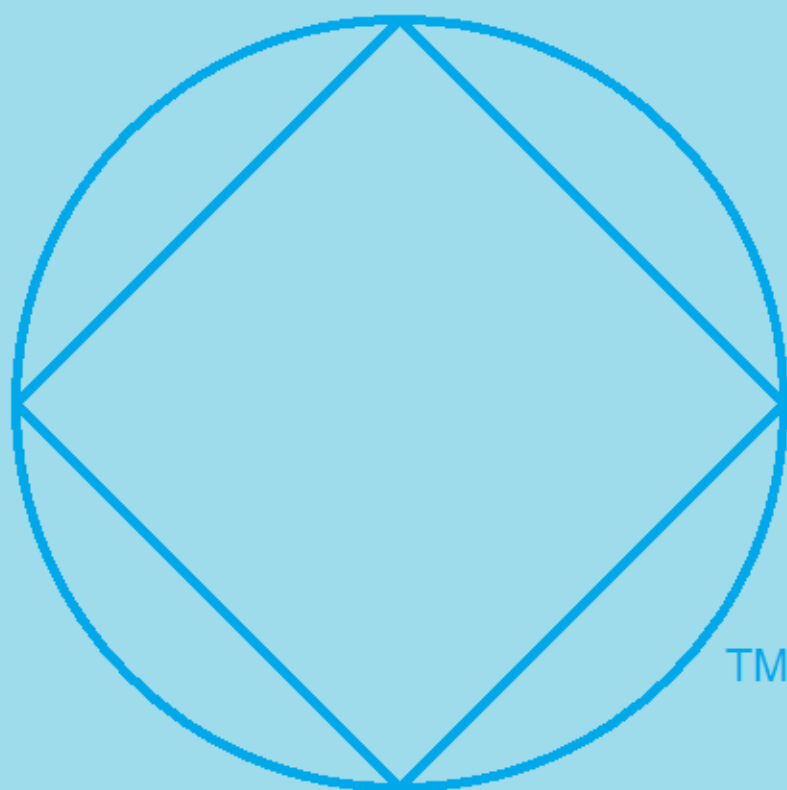


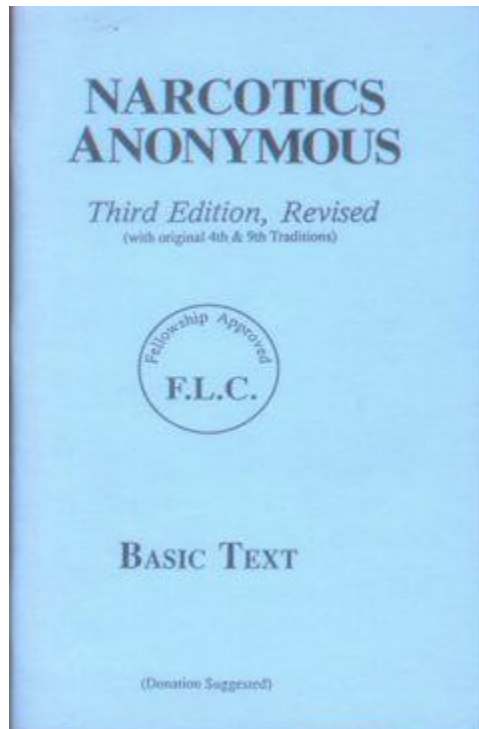
NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

Third Edition Revised & Restored
"The Baby Blue"



BASIC TEXT

Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text



3rd Edition Revised & Restored To Our Original Non-Negotiable Traditions

This is the 3rd Edition Revised Basic Text as printed in 1986. However, the 4th & 9th Traditions were inserted from the 2nd Edition as it was felt that they conveyed the actual sentiment of the Fellowship and had been altered without consent. This became the contents of what is now known as "The Baby Blue Basic Text". It was never officially published by NAWA or WSO, but rather by many homegroups of Narcotics Anonymous (also known as the actual Fellowship).

"Many books have been written about the nature of addiction. This book primarily concerns itself with the nature of recovery. If you are an addict and have found this book, please give yourself a break and read it!"

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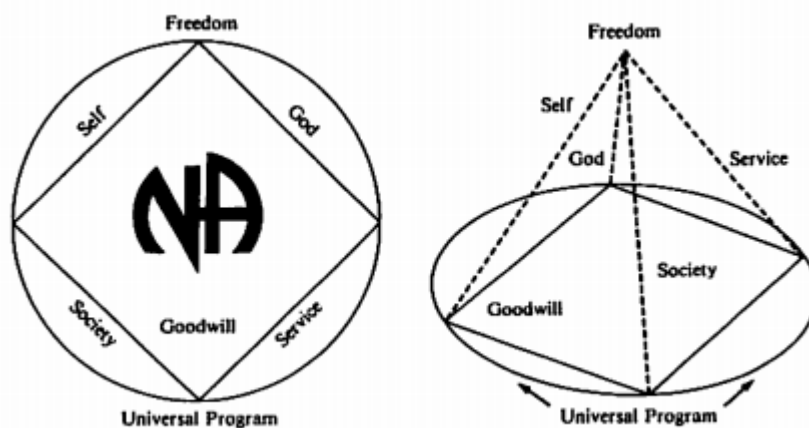
OUR SYMBOL

Simplicity is the keynote of our symbol; it follows the simplicity of our Fellowship. We could find all sorts of occult and esoteric connotations in the simple outlines, but foremost in our minds were easily understood meanings and relationships.

The outer circle denotes a universal and total program that has room within for all manifestations of the recovering and wholly recovered person.

The square, whose lines are defined, is easily seen and understood; but there are other unseen parts of the symbol. The square base denotes Goodwill, the ground of both the fellowship and the member of our society. Actually, it is the four pyramid sides which rise from this base in a three dimensional figure that are the Self, Society, Service and God. All rise to the point of Freedom.

All parts thus far are closely related to the needs and aims of the addict seeking recovery and the purpose of the fellowship seeking to make recovery available to all. The greater the base, as we grow in unity in numbers and in fellowship, the broader the sides and the higher the point of freedom. Probably the last to be lost to freedom will be the stigma of being an addict. Goodwill is best exemplified in service and proper service is "Doing the right thing for the right reason". When this supports and motivates both the individual and the fellowship, we are fully whole and wholly free.



INTRODUCTION

This book is the shared experience of the fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. We welcome you to read this text, hoping that you will choose to share with us in the new life we have found. We have by no means found a “cure” for addiction. We offer only a proven plan for daily recovery.

In N.A., we follow a program adapted from Alcoholics Anonymous. More than one million people have recovered in A.A., most of them just as hopelessly addicted to alcohol as we were to drugs. We are grateful to the A.A. fellowship for showing us the way to a new life.

The Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous, as adapted from A.A., are the basis of our recovery program. We have only broadened their perspective. We follow the same path with a single exception; our identification as addicts is all-inclusive in respect to any mood-changing, mind-altering substance. “Alcoholism” is too limited a term for us; our problem is not a specific substance, it is a disease called “addiction”. We believe that as a fellowship, we have been guided by a Greater Consciousness, and are grateful for the Direction that has enabled us to build upon an already-proven program of recovery.

We have come to Narcotics Anonymous by various means and believe that our common denominator is that we failed to come to terms with our addiction. Because of the degree and variety of addiction found within our fellowship, we have approached the solution contained within this book in general terms. We pray that we have been searching and thorough, so that every addict who reads this volume will find the hope we have found.

Based on our experience, we believe that every addict, including the “potential” addict, suffers from an incurable disease of body, mind and spirit. We were in the grip of a hopeless dilemma, the solution of which is spiritual in nature. Therefore, this book will deal with spiritual matters.

We are not a religious organization. Our program is a set of spiritual principles through which we are recovering from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. Throughout the compiling of this work, we have prayed: “GOD, grant us knowledge that we may write according to Your Divine precepts, instill in us a sense of Your purpose, make us servants of Your will and grant us a bond of selflessness that this may truly be Your work, not ours, in order that no addict, anywhere, need die from the horrors of addiction.”

Everything that occurs in the course of N.A. service must be motivated by the desire to more successfully carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers. It was for this reason that we began this work. We must always remember that as individual members, groups, and service committees, we are not, and should never be, in competition with each other. We work separately and together to help the newcomer and for our common good. We have learned, painfully, that internal strife cripples our fellowship; it prevents us from providing the services necessary for growth.

It is our hope that this book will help the suffering addict find the solution we have found. Our purpose is to remain clean, just for today, and to carry the message of recovery.

Thank you,

LITERATURE SUBCOMMITTEE
WORLD SERVICE CONFERENCE
NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

Chapter One

WHO IS AN ADDICT?

Most of us do not have to think twice about this question. WE KNOW! Our whole life and thinking was centered in drugs in one form or another; the getting and using and finding ways and means to get more. We lived to use and used to live. Very simply, an addict is a man or woman whose life is controlled by drugs. We are people in the grip of a continuing and progressive illness whose ends are always the same: jails, institutions and death.

Those of us who have found the program of Narcotics Anonymous do not have to think twice about the question: Who is an addict? We know! The following is our experience.

As addicts, we are people whose use of any mind-altering, mood-changing substance causes a problem in any area of life. Addiction is a disease which involves more than simple drug use. Some of us believe that our disease was present long before the first time we used.

Most of us did not consider ourselves addicted before coming to the Narcotics Anonymous program. The information available to us came from misinformed people. As long as we could stop using for a while, we thought we were all right. We looked at the stopping, not the using. As our addiction progressed, we thought of stopping less and less. Only in desperation did we ask ourselves, "Could it be the drugs"?

We did not choose to become addicts. We suffer from a disease which expresses itself in ways that are anti-social and make detection, diagnosis and treatment difficult. Our disease isolated us from people except for the getting, using and finding ways and means to get more. Hostile, resentful, self-centered and self-seeking, we cut ourselves off from the outside world. Anything not completely familiar became alien and dangerous. Our world shrank and isolation became our life. We used in order to survive. It was the only way of life we knew.

Some of us used, misused and abused drugs and still never considered ourselves addicts. Through all of this, we kept telling ourselves, "I can handle it". Our misconceptions about the nature of addiction conjured up visions of violence, street crime, dirty needles and jail.

When our addiction was treated as a crime or moral deficiency, we became rebellious and were driven deeper into isolation. Some of the highs felt great, but eventually the things we had to do in order to support our using reflected desperation. We were caught in the grip of our disease. We were forced to survive any way we could. We manipulated people and tried to control everything around us. We lied, stole, cheated and sold ourselves. We had to have drugs, regardless of the cost. Failure and fear began to invade our lives.

One aspect of our addiction was our inability to deal with life on its terms. We tried drugs and combinations of drugs in an effort to cope with a seemingly hostile world. We dreamed of finding a magic formula that would solve our ultimate problem - ourselves. The fact was that we could not successfully use any mind-altering or mood-changing substance, including marijuana and alcohol. Drugs ceased to make us feel good.

At times, we were defensive about our addiction and justified our right to use, especially when we had "legal prescriptions". We were proud of the sometimes illegal and often bizarre behavior that typified our using. We "forgot" the times we sat alone consumed by fear and self-pity. We fell into a pattern of selective thinking. We only remembered the "good" drug experiences. We justified and rationalized the things we had to do to keep from being sick or going crazy. We ignored the times when life seemed to be a nightmare. We avoided the reality of our addiction.

Higher mental and emotional functions, such as conscience and the ability to love, were sharply affected by our use of drugs. Living skills were reduced to the animal level. Our spirit was broken. The capacity to feel human was lost. This seems extreme, but many of us have been in this state.

We were constantly searching for “the answer” -that person, place or thing that would make everything all right. We lacked the ability to cope with daily living. As our addiction caught up with us, many of us found ourselves in and out of institutions.

These experiences indicated there was something wrong with our lives. We wanted an easy way out and some of us thought of suicide. Our attempts were usually feeble, and only helped to contribute to our feelings of worthlessness. We were trapped in the illusion of “what if”, “if only” and “just one more time”. When we did seek help, we were really only looking for the absence of pain.

We have regained good physical health many times, only to lose it by using again. Our track record shows that it is impossible for us to use successfully. No matter how well we may appear to be in control, using drugs always brings us to our knees.

Like other incurable diseases, addiction can be arrested. We agree that there is nothing shameful about being an addict, provided we accept our dilemma honestly and take positive action. We are willing to admit without reservation that we are allergic to drugs. Common sense tells us that it would be insane to go back to the source of our allergy. Our experience indicates that medicine cannot “cure” our illness.

Although physical and mental tolerance play a role, many drugs require no extended period of use to trigger allergic reactions. Our reaction is what makes us addicts, not how much we use.

Many of us did not think we had a problem until the drugs ran out. Even when others told us we had a problem, we were convinced that we were right and the world was wrong. We used this belief to justify our self-destructive behavior. We developed a point of view that enabled us to pursue our addiction without concern for our own well-being or that of others. We began to feel the drugs were killing us long before we could ever admit it to anyone else. We noticed that if we tried to stop using, we couldn't. We suspected we had lost control over the drugs and had no power to stop.

Certain things followed as we continued to use. We became accustomed to a state of mind common to addicts. We forgot what it was like before we started using; we forgot the social graces. We acquired strange habits and mannerisms. We forgot how to work; we forgot how to play; we forgot how to express ourselves and show concern for others. We forgot how to feel.

While using, we lived in another world. We experienced only periodic jolts of reality or self-awareness. It seemed we were at last two people instead of one, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. We ran around trying to get our lives together before our next run. Sometimes we could do this very well, but later, it was less important and more impossible. In the end, Dr. Jekyll died and Mr. Hyde took over.

Each of us has a few things we can say we never did. We cannot let these things become excuses to use again. Some of us feel lonely because of differences between us and other members, and this makes it difficult to give up old connections and old habits.

We all have different tolerances for pain. Some addicts needed to go to greater extremes than others. Some of us found we had had enough when we realized that we were getting high too often and it was affecting our daily lives. At first, we were using in a manner which seemed to be social or at least controllable with little indication of the disaster which the future held for us. At some point, our using became uncontrollable and antisocial. This began when things were going well and we were in situations that allowed us to use frequently. This was usually the end of the good times. We may have tried to moderate, substitute, or even stop using, but we went from a state of drugged success and well-being to complete spiritual, mental and emotional bankruptcy. This rate of decline varies from addict to addict. Whether it is years or days, it is all downhill. Those of us who don't die from the disease will go on to prison, mental institutions or complete demoralization as the disease progresses.

Drugs had given us the feeling that we could handle whatever situation might develop. We became aware, however, that drugs were largely responsible for having gotten us into our very worst predicaments. Some of us may spend the rest of our lives in jail for a drug-related crime or a crime committed while using.

We had to reach our bottom before we became willing to stop. We were much more motivated to seek help in the latter stage of our addiction. It was easier for us to see the destruction, disaster and delusion of our using. It was harder to deny our addiction when problems were staring us in the face.

Some of us first saw the effects of addiction on the people with whom we were close. We were very dependent on them to carry us emotionally through life. We felt angry, disappointed and hurt when they had other interests, friends and loved ones. We regretted the past, dreaded the future, and we weren't too thrilled about the present. After years of searching, we were more unhappy and less satisfied than when it all began.

Our addiction had enslaved us. We were prisoners of our own mind, condemned by our own guilt. We had given up ever stopping. Our attempts to stay clean had always failed, causing us pain and misery.

As addicts, we have an incurable disease called addiction which is chronic, progressive and fatal. However, it is a treatable disease. We feel that each individual alone has to answer the question, "Am I an addict?" How we got the disease is of no immediate importance to us. We are concerned with recovery.

We begin to treat our addiction by not using. Many of us sought answers but failed to find any workable solution until we found each other. Once we identify ourselves as addicts, help becomes possible. We can see a little of ourselves in every addict and a little bit of them in us. This insight lets us help one another. Our futures seemed hopeless until we found clean addicts who were willing to share with us. Denial of our addiction was what had kept us sick, and our honest admission enabled us to stop using. The people of Narcotics Anonymous told us that they were recovering addicts who had learned to live without drugs. If they could do it, so could we.

The only alternatives to recovery are jails, institutions, dereliction and death. Unfortunately, our disease makes us deny our addiction. If you are an addict, you too can find a new way of life through the N.A. program that would not otherwise be possible. We have become very grateful in the course of our recovery. Our lives have become useful, through abstinence and by working the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous.

We realize that we are never cured and carry the disease within us all our lives. We have a disease from which we do recover. Each day we are given another chance. We are convinced that there is only one way for us to live, and that is the N.A. way.

Chapter Two

WHAT IS THE NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS PROGRAM?

N.A. is a non-profit Fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean. This is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs. There is only ONE requirement for membership, the desire to stop using. We suggest that you keep an open mind and give yourself a break. Our program is a set of principles written so simply that we can follow them in our daily lives. The most important thing about them is that THEY WORK.

There are no strings attached to N.A. We are not affiliated with any other organizations, we have no initiation fees or dues, no pledges to sign, no promises to make to anyone. We are not connected with any Political, religious or law enforcement groups, and are under no surveillance at any time. Anyone may join us, regardless of age, race, sexual identity, creed, religion or lack of religion.

We are not interested in what or how much you used or who your connections were, what you have done in the past, how much or how little you have, but only in what you want to do about your problem and how we can help. The newcomer is the most important person at any meeting, because we can only keep what we have by giving it away. We have learned from our group experience that those who keep coming to our meetings regularly stay clean.

Narcotics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who are learning to live without drugs. We are a non-profit society and have no dues or fees of any kind. Each of us has paid the price of membership. We have paid dearly with our pain for the right to recover.

We are addicts, surviving against all odds, who meet regularly together. We respond to honest sharing and listen to the stories of our members for the message of recovery. We realize that, at last, there is hope for us.

We make use of the tools that have worked for other recovering addicts who have learned to live without drugs in Narcotics Anonymous. The Twelve Steps are positive tools that make recovery possible. Our primary purpose is to stay clean and to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. We are united by our common problem of addiction. By meeting, talking with, and helping other addicts, we are able to stay clean. The newcomer is the most important person at any meeting because we can only keep what we have by giving it away.

Narcotics Anonymous has had many years of experience with literally hundreds of thousands of addicts. This mass of intensive first-hand experience in all phases of illness and recovery is of unparalleled therapeutic value. We are here to share freely with any addicts who want it.

Our message of recovery is based on our own experience. Before coming to the fellowship, we exhausted ourselves trying to “use” successfully, or trying to find out what was wrong with us. After coming to N.A., we found ourselves among a very special group of people who have suffered like us and found recovery. In their experiences, freely shared, we found hope for ourselves. If the Program worked for them, it would work for us.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using. We have seen the Program work for any addict who honestly and sincerely wants to stop. We don’t have to be clean when we get here, but after the first meeting, we suggest that newcomers keep coming back and come back clean. We don’t have to wait for an overdose, or jail sentence, to get help from Narcotics Anonymous, nor is addiction a hopeless condition from which there is no recovery.

We meet addicts like ourselves who are clean. We watch and listen to them and realize that they have found a way to live and enjoy life without drugs. We don’t have to settle for the limitations of the past. We can examine and re-examine all our old ideas and constantly improve on them or replace them with new ones. We are men and women who have discovered and admitted that we are powerless over our addiction. When we use, we lose.

When we discovered that we cannot live with or without drugs, we sought help through N.A. rather than prolong our suffering. The Program works a miracle in our lives. We become different people. The steps and abstinence give us a daily reprieve from our self-imposed life sentences. We become free to live.

We want the place where we recover to be a safe place, free from outside influences. For the protection of the

fellowship, we insist that no drugs or paraphernalia be brought to any meeting.

We feel totally free to express ourselves within the fellowship, because no law enforcement agencies are involved. Our meetings have an atmosphere of empathy. In accordance with the principles of recovery, we try not to judge, stereotype or moralize with each other. We are not recruited and it doesn't cost anything. N.A. does not provide counseling or social services.

Our meetings are a process of identification, hope and sharing. The heart of N.A. beats when two addicts share their recovery. What we do becomes real for us when we share it. This happens on a larger scale in our regular meetings. A meeting is two or more addicts gathered together to help each other stay clean.

At the beginning of the meeting, we read N.A. literature which is available to anyone. Some meetings have speakers, topic discussions or both. Closed meetings are for addicts or those who think they might have a drug problem; open meetings welcome anyone wishing to experience our Fellowship. The atmosphere of recovery is protected by our Twelve Traditions. We are fully self-supporting through voluntary contributions from our members. Regardless of where the meeting takes place, we remain unaffiliated. Meetings provide us with a place to be with fellow addicts. All we need are two addicts, caring and sharing, to make a meeting.

We let new ideas flow into us. We ask questions. We share what we have learned about living without drugs. Though the principles of the Twelve Steps may seem strange to us at first, the most important thing about them is that they work. Our Program is, in fact, a way of life. We learn the value of such spiritual principles as surrender, humility and service from reading the N.A. literature, going to meetings, and working the steps. We find that our lives steadily improve, if we maintain abstinence from mind-altering, mood-changing chemicals and work the Twelve Steps to sustain our recovery. Living this Program gives us a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves, corrects defects, leads us to help others, and where there has been wrong, teaches us the spirit of forgiveness.

Many books have been written about the nature of addiction. This book concerns itself with the nature of recovery. If you are an addict and have found this book, please give yourself a break and read it.

Chapter Three WHY ARE WE HERE?

Before coming to the Fellowship of N.A., we could not manage our own lives. We could not live and enjoy life as other people do. We had to have something different and we thought we had found it in drugs. We placed their use ahead of the welfare of our families, our wives, husbands, and our children. We had to have drugs at all costs. We did many people great harm, but most of all we harmed ourselves. Through our inability to accept personal responsibilities we were actually creating our own problem. We seemed to be incapable of facing life on its own terms.

Most of us realized that in our addiction we were slowly committing suicide, but addiction is such a cunning enemy of life that we had lost the power to do anything about it. Most of us ended up in jail, or sought help through medicine, religion and psychiatry. None of these methods was sufficient for us. Our disease always resurfaced or continued to progress until in desperation, we sought help from each other in Narcotics Anonymous.

After coming to N.A. we realized we were sick people. We suffered from a disease from which there is no known cure. It can, however, be arrested at some point, and recovery is then possible.

We are addicts seeking recovery. We used drugs to cover up our feelings, and did whatever was necessary to get them. Many of us woke up sick, unable to make it to work, or went to work loaded. Many of us stole to support our habit. We hurt the ones we loved. We did all these things and told ourselves, "We can handle it". We were looking for a way out. We couldn't face life on its own terms. In the beginning, using was fun. For us it became a habit and finally was necessary for survival. The progression of the disease was not apparent to us. We continued on the path of destruction, unaware of where it was leading us. We were addicts and did not know it. Through drugs we tried to avoid reality, pain and misery. When the drugs wore off, we realized that we still had the same problems and that they were becoming worse. We sought relief by using again and again - more drugs, more often.

We sought help and found none. Often doctors didn't understand our dilemma; they tried to help by giving us medication. Our husbands, wives and loved ones gave us what they had and drained themselves in the hope that we would stop using or get better. We tried substituting one drug for another, but this only prolonged our pain. We tried limiting our usage to "social" amounts without success. There is no such thing as a "social addict". Some of us sought an answer through churches, religions or cultism. Some sought a cure by geographic change, blaming our surroundings and living situations for our problems. This attempt only gave us a chance to take advantage of new people. Some of us sought approval through sex or change of friends. This approval-seeking carried us further into our addiction. Some of us tried marriage, divorce or desertion. Regardless of what we tried, we could not escape from our disease.

We reached a point in our lives where we felt like a lost cause. Our worth to our jobs, families and friends was little or none. Many of us were unemployed and unemployable. Any form of success was frightening and unfamiliar. We didn't know what to do. As the self-loathing grew, we needed to use more and more to mask our feelings. We were sick and tired of pain and trouble. We were frightened and ran from the fear. No matter how far we ran, we always carried the fear with us. We were hopeless, useless and lost. Failure had become our way of life and self-esteem was nonexistent. Perhaps the most painful of all was the desperation of loneliness. Isolation and the denial of our addiction kept us moving along this downhill path. Any hope of getting better disappeared. Helplessness, emptiness and fear became our way of life. We were complete failures. Personality change was what we really needed. Change from self-destructive patterns of life became necessary. When we lied, cheated or stole, we degraded ourselves in our own eyes. We had had enough of self-destruction. We experienced how powerless we really are. When nothing relieved our paranoia and fear, we hit bottom and became ready to ask for help.

We were searching for an answer when we reached out and found Narcotics Anonymous. We came to our first N.A. meeting in defeat and didn't know what to expect. After sitting in a meeting, or several meetings, we began to feel that people cared and were willing to help. Although our minds told us we would never make it, the people in the Fellowship gave us hope by insisting we could recover. We found that no matter what our past thoughts or actions were, others had felt and done the same. Surrounded by fellow addicts, we realized that we were not alone. Recovery is what happens in our meetings; each of our lives is at stake. We found that by putting recovery first, the Program works.

We faced three disturbing realizations:

1. We are powerless over addiction and our lives are unmanageable;
2. Although we are not responsible for our disease, we are responsible for our recovery;
3. We can no longer blame people, places and things for our addiction. We must face our problems and our feelings.

The ultimate weapon for recovery is the recovering addict. We concentrate on recovery and how we feel, not what we have done in the past. Old friends, places and ideas are often a threat to our recovery. We need to change our playmates, playgrounds and playthings.

When we realized we are not able to manage on our own, some of us immediately began experiencing depression, anxiety, hostility and resentment. Petty frustrations, minor setbacks and loneliness often made us feel that we were not getting any better. We found that we suffered from a disease, not a moral dilemma. We were critically ill, not hopelessly bad. Our disease can only be arrested through abstinence.

Today we experience a full range of feelings. Before coming into the fellowship, we either felt elated or depressed with very little in between. Our negative sense of self has been replaced by a positive concern for others. Answers are provided and problems are solved. It is a great gift to feel human again.

What a change from the way we used to be! That's how we know that the N.A. program works. It is the first thing that ever convinced us that we needed to change ourselves, instead of trying to change the people and situations around us. We discover new opportunities. We find a sense of self-worth. We learn self-respect. This is a program for doing just those things. By working the steps, we come to accept a Higher Power's will; this acceptance leads us to recovery. We lose our fear of the unknown. We are set free.

Chapter Four HOW IT WORKS

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.

- 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 these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

This sounds like a big order, and we can't do it all at once. We didn't become addicted in one day, so remember - EASY DOES IT.

There is one thing more than anything else that will defeat us in our recovery; this is an attitude of indifference or intolerance toward spiritual principles. Three of these that are indispensable are honesty, open-mindedness and willingness. With these we are well on our way.

We feel that our approach to the disease of addiction is completely realistic, for the therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel. We feel that our way is practical, for one addict can best understand and help another addict. 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.

The only way to keep from returning to active addiction is not to take that first drug. If you are like us you know that one is too many and a thousand never enough. We put great emphasis on this, for we know that when we use drugs in any form, or substitute one for another, we release our addiction all over again.

Thinking of alcohol as different from other drugs has caused a great many addicts to relapse. Before we came to N.A., many of us viewed alcohol separately, but we cannot afford to be confused about this. Alcohol is a drug. We are people with the disease of addiction who must abstain from all drugs in order to recover.

These are some of the questions we have asked ourselves: Are we sure we want to stop using? Do we understand that we have no real control over drugs? Do we recognize that in the long run, we didn't use drugs—they used us? Did jails and institutions take over the management of our lives at different times? Do we fully accept the fact that our every attempt to stop using or control our using failed? Do we know that our addiction changed us into something we didn't want to be: dishonest, deceitful, self-willed people at odds with ourselves and our fellow man? Do we really believe that, as drug users, we have failed?

When we were using, reality became so painful that oblivion was preferable. We tried to keep other people from knowing about our pain. We isolated ourselves, and lived in prisons built out of our loneliness. Through this desperation we sought help in Narcotics Anonymous. When we come to Narcotics Anonymous we are physically, mentally, and spiritually bankrupt. We have hurt long enough that we are willing to go to any length to stay clean. Our only hope is to live by the example of those who have faced our dilemma, and have found a way out. Regardless of who we are, where we came from, or what we have done, we are accepted in Narcotics Anonymous. Our addiction

gives us a common ground for understanding one another.

As a result of attending a few meetings, we begin to feel like we finally belong. It is in these meetings that we are introduced to the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous. We learn to work them in the order they are written and to use them on a daily basis. The steps are our solution. They are our survival kit. They are our defense, for addiction is a deadly disease. Our steps are the principles that make our recovery possible.

STEP ONE

“We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.”

It doesn't matter what or how much we used. In Narcotics Anonymous staying clean has to come first. We realize that we cannot use drugs and live. When we admit our powerlessness and the inability to manage our own lives, we open the door to recovery. No one could convince us that we were addicts. It is an admission that we had to make for ourselves. When some of us have doubts, we ask ourselves this question: “Can I control my use of any form of mind or mood-altering chemicals?”

Most will see that control is impossible the moment it is suggested. Whatever the outcome, we find that we cannot control our using for any length of time. This would clearly suggest that an addict has no control over drugs. Powerlessness means using against our will. If we can't stop, how can we tell ourselves we are in control? The inability to stop using, even with the greatest willpower and the most sincere desire, is what we mean when we say, “We have absolutely no choice”. However, we do have a choice after we eliminate all the things we have been telling ourselves to justify our using. We didn't stumble into this fellowship brimming with love, honesty, open-mindedness or willingness. We reached the point where we could no longer continue because of physical, mental, and spiritual pain. When we were beaten, we became willing. Our inability to control our usage of drugs is a symptom of the disease of addiction. We are powerless not only over drugs, but our addiction as well. We need to admit this in order to recover. Addiction is a physical, mental and spiritual disease, affecting every area of our lives.

The physical aspect of our disease is the compulsive use of drugs: the inability to stop using once we have started. The mental aspect of our disease is the obsession, or overpowering desire, which leads us to using even when it has destroyed our lives. The spiritual part of our disease is our total self-centeredness. We felt that we could stop whenever we wanted to, despite all evidence to the contrary. Denial, substitution, rationalization, justification, distrust of others, guilt, embarrassment, dereliction, degradation, isolation, and loss of control are all results of our disease. Our disease is progressive, incurable and fatal. Most of us are relieved to find out we have a disease instead of a moral deficiency.

We are not responsible for our disease, but we are responsible for our recovery. Most of us tried to stop using on our own, but we were unable to live with or without drugs. Eventually we realized that we were powerless over our addiction.

Many of us tried to stop using on sheer willpower, and this turned out to be a temporary solution. We saw that willpower alone would not work for any length of time. We tried countless other remedies-psychiatrists, hospitals, recovery houses, lovers, new towns, new jobs. Everything we tried, failed. We began to see that we had rationalized the most outrageous sort of nonsense in order to justify the mess drugs had made of our lives.

Until we let go of all our reservations, the foundation on which our recovery is based is in danger. Reservations, no matter what they are, rob us of obtaining all the benefits this program has to offer. In ridding ourselves of all reservations, we surrender. Then, and only then, can we be helped to recover from the disease of addiction.

Now, the question is: “If we are powerless, how can Narcotics Anonymous help?” We begin by asking for help, and this is accomplished by working the Twelve Steps. The foundation is the admission that we, of ourselves, have no power over addiction. When we can accept this, we have completed the first part of Step One.

A second admission must be made before the foundation is complete. If we stop here, we will know only half the truth. We are great ones for manipulating the truth. We might say on one hand, “Yes, I am powerless over my

addiction”, and on the other hand, “When I get my life together, I can handle drugs”. Such thoughts and actions led us back to active addiction. It never occurred to us to ask, “If we can’t control our addiction, how can we control our lives?” We felt miserable without drugs.

Unemployability, dereliction and destruction are easily seen as characteristics of an unmanageable life. Our families generally are disappointed, baffled and confused by our actions and often have deserted or disowned us. Becoming employed, socially acceptable and reunited with our families does not make our lives manageable. Social acceptability does not equal recovery.

We have found that we had no choice except to completely change our old ways of thinking or go back to using. When we give our best, it works for us as it has worked for others. When we could no longer stand our old ways, we began to change. From that point forward, we can see that every clean day is a successful day, no matter what happens. Surrender means not having to fight anymore. We accept our addiction and life the way it is. We become willing to do whatever is necessary to stay clean, even the things we don’t like doing. Until we took Step One, we were full of fear and doubt. At this point, many of us felt lost and confused. We felt different. Upon working this step, we affirmed our surrender to the principles of Narcotics Anonymous, and only then did we begin to overcome the alienation of addiction. Help for addicts begins only when we are able to admit complete defeat. This can be frightening, but it is the foundation on which we have built our lives. Step One means that we do not have to use, and this is a great freedom. It took a while for some of us to realize how unmanageable our lives had become; for others of us, this was the only thing of which we could be sure. We knew in our hearts that drugs had the power to change us into something that we didn’t want to be.

Being clean and working this step, we are released from our chains. However, none of the steps work by magic. We do not just say the words of this step; we learn to live them. We see for ourselves that the Program has something to offer us.

We have found hope. We find that we can learn to function in the world we live in. We, too, can find meaning and purpose in life and be rescued from insanity, depravity and death. When we admit our powerlessness and inability to manage our own lives, we open the door for a Power greater than ourselves to help us. It is not where we were that counts, but where we are going.

STEP TWO

“We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”

The Second Step is necessary if we expect to achieve any sort of ongoing recovery. The First Step leaves us with the need to believe in something that can help us with our powerlessness, uselessness, and helplessness. The First Step has left a vacuum in our lives.

We need to find something to fill that void.

This is the purpose of the Second Step. Some of us didn’t take this step seriously at first; we passed over it with a minimum of concern, only to find the next steps would not work until we worked this one. Even when we admitted we needed help with our drug problem, many of us would not admit to the need for faith and sanity.

We have a disease: progressive, incurable and fatal. One way or another we went out and bought our destruction on the time plan! All of us, from the junkie snatching purses to the sweet little old ladies hitting two or three doctors for legal prescriptions, have one thing in common: we seek our destruction a bag at a time, a few pills at a time, or a bottle at a time until we die. This is at least part of the insanity of addiction. The price may seem higher for the addict who prostitutes for a fix than it is for the addict who merely lies to a doctor, but ultimately both pay with their lives. Insanity is repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results.

Many of us realize when we get to the Program that we have gone back time and again to using, even though we knew that we were destroying our lives by doing so. Insanity is using day after day knowing that only physical and mental destruction comes when we do. The most obvious insanity of the disease of addiction is the obsession to use drugs.

Ask yourself this question: Do I believe it would be insane to walk up to someone and say, "May I please have a heart attack or a fatal accident?" If you can agree that this would be an insane thing, you should have no problem with the Second Step. The first thing we do in this Program is stop using. At this point we begin to feel the pain of living without drugs or anything to replace them. This pain forces us to seek a Power greater than ourselves that can relieve our obsession to use.

The process of coming to believe is something that we seem to experience in similar ways. One thing most of us lacked was a working relationship with a Higher Power. We begin to develop this relationship by simply admitting to the possibility of a Power greater than ourselves. Most of us have no trouble admitting that addiction had become a destructive force in our lives. Our best efforts resulted in ever greater destruction and despair. At some point we realized we needed the help of some Power greater than our addiction. Our understanding of a Higher Power is up to us. No one is going to decide for us. We can call it the group, the program, or we can call it God. The only suggested guidelines are that this Power be loving, caring and greater than ourselves. We don't have to be religious to accept this idea. The point is that we open our minds to believe. We may have difficulty with this, but by keeping an open mind, sooner or later, we find the help we need.

We talked and listened to others. We saw other people recovering, and they told us what was working for them. We began to see evidence of some Power that could not be fully explained. Confronted with this evidence, we began to accept the existence of a Power greater than ourselves. We can use this Power before we begin to understand it. As we see "coincidences" and miracles happening in our lives, our acceptance becomes trust. We grow to feel comfortable with our Higher Power as a source of strength. As we learn to trust this Power, we begin to overcome our fears of life.

The process of coming to believe is a restoration to sanity. The strength to move into action comes from this belief. We need to accept this step to start us on the road to recovery. When our belief has grown, we are ready for Step Three.

STEP THREE

"We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him."

As addicts, we have turned our will and our lives over many times to a destructive power. Our will and our lives were controlled by drugs. We were trapped by our need for the instant gratification that drugs gave us. During that time, our total being-body, mind and spirit-was dominated by drugs. For a time it was pleasurable, then the euphoria began to wear off, and we saw the ugly side of addiction. We found that the higher our drugs took us, the lower they brought us. We faced two choices: either we suffered the pain of withdrawal or took more drugs.

For all addicts, the day comes when there is no longer a choice; we had to use. Having given our will and lives to our addiction, in utter desperation we looked for another way. In Narcotics Anonymous, we decide to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him. This is a giant step. We don't have to be religious; anyone can take it. All that is required is willingness. All that is essential is that we open the door to a Power greater than ourselves.

Our concept of God comes not from dogma but from what we believe ourselves, what works for us. Many of us understand God to be simply whatever keeps us clean. The right to a God of your understanding is total and without any catches. Because we have this right, it is necessary to be honest about our belief if we are to grow spiritually.

We found that all we needed to do was to try. When we gave our best effort to the Program, it worked for us as it has worked for countless others. The Third Step does not say, "We turned our will and our lives over to the care of God". It says, "We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him". We made the decision; it was not made for us by the drugs, our families, a probation officer, judge, therapist or doctor. We made it. For the first time since that first high, we have made a decision for ourselves.

The word "decision" implies action. This decision is based on faith. We have only to believe that the miracle we see working in the lives of clean addicts can happen to any addict with the desire to change. We simply realize there is a

force for spiritual growth that can help us become more tolerant, patient, and useful in helping others. Many of us have said, "Take my will and my life. Guide me in my recovery. Show me how to live". The relief of "letting go and letting God" helps us develop a life worth living.

Surrendering to the will of our Higher Power gets easier with daily practice. When we honestly try, it works. Many of us start our day with a simple request for guidance from our Higher Power.

Although we know that "turning it over" works, we may still take our will and life back. We may even get angry because God permits it. At times during our recovery, the decision to ask for God's help is our greatest source of strength and courage. We cannot make this decision often enough. We surrender quietly and let the God of our understanding take care of us.

At first, our heads reeled with the questions:

"What will happen when we turn our life over? Will we become 'perfect'?" We may have been more realistic than this. Some of us had to turn to an experienced N.A. member and ask, "What was it like for you?" The answer will vary from member to member. Most of us feel open-mindedness, willingness and surrender are the keys to this step.

We have surrendered our will and our lives to the care of a Power greater than ourselves. If we are thorough and sincere, we will notice a change for the better. Our fears are lessened and faith begins to grow as we learn the true meaning of surrender. We are no longer fighting fear, anger, guilt, self-pity or depression. We realize that what brought us to this Program is still with us today and will continue to guide us if we allow it. We are slowly beginning to lose the paralyzing fear of hopelessness. The proof of this step is in the way we live.

We have come to enjoy clean living and want more of the good things that the N.A. fellowship holds for us. We know now that we cannot pause in our spiritual program; we want all we can get.

We are now ready for our first honest self-appraisal, and we begin with Step Four.

STEP FOUR

"We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

The purpose of a searching and fearless moral inventory is to sort through the confusion and the contradiction of our lives so that we can find out who we really are. We are starting a new way of life and need to be rid of the burdens and traps which have controlled us and prevented our growth.

As we approach this step, most of us are afraid that there is a monster inside us that, if released, will destroy us. This fear can cause us to put off our inventory or may even prevent us from taking this crucial step at all. We have found that fear is lack of faith, and we have found a loving, personal God to whom we can turn. We no longer need to be afraid.

We have been experts at self-deception and rationalization; by writing our inventory, we can overcome these obstacles. A written inventory will unlock parts of our subconscious which remain hidden when we simply think about or talk about who we are. Once it is all down on paper, it is much easier to see, and much harder to deny our true nature. Honest self-assessment is one of the keys to our new way of life.

Let's face it; when we were using, we were not honest with ourselves. We are becoming honest with ourselves when we admit that addiction has defeated us and that we need help. It took a long time to admit that we were beaten. We found that we do not recover physically, mentally or spiritually overnight. Step Four will help us toward our recovery more than we imagine. Most of us find that we were neither as terrible, nor as wonderful, as we supposed. We are surprised to find that we have good points in our inventory. Anyone who has some time in the Program and has worked this step will tell you that the Fourth Step was a turning point in their life.

Some of us make the mistake of approaching the Fourth Step as if it were a confession of how horrible we are-what a bad person we have been. In this new way of life, a binge of emotional sorrow can be dangerous. This is not the purpose of the Fourth Step. We are trying to free ourselves of living in old, useless patterns. We take the Fourth Step

to gain the necessary strength and insight which enables us to grow. We may approach the Fourth Step in a number of ways.

It is advisable that before we start, we go over the first three steps with a sponsor. These steps are the preparation necessary to have the faith and courage to write a fearless inventory.

We get comfortable with our understanding of these steps. We allow ourselves the privilege of feeling good about what we are doing. We have been thrashing about for a long time and have gotten nowhere. Now we are going to start this step, not letting it frighten us. We simply put it on paper, to the best of our present ability.

We must be done with the past, not cling to it. We want to look our past in the face, see it for what it really was and release it so we can live today. The past, for most of us, has been a ghost in the closet. We have been afraid to open that closet for fear of what that ghost may do to us. We do not have to do this alone. Our will and our life are now in the hands of our Higher Power. Writing a thorough and honest inventory seemed impossible. It was, as long as we were operating under our own power. We take a few quiet moments before writing and ask for the strength to be fearless and thorough.

In Step Four, we begin to get in touch with ourselves. We write about our liabilities such as guilt, shame, remorse, self-pity, resentment, anger, depression, frustration, confusion, loneliness, anxiety, betrayal, hopelessness, failure, fear and denial.

We write on paper what is bothering us here and now. We have a tendency to think negatively, so putting it on paper gives us a chance to look more positively at what is happening. Assets must also be considered if we are to get an accurate and complete picture of ourselves. This is very difficult for most of us because it is hard for us to accept that we have good qualities. However, we all have assets, many of them newly found in the Program, such as being clean, open-mindedness, God-awareness, honesty with others, acceptance, positive action, sharing, willingness, courage, faith, caring, gratitude, kindness and generosity. Also, our inventories usually include a lot of material on relationships.

We review our past performance and our present behavior to see what we want to keep and what we want to be rid of. No one is forcing us to give up our misery. This step has the reputation of being difficult; in reality, it is quite simple.

We write our inventory for ourselves without considering with whom we might share it. We work Step Four as if there were no Step Five. We can write alone or near other people; whatever is more comfortable to the writer is fine. We can write as long or as short as needed. Someone with experience can help with this. The important thing is to write a moral inventory. If the word "moral" bothers us, we may call it a positive/negative inventory.

The way to write an inventory is to write it! Thinking about an inventory, talking about it, theorizing about the inventory will not get it written. We sit down with a notebook, ask for guidance, pick up our pen and start writing. Anything we think about is inventory material. When we realize how little we have to lose, and how much we have to gain, we begin this step.

A basic rule of thumb is that we can write too little, yet we can never write too much. The inventory will fit the individual. Perhaps this seems difficult or painful. It may appear impossible. We may fear that being in touch with our feelings will trigger an overwhelming chain reaction of pain and panic. We may feel like avoiding an inventory because of a fear of failure. When we ignore our feelings the tension becomes too much for us. The fear of impending doom is so great it overrides our fear of failure.

An inventory becomes a relief to do because the pain of doing it is less than the pain of not doing it. We learn that pain can be a motivating factor in recovery. Thus, facing it becomes unavoidable. Every topic of step meetings we attend seems to be on the Fourth Step or doing a daily inventory. Through the inventory process, we are able to deal with all the things that can build up. The more we live our Program, the more God seems to position us to have things surface, so we can write about them. We begin enjoying our recovery because we have a way to resolve the shame, guilt, or resentment.

We are also able to be rid of the stress trapped inside. Writing will lift the lid from our pressure cooker to see whether we want to serve it up, put the lid back on it, or throw it out, we no longer have to stew in it. We sit down with paper and pen and ask for our God's help in revealing the defects that are causing pain and suffering. We pray for the courage to be fearless and thorough so that this inventory may help us to put our lives in order. When we pray and take action, it always goes better for us.

We are not going to be perfect. If we were perfect, we would not be human. The important thing is that we do our best. We use the tools available to us, and we develop the ability to survive our emotions. We do not want to lose any of what we have gained; we want to continue in the Program. It is our experience that no matter how searching and thorough, no inventory is of any lasting effect unless it is promptly followed by an equally thorough Fifth Step.

STEP FIVE

“We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.”

The Fifth Step is the key to freedom. It allows us to live clean in the here and now. Sharing the exact nature of our wrongs sets us free to live. After taking a thorough Fourth Step, we have to deal with what we have found in our inventory. We are told that if we keep these defects inside us, they will lead us back to using. Holding on to our past would eventually sicken us and keep us from taking part in this new way of life. If we are not honest when we take a Fifth Step, we will have the same negative results that dishonesty brought us in the past.

Step Five suggests that we admit to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. We have looked at our wrongs, have seen patterns on paper, and have begun to see deeper aspects of our disease. Now we sit down with another person and share our inventory out loud. Our Higher Power will be with us when we do this, and will help to free us from the fear of facing ourselves and another human being. It seemed unnecessary to some of us to admit the exact nature of our wrongs to our Higher Power. “God already knows that stuff”, we rationalized. Although He already knows, the admission must come from our own lips to be truly effective. Step Five is not simply a reading of Step Four.

For years, we avoided seeing ourselves as we really were. We were ashamed of ourselves and felt isolated from the rest of the world. Now that we have the shameful part of our past trapped, we can sweep it out of our lives if we face and admit it. It would be tragic to have it all written down and then shove it in a drawer. These defects grow in the dark, and die in the light of exposure.

Before coming to Narcotics Anonymous, we felt that no one could ever relate to us or understand the things we had done. We feared that if we ever revealed ourselves as we were, we would surely be rejected. Most addicts are uncomfortable about this. We recognize that we have been unrealistic in feeling this way. Our fellow members do understand us. We must carefully choose the person who is to hear our Fifth Step.

We must make sure they know what we are doing and why we are doing it. Although there is no hard rule about whom we should choose, it is important that we trust the person. Only complete confidence in the person's integrity and discretion can make us willing to be thorough in this step. Some of us take our Fifth Step with a total stranger, although some of us feel more comfortable choosing a member of Narcotics Anonymous. We know that another addict would be less likely to judge us with malice or misunderstanding.

Once we make up our minds and are actually alone with the person we have chosen to accept our confidence, we proceed, with their encouragement. We want to be definite, honest and thorough, realizing that this is a life and death matter.

Some of us have attempted to hide part of our past, and in doing so, have tried desperately to find easier ways of dealing with our inner feelings. We may think that we have done enough by writing everything down, and this is a mistake we cannot afford. This step will expose our motives and our actions for what they really are. We cannot expect these things to reveal themselves.

Our embarrassment is eventually overcome and we can avoid future guilt.

We do not procrastinate. We must be exact. We want to tell the simple truth, cut and dried, as quickly as possible. There is always a danger that we will exaggerate our wrongs, and an equal danger that we will minimize or rationalize away our part in past situations. If we are anything like we were when we first entered the N.A. fellowship, we still want to “sound good.”

Addicts tend to live secret lives. For many years, we covered low self esteem by hiding behind phony images that we hoped would fool people. Unfortunately, we ended up fooling ourselves more than anyone. Although we often appeared attractive and confident on the outside, we were really hiding a shaky, insecure person on the inside. The masks have to go. We share our inventory as it is written, skipping nothing. We continue to approach this step with honesty and thoroughness until we finish. It is a great relief to get rid of all our secrets and to share the burden of our past.

Usually, as we share this step, the listener will share some of his or her story too, and we will find out that the things about ourselves that we thought were so awful or different were not all that unique. We see, by the acceptance of our confidant, that we can be accepted just the way we are.

We may never be able to remember all of our past mistakes. We do, however, give it our best and most complete effort. We begin to experience real personal feelings of a spiritual nature. Where once we had spiritual theories, we now begin to awaken to spiritual reality. This initial examination of ourselves usually reveals some things about us that we don't particularly like. However, facing these things and bringing them out in the open makes it possible for us to deal with them constructively. We cannot make these changes alone. We will need the help of God, as we understand Him, and the fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.

STEP SIX

“We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.”

Why ask for something that we are not ready for? This would be asking for trouble. So many times we addicts have sought the rewards of hard work without the labor. Willingness is what we strive for in Step Six. How sincerely we work this step will be proportionate to our desire for change. Do we really want to be rid of our resentments, our anger, our fear? Many of us cling to our fears, doubts, and self-loathing or hatred of others because there is a certain distorted security in familiar pain. It seems safer to hold on to what we know than to let go of it for the unknown.

Letting go of character defects should be done decisively. We suffer because their demands weaken us. Where we were proud, we now find that we cannot get away with arrogance. Those of us who are not humble are humiliated. If we are greedy, we find that we are never satisfied. Where before we could get away with fear, anger, dishonesty or self-pity, we now see where they cloud our ability to think logically. Selfishness becomes an intolerable, destructive chain that ties us to our bad habits. Our defects drain us of all our time and energy.

We examine the Fourth Step inventory and get a good look at what these defects are doing to our lives. We begin to long for freedom from these defects. We pray or otherwise become willing, ready and able to let God remove these destructive traits. We need a personality change if we are to stay clean. We want to change.

We should approach old defects with an open mind. We are aware of them and yet we still make the same mistakes and are unable to break the bad habits. We look to the fellowship for the kind of life we want for ourselves. We ask our friends, “Did you let go?” Almost without exception the answer is, “Yes, to the best of our ability”. When we see how our defects exist in our lives and accept them, we can let go of them and get on with our new life. We learn that we are growing when we make new mistakes instead of repeating old ones.

When we are working Step Six, it is important to remember that we are human and should not place unrealistic expectations on ourselves. This is a step of willingness. That is the spiritual principle of Step Six. It is as if to say that we are now willing to move in a spiritual direction. Being human we will, of course, wander.

Rebellion is a character defect that spoils us here. We need not lose faith when we become rebellious. The indifference or intolerance that rebellion can bring out in us has to be overcome by persistent effort. We keep asking for willingness. We may be doubtful still that God will see fit to relieve us or that something will go wrong. We ask another member who says, "You're right where you're supposed to be". We renew our readiness to have our defects removed. We surrender to the simple suggestions that the Program offers us. Even though we are not entirely ready, we are headed in that direction.

Eventually faith, humility and acceptance replace pride and rebellion. We come to know ourselves. We find ourselves growing into a mature consciousness. We begin to feel better as willingness grows into hope for relief. Perhaps for the first time, we see a vision of our new life. With this in sight, we put our willingness into action by moving on to Step Seven.

STEP SEVEN

"We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."

Having decided we want God, as we understand Him, to relieve us of the useless or destructive aspects of our personalities, we have arrived at the Seventh Step. We couldn't handle the ordeal of life all by ourselves. It wasn't until we made a real mess of our lives that we realized we couldn't do it alone. By admitting this, we achieved a glimpse of humility. This is the main ingredient of Step Seven. Humility has a lot to do with getting honest with ourselves, which is something we have practiced from Step One. We accepted our addiction and powerlessness. We found a strength beyond ourselves and learned to rely on it. We examined our lives and discovered who we really are. To be truly humble is to accept and honestly try to be who we are. None of us are perfectly good or perfectly bad. We are people who have assets and liabilities and most important of all, we are human.

Humility is as much a part of staying clean as food and water are to staying alive. As our addiction progressed, we devoted our energy toward satisfying our material desires. All other needs were beyond our reach. We always wanted gratification of our basic desires.

Character defects are those things which cause pain and misery all of our lives. If they really contributed to our health and happiness, we would not have come to such a state of desperation. We had to become ready to have God remove these defects.

The Seventh Step is an action step, and it is time to ask God for help and relief. We have to understand that our way of thinking is not the only way; other people can give us direction. When someone points out a shortcoming, our first reaction may be one of defensiveness. We must realize that we are not perfect. There will always be room for growth. If we truly want to be free, we will take a good look at what is pointed out to us. If the shortcomings we discover are real and we have a chance to be rid of them, we will surely experience a sense of well-being. Some will want to get on their knees for this step.

Some will be very quiet, and others will put forth a great emotional effort to show intense willingness. The word humble applies because we approach this Power greater than ourselves to ask for the freedom to live without the limitations of our past ways. Many of us are willing to do it without reservations, on pure blind faith, because we are sick of what we have been doing and how we are feeling. Whatever works, we go all the way.

This is our road to spiritual growth. We change every day to gradually, carefully and simply pull ourselves out of the isolation and loneliness of addiction into the mainstream of life. This comes not from wishing, but from action and prayer. The main objective of Step Seven is to get out of ourselves and strive for achieving the will of our Higher Power. If we are careless and fail to grasp the spiritual meaning of this step, we may have difficulties and stir up old troubles. One danger is in being too hard on ourselves.

Sharing with other addicts in recovery helps us to not become morbidly serious about ourselves. Accepting the defects of others can help us become humble enough to be relieved of our own defects. God often works through those who care enough about our recovery to help make us aware of our shortcomings.

We have noticed that humility plays a big part in this Program and our new way of life. We take our inventory; we become ready to let God remove our defects of character; we humbly ask Him to remove our shortcomings. This is our road to spiritual growth and we will want to continue. We are ready for Step Eight.

STEP EIGHT

“We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.”

This step is the test of our new-found humility. Our purpose is to achieve freedom from the guilt we have carried so far, so that we can look the world in the eye with neither aggressiveness nor fear.

Are we willing to make a list to clear away the fear and guilt that our past holds for us? Our experience tells us that we must become willing before this step will have any effect. The Eighth Step is not easy; it demands a new kind of honesty about our relations with other people. The Eighth Step starts the procedure of forgiving others and possibly being forgiven by them, forgiving ourselves, and learning how to live in the world. By the time we reach this step, we have become ready to understand rather than to be understood. We can live and let live easier when we know the areas in which we owe amends. It seems hard now, but once we have done it, we will wonder why we did not do it long ago.

We need some real honesty before we can make an accurate list. In preparing to make the Eighth Step list, it is helpful to define harm. One definition of harm is physical or mental damage. Another definition of harm is inflicting pain, suffering or loss. The damage may be caused by something that is said, done or left undone, and the harm resulting from these words or actions may be either intentional or unintentional. The degree of harm can range from making someone feel mentally uncomfortable to inflicting bodily injury or even death.

A problem many of us have with the Eighth Step and the admission of the harm is the belief that we were victims, not victimizers, in our addiction. Avoiding this rationalization is crucial to the Eighth Step. We must separate what was done to us from what we did. We cut away all our justifications and all our ideas of being a victim. We often feel that we only harmed ourselves, yet we usually list ourselves last, if at all. This step is doing the leg work to repair the wreckage of our lives. It will not make us better people to judge the faults of another. It will make us feel better to clean up our lives by relieving ourselves of guilt. By writing our list, we can no longer deny that we did harm. We admit that we hurt others, directly or indirectly, through some action, lie, broken promise, neglect or whatever.

We make our list, or take it from our Fourth Step, and add any additional people we can think of. We face this list honestly, and openly examine our faults so that we can become willing to make amends.

We may not know who it was we wronged. Just about anyone we came in contact with risked being harmed. Many members mention their parents, spouses, children, friends, lovers, other addicts, casual acquaintances, co-workers, employers, teachers, landlords or total strangers. We may find it beneficial to make a separate list of people to whom we owe financial amends. We may also place ourselves on the list because while practicing our addiction, we have slowly been killing ourselves.

As with each step, we must be thorough. Most of us fall short of our goals more often than we exceed them. At the same time, we cannot put off completion of this step just because we are not sure we are done. We are never done.

The final difficulty in working the Eighth Step is separating it from the Ninth Step. Projecting about actually making amends can be a major obstacle both in making the list and in becoming willing. We do this step as if there were no Ninth Step. We do not even think about making the amends but just concentrate on exactly what the Eighth Step says which is to make a list and to become willing. The main thing this step does for us is to help build an awareness that, little by little, we are gaining new attitudes about ourselves and how we deal with other people.

Listening carefully to other members share their experience with this step can clean up any confusion we may have about our list and the benefits of it. Also, our sponsors may share with us how it worked for them. Asking questions during a meeting can give us the benefit of Group Conscience.

The Eighth Step is a big change from a life dominated by guilt and remorse. Our futures are changed because we don't have to avoid those we have harmed, and as a result of this step, we've received a new freedom which contributes to the end of isolation. As we realize our need to be forgiven, we tend to be more forgiving. At least, we know we are no longer intentionally making life miserable for people in our recovery.

The Eighth Step is an action step. Like all the steps, it offers immediate benefits. We are now free to begin our amends in Step Nine.

STEP NINE

“We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.”

This step should not be avoided. If we do, we are reserving a place in our Program for relapse. Pride, fear and procrastination often seem an impossible barrier; they stand in the way of progress and growth. The important thing is to take action and be ready to accept the reactions of those persons we have harmed. We make amends to the best of our ability.

Timing is an essential part of this step. We should make amends when the first opportunity presents itself, except when to do so will cause more harm. Sometimes we cannot actually make the amends; it is neither possible nor practical. In some cases, amends may be beyond our means. We have found that willingness can serve in the place of action where we are unable to contact the person we have harmed. However, we should never fail to contact anyone because of embarrassment, fear or procrastination.

We want to be free of our guilt, but we don't wish to do so at the expense of anyone else. We might run the risk of involving a third person or some companion from our using days who does not wish to be exposed. We do not have the right or the need to endanger another person. It is often necessary to take guidance from others in these matters. We recommend turning our legal problems over to lawyers and our financial or medical problems to professionals. Part of learning how to live is not to take on problems and responsibilities that we are not equipped to deal with.

In some old relationships, an unresolved conflict may still exist. We do our part to resolve old conflicts by making our amends. We want to step away from further antagonisms and ongoing resentments. In many instances we can only go to the person and humbly ask for understanding of past wrongs. Sometimes this will be a joyous occasion when some old friend or relative proves very willing to let go of their bitterness. To go to someone who is hurting from the burn of our misdeeds can be dangerous. Indirect amends may be necessary where direct ones would be unsafe or endanger other people. We can only make our amends to the best of our ability. We try to remember that when we make amends, we are doing it for ourselves. Instead of feeling guilty and remorseful, we feel relieved about our past.

We accept that it was our actions that caused our negative attitude. Step Nine helps us with our guilt and others with their anger. Sometimes, the only amend we can make is to stay clean ourselves. We owe it to ourselves and loved ones. We are no longer making a mess in society as a result of our using. The only way we can make amends to some of the people we have harmed is to contribute to society. Now, we are helping ourselves and other addicts achieve cleanliness. This is a tremendous amend to the whole community.

In the process of our recovery we were restored to sanity and part of sanity is effectively relating to others. We less often view people as a threat to our security. Real security will replace the physical ache and mental confusion we have experienced in the past. We approach those we have harmed with humility and patience. Many of our sincere well-wishers would be reluctant to accept our recovery as real. We must remember the pain they have known. In time many miracles will occur. Many of us that were separated from our families succeed in establishing relationships with them. Eventually it becomes easier for them to accept the change in us. Clean time speaks for itself. Patience is an important part of our recovery. The unconditional love we experience will rejuvenate our will to live, and each positive move on our part will be matched by an unexpected opportunity. A lot of courage and faith goes into making an amend, and a lot of spiritual growth results.

We are achieving freedom from the wreckage of our past. We will want to keep our “house in order” by practicing a continuous personal inventory in Step Ten.

STEP TEN

“We continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.”

The Tenth Step frees us from the wreckage of our present. If we do not stay aware of our defects, they can drive us into a corner that we can't get out of clean.

One of the first things we learn in Narcotics Anonymous is that if we use, we lose. By the same token, we won't experience as much pain if we can avoid the things that cause us pain. Continuing to take a personal inventory means that we form a habit of looking at ourselves, our actions, our attitudes and our relationships on a regular basis.

We are creatures of habit and are vulnerable to our old ways of thinking and reacting. At times it seems easier to continue in the old rut of self-destruction rather than to attempt a new and seemingly dangerous route. We don't have to be trapped by our old patterns. Today we have a choice.

The Tenth Step can do this for us; it can help us correct our living problems and prevent their recurrence. We examine our actions during the day. Some of us write about our feelings, explaining how we felt and what part we might have played in any problems which occurred. Did we cause someone harm? Do we need to admit that we were wrong? If we find difficulties, we make an effort to take care of them. When these things are left undone, they have a way of festering.

This step can be a defense against the old insanity. We can ask ourselves if we are being drawn into old patterns of anger, resentment or fear. Do we feel trapped? Are we “setting ourselves up” for trouble? Are we too hungry, angry, lonely or tired? Are we taking ourselves too seriously? Are we judging our insides by the outside appearances of others? Do we suffer from some physical problem? The answers to questions like these can help us to deal with the difficulties of the moment. We no longer have to live with the feeling of a “hole in the gut”. A lot of our chief concerns and major difficulties come from our inexperience with living without drugs. Often when we ask an “oldtimer” what to do we are amazed at the simplicity of the answer.

The Tenth Step can be a pressure relief valve. We work this step while the day's ups and downs are still fresh in our minds. We list what we have done and try not to rationalize our actions. This may be done in writing at the end of the day. The first thing we do is stop! Then we take the time to allow ourselves the privilege of thinking. We examine our actions, our reactions, and our motives. We often find that we've been “doing” better than we've been “feeling”. This allows us to find out where we have gone wrong and admit fault before things get any worse. We need to avoid rationalizing. We promptly admit our faults, not explain them.

We work this step continuously. This is a prevention, and the more we do it, the less we will need the corrective part of this step. This is really a great tool. It gives us a way of avoiding grief before we bring it on ourselves. We monitor our feelings, our emotions, our fantasies, and our actions. By constantly looking at these things we may be able to avoid repeating the actions that make us feel bad.

We need this step even when we're feeling good and things are going well. Good feelings are new to us and we need to nurture them. In times of trouble we can try the things that worked before. We have the right not to feel miserable. We have a choice. The good times can also be a trap; the danger is that we may forget that our first priority is staying clean. For us, recovery is more than just pleasure.

We need to keep in mind that everyone makes mistakes. We will never be perfect. However, we can accept this fact by using Step Ten. By continuing a personal inventory we are set free, in the here and now, from ourselves and the past. We no longer are forced to justify our existence. This step allows us to be ourselves.

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.”

The first ten steps have set the stage for us to improve our conscious contact with the God of our understanding. They give us the foundation to achieve our long-sought positive goals. Having entered into this phase of our spiritual program through practicing our previous ten steps, most of us find that we can welcome the exercise of prayer and meditation. We have found that our spiritual condition is the basis for a successful recovery that offers unlimited growth.

Many of us really begin to appreciate the fact that we have been clean for awhile when we get to the Eleventh Step. In the Eleventh Step, the life we've been practicing begins to take on a deeper meaning. By the surrender of our control, we gain a far greater power.

The nature of our belief will determine the manner of our prayers and meditations. We need only to make sure we have a system of belief which works to provide for our needs. Results count in recovery. As has been noted elsewhere, our prayers seemed to work as soon as we entered the Program of Narcotics Anonymous and surrendered to our disease. The conscious contact described in this step is the direct result of living these steps. We use this step to improve and maintain our spiritual condition.

When we first came into the Program, we received help from some Power greater than ourselves. This was set in motion by our surrendering to the Program. The purpose of the Eleventh Step is to increase our awareness of that Power and to improve our ability to use it as a source of strength in our new lives.

The more we improve our conscious contact with our God through prayer and meditation, the easier it is to say, "Your will, not mine, be done". We can ask for God's help when we need it and our lives get better. The experiences some people talk about in regard to meditation no more apply to us than do their individual religious beliefs. Ours is a spiritual, not religious, program. By the time we get to the Eleventh Step, the factors that could cause problems have usually been dealt with by the actions we have taken in the preceding steps. Our deepest longings and images of the kind of people we would like to be are but fleeting glimpses of God's will for us. Often our outlooks are so limited we can only see our immediate wants and needs.

It is easy to slip back into our old ways. We have to learn to maintain our new lives on a spiritually sound basis to insure our continued growth and recovery. God will not force His goodness on us, but we will receive it if we ask. We usually feel the difference at the time and see the change in our lives later. When we finally get our own selfish motives out of the way, we begin to find a peace we never imagined. Enforced morality lacks the power that comes to us when we choose to live a spiritually-oriented life. Most of us pray when we are hurting. We learn that if we pray regularly we won't be hurting as often, or as intensely.

Outside of Narcotics Anonymous, there are any number of different groups practicing meditation, but nearly all of them are connected with a particular religion or philosophy. An endorsement of any one of these methods would be a violation of our Traditions and a restriction on individuals' freedom to have a God of their own understanding. Meditation allows us to develop spiritually in our own way. Some of the things that didn't work for us before might work today. We take a fresh look each day with an open mind. We now know that if we pray to do God's will, we will receive what is really best for us, regardless of what we think. This knowledge is based on our belief and experience as recovering addicts.

Prayer is communicating our concerns to a Power greater than ourselves. Sometimes when we pray, a remarkable thing happens; we find the means, the ways and the energies to perform tasks far beyond our capacities. We grasp the limitless strength provided for us through our daily prayer and surrender so long as we keep faith and renew it.

For some, prayer is asking for God's help, and meditation is listening for God's answer. We learn to be careful of praying for specific things. We pray that God will show us His will and that He will help us carry that out. In some cases He makes His will so obvious to us that we have little difficulty seeing it. In others, our egos are so self-centered that we won't accept God's will for us without another struggle and surrender. If we pray for God to remove any distracting influences, the quality of our prayers usually improves and we feel the difference. Prayer takes practice and it may be well to remind ourselves that skilled people were not born with their skills. It took lots of effort on their part to develop them. Through prayer we seek conscious contact with our God. In meditation we achieve this contact and the Eleventh Step helps us to maintain it.

We may have been exposed to and practiced many religious and meditative disciplines before coming to Narcotics Anonymous. Some of us were devastated and completely confused by these practices, and we were sure that it was God's will for us to use drugs to reach "higher consciousness". Many of us find ourselves in very strange states as a result of these practices. We never suspected the damaging effects of our addiction as the root of the difficulty and pursued to the end whatever path offered hope.

In quiet moments of meditation, God's will can become evident to us. Quieting the mind through meditation brings an inner peace which brings us into contact with the God within. A basic premise of meditation is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain conscious contact unless our mind is still. The usual, never-ending succession of thoughts has to cease for progress to be made. So our preliminary practice is aimed at stilling the mind, and letting the thoughts that arise die a natural death. We leave our thoughts behind, as the meditation part of the Eleventh Step becomes a reality for us.

Emotional balance is one of the first results of meditation, and our experience bears this out.

Some of us have come into the Program broken, and hung around for awhile, only to find God or salvation in one kind of religious cult or another. It is easy to float back out the door on a cloud of religious zeal and forget we are addicts with an incurable disease.

It is said that for meditation to be of value, the results must show in our daily lives, and this is implicit in the Eleventh Step: "... His will for us and the power to carry it out". For those of us who do not pray, meditation is our only way of working this step.

We find ourselves praying because it brings us peace and restores our confidence and courage. It helps us to live a life free of fear and distrust. When we remove our own selfish motives and pray for guidance, we find feelings of peace and serenity that we never knew before. We begin to experience an awareness and an empathy with other people that was not possible before.

As we seek our personal contact with God, we begin to open up like a flower in the sun. We begin to see that God's love has been here all the time, just waiting for us to accept it. We can put in the footwork and accept what's being freely given to us on a daily basis. We find relying on God becomes more comfortable for us.

When we first come to the Program, we usually express a lot of things which seem to be important wants and needs. As we grow spiritually and find out about a Power greater than ourselves, we begin to realize that as long as our spiritual needs are truly met, our living problems are reduced to a point of comfort. When we forget where our real strength lies, we quickly become subject to the same patterns of thinking and action that got us to the Program in the first place. We eventually redefine our beliefs and understanding to the point where we see that our greatest need is for knowledge of God's will for us and the strength to carry that out. We are able to set aside some of our personal preference, if necessary, to do this because we learn that God's will consists of the very things we care most about. God's will for us becomes our own true will for ourselves. This happens in an intuitive manner which cannot be adequately explained in words.

We become willing to let other people be what they are without having to pass judgment on them. The urgency to take care of things isn't there anymore. We couldn't comprehend acceptance in the beginning-now we can.

We know that whatever the day brings, God has given us everything we need for our spiritual well-being. It is all right for us to admit powerlessness because God is powerful enough to help us stay clean and enjoy spiritual progress. God is helping us get our house in order.

We begin to see more and more clearly what is happening, and through constant contact with our Higher Power, the answers we are looking for come to us and we gain the ability to do what we once could not. We respect the beliefs of others. We encourage you to seek strength and guidance according to your belief.

We are thankful for this step because we begin to get what is best for us. The way we have sometimes prayed for our wants often got us into the trap of having to live with them once we got them. We could pray and get something, then have to pray for its removal because we couldn't handle it.

Hopefully, having learned the power of prayer and the responsibility prayer brings with it, we can use the Eleventh Step as a guideline for our daily Program.

We begin to pray only for God's will for us. This way we are getting only what we are capable of handling. We are able to respond to it and handle it because God helps us prepare for it. Some of us simply use our words to give thanks for God's grace.

In an attitude of surrender and humility, we approach this step again and again to receive the gift of knowledge and strength from the God of our understanding. The Tenth Step clears the errors of the present so we may work this step. Without this step, it is unlikely that we could ever experience a spiritual awakening, be able to practice spiritual principles in our lives, or carry a sufficient message to attract others to recovery. There is a spiritual principle of giving away what we have been given in Narcotics Anonymous in order to keep it. By helping others to stay clean, we enjoy the benefit of the spiritual wealth we have found. We must give freely and gratefully that which has been freely and gratefully given to us.

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."

We came to Narcotics Anonymous as the end result of the wreckage of our past. The last thing we expected was an awakening of the spirit. We just wanted to stop hurting.

The steps lead to an awakening of a spiritual nature. This awakening within is evidenced by change in our lives. This change makes us better able to live by spiritual principles and to carry our message of recovery and hope to the addict who still suffers. The message, however, is meaningless unless we live it. As we live it, our lives and actions give it more meaning than our words and literature ever could.

The idea of a spiritual awakening takes many different forms in the different personalities we find in the fellowship. However, all spiritual awakenings have some things in common. Among them are an end to loneliness and a sense of direction in our lives. Many of us believe a spiritual awakening is meaningless unless accompanied by an increase in peace of mind and concern for others. In order to maintain peace of mind, we strive to live in the here and now.

Those of us who have made the effort to work these steps to the best of our ability received many benefits. We believe that these benefits are a direct result of living this Program.

When we first begin to enjoy relief from our addiction, we run the risk of assuming control of our lives again. We forget the agony and pain we have known. Our disease controlled all our lives when we were using. It is ready and waiting to take over again. We quickly forget that all our past efforts at controlling our lives failed.

By this time most of us have come to realize that the only way we can keep what was given to us is by sharing this new gift of life with the still-suffering addict. This is our best insurance against relapse to the torturous existence of using. We call it carrying the message and we do it in a number of ways.

In the Twelfth Step, we practice the spiritual principles of giving the N.A. message of recovery in order to keep it. Even a member with one day in the N.A. fellowship can carry the message that this Program works.

When we share with someone new, we may ask to be used as a spiritual instrument of our Higher Power. We don't set ourselves up as gods. We often ask for the help of another recovering addict when sharing with a new person. It is a privilege to respond to a cry for help. We who have been in the pits of despair feel fortunate to help others find recovery.

We help new people learn the principles of Narcotics Anonymous. We try to make them feel welcome and help them learn what the Program has to offer. We share our experience, strength and hope and when possible accompany them

to a meeting.

The selfless service of this work is the very principle of Step Twelve. We received our recovery from the God of our understanding, so we now make ourselves available as His tool to share recovery with those who seek it. Most of us learn in time that we can only carry our message to someone who is asking for help. Sometimes the only message necessary to make the suffering addict reach out is the power of example. An addict may be suffering but unwilling to ask for help. We can make ourselves available to these people, so that when they ask, someone will be there.

Learning the art of helping others when it is appropriate is a benefit of the N.A. Program. Remarkably, the Twelve Steps guide us from humiliation and despair to a state wherein we may act as instruments of our Higher Power. We are given the ability to help a fellow addict when no one else can. We see it happening among us every day. This miraculous turnabout is evidence of spiritual awakening. We share from our own personal experience what it has been like for us. The temptation to give advice is great, but when we do so we lose the respect of newcomers. This clouds our message. A simple, honest message of recovery from addiction rings true.

We attend meetings and make ourselves visible and available to serve the fellowship. We give freely and gratefully of our time, service, and what we have found here. The service we speak of in Narcotics Anonymous is the primary purpose of our groups. Service work is carrying the message to the addict who still suffers. The more eagerly we wade in and work, the richer our spiritual awakening will be.

The first way in which we carry the message speaks for itself. People see us on the street and remember us as devious, frightened loners. They notice the fear leaving our faces. They see us gradually come alive. Once we find the N.A. way, boredom and complacency have no place in our new life. By staying clean we begin to practice such spiritual principles as hope, surrender, acceptance, honesty, open-mindedness, willingness, faith, tolerance, patience, humility, unconditional love, sharing and caring. As our recovery progresses, they touch every area of our lives because we simply try to live this Program in the here and now.

We find indescribable joy as we start to learn how to live by the principles of recovery. It is the joy of watching a person two days clean say to a person with one day clean, "An addict alone is in bad company". It is the joy of watching a person who was really struggling to make it, suddenly, in the middle of helping another addict to stay clean, become able to find the words they need to say coming from within.

We feel our lives have become worthwhile. Spiritually refreshed, we are glad to be alive. When using, our lives became an exercise in survival. Now we are doing much more living than surviving. Realizing the bottom line is staying clean, we can enjoy it. We like being clean and enjoy helping to carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers. Going to meetings really works.

Practicing spiritual principles in our daily lives leads us to a new image of ourselves. Honesty, humility and open-mindedness help us to treat our associates fairly. Our decisions become tempered with tolerance. We learn to respect ourselves.

The lessons we learn in our recovery are sometimes bitter and painful. By helping others we find the reward of self-respect as we are able to share these lessons with other members of Narcotics Anonymous. We cannot deny other addicts their pain, but we can carry the message of hope that was given to us by our fellow addicts in recovery. We share the principles of recovery as they have worked in our lives. God helps us as we help each other. Life takes on a new meaning, a new joy, and a quality of being and feeling worthwhile. We become spiritually refreshed and are glad to be alive. One aspect of our spiritual awakening comes through the new understanding of our Higher Power that we develop by sharing another addict's recovery.

Yes, we are a vision of hope. We are examples of the Program working. The joy we have in living clean is an attraction to the addict who still suffers.

We do recover to live clean and happy lives. Welcome to N.A. The steps do not end here; they are a new beginning.

Chapter Five WHAT CAN I DO?

Begin your own program by taking Step One from the previous chapter, "How It Works". When we fully concede to our innermost selves that we are powerless over our addiction, we have taken a big step in our recovery. Many of us have had some reservations at this point, so give yourself a break and be as thorough as possible from the start. Go on to Step Two, and so forth, and as you go on you will come to an understanding of the program for yourself. If you are in an institution of any kind and have stopped using for the present, you can with a clear mind try this way of life.

Upon release, continue your daily program and contact a member of N.A. Do this by mail, by phone, or in person. Better yet, come to our meetings. Here you will find answers to some of the things that may be disturbing you now.

If you are not in an institution, the same holds true. Stop using for today. Most of us can do for eight or twelve hours what seems impossible for a longer period of time. If the obsession or compulsion becomes too great, put yourself on a five minute basis of not using. Minutes will grow to hours, and hours to days, so you will break the habit and gain some peace of mind. The real miracle happens when you realize that the need for drugs has in some way been lifted from you. You have stopped using and started to live.

The first step to recovery is to stop using. We cannot expect the Program to work for us if our minds and bodies are still clouded by drugs. We can do this anywhere, even in prison or an institution. We do it anyway we can, cold turkey or in a detox, just as long as we get clean.

Developing the concept of God as we understand Him is a project we can undertake. We can also use the steps to improve our attitudes. Our best thinking is what got us into trouble. We recognize the need for change. Our disease involves much more than using, and so our recovery must involve much more than simple abstinence. Recovery is an active change of our ideas and attitudes.

The ability to face problems is necessary to stay clean. If we had problems in the past it is unlikely that simple abstinence will provide the solution to them. Guilt and worry can keep us from living in the here and now. The denial of our disease and other reservations keep us sick. Many of us feel that we cannot possibly have a happy life without drugs. We suffer from fear and insanity and feel that there is no escape from using. We may fear rejection from our friends if we get clean. These feelings are common to the addict seeking recovery. We could be suffering from an overly sensitive ego. Some of the most common excuses for using are loneliness, self-pity and fear. Dishonesty, close-mindedness and unwillingness are three of our greatest enemies. Self-obsession is the core of our disease.

We have learned that old ideas and old ways won't help us to stay clean or live a better life. If we allow ourselves to stagnate and cling to "terminal hipness" and "fatal cool", we are giving into the symptoms of our disease. One of the problems is that we found it easier to change our perception of reality than to change reality. We must give up this old concept and face the fact that reality and life go on whether we choose to accept them or not. We can only change the way we react and the way we see ourselves. This is necessary for us to accept that change is gradual and recovery is an ongoing process.

A meeting a day at least the first ninety days is a good idea. There is a special feeling that comes over a person with our disease when they discover that there are other people who share their difficulties, past and present. At first we can do little more than go to meetings. Probably we cannot remember a single word, person or thought from our first meeting. In time, we relax and enjoy the atmosphere of recovery. Meetings strengthen our recovery. We may be scared at first because we don't know anyone. Some of us think we don't need meetings. When we hurt though, we go to a meeting for relief. Meetings keep us in touch with where we've been, but more importantly with where we could go in our recovery. As we go to meetings regularly, we learn the value of talking with other addicts who share our problems and goals. We have to open up and accept the love and understanding we need in order to change. When we become acquainted with the fellowship and its principles and begin to put them into action, we start to grow. We apply our efforts to our most obvious problems and let go of the rest. We do the job at hand and as we progress, new opportunities for improvement present themselves.

Our new friends in the fellowship will help us. Our common effort is recovery. Clean, we face the world together. We no longer have to feel backed into a corner and at the mercy of events and circumstances. It makes all the difference to have friends who care if we hurt. We find our place in the fellowship, and we join a group whose meetings help us in our recovery. We have been untrustworthy for so long that most of our friends and families will doubt our recovery because they think it won't last. We need people that understand our disease and the recovery process. At meetings we can share with other addicts, ask questions and learn about our disease. We learn new ways to live. We are no longer limited to our old ideas.

Gradually, we replace old habits with new ways of living. We become willing to change. We go to meetings regularly, get and use telephone numbers, read literature, and most importantly, we don't use. We learn to share with others. If we don't tell someone we are hurting, they will seldom see it. When we reach out for help, we can receive it.

Another tool for the newcomer is involvement with the fellowship. As we become involved we learn to keep the Program first and take it easy in other matters. We begin immediately by asking for help and trying out the recommendation of the people at the meetings. It is beneficial to allow others in the group to help us. In time, we will be able to pass on what we have been given. We learn that service will get us out of ourselves. Our work can begin with simple things: emptying ashtrays, making coffee, cleaning up, setting up for a meeting, opening the door, chairing a meeting, and passing out literature. Doing these things helps us feel a part of the fellowship.

We have found it helpful to have a sponsor and to use this sponsor. Sponsorship is merely a way of describing the special interest of an experienced member that can mean so much to newcomers after they turn to N.A. for help. Sponsorship is also a two-way street, helping both the newcomer and the sponsor. The sponsor's clean time and experience may well depend on the availability of sponsors in a locality. Sponsorship is also the responsibility of the group for helping the newcomer. It is implied and informal in its approach, but it is the heart of the N.A. way of recovery from addiction-one addict helping another.

One of the most profound changes in our lives is in the realm of personal relationships. Our earliest involvements with others often begin with our sponsor. As newcomers we find it easier if we have someone whose judgment we trust and can confide in. We find trusting others with more experience to be a strength rather than a weakness. Our experience reveals that working the steps is our best guarantee against a relapse. Our sponsors and friends can advise us regarding how to work the steps. We can talk over what the steps mean with them. They can help us to prepare for the spiritual experience of living the steps. Asking God as we understand Him for help improves our understanding of the steps. When we are prepared, we must try out our newly found way of life. We learn that the Program won't work when we try to adapt it to our life. We must learn to adapt our life to the Program.

Today we seek solutions, not problems. We try what we learn on an experimental basis. We keep what we need and leave the rest. We find that by working the steps, communicating with our Higher Power, talking to our sponsors, and sharing with newcomers we are able to grow spiritually.

The Twelve Steps are used as a program of recovery. We learn that we can go to our Higher Power for help in solving problems. When we find ourselves sharing difficulties that used to have us on the run, we experience good feelings that give us the strength to begin seeking God's will for us.

We believe that our Higher Power will take care of us. If we honestly try to do God's will to the best of our ability, we can handle the results of anything that happens. Seeking our Higher Power's will is a spiritual principle found in the steps. Working the steps and practicing the principles simplifies our lives and changes our old attitudes. When we admit that our lives had become unmanageable, we don't have to argue our point of view. We have to accept ourselves as we are. We no longer have to be right all the time. When we give ourselves this freedom, we can allow others to be wrong. Freedom to change seems to come mainly after our acceptance of ourselves.

Sharing with fellow addicts is a basic tool in our Program. This help can only come from another addict. It is help that says, "I have had something like that happen to me, and I did this" For anyone who wants our way of life, we share experience, strength and hope instead of preaching and judging. If sharing the experience of our pain helps just one person, it will have been worth the suffering. We strengthen our own recovery when we share it with others who ask for help. If we keep what we have to share, we lose it. Words mean nothing until we put them into action.

We recognize our spiritual growth when we are able to reach out and help others. We help others when we participate in Twelve Step work and try to carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers. We learn that we keep what we have only by giving it away. Also, our experience shows many personal problems are resolved when we get out of ourselves and offer to help those in need. We recognize that one addict can best understand and help another. No matter how much we give, there is always another addict seeking help.

We cannot afford to lose sight of the importance of sponsorship and of taking a special interest in a confused addict who wants to stop using. Experience shows clearly that those who get the most out of the N.A. program are those to whom sponsorship is important. Sponsorship responsibilities are welcomed by us and accepted as opportunities to enrich our personal N.A. Experience.

Working with others is only the beginning of service work. N.A. service allows us to spend much of our time directly helping the suffering addicts as well as insuring that Narcotics Anonymous itself survives. This way we keep what we have by giving it away.

Chapter Six THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF N.A.

We keep what we have only with vigilance, and just as freedom for the individual comes from the Twelve Steps, so freedom for the group 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.

- 1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on N.A. 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 N.A. as a whole.*
- 5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.*
- 6. An N.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the N.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.*
- 7. Every N.A. 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. N.A., as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.*
- 10. Narcotics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the N.A. 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.*

Understanding these Traditions comes slowly over a period of time. We pick up information as we talk to members and visit various groups. It usually isn't until we get involved with service that someone points out that "personal recovery depends on N.A. unity", and that unity depends on how well we follow our Traditions. Because we hear about "suggested steps" and "no musts" so often, some of us make a mistake and assume that this applies to groups the way it applies to the individual. The Twelve Traditions of N.A. are not negotiable. They are the guidelines that keep our fellowship alive and free.

By following these guidelines in our dealings with others and society at large, we avoid many problems. That is not to say our Traditions eliminate them all. We still have to face difficulties as they arise: communication problems, differences of opinion, internal controversies, and troubles with individuals and groups outside the fellowship. However, when we apply these principles, we avoid some of the pitfalls.

Many of our problems are like those our predecessors had to face. Their hard-won experience gave birth to the Traditions, and our own experience has shown that these principles are just as valid today as they were when these Traditions were formulated. Our Traditions protect us from the internal and external forces which could destroy us. They are truly the ties that bind us together. It is only through understanding and application that they work.

TRADITION ONE

"Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on N.A. unity."

Our First Tradition concerns unity and our common welfare. One of the most important things about our new way of life is being a part of a group of addicts seeking recovery. Our survival is directly related to the survival of the group and of the fellowship. To maintain unity within Narcotics Anonymous it is imperative that the group remain stable, or else the entire fellowship perishes and the individual dies.

It wasn't until we came to Narcotics Anonymous that recovery became possible. This program can do for us what we

could not do for ourselves. We became part of a group and found that we could recover. We learned that those who did not continue to be an active part of the fellowship faced a rough road. The individual is precious to the group, and the group is precious to the individual. We never experienced the kind of attention and personal care that we found in the Program. We are accepted and loved for what we are, instead of “in spite” of what we are. No one can revoke our membership or make us do anything we do not choose to do. We follow this way of life by example rather than direction. We share our experience and learn from each other. In our addiction, we consistently placed our personal desires before anything else. In Narcotics Anonymous we found that what is best for the group is usually good for us.

Our personal experiences while using differed from one another. However, as a group we have found many common themes in our addiction. One of these was the need to prove self-sufficiency. We had convinced ourselves that we could make it alone and proceeded to live life on that basis. The results were disastrous, and in the end, each of us had to admit that self-sufficiency was a lie. This admission was the starting point of our recovery and is a primary point of unity for the fellowship.

Not only are these common themes in our addiction, but we find that in our recovery we have much in common. We share a common desire to stay clean. We have learned to depend on a Power greater than ourselves. Our purpose is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. Our Traditions are the guidelines that protect us from ourselves. They are our unity.

Unity is a must in Narcotics Anonymous. This is not to say that we do not have our disagreements and conflicts; we do. Whenever people get together there are differences of opinion. However, we can disagree without being disagreeable. Time and time again, we have seen that in crises we set aside our differences and work for the common good. We have seen two members who usually do not get along well working together with a newcomer. We have seen a group doing menial tasks to pay rent for their meeting hall. We have seen members drive hundreds of miles to help support a new group. These activities and many others are commonplace in our fellowship. They must be because without these things, N.A. could not survive.

We must live and work together as a group to insure that in a storm our ship does not sink and members perish. With faith in a Power greater than ourselves, hard work, and unity we will survive and continue to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.

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.”

In Narcotics Anonymous, we are concerned with protecting ourselves from ourselves. Our Second Tradition is an example of this. By nature, we are strong-willed, self-centered people, thrust together in N.A.; mismanagers all; not one of us is capable of making consistently good decisions.

In Narcotics Anonymous, we rely on a loving God as He expresses Himself in our group conscience, rather than on personal opinion or ego. In working the steps, we learn to depend on a Power greater than ourselves, and utilize it for our group purposes. We must be constantly on guard that our decisions are truly an expression of God’s will. There is often a vast difference between group conscience and group opinion, as dictated by powerful personalities or popularity. Some of our most painful growing experiences have come as a result of decisions made in the name of “group conscience”. True spiritual principles are never in conflict; they complement each other. The spiritual conscience of a group will never contradict any of our Traditions. The Second Tradition concerns the nature of leadership in N.A. We have learned that for our fellowship, leadership by example and by selfless service works and that direction and manipulation fail. We choose not to have presidents, masters, or directors. Instead we have secretaries, treasurers and representatives. These titles imply service rather than control. Our experience shows that if a group becomes an extension of the personality of a leader or a certain member, it loses its effectiveness. An atmosphere of recovery in our groups is one of our most valued assets, and we must guard it carefully lest we lose it to politics and personalities.

Those of us who have been involved in service or in getting a group started sometimes have a hard time letting go.

Egos and unfounded pride and self-will would destroy a group if given authority. We must instead remember that offices have been placed in trust, that we are trusted servants and that at no time do any of us govern. Narcotics Anonymous is a God-given Program, and we can maintain our group in dignity only with group conscience and God's love.

Some will resist. However, many will become the role models for newcomers to follow while the self-seeking soon find they are on the outside, causing dissension and eventually disaster to themselves. Many of them change; they learn we can only be governed by a loving God as expressed in our group conscience.

TRADITION THREE

“The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using.”

This Tradition is important for both the individual and the group. Desire is the key word; desire is the basis of our recovery. In our stories and in our experience of trying to carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers, one painful fact of life has emerged again and again. An addict who does not want to stop using will not stop using. They can be analyzed, counseled, reasoned with, prayed over, threatened, beaten, locked up, or whatever, but they will not stop until they want to stop. The only thing we ask of our members is that they have this desire. Without it they are doomed, but with it miracles will happen.

Desire is our only requirement, and rightly so. Addiction does not discriminate. This Tradition is to insure that any addict regardless of drugs used, race, religious beliefs, sex, sexual preference or financial condition is free to practice the N.A. way of life. That only the desire to stop using is needed insures that no caste system will develop making one addict superior to another. All addicted persons are welcome and equal in obtaining the relief they are seeking from their addiction; every addict can recover in this program on an equal basis. This Tradition guarantees our freedom to recover.

Membership in Narcotics Anonymous is not automatic when someone walks in the door or when the newcomer decides to stop using. The decision to become a part of our fellowship rests with the individual. Any addict who has a desire to stop using can become a member of N.A. We are addicts and our problem is addiction.

The choice of membership rests with the individual. We feel the ideal state for our fellowship exists when addicts can come freely and openly to an N.A. meeting, whenever and wherever they choose, and leave just as freely if they want. We realize that recovery is a reality and that life without drugs is better than we ever imagined. We open our doors to addicts hoping that they can find what we have found, knowing only those who have a desire to stop using and want what we have to offer will join us in our way of life.

TRADITION FOUR

“Each Group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other Groups, or N.A. as a whole.”

The autonomy of our groups is necessary for our survival. A dictionary defines autonomous as “having the right or power of self government...undertaken or carried on without outside control”. This means our groups are self-governing and are not subject to outside control. Every group has had to stand and grow on its own.

One might ask, “Are we truly autonomous? What about our service committees, our offices, activities, and all the other things that go on in N.A.?” The answer is that these things are not N.A. They are services we utilize to help us in our recovery and to further the primary purpose of our groups. Narcotics Anonymous is a Fellowship of men and women; addicts meeting in groups and using a given set of spiritual principles to find freedom from addiction and a new way to live. All else is not N.A. Those things we mentioned are the result of members caring enough to reach out and offer their help and experience so that our road might be easier. Whether we choose to utilize these services is up to the group.

A Narcotics Anonymous group is any meeting which meets regularly at a specified place and time for the purpose of recovery provided that it follows the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous. There are two

basic types of meetings: those which are opened to the general public and those closed to the public (for addicts only). Meetings vary widely in format from group to group. Some are participation meetings, some speakers, some question and answer, some special problems discussion.

Despite the type or format a group uses for its meetings, the function of a group is always the same: to provide a suitable and reliable environment for personal recovery and to promote such recovery. These Traditions are part of a set of spiritual principles of Narcotics Anonymous, and without them, N.A. does not exist.

We say that for N.A., autonomy is more than this. It gives our groups the freedom to act on their own to establish their atmosphere of recovery, serve their members, and fulfill their primary purpose. It is for these reasons that we guard our autonomy so carefully.

It would seem that we, in our groups, can do whatever we decide regardless of what anyone says. This is partly true. Each group does have complete freedom, except when their actions affect other groups or N.A. as a whole. Like group conscience, autonomy can be a two-edged sword. Group autonomy has been used to justify the violation of the Traditions. If a contradiction exists, we have slipped away from our principles. If we check to make sure that our actions are clearly within the bounds of our Traditions; if we do not dictate to other groups, or force anything upon them; and if we consider the consequences of our action ahead of time, then all will be well.

TRADITION FIVE

“Each group has but one primary purpose-to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.”

“You mean to say that our primary purpose is to carry the message? I thought we were here to get clean. I thought that our primary purpose was to recover from drug addiction.” For the individual, this is certainly true; our members are here to find freedom from addiction and a new way of life. However, groups aren’t addicted and don’t recover. All our groups can do is plant the seed for recovery and bring addicts together so that the magic of empathy, honesty, caring, sharing, and service can do their work. The purpose of this Tradition is to insure that this atmosphere of recovery is maintained. This can only be achieved by keeping our groups recovery-oriented. The fact that we, each and every group, focus on carrying the message provides consistency; addicts can count on us. Unity of action and purpose makes possible what seemed impossible for us-recovery.

The Twelfth Step of our personal Program also says that we carry the message to the addict who still suffers. Working with others is a powerful tool. “The therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel.” For the newcomers, this is how they found Narcotics Anonymous and learned to stay clean. For the members this reaffirms their commitment to recovery. The group is the most powerful vehicle we have for carrying the message. When a member carries the message, he is somewhat bound by interpretation and personality. The problem with literature is language. The feelings, the intensity, and the strengths are sometimes lost. In our group, with many different personalities, the message of recovery is a recurring theme.

“What would happen if our groups had another primary purpose?” We feel our message would be diluted and then lost. If we concentrated on making money, many might get rich. If we were a social club, we could find many friends and lovers. If we specialized in education, we’d end up with many smart addicts. If our specialty was medical help, many would get healthy. If our group purpose were anything other than to carry the message, many would die and few would find recovery.

What is our message? That an addict, any addict, can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live. Our message is hope and the promise of freedom. When it is said and done, our primary purpose can only be to carry the message to the addict who still suffers because that is all we have to give.

TRADITION SIX

“An N.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the N.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.”

Our Sixth Tradition tells us some of the things we must do to preserve and protect our primary purpose. This Tradition is the basis for our policy of non-affiliation and is extremely important to the continuation and growth of Narcotics Anonymous.

Let's take a look at what this Tradition says. The first thing a group ought never do is endorse. To endorse is to sanction, approve or recommend. Endorsements can be either direct or implied. We see direct endorsements everyday in T.V. commercials. An implied endorsement is one that is not specifically stated.

Many other organizations wish to ride on the N.A. name. To allow them to do so would be an implied endorsement and a violation of this Tradition. Hospitals, drug recovery houses, probation and parole offices are some of the facilities we deal with in carrying the N.A. message. While these organizations are sincere and we hold N.A. meetings in their establishments, we cannot endorse, finance or allow them to use the N.A. name to further their growth. However, we are willing to carry the N.A. principles into these institutions to the addicts who still suffer so that they can make the choice.

The next thing we ought never to do is finance. This is more obvious. To finance means to supply funds or to help support financially.

The third thing warned against is lending the N.A. name to fulfill the purposes of other programs. For example, several times other programs have tried to use Narcotics Anonymous as part of their "services offered" to help justify funding.

This Tradition also tells us "who". A related facility is any place that involves N.A. members. It might be a halfway house, a detox center, a counseling center, a clubhouse or any one of a number of such places. People are easily confused by what is N.A. and what are the related facilities. Recovery houses which have been started or staffed by N.A. members have to take care that the differentiation is clear. Perhaps the most confusion exists when it involves a clubhouse situation. Newcomers and even older members often identify the clubhouse with Narcotics Anonymous. We should make a special effort to let these people know that these are not the same. The second "who" are outside enterprises. An outside enterprise is any agency, business venture, religion, society, organization, related activity, or any other fellowship. Most of these are easy to identify, except for the other fellowships. Narcotics Anonymous is a separate and distinct fellowship in its own right. Our problem is addiction. The other Twelve Step fellowships specialize in other problems, and our relationship with them is one of "cooperation, not affiliation". The use of literature, speakers, and announcements of other fellowships in our meetings constitutes an implied endorsement of an outside enterprise.

This Sixth Tradition goes on to warn us what may happen: "lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary purpose". These often become obsessions and shut us off from our spiritual aim. For the individual, this type of abuse can be devastating; for the group, it can be disastrous. When we as a group waver from our primary purpose, addicts die who might have found recovery.

TRADITION SEVEN

"Every N.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions."

Being self-supporting is an important part of our new way of life. For the individual, this is usually quite a change. In our addiction, we were dependent on people, places and things. We looked to them to support us and supply the things we found lacking in ourselves. As recovering addicts, we find that we are still dependent, but our dependence has shifted from the things around us to a loving God and the inner strength we get in our relationship with Him. We, who were unable to function as human beings, now find anything is possible of us. Those dreams we gave up long ago can now become realities. Addicts as a group have been a burden to society. In N.A., our groups not only stand on their own, but demand the right to do so.

Money has always been a problem for us. We could never find enough to support ourselves and our habits. We worked, stole, conned, begged and sold ourselves; there was never enough money to fill the emptiness inside. In our recovery, money is still often a problem.

We need money to run our group: there is rent to pay, supplies and literature to buy. We take a collection in our meetings to cover these expenses and whatever is left over goes to support our services and to further our primary purpose. Unfortunately, there is little left over once a group pays its way. Sometimes members who can afford it kick in a little extra to help. Sometimes a committee is formed to put on an activity to raise funds. These efforts help and without them, we could not have come this far. N.A. services remain in need of money, and even though it is sometimes frustrating, we really would not have it any other way; we know the price would be too high. We all have to pull together, and in pulling together we learn that we really are part of “something greater than ourselves”.

Our policy concerning money is clearly stated:

We decline any outside contributions; our fellowship is completely self-supporting. We accept no funding, endowments, loans, and/or gifts. Everything has its price, regardless of intent. Whether the price is money, promises, concessions, special recognition, endorsements, favors, or anything else, it's too high for us. Even if those who would help us could guarantee no strings, we still would not accept their aid. We cannot afford to let our members contribute more than their fair share. We have found that the price paid by our groups is disunity and controversy. We will not put our freedom on the line.

TRADITION EIGHT

“Narcotics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.”

The Eighth Tradition is vital to the stability of N.A. as a whole. In order to understand this Tradition we need to define “non-professional service centers” and “special workers”. With an understanding of these terms, this important Tradition is self-explanatory.

In this Tradition we say we have no professionals. By this, we mean we have no staff psychiatrists, doctors, lawyers, counselors, etc. Our program works by one addict helping another. By employing professionals in N.A., we would destroy our unity. We are simply addicts of equal status freely helping one another.

We recognize and admire the professionals. Many of our members are professionals in their own right. It is just that there is no room for professionalism in N.A.

A service center is defined as a place where N.A. service committees operate. The World Service Office or local regional and area offices are examples of service centers. A clubhouse or halfway house, or similar facility, is not an N.A. service center and is not affiliated with N.A. A service center is, very simply, a place where N.A. services are offered on a continuing basis.

“Service centers may employ special workers.” This statement means that service centers may employ workers for special skills such as phone answering, clerical work, or printing. Such employees are directly responsible to a service committee. As N.A. grows, the demand for these workers will grow. Special workers are necessary to insure efficiency in an ever-expanding fellowship.

The difference between professionals and special workers should be defined for clarity. Professionals work in specific professions which do not direct services of N.A., but are for personal gain. Professionals do not follow N.A. Traditions. Our special workers, on the other hand, work within our Traditions and are directly responsible always to those they serve, to the fellowship.

In regards to our Eighth Tradition, we do not single out our members as “professional”; by not placing professional status on any member, we insure that we remain “forever non-professional”.

TRADITION NINE

“N.A. as such ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.”

This Tradition defines the way our Fellowship functions. We must first understand what N.A. is. Narcotics Anonymous is addicts who have the desire to stop using, and have joined together to do so. Our meetings are a gathering of members for the purpose of staying clean and carrying the message of recovery. Our Steps and Traditions are set down in a specific order. They are numbered, not random and unstructured. They are organized, but this is not the type of organization referred to in the Ninth Tradition. For the purpose of this Tradition, “organized” means having management and control. On this basis, the meaning of Tradition Nine is clear. Without this Tradition, our Fellowship would be in opposition to spiritual principles. A loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience is our ultimate authority.

The Ninth Tradition goes on to define the nature of the things that we can do to help N.A. It says that we may create service boards or committees to serve the needs of the Fellowship. None of them has the power to rule, censor, decide, or dictate. They exist solely to serve the Fellowship, but they are not a part of Narcotics Anonymous. This is the nature of our service structure as it has evolved and been defined in the N.A. service manual.

TRADITION TEN

“Narcotics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the N.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.”

In order to achieve our spiritual aim, Narcotics Anonymous must be known and respected. Nowhere is this more obvious than in our history. N.A. was founded in 1953. For twenty years, our fellowship remained small and obscure. In the 1970’s, society realized that addiction had become a worldwide epidemic and began to look for answers. Along with this came change in the way people conceived the addict. This change allowed addicts to seek help more openly. N.A. groups sprang up in many places where we were never tolerated before. Recovering addicts paved the way for more groups and more recovery. Today N.A. is a worldwide fellowship; we are known and respected everywhere.

If an addict has never heard of us, he cannot seek us out. If those who work with addicts are unaware of our existence, they cannot refer them to us. One of the most important things we can do to further our primary purpose is to let people know who, what and where we are. If we do this and keep our reputation good, we will surely grow.

Our recovery speaks for itself. Our Tenth Tradition specifically helps protect our reputation. This Tradition says that N.A. has no opinion on outside issues. We don’t take sides. We don’t have any recommendations. N.A., as a fellowship, does not participate in politics; to do so would invite controversy. It would jeopardize our fellowship. Those who agree with our opinions might commend us for taking a stand, but some would always disagree.

With a price this high, is it any wonder we choose not to take sides in society’s problems? For our own survival, we have no opinion on outside issues.

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.”

This Tradition deals with our relationship to those outside the fellowship. It tells us how to conduct our efforts at the public level. Our public image consists of what we have to offer which is a successful proven way of maintaining a drug-free lifestyle. While it is important to reach as many persons as possible, it is imperative for our protection that we are careful about ads, circulars and any literature that may reach the public’s hands.

Our attraction is that we are successes in our own right. As groups gathered together we offer recovery. We have found the success of our program speaks for itself; this is our “promotion”.

This Tradition goes on to tell us that we need to maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films. This is to protect the membership and reputation of Narcotics Anonymous. We do not give our last names nor appear in the media as a member of Narcotics Anonymous. No individual inside or outside the fellowship represents Narcotics Anonymous.

TRADITION TWELVE

“Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.”

A dictionary definition of anonymity is “a state of bearing no name”. In keeping with this, the “I” becomes “we”. The spiritual foundation becomes more important than any one particular group or individual.

As we find ourselves growing closer together the awakening of humility occurs. Humility is a by-product which allows us to grow and develop in an atmosphere of freedom and removes the fear of becoming known by our employers, families, or friends as addicts. Therefore, we attempt to rigorously adhere to the principle that “what is said in meetings stays in meetings”.

Throughout our Traditions, we speak in terms of “we” and “our” rather than “me” and “mine”. By working together for our common welfare we achieve the true spirit of anonymity.

We have heard the phrase “principles before personalities” so often that it is like a cliché. While we may disagree as individuals, the spiritual principle of anonymity makes us all equal as members of the group. No member is greater or lesser than any other member. The drive for personal gain in the areas of sex, property and social position, which brought so much pain in the past, falls by the wayside if the principle of anonymity is adhered to. Anonymity is one of the basic elements of our recovery and so it pervades our Traditions and our fellowship. It protects us from our own defects of character and renders personalities and their differences powerless. Anonymity in action makes it impossible for personalities to come before principles.

Chapter Seven RECOVERY AND RELAPSE

Many people think that recovery is simply a matter of not using drugs. They consider a relapse a sign of complete failure, and long periods of abstinence a sign of complete success. We in the recovery program of Narcotics Anonymous have found that this perception is too simplistic. After a member has had some involvement in our Fellowship, a relapse may be the jarring experience that brings about a more rigorous application of the program. By the same token we have observed some members who remain abstinent for long periods of time whose dishonesty and self-deceit still prevent them from enjoying complete recovery and acceptance within society. Complete and continuous abstinence, however, in close association and identification with others in N.A. groups, is still the best ground for growth.

Although all addicts are basically the same in kind, we do, as individuals, differ in degree of sickness and rate of recovery. There may be times when a relapse lays the groundwork for complete freedom. At other times that freedom can only be achieved by a grim and obstinate willfulness to hang on to abstinence come hell or high water until a crisis passes. An addict, who by any means can lose, even for a time, the need or desire to use, and has free choice over impulsive thinking and compulsive action, has reached a turning point that may be the decisive factor in his recovery. The feeling of true independence and freedom hangs here at times in the balance. To step out alone and run our own lives again draws us, yet we seem to know that what we have has come from dependence on a Power greater than ourselves and from the giving and receiving of help from others in acts of empathy.

Many times in our recovery the old bugaboos will haunt us. Life may again become meaningless, monotonous and boring. We may tire mentally in repeating our new ideas and tire physically in our new activities, yet we know that if we fail to repeat them we will surely take up our old practices. We suspect that if we do not use what we have, we will lose what we have. These times are often the periods of our greatest growth. Our minds and bodies seem tired of it all, yet the dynamic forces of change or true conversion, deep within, may be working to give us the answers that alter our inner motivations and change our lives.

Recovery as experienced through our Twelve Steps is our goal, not mere physical abstinence. To improve ourselves takes effort, and since there is no way in the world to graft a new idea on a closed mind, an opening must be made somehow. Since we can do this only for ourselves, we need to recognize two of our seemingly inherent enemies, apathy and procrastination. Our resistance to change seems built in, and only a nuclear blast of some kind will bring about any alteration or initiate another course of action. A relapse, if we survive it, may provide the charge for the demolition process. A relapse and sometimes subsequent death of someone close to us can do the job of awakening us to the necessity for vigorous personal action.

We have seen addicts come to our fellowship, try our Program and stay clean for a period of time. They lost contact with other recovering addicts and eventually returned to active addiction. They forgot that it is really the first fix, pill, drink, snort or toke that starts the deadly cycle all over again. They tried to control it, to use in moderation, or to use just certain drugs. None of these worked for them.

Relapse is a reality. It can and does happen. Experience shows that those who do not work our Program of recovery on a daily basis may relapse. We see them come back seeking recovery. Maybe they were clean for years before their relapse. If they are lucky enough to make it back, they are shaken badly. They tell us that the relapse was more horrible than before they first found N.A. We have never seen a person relapse who lives the Narcotics Anonymous program.

Relapses are often fatal. We have attended funerals of loved ones who died from a relapse. They died in various ways. Other times we see relapsers lost for years, living in misery. Those who make it to jail or institutions may survive longer and perhaps have a reintroduction to N.A.

In our daily lives we are subject to emotional and spiritual lapses, causing us to become defenseless against the physical relapse of drug use. As an incurable disease, drug addiction is subject to relapse.

We are never forced into relapse. We are given a choice. Relapse is never an accident. Relapse is a sign that we have had a reservation in our program. We slighted our program and left loopholes in our daily lives. Unaware of the pitfalls ahead, we stumbled blindly on in the belief we could make it on our own. Sooner or later we fell back into the illusions that drugs would make life easier. We believed that drugs would change us, and we forgot that these changes are lethal. When we believe that drugs will solve our problems and forget what they can do to us, we are in real trouble. Unless the illusions are shattered that we, in any way can continue to use or stop using on our own, we most certainly sign our own death warrant. For some reason, not taking care of our personal affairs lowers our self-esteem and that sets up a pattern that repeats itself in all areas of our lives. If we begin to avoid our new responsibilities by missing meetings, neglecting Twelve Step work, or not getting involved, our Program stops. These are the kinds of things that lead to relapse. We may sense a change coming over us. Our ability to remain open-minded disappears. We may become angry and resentful toward anyone or anything. We may begin to reject those who were close to us. We isolate ourselves. We become sick of ourselves in a short time. We revert back to our sickest behavior patterns without even having to use drugs.

When a resentment or any other emotional upheaval occurs, failure to practice the steps can result in a relapse. Obsessive behavior is a common denominator for addictive people.

We have times when we try to fill ourselves up until we are satisfied, only to discover that there is no way to satisfy us. Part of our addictive pattern is that we can never get enough of whatever we think we want. Sometimes we forget and we think that if we can just get enough food or enough sex or enough money we'll be satisfied and everything will be all right. Self-will still leads us to make decisions based on manipulation, ego, lust or false pride. We don't like to be wrong. Our egos tell us that we can do it on our own, but loneliness and paranoia quickly return. We find that we cannot really do it alone; when we try things get worse. We need to be reminded of where we came from and that it will get progressively worse if we use. This is when we need the fellowship the most.

We don't recover overnight. When we realize that we have made a bad decision or bad judgment, our inclination is to make an attempt to rationalize it. We often become extreme in our self-obsessive attempt to cover our tracks. We forget we have a choice today. We get sicker.

There is something in our self-destructive personalities that cries for failure. Most of us feel that we do not deserve to succeed. This is a common theme with addicts. Self-pity is one of the most destructive of defects. It will drain us of all positive energy. We focus on anything that isn't going our way and ignore all the beauty in our lives. With no real desire to improve our lives, or even to live, we just keep going further and further down. Some of us never make it back.

We must relearn many things that we have forgotten and develop a new approach to life if we are to survive. This is what Narcotics Anonymous is all about. It is about people who care about desperate, dying addicts and who can, in time, teach them how to live without drugs. Many of us had difficulty coming into the fellowship because we did not understand that we have the disease of addiction. We sometimes see our past behavior as part of ourselves and not part of our disease.

We take the First Step. We admit we are powerless over our addiction, that our lives have become unmanageable. Slowly things get better and we start getting our confidence back. Our ego tells us we can do it on our own. Things are getting better and we think we really don't need this program. Cockiness is a red light indicator. The loneliness and paranoia will come back. We find out we can't do it on our own and things get worse. We really take the First Step, this time internally. There will be times, however, when we really feel like using. We want to run, and we feel lousy; we need to be reminded of where we came from and that it will be worse this time. This is when we need the program the most. We realize we must do something.

When we forget the effort and work it took us to get a period of freedom in our lives, lack of gratitude sinks in and self-destruction begins again. Unless action is taken immediately we run the risk of a relapse, which threatens our very existence. Keeping our illusion of reality, rather than using the tools of the program, will return us to isolation. Loneliness will kill us inside and the drugs, which almost always come next, may do the job completely. The symptoms and the feelings we experienced at the end of our using will come back even stronger than before. This impact is sure to destroy us if we don't surrender ourselves to the N.A. Program.

Relapse can be the destructive force that kills us or leads us to the realization of who and what we really are. The eventual misery of using is not worth the temporary escape it might give us. For us, to use is to die, often in more ways than one.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks seems to be in placing unrealistic expectations on ourselves or others. Relationships can be a terribly painful area. We tend to fantasize and project what will happen. We get angry and resentful if our fantasies are not fulfilled. We forget that we are powerless over other people. The old thinking and feelings of loneliness, despair, helplessness and self-pity creep in. Thoughts of sponsors, meetings, literature and all other positive input leave our consciousness. We have to keep our recovery first and our priorities in order.

Writing about what we want, what we are asking for, and what we get and sharing this with our sponsor or another trusted person helps us to work through negative feelings. Letting others share with us about their experience gives us hope that it does get better. It seems that being powerless is a huge stumbling block. When a need arises for us to admit our powerlessness, we may first look for ways to exert power against it. Exhausting these ways, we begin sharing with others and find hope. Attending meetings daily, living a day at a time, and reading literature seems to send our mental attitude back toward the positive. Willingness to try what has worked for others is vital. Even when we feel that we don't want to attend, meetings are a source of strength and hope for us.

It is important to share our feelings of wanting to use drugs. It is amazing how often newcomers think that it is really abnormal for a drug addict to want to use. When we feel the old urges come over us, we think there must be something wrong with us, and that other people in Narcotics Anonymous couldn't possibly understand.

It is important to remember that the desire to use will pass. We never have to use again, no matter how we feel. All feelings will eventually pass.

The progression of recovery is a continuous uphill journey. Without effort we start the downhill run again. The progression of the disease is an ongoing process, even during abstinence.

We come here powerless, and the power we seek comes to us through other people in Narcotics Anonymous, but we must reach out for it. Now clean and in the fellowship, we need to keep ourselves surrounded by others who know us well. We need each other. Narcotics Anonymous is a fellowship of survival, and one of its advantages is that it places us in intimate, regular contact with the very people who can best understand and help us in our recovery. Good ideas and good intentions do not help if we fail to put them into action. Reaching out is the beginning of the struggle that will set us free. It will break down the walls that imprison us. A symptom of our disease is alienation, and honest sharing will free us to recover.

We are grateful that we were made so welcome at meetings that we felt comfortable. Without staying clean and coming to those meetings, we would surely have had a rougher time with the steps. Just one fix, pill, drink, snort, or toke will interrupt the process of recovery.

We all find that the feeling we get from helping others motivates us to do better in our own lives. If we are hurting, and most of us do from time to time, we learn to ask for help. We find that pain shared is pain lessened. Members of the Fellowship are willing to help a relapser recover and have insight and useful suggestions to offer when asked. Recovery found in Narcotics Anonymous must come from within, and no one stays clean for anyone but themselves.

In our disease, we are dealing with a destructive, at times violent, power greater than ourselves that can lead to relapse. If we have relapsed, it is important to keep in mind that we must get back to meetings as soon as possible. Otherwise, we may have only months, days, or hours before we reach a threshold where we are gone beyond recall. Our disease is so cunning that it can get us into impossible situations. When it does, we come back to the program if we can, while we can. Once we use, we are under the control of our disease.

We never fully recover, no matter how long we've been clean. Complacency is the enemy of members with substantial clean time. If we remain complacent for long, the recovery process ceases. The disease will manifest apparent symptoms in us. Denial returns, along with obsession and compulsion. Guilt, remorse, fear and pride may become unbearable. Soon we reach a place where our backs are against the wall. Denial and the First Step conflict in our

minds. If we let the obsession of using overcome us, we are doomed. Only a complete and total acceptance of the First Step can save us. We must totally surrender ourselves to the Program.

The first thing to do is to get clean. This makes the other stages of recovery possible. As long as we stay clean, no matter what, we have the greatest possible advantage over our disease. For this we are grateful.

Many of us get clean in a protected environment, such as a rehabilitation center or recovery house. When reentering the world, we feel lost, confused and vulnerable. Going to meetings as often as available will reduce the shock of change. Meetings provide a safe place to share with others during this time. We begin to live the program; we learn to apply spiritual principles in our lives. We must use what we learn or we will lose it in a relapse.

Many of us would have had nowhere else to go, if we could not have trusted N.A. groups and members. At first, we were both captivated and intimidated by the fellowship. No longer comfortable with our using friends, we were not yet at home in the meetings. We began to lose our fear through the experience of sharing. The more we did this, the more our fears slipped away. We shared for this reason. Growth means change. Spiritual maintenance means ongoing recovery, and isolation is dangerous to spiritual growth.

Those of us who find the fellowship and begin to live the steps develop some kind of relationship with others. As we grow, we learn to overcome the tendency to run and hide from ourselves and our feelings. Being honest about our feelings helps others to identify with us. We find that when we communicate honestly we reach others better. Honesty takes practice and none of us claims to be perfect. When we feel trapped or pressured, it takes great spiritual and emotional strength to be honest. Sharing with others keeps us from feeling isolated and alone. This process is a creative action of the spirit.

When we work the program we are living the steps daily. This gives us experience in applying spiritual principles. The experience we gain with time helps our ongoing recovery. We must use what we learn or we will lose it, no matter how long we have been clean. Eventually we are shown that we must get honest or we will use again. We pray for willingness and humility and finally get honest about our mistaken judgements or bad decisions. We tell those who we hurt that we were to blame and make whatever amends are necessary. Now we are in the solution again. We are working the program. It becomes easier to work the program now. We know that the steps help prevent relapse.

Relapsers may also fall into another trap. We may doubt that we can stop using and stay clean. We can never stay clean on our own. Frustrated, we cry, "I cannot do it!" We beat ourselves as we come back into the program. We imagine that our fellow members will not respect the courage it takes to come back. We have learned the utmost respect for that type of courage. We applaud heartily. It is not shameful to relapse-the shame is in not coming back. We must smash the illusion that we can do it alone.

Another type of relapser does not keep being clean as top priority. Staying clean must always come first. At times, we all experience difficulty in our recovery. Emotional lapses result from not putting into practice what we have learned. Those who make it through these times show a courage not their own. After coming through one of these periods, we can readily agree that it is always darkest before the dawn. Once we get through a difficult time clean, we are given a tool of recovery that we can use again and again.

If we relapse, we may feel guilt and embarrassment. Our relapse is embarrassing, but we cannot save our face and our ass at the same time. We find it best to get back on the program as soon as possible. It is better to swallow our pride than to die or go permanently insane.

As long as we maintain an attitude of being thankful for being clean, we find it is easier to remain clean. The best way to express gratitude is by carrying the message of our experience, strength and hope to the still-suffering addict. We are ready to work with any suffering addict.

Living the program on a daily basis provides many valuable experiences. If we are plagued by an obsession to use, experience has taught us to call a fellow recovering addict and get to a meeting.

Using addicts are self-centered, angry, frightened and lonely people. In recovery we experience spiritual growth. While using we were dishonest, self-seeking and often institutionalized. The program allows us to become responsible

and productive members of society.

As we begin to function in society, our creative freedom helps us sort our priorities and do the basic things first. Daily practice of our Twelve Step program enables us to change from what we were to what our Higher Power would have us become. With the help of our sponsor or spiritual advisor, gradually we learn to trust and depend on our Higher Power as we understand it.

Chapter Eight WE DO RECOVER

Although "Politics makes strange bedfellows", as the old saying goes, addiction makes us one of a kind. Our personal stories may vary in individual pattern but in the end we all have the same thing in common. This common illness or disorder is addiction. We know well the two things that make up true addiction: obsession and compulsion.

Obsession-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.

Compulsion-once having started the process with one fix, one pill, or one drink we cannot stop through our own power of will. Because of our physical sensitivity to drugs, we are completely in the grip of a destructive power greater than ourselves.

When at the end of the road we find that we can no longer function as a human being, either with or without drugs, we all face the same dilemma. What is there left to do? There seems to be this alternative: either go on as best we can to the bitter ends-jails, institutions, or death-or find a new way to live. In years gone by, very few addicts ever had this last choice. Those who are addicted today are more fortunate. For the first time in history, a simple way has been proving itself in the lives of many addicts. It is available to us all. This is a simple spiritual-not religious-program, known as Narcotics Anonymous.

When my addiction brought me to the point of complete powerlessness, uselessness and surrender some fifteen years ago (Written in 1965), there was no N.A. I found A.A., and in that Fellowship met addicts who had also found that program to be the answer to their problem. However, we knew that many were still going down the road of disillusion, degradation and death, because they were unable to identify with the alcoholic in A.A. Their identification was at the level of apparent symptoms and not at the deeper level of emotions or feelings, where empathy becomes a healing therapy for all addicted people. With several other addicts and some members of A. A. who had great faith in us and the program, we formed, in July of 1953, what we now know as Narcotics Anonymous. We felt that now the addict would find from the start as much identification as each needed to convince himself that he could stay clean, by the example of others who had recovered for many years.

That this was what was principally needed has proved itself in these passing years. That wordless language of recognition, belief and faith, which we call empathy, created the atmosphere in which we could feel time, touch reality and recognize spiritual values long lost to many of us. In our program of recovery we are growing in numbers and in strength. Never before have so many clean addicts, of their own choice and in free society, been able to meet where they please, to maintain their recovery in complete creative freedom.

Even addicts said it could not be done the way we had it planned. We believed in openly scheduled meetings-no more hiding as other groups had tried. We believed this differed from all other methods tried before by those who advocated long withdrawal from society. We felt that the sooner the addict could face his problem in everyday living, just that much faster would he become a real productive citizen. We eventually have to stand on our own feet and face life on its own terms, so why not from the start.

Because of this, of course, many relapsed and many were lost completely. However, many stayed and some came back after their setback. The brighter part is the fact that of those who are now our members, many have long terms of complete abstinence and are better able to help the newcomer. Their attitude, based on the spiritual values of our steps and traditions, is the dynamic force that is bringing increase and unity to our program. Now we know that the time has come when that tired old lie, "Once an addict, always an addict", will no longer be tolerated by either society or the addict himself. We do recover.

Recovery begins with surrender. From that point forward, each of us is reminded that a day clean is a day won. In Narcotics Anonymous our attitudes, thoughts and reactions change. We come to realize that we are not alien and begin to understand and accept who we are.

As long as there have been people, addiction has existed. For us, addiction is an obsession to use the drugs that are

destroying us followed by a compulsion which forces us to continue. Complete abstinence is the foundation for our new way of life.

In the past, there was no hope for an addict. In Narcotics Anonymous, we learn to share the loneliness, anger and fear that addicts have in common and cannot control. Our old ideas are what got us into trouble. We weren't oriented toward fulfillment; we focused on the emptiness and worthlessness of it all. We could not deal with success, so failure became a way of life. In recovery, failures are only temporary setbacks rather than links in an unbreakable chain. Honesty, open-mindedness and willingness to change are all new attitudes that help us admit our faults and ask for help. We are no longer compelled to act against our true nature and do things we don't really want to do.

Most addicts resist recovery, and the program we share with them interferes with their using. If a newcomer tells us that they can continue to use drugs in any form and suffer no ill effects, there are two ways we can look at it. The first possibility is that they are not an addict. The other is that their disease has not become apparent to them and that they are still denying their addiction. Addiction and withdrawal distort rational thought, and newcomers usually focus on differences rather than similarities. They look for ways to disprove the evidence of addiction or disqualify themselves from recovery.

Many of us did the same thing when we were new, so when we work with others we try not to do or say anything that will give them the excuse to continue using. We know that honesty and empathy are essential. Complete surrender is the key to recovery, and total abstinence is the only thing that has ever worked for us. In our experience, no addict who has completely surrendered to this Program has ever failed to find recovery.

Narcotics Anonymous is a spiritual, not religious program. Any clean addict is a miracle, and keeping the miracle alive is an ongoing process of awareness, surrender and growth. For an addict, not using is an abnormal state. We learn to live clean. We learn to be honest with ourselves and think of both sides of things. Decision-making is rough at first. Before we got clean, most of our actions were guided by impulse. Today, we are not locked into this type of thinking. We are free.

In our recovery, we find it essential to accept reality. Once we can do this, we do not find it necessary to use drugs in an attempt to change our perceptions. Without drugs, we have a chance to begin functioning as useful human beings, if we accept ourselves and the world exactly as it is. We learn that conflicts are a part of reality, and we learn new ways to resolve them instead of running from them. They are a part of the real world. We learn not to become emotionally involved with problems. We deal with what is at hand and try not to force solutions. We have learned that if a solution isn't practical, it isn't spiritual. In the past, we made simple situations into problems; we made mountains out of molehills. Our best ideas got us here. In recovery, we learn to depend on a Power greater than ourselves. We don't have all the answers or solutions, but we can learn to live without drugs. We can stay clean and enjoy life, if we remember to live "Just for Today".

We are not responsible for our disease, only our recovery. As we begin to apply what we have learned, our lives begin to change for the better. We seek help from addicts who are enjoying lives free from the obsession to use drugs. We do not have to understand this Program for it to work. All we have to do is follow direction.

We get relief through the Twelve Steps which are essential to the recovery process, because they are a new, spiritual way of life that allows us to participate in our own recovery.

From "day one", the Twelve Steps become a part of our lives. At first, we may be filled with negativity, and only allow the First Step to take hold. Later, we have less fear and can use these tools more fully and to our greater advantage. We realize that old feelings and fears are symptoms of our disease. Real freedom is now possible.

As we recover, we gain a new outlook on being clean. We enjoy a feeling of release and freedom from the desire to use. We find that everyone we meet eventually has something to offer. We become able to receive as well as to give. Life can become a new adventure for us. We come to know happiness, joy and freedom.

There is no model of the recovered addict. When the drugs go and the addict works the Program, wonderful things happen. Lost dreams awaken and new possibilities arise. Our willingness to grow spiritually keeps us buoyant. When we take the actions indicated in the steps, the results are a change in our personality. It is our action that is important.

We leave the results to our Higher Power.

Recovery becomes a contact process; we lose the fear of touching and of being touched. We learn that a simple, loving hug can make all the difference in the world when we feel alone. We experience real love and real friendship.

We know that we are powerless over a disease which is incurable, progressive and fatal. If not arrested, it gets worse until we die. We cannot deal with the obsession and compulsion. The only alternative is to stop using and start learning how to live. When we are willing to follow this course and take advantage of the help available to us, a whole new life opens up. In this way, we do recover.

Today, secure in the love of the fellowship, we can finally look another human being in the eye and be grateful for who we are.

Chapter Nine
JUST FOR TODAY
LIVING THE PROGRAM

Tell yourself:

JUST FOR TODAY my thoughts will be on my recovery, living and enjoying life without the use of drugs.

JUST FOR TODAY I will have faith in someone in N.A. who believes in me and wants to help me in my recovery.

JUST FOR TODAY I will have a program. I will try to follow it to the best of my ability.

JUST FOR TODAY through N.A. I will try to get a better perspective on my life.

JUST FOR TODAY I will be unafraid, my thoughts will be on my new associations, people who are not using and who have found a new way of life. So long as I follow that way, I have nothing to fear.

We admit our lives have been unmanageable, but sometimes we have a problem admitting our need for help. Our own self-will leads to many problems in our recovery; we want and demand that things go our way. We should know from our past experience that our way of doing things did not work. The principle of surrender guides us into a way of life in which we draw our strength from a Power greater than ourselves. Our daily surrender to our Higher Power provides the help we need. As addicts we have trouble with acceptance which is critical to our recovery. When we refuse to practice acceptance, we are, in effect, still denying our faith in a Higher Power. Worrying is the practice of lack of faith.

Surrendering our will puts us in contact with a Higher Power which fills the empty place inside that nothing could ever fill before. We learned to trust God for help daily. Living just for today relieves the burden of the past and the fear of the future. We learned to take whatever actions are necessary and leave the results in the hands of our Higher Power.

The Narcotics Anonymous program is spiritual. We strongly suggest that each person make an attempt to find a Higher Power of their understanding. Some of us have profound spiritual experiences, dramatic and inspirational in nature. For others, the awakening is more subtle. We recover in an atmosphere of acceptance and respect for one another's beliefs. We try to avoid the self-deception of arrogance and self-righteousness. As we develop faith in our daily lives, we find that our Higher Power supplies us with the strength and guidance we need.

Each of us is free to work out our own concept of a Higher Power. Many of us were suspicious and skeptical because of disappointments we have had with religion. As new members, the talk of God we heard in meetings repelled us. Until we sought our own answers in this area, we were trapped in the ideas gathered from our past. Agnostics and atheists sometimes start out by just talking to "whatever's there". There is a spirit or an energy that can be felt in the meetings. This is sometimes the newcomer's first concept of a Higher Power. Ideas from the past are often incomplete and unsatisfactory. Everything we know is subject to revision, especially what we know about the truth. We reevaluate our old ideas, so we can become acquainted with the new ideas that lead to a new way of life. We recognize we are human with a physical, mental and spiritual sickness. When we accept that our addiction caused our own hell and that there is a power available to help us, we begin to make progress in solving our problems.

Lack of daily maintenance can show up in many ways. Through open-minded effort we come to rely on a daily relationship with God as we understand Him. Each day most of us ask our Higher Power to help us stay clean, and each night we give thanks for the gift of recovery. As our lives become more comfortable, many of us lapse into spiritual complacency, and risking relapse, we find ourselves in the same horror and loss of purpose from which we have been given only a daily reprieve. This is hopefully when our pain motivates us to renew our daily spiritual maintenance. One way we can continue a conscious contact, especially in hard times, is to list the things for which we are grateful.

Many of us have found that setting aside quiet time for ourselves is helpful in making conscious contact with our Higher Power. By quieting of the mind, meditation can lead us to calmness and serenity. This quieting of the mind can be done in any place, time, or manner according to the individual.

Our Higher Power is accessible to us at all times. We receive guidance when we ask for knowledge of God's will for us. Gradually as we become more God-centered than self-centered, our despair turns to hope. Change also involves the great source of fear-the unknown. Our Higher Power is our source of the courage we need to face this fear.

Some things we must accept, and others we can change. The wisdom to know the difference comes with growth in our spiritual program. If we maintain our spiritual condition daily, we find the pain and confusion easier to deal with. This is the emotional stability that we so badly need. With the help of our Higher Power, we never have to use again.

Any addict clean is a miracle. We keep this miracle alive in ongoing recovery with positive attitudes. If, after a period of time, we find ourselves in trouble with our recovery, we have probably stopped doing one or more of the things which helped us in the earlier stages of our recovery.

Three basic spiritual principles are Honesty, Open-mindedness, and Willingness to try. We say these are the HOW of our program. The initial honesty that we express is the desire to stop using. Next we honestly admit our powerlessness and the unmanageability of our lives.

Rigorous honesty is the most important tool we have in learning to live for today. Although honesty is difficult to practice, it is most rewarding. Honesty is the antidote to our diseased thinking. Our newly found faith serves as a firm foundation for courage in the future.

What we knew about living when we got here had almost killed us. Managing our own lives got us to the program of Narcotics Anonymous. We came in, knowing very little about how to be happy and enjoy life. A new idea cannot be grafted onto a closed mind. Being open-minded allows us to hear something that might save our lives. It allows us to listen to opposing points of view, and come to conclusions of our own. Open-mindedness leads us to the very insights that have eluded us during our lives. It is this principle that allows us to participate in a discussion without jumping to conclusions or predetermining right and wrong. We no longer need to make fools of ourselves by standing up for nonexistent virtues. We have learned that it is O.K. to not know all the answers, for then we are teachable and can learn to live our new life successfully.

Open-mindedness without willingness, however, will get us nowhere. We must be willing to do whatever is necessary to recover. We never know when the time will come when we must put forth all the effort and strength we have just to stay clean.

Honesty, open-mindedness and willingness to try, work hand-in-hand. The lack of one of these principles in our personal program can lead to relapse, and will certainly make recovery difficult and painful when it could be simple. This program is a vital part of our everyday living. If it were not for this program most of us would be dead or institutionalized. Our viewpoint changes from that of a loner to that of a member. We emphasize setting our house in order because it brings us relief. We trust in our Higher Power for the strength to meet our needs.

One way to practice the principles of HOW is by taking a daily inventory. Our inventory allows us to recognize our daily growth. We shouldn't forget about our assets in striving to eliminate our defects. The old self-deception and self-centeredness can be replaced with spiritual principles.

Staying clean is the first step in facing life. When we practice acceptance, our lives are simplified. When problems arise, we hope to be well equipped with the tools of the program. We honestly have to surrender our own self-centeredness and self-destructiveness. In the past we believed desperation would give us the strength to survive. Now we accept responsibility for our problems and see that we're equally responsible for our solutions.

As recovering addicts, we have a lot to be grateful for. As our defects are removed, we are free to become all we can. We emerge as new individuals with an awareness of ourselves and the ability to take our places in the world.

In living the steps, we begin to let go of our self-obsession. We ask a Higher Power to remove our fear of facing ourselves and life. We redefine ourselves by working the steps and using the tools of recovery. We see ourselves differently. Our personalities change. We become feeling people, capable of responding appropriately to life. We put spiritual living first and learn to use patience, tolerance and humility in our daily affairs.

Other people in our lives help us develop trust and loving attitudes; we demand less and give more. We anger more slowly and forgive more easily. We learn about love from members of Narcotics Anonymous. Through the love we receive in our fellowship we begin to feel lovable ourselves, a feeling totally alien to our old egocentric selves.

Ego used to control us in all sorts of subtle ways. Anger is our reaction to our present reality. Resentments are reliving of past experiences again and again in our minds, and fear is our response to the future. We need to become willing to let God remove these defects that burden our spiritual growth.

New ideas are available to us through the sharing of our living experience. Rigorously practicing the few simple guidelines in this chapter, we recover daily. The principles of the program shape our personalities.

From the isolation of our addiction, we find a fellowship of people with the common bond of recovery. N.A. is like a lifeboat in a sea of isolation, hopelessness and destructive chaos. Our faith, strength and hope come from people sharing their recovery and from our relationship with the God of our own understanding. At first it feels awkward to share our feelings. Part of the pain of addiction is being cut off from this sharing experience. If we find ourselves in a bad place or we sense trouble coming, we call someone or get to a meeting. We learn to seek help before making difficult decisions. By humbling ourselves and asking for help, we can get through the toughest of times. I can't, we can! In this way we find the strength we need when we need it the most. We form a mutual bond as we share our spiritual and mental resources.

Sharing in regularly scheduled meetings and one-on-one with recovering addicts helps us to stay clean. Attending meetings reminds us what it is like to be new and of the progressive nature of our disease. Attending our home group provides encouragement from the people we get to know. This sustains our recovery and helps us in our daily living. When we honestly tell our own story, someone else may identify with us. Serving the needs of our members and making our message available gives us a feeling of joy. Service gives us opportunities to grow in ways which touch all parts of our lives. Our experience in recovery may help them deal with their problems-what worked for us might work for them. Most addicts are able to accept this type of sharing, even from the very beginning. The get-togethers after our meetings are good opportunities to share things we didn't get to discuss during the meeting. This is also a good time to talk one-on-one with our sponsors. Things we need to hear will surface and become clearer to us.

By sharing the experience of our recovery with newcomers, we help ourselves to stay clean. We share comfort and encouragement with others. Today we have people in our lives who stand with us. Getting away from our self-centeredness gives us a better perspective on life. By asking for help, we can change. Sharing is risky at times, but by becoming vulnerable we are able to grow.

Some will come to Narcotics Anonymous still trying to use people to help them continue their habit. Their closed mind is a barrier against change. A spirit of open-mindedness, coupled with an admission of powerlessness, is a key that will unlock the door to recovery. If someone with a drug problem comes to us seeking recovery and is willing to try, we gladly share with them how we stay clean.

We develop self-esteem as we help others find a new way of life. When we honestly evaluate what we have, we can learn to appreciate it. We begin to feel worthwhile being members of N.A. We can carry the gifts of recovery with us everywhere. The Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous are a progressive recovery process established in our daily living. Ongoing recovery is dependent on our relationship with a loving God who cares for us and will do for us what we find impossible to do for ourselves.

During our recovery, each of us comes to our own understanding of the program. If we have difficulties, we trust our groups, our sponsors and our Higher Power to guide us. Thus, recovery, as found in Narcotics Anonymous, comes both from within and without.

We live a day at a time but also from moment to moment. When we stop living in the here and now, our problems become magnified unreasonably. Patience isn't a strong point with us. That's why we need our slogans and our N.A. friends to remind us to live the program just for today.

Tell yourself:

JUST FOR TODAY my thoughts will be on my recovery, living and enjoying life without the use of drugs.

JUST FOR TODAY I will have faith in someone in N.A. who believes in me and wants to help me in my recovery.

JUST FOR TODAY I will have a program. I will try to follow it to the best of my ability.

JUST FOR TODAY through N.A. I will try to get a better perspective on my life.

JUST FOR TODAY I will be unafraid, my thoughts will be on my new associations, people who are not using and who have found a new way of life. So long as I follow that way, I have nothing to fear.

Chapter Ten

MORE WILL BE REVEALED

As our recovery progressed, we became increasingly aware of ourselves and the world around us. Our needs and wants, our assets and liabilities, were revealed to us. We came to realize that we had no power to change the outside world; we could only change ourselves. The program of Narcotics Anonymous provides an opportunity for us to ease the pain of living, through spiritual principles.

We are very fortunate to have had this program to come to. Before, very few people recognized that addiction was a disease. Recovery was only a dream.

The responsible, productive, drug-free lives of thousands of members illustrate the effectiveness of our program. Recovery is a reality for us today. Through working the steps we are rebuilding our fractured personalities. Narcotics Anonymous is a healthy environment for growth. As a fellowship, we love and cherish one another, supporting our new way of life together.

As we grow, we come to understand humility as acceptance of both our assets and our liabilities. What we want most is to feel good about ourselves. Today we have real feelings of love, joy, hope, sadness, excitement-not our old drug-induced feelings.

At times we find ourselves caught up in old ideas, even with time on the program. The basics are as important to recovery as they were in the beginning. We need to avoid old thinking patterns, both the old ideas and the tendency towards complacency. We cannot afford to become complacent because our disease is with us twenty-four hours a day. If, while practicing these principles, we allow ourselves to feel superior or inferior, we isolate ourselves. We are headed for trouble if we feel "apart from" other addicts. Separation from the atmosphere of recovery and the spirit of service to others slows our spiritual growth. Complacency keeps us from goodwill, love and compassion.

If we are unwilling to listen to others, we will deny the need for improvement. We learn to become flexible and to admit when others are right and we are wrong. As new things are revealed, we feel renewed. We need to stay open-minded and willing to do that one extra thing; go to that one extra meeting; stay on the phone that one extra minute; and help that newcomer stay clean that one extra day. This extra effort is vital to our recovery.

We come to know ourselves as never before. We experience new sensations, such as finding out what it is to love, to be loved, to know that people care about us, and to have concern and compassion for others. We find ourselves doing things that we never thought we would be doing, and enjoying them. We make mistakes and we accept and learn from them. We experience failure and we learn how to succeed. Often we have to face some type of crisis during our recovery, such as death of a loved one, financial difficulties or divorce. These are realities of life and they don't go away just because we get clean. Some of us, even after years of recovery, found ourselves jobless, homeless or penniless. We entertained the thought that staying clean was not "paying off" and the old thinking stirred up self-pity, resentment and anger. No matter how painful life's tragedies can be for us, one thing is clear: "We must not use, no matter what!"

This is a program of total abstinence, however, there are times, such as in cases of health problems involving surgery and/or extreme physical injury, when medication may be valid. This does not constitute a license to use. There is no safe use of drugs for us. Our bodies don't know the difference between drugs prescribed by a physician for pain and drugs "prescribed by ourselves" to get high. As addicts our skill at self-deception will be at a peak in such a situation. Often our minds will even manufacture additional pain as an excuse to use. Turning it over to our Higher Power and getting the support of our sponsor and other members can help prevent us from being our own worst enemies. Being alone during such times would give our disease too much leeway to take over. Honest sharing can dispel our fears of relapse. Serious illness or surgery can present particular problems for us.

Physicians should have specific knowledge of our addiction. Remember that we-not our doctor-are ultimately responsible for the risk we expose ourselves to. To minimize the danger there are a few specific options that we may consider. These are using local anesthesia, avoiding our drug of choice, if any, stopping while we are still hurting, and

spending extra days in the hospital in case withdrawal occurs.

Whatever pain we experience will pass. Through prayer, meditation and sharing we keep our minds off our discomfort and have the strength to keep our priorities in order. It is imperative to keep N.A. members close by at all times, if possible. It is amazing how our minds will go back so quickly to our old ways and old thinking. You'd be surprised how much pain we can handle without medication. In this program of total abstinence, however, we need feel no guilt after having taken a minimum amount of medication prescribed by an informed professional for extreme physical pain.

We grow through pain in recovery and often find that such a crisis is a gift, an opportunity to experience growth by living clean. Before, we were unable to even conceive of the thought that problems bring gifts. This may be finding strength within ourselves that we never knew before or regaining the feeling of self-respect we had lost. Spiritual growth, love and compassion are but idle potentials until shared with a fellow addict. By giving unconditional love in the fellowship, we become more loving, and in the sharing of spiritual growth we become more spiritual.

By carrying this message to another addict, we are well reminded of where we come from. Having had an opportunity to remember old feelings and behaviors, we are able to see our own personal and spiritual growth. In the process of answering the questions of another, we become more clear in our thinking. Newer members are a constant source of hope, ever reminding us that the program works. We have the opportunity to live the knowledge acquired by staying clean, when we work with them.

We have learned to value others' respect for us. We are pleased when people can now depend on us. For the first time in our lives we may be asked to serve in positions of responsibility in community organizations outside of N.A. Our opinions are at times sought and valued by non-addicts in areas other than addiction and recovery. We can enjoy our families in a new way and may become a credit to them instead of an embarrassment or a burden. They can be proud of us today. Our individual interests broaden possibly to include social or even political issues. Hobbies and recreation give us new pleasure. It gives us good feelings to know that aside from our value to others as recovering addicts we are also of value as human beings.

The reinforcement received by sponsorship is limitless. We spent years taking from others in every conceivable way. Words cannot describe the sense of spiritual awareness that we receive when we have given something, no matter how small, to another person.

We are each other's eyes and ears; when we do something wrong our fellow addicts help us to help ourselves by showing us what we cannot see. We sometimes find ourselves caught up in old ideas. We need to constantly review our feelings and thinking, if we are to stay enthusiastic and grow spiritually. This enthusiasm will aid our ongoing recovery.

Today we have the freedom of choice. As we work the program to the best of our ability, the obsession with self is removed. Much of our loneliness and fear are replaced by the love and security of the fellowship. Helping a suffering addict is one of the greatest experiences life has to offer. We are willing to help. We have had similar experiences and understand fellow addicts as no one else can. We offer hope for we know that a better way of life is now real for us, and we give love because it was so freely given. New frontiers are open to us as we learn how to love. Love can be the flow of life energy from one person to another. By caring, sharing, and praying for others, we become a part of them, and through empathy, allow them to become part of us. As we do this, we undergo a vital spiritual experience and are changed.

On a practical level, changes occur because what's appropriate to one phase of recovery may not be for another. We constantly let go of what has served its purpose, and let God guide us through the current phase with what works here and now.

As we become more God-reliant and gain self-respect, we realize that we don't need to feel superior or inferior to anyone; our real value is in being ourselves. Our egos, once so large and dominant, now take a back seat because we are in harmony with a loving God. We find that we lead richer, happier and much fuller lives when we lose self-will. We become able to make wise and loving decisions, based on principles and ideals that have real value in our lives.

Shaping our thoughts with the spiritual ideals that we are moving toward, we are freed to become who we want to be. What we had feared, we can now overcome through our dependence on a loving God. Faith has replaced our fear and given us freedom from ourselves.

In recovery, we also strive for gratitude. We feel grateful for ongoing God-consciousness. Whenever we confront a difficulty that we do not think we can handle, we ask God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

A spiritual awakening is an ongoing process. We experience a wider view of reality as we grow spiritually. An opening of our minds to new spiritual and physical experiences is the key to better awareness. As we grow spiritually we become attuned to our feelings and our purpose in life.

By loving ourselves, we become able to truly love others. This is a spiritual awakening that comes as a result of living this program. We find ourselves daring to care and love.

Higher mental and emotional functions, such as conscience and the ability to love, were sharply affected by our use of drugs. Living skills were reduced to the animal level. Our spirit was broken. The capacity to feel human was lost. This seems extreme, but many of us have been in this state.

In time, through recovery, our dreams come true. We don't mean that we necessarily become rich or famous. However, by realizing the will of our Higher Power, dreams do come true in our recovery.

One of the continuing miracles of recovery is becoming a productive, responsible member of society. We need to tread carefully into areas that expose us to ego-inflating experience, prestige and manipulation that may be difficult for us to deal with. We have found that the way to remain a productive, responsible member of society is to put our recovery first. N.A. can survive without us but we cannot survive without N.A.

Living just for today, we have no way of knowing what will happen to us. We are often amazed at how things work out for us. Recovering in the here and now, the future becomes an exciting journey. If we had written our list of expectations when we came to the program, we would have been cheating ourselves. Hopeless living problems became joyously changed. Our disease has been arrested and now anything is possible.

We become increasingly open-minded which opens the door for new ideas, in all areas of our lives. Through active listening, we hear things that work for us. This ability is a gift and grows as we grow spiritually. Life takes on a new meaning when we open ourselves to this gift. In order to receive, we must be willing to give.

Narcotics Anonymous offers only one promise and that is freedom from active addiction, the solution that eluded us for so long. We will be freed from our self-made prisons.

In recovery, our ideas of fun change. We are now free to enjoy the simple things in life, like fellowship and living in harmony with nature. We now have become free to develop a new understanding of life. As we look back, we are grateful for our new life. It is so unlike the events that brought us here.

While using, we thought that we had fun and that non-users were deprived of it. Spirituality enables us to live to the fullest, feeling grateful for who we are and what we have done in life. Since the beginning of our recovery, we have found that joy doesn't come from material things, but from within ourselves. We find that when we lose self-obsession, we are able to understand what it means to be happy, joyous, and free. Indescribable joy comes from sharing from the heart; we no longer need to lie to gain acceptance.

Narcotics Anonymous offers addicts a program of recovery which is more than just a life without drugs. Not only is this way of life better than the hell we lived, it is better than any life we had ever known.

We have found a way out, and we see it work for others. Each day more will be revealed.

The End

***“My gratitude speaks... When I care and
When I share with others The N.A. way.”***