being better than others. A sense of one's own proper dignity or value; self-respect or an excessively high opinion of oneself; conceit.

PRIMARY: Most important.

PRINCIPLES: A general or basic truth on which other truths or theories can be based.

PRIVILEGE: A right or liberty granted. A special advantage or benefit not enjoyed by all.

PROCESS: A series of actions, motions, or operations leading to some result such as practicing the principles in the Steps. A natural

progressively continuing operation or development marked by a series of gradual changes that succeed one another in a relatively fixed way and lead toward a particular result or end.

PROCRASTINATION: To put off doing something until later. To put off doing something, especially out of habitual carelessness or laziness.

PRODUCTIVE: Having the power to produce plentifully. Bringing into being; causing to exist.

PROFOUND: Feeling deeply or showing great knowledge and understanding.

PROGRAM: The plan of action that one follows and the tools that we use to achieve a goal such as the Twelve Steps and Traditions.

PROGRESS: To move toward a higher, better, or more advanced stage. Gradual improvement or growth or development.

PROGRESSIVE: Taking place gradually and consistently. Moving forward; advancing.

PROJECTION: To place one's own expectations and desires in place of what is actually happening. A prediction made by extrapolating from past observations.

PROMISE: A statement by a person as to what they will or will not do. To make a declaration assuring that something will or will not be done.

PROMOTION: An effort to help NA move up in our public image, position or rank by the use of promises. NA's public image consists of

what we have to offer, a successful proven way of maintaining a drug-free lifestyle. A message issued in behalf of some product or cause or idea or person or institution.

ROMPTLY: Done at once. With little or no delay.

PROTECTED: Covered or shielded from something that would destroy or injure.

PROVEN: Convincing others of the truth of something by showing the facts. Established beyond doubt.

PURPOSE: Something set up a goal to be achieved.

PURSUED: To follow with an end in view.

Q . . .

QUESTION: Something asked. To analyze; examine.

QUINTESSENTIAL: The most perfect manifestations of a quality or a thing. Representing the perfect example of a class or quality.

R . . .

RACE: One of the three, four, or five great divisions based on easily seen thing such as skin color into which human beings are usually divided.

RATIONALIZATION: Finding believable but untrue reasons for one's conduct. A defense mechanism by which your true motivation is concealed by explaining your actions and feelings in a way that is not

threatening.

REACTION: A response of the body or mind to a stimulus such as a situation or stress. A response that reveals a person's feelings or attitude.

READINESS: The state of being prepared for use or action.

READY: Prepared for use or action.

REALITY: Actual existence. All of your experiences that determine how things appear to you.

REALM: The field of activity or influence.

REBELLION: Open opposition to authority.

RECAPTURED: To experience again. The act or condition of having been retaken or recovered.

RECEIVE: To take or get something that is given, paid, or sent.

RECIPROCAL: Done, felt, or given in return. Done by each to the other; interchanging or interchanged; given and received.

RECKLESS: The state of being given to wild careless behavior. Marked by unthinking boldness; with defiant disregard for danger or consequences.

RECOGNITION: The act or state of being willing to acknowledge. The form of memory that consists in knowing or feeling that a present object has been met before.

RECOGNIZE: To be willing to acknowledge. To know or identify from past experience or knowledge.

RECOVERY: The act, process, or an instance of regaining normal health, self-confidence, or position. The act of regaining or returning toward a normal or healthy state.

REGRET: Sorrow aroused by events beyond one's control. Pain of mind on account of something done or experienced in the past, with a wish that it had been different.

REGULARLY: Steadily in practice or occurrence while following established usages or rules. Steadily in practice or occurrence while following established usages or rules.

RELAPSE: To slip or fall back into a former condition after a change for the better such as using drugs again.

RELATIONSHIP: A state of being connected by a common bond. A particular type of connection existing between people related to or having dealings with each other.

RELIEVING: Freeing partly or wholly from a burden or distress. Freeing from pain, anxiety, or distress.

RELIGION: The service or worship of God. A strong belief in a supernatural power or powers that control human destiny.

RELY: To place faith or confidence in someone or something. To place faith or confidence in someone or something.

REMAIN: To be something yet to be done or considered. To continue unchanged in place, form, or condition, or undiminished in quantity.

REMORSE: Deep regret for one's sins or for acts that wrong others. Deep regret for one's sins or for acts that wrong others.

REMOVE: To get rid of. To take away.

RENEW: To make, do, or begin again.

REPARATION: The act of making up for a wrong. Compensation (given or received) for an insult or injury.

REPRIEVE: To delay the punishment or the consequences of one's actions. A (temporary) relief from harm or discomfort.

REQUIRED: Necessary. Needed; essential.

RESENTMENT: A feeling of angry displeasure at a real or imaginary wrong, insult, or injury. Indignation or ill will felt as a result of a real or imagined grievance.

RESERVATIONS: The act of keeping something available for future use. A limiting qualification, condition, or exception.

RESPECT: To consider worthy of high regard. Courteous regard for people's feelings.

RESPONSIBLE: Having the credit or blame for one's acts or decisions. Able to make moral or rational decisions on one's own and therefore answerable for one's behavior.

RESTORATION: The act of being put or brought back into an earlier or original state. A returning to a normal or healthy condition.

RESULTS: Something that comes about as an effect or end of. A favorable or concrete outcome or effect.

REVEAL: To show clearly. To make known (that which has been concealed or kept secret)

REVERT: To go back. To go back to a previous state.

RIDICULE: To make fun of. Language or behavior intended to mock or humiliate.

RIGHTEOUSNESS: The state of doing or being what is right.

RIGOROUS: Hard to put up with, harsh. Demanding strict attention to rules and procedures.

RISK: Possibility of loss or injury. The possibility of suffering harm or loss; danger.

ROOT: Source. The place where something begins.

S . . .

SANCTION: Approval. A consideration, influence, or principle that dictates an ethical choice.

SEARCHING: To go through thoroughly in an effort to find something. Examining closely or thoroughly.

SELF-ABSORPTION: Great interest or engrossment in one's own interests, affairs, etc. Preoccupation with yourself to the exclusion of everything else.

SELF-APPRAISAL: Estimating the quality of one's own life.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Estimating the quality of one's own life.

SELF-CENTERED: Concerned only with one's own affairs, selfish. Limited to or caring only about yourself and your own needs.

SELF-ESTEEM: Belief in oneself. Pride in oneself; self_respect.

SELFISHNESS: Taking care of oneself without thought for others. That supreme self-love or self-preference which leads a person to direct his purposes to the advancement of his own interest, power, or happiness, without regarding those of others.

SELF-PITY: Pity for oneself. A feeling of sorrow (often self-indulgent) over your own sufferings.

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS: Being strongly convinced of the rightness of one's actions or beliefs. Being strongly convinced of the rightness of one's actions or beliefs; moralistic.

SELF-SEEKING: Seeking to mainly further one's own interest. Taking advantage of opportunities without regard for the consequences for others.

SENSITIVE: Easily or strongly affected, impressed, or hurt.

SERENITY: Calmness of mind; evenness of temper The absence of mental stress or anxiety.

SERVICE: Doing the right thing for the right reason.

SETBACK: A slowing of progress, a temporary defeat. An unfortunate happening that hinders or impedes.

SHAME: A painful emotion caused by having done something wrong or improper. A painful emotion caused by a strong sense of guilt, embarrassment, unworthiness, or disgrace.

SHARE: Belonging to one person. To participate in, use, enjoy, or experience jointly or in turns.

SHARING: To use, experience, or enjoy with others. Using or enjoying something jointly with others.

SHORTCOMING: The acting out on a character defect.

SHY: Not wanting or able to call attention to oneself because of not feeling comfortable around people. Lacking self-confidence.

SINCERELY: Being what it appears to be, genuine. Without pretense.

SOLUTION: The act, process, or result of finding an answer. A method for solving a problem.

SOURCE: The cause or starting point of something. The place where something begins, where it springs into being.

SPIRIT: A force within a human being thought to give the body life, energy, and power or the active presence of God in human life. A fundamental emotional and activating principle determining one's character.

SPIRITUAL: Of, relating to, or consisting of spirit not material. Of, relating to, or consisting of spirit not material.

SPOILS: Stolen goods. To do harm to the character, nature, or attitude of by over-solicitude, overindulgence, or excessive praise.

SPONSOR: Another recovering addict who can guide one through the Steps and Traditions.

STAGNATE: To become inactive. Be idle; exist in a changeless situation.

STEADFAST: Unchanging, loyal. Firm and dependable especially in loyalty.

STRENGTH: The quality of being strong. Capacity for exertion or endurance, whether physical, intellectual, or moral.

SUBCONSCIOUS: Occurring with little or no conscious perception on the part of the individual Existing in the mind but not immediately available to consciousness : affecting thought, feeling, and behavior without entering awareness.

SUBSEQUENT: Following in time, order, or place. Following in time; coming or being after something else at any time, indefinitely.

SUBSTITUTION: The act, process, or thing that takes the place of something else. The act of putting one thing or person in the place of another.

SUCCESSION: A series of persons or things that follow one after another. The act or process of following in order.

SUFFER: To experience something unpleasant, bear loss or damage. To feel or undergo pain of body or mind.

SUFFERING: The state or experience of one that suffers. Troubled by pain or loss.

SUFFICIENT: Enough to achieve a goal or fill a need. Of a quantity that can fulfill a need or requirement but without being abundant.

SUGGEST: To offer as an idea.

SUICIDE: The act of killing oneself purposefully. The act of killing yourself.

SUPERIOR: Feeling that one is more important than others.

SUPPORT: To keep going, sustain. Give moral or psychological support, aid, or courage to.

SUPPRESS: To put down, subdue. Control and refrain from showing.

SURRENDER: The act of giving up or yielding oneself or something into the possession or control of someone else. Acceptance of despair.

SURVIVE: To remain alive. To carry on despite hardships or trauma.

SYMPTOMS: Noticeable changes in the body or its functions that are typical of a disease. Signs or tokens; that indicate the existence of something else.

SYSTEMATICALLY: Carrying out a plan with thoroughness or regularity. Carried on using step_by_step procedures.

T . . .

TEMPERED: Made into a more useful state.

TEMPTATIONS: That which makes one think of doing wrong. That which is attractive or inviting.

TENSIONS: A state of mental unrest. Mental, emotional, or nervous strain.

TERMINAL: Resulting in the end of life. Causing, ending in, or approaching death; fatal.

TERRIFIED: Frightened greatly. Thrown into a state of intense fear or desperation.

THANKFULNESS: Feeling grateful or showing thanks. Warm friendly feelings of gratitude.

THERAPEUTIC: Healing. Having a healing power or quality.

THOROUGH: Careful about little things. Painstakingly careful and

accurate.

THRASHING: To move about violently. Moving about wildly or violently.

THREAT: A showing of an intention to do harm. An expression of an intention to inflict pain, injury, evil, or punishment or something that is a source of danger.

TOLERANCE: Sympathy for or acceptance of feelings or habits which are different from one's own. Willingness to recognize and respect the beliefs or practices of others.

TOLERANT: Showing tolerance. Showing respect for the rights or opinions or practices of others.

TOPIC: The focus of discussion. The subject matter of a conversation or discussion.

TORTUROUS: Having many twists and turns. Extremely painful.

TRADITION: One of the set of twelve principles which help us live.

TRAITS: Qualities that set one person or thing off from another. Distinguishing features.

TRUST: Firm belief in the character, strength, or truth of someone or something. Firm reliance on the integrity, ability, or character of a person or thing.

TRUSTWORTHY: Deserving trust and confidence. Worthy of

confidence, trust, or belief.

U . . .

UNCONDITIONAL: Without any special exceptions. Without conditions or limitations; absolute.

UNDERLYING: Forming the foundation of. Present but not obvious; implicit.

UNDERSTANDING: Knowing thoroughly or having reason to believe. Anything mutually understood or agreed upon.

UNIFORMITY: The quality, state, or an instance of having always the same form, manner, or degree – not changing. Conforming to one principle, standard, or rule; consistent.

UNIQUE: Being the only one of its kind. Radically distinctive and without equal.

UNITY: The state of those who are in full agreement. The state or quality of being in accord; harmony.

UNLIMITED: Having no restrictions or controls. Having or seeming to have no boundaries.

UNMANAGEABLE: Hard or impossible to manage. Difficult to keep under control or within limits.

UNPARALLELED: Having no equal. Radically distinctive and without equal.

URGENCY: The quality or state of calling for immediate action. Pressing importance requiring speedy action.

USELESSNESS: The feeling of being of or having no use. Incapable of functioning or assisting.

USERS: One who consumes as drugs. One who uses addictive drugs.

V . . .

VARIOUS: Of different kinds. Of many different kinds purposefully arranged but lacking any uniformity.

VICTIM: A person who is cheated, fooled, or hurt by another. A person who suffers injury, loss, or death as a result of a voluntary undertaking.

VIGILANCE: Staying alert especially to possible danger. The process of paying close and continuous attention.

VIGILANT: Alert especially to avoid danger. Carefully observant or attentive; on the lookout for possible danger.

VIGOROUS: Having strength or energy of body or mind. Characterized by forceful and energetic action or activity.

VIOLENT: Showing very strong force. Acting with, marked by, or resulting from great force, energy or emotional intensity.

VIRTUE: A desirable quality such as truth. The quality of doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong.

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VOID: Containing nothing.

Z . . .

ZEAL: Eager desire to get something done or see something succeed.
Enthusiastic devotion to a cause, ideal, or goal and tireless diligence in its furtherance.

CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP CHRONOLOGY

This work began in 1989, when my sponsee Dale A. suggested I write some original writing on the spiritual principles of NA. In particular, the writing was to address how these principles would in application prevent or limit some of our early service disorders. This resulted in the original material on the principles. The list was taken from the Twelfth Step in the book, *Narcotics Anonymous*. Expansion included looking up synonyms and antonyms for clarity.

Later, in 1990 or early 1991, the expansion of the original material into other areas of interest began. Staying clean, going to meetings and discovering the many things brought to us by the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions, writing them down had become a habit to me. I sought and found many items written and found by friends in the program and much if not all of the material has been work-shopped many times, in many places. At some point, I realized that the material is consistent with the dialogues shared with friends in recovery on the telephone, in meetings and in person. That is the source of this material. If ever there should come a time when the truth needs to be known or spoken, write it down and share it the NA way!

All the chronology material is posted on the World Wide Web at www.nawol.org. NAWOL, is the acronym for NA Way of Life. This has let countless thousands of members download the material for free either by chapter or the entire work. This 2011 Form is the most current. Deepest, heartfelt thanks to all the many good members who have worked with me so hard over the years since 1989 to produce the current work. Nobody makes it alone.

In Loving Service,
Bo S.