

1988 Drafts from Chicagoland Region for It Works

STEP ONE .

*"We admitted that we were powerless over
our addiction, that our lives had become
unmanageable."*

As addicts, we have each known the pain, loneliness and despair of addiction. The First Step of Narcotics Anonymous is the beginning of a journey toward freedom. Many thousands of us have started this process with the admissions contained in this step. Surrender, coupled with the spiritual principles associated with Step One, opens our hearts and minds to see ourselves honestly. The basis of our empathy and identification is the unifying admission of powerlessness over the disease of addiction.

Long, before we came to N.A. most of us felt like we were different. Many new members described feeling out of place--like they never belonged anywhere. Alone in our isolation we desperately sought acceptance and love. We had no power over how we felt. Fear was a part of everyday reality. We tended to live in the extremes of self-pity or self-righteousness because we believed that no one understood us. These feelings were at times unbearable, and we spent much of our time looking for some person, place, or thing to make everything alright. We seemed to be drawn to substances. From the beginning, we noticed that drugs seemed to act differently for us than for others. When we first started using, we got some relief and found ourselves attempting to recapture that feeling unsuccessfully. During our active addiction, we noticed times when the drugs would no longer have the desired effect. They may even have stopped working for us entirely. Many of us wondered why.

Addiction is a progressive disease that affects us physically, mentally and spiritually. The physical aspect of our disease is the compulsive use of drugs and the overpowering desire to use even when it is destructive. When we use, a physical reaction takes place that compels us to use again.

Recovery begins with abstinence. When we begin feeling better, we find a tremendous amount of relief. We may even think we are cured. This is a dangerous misconception. The disease of addiction does not go away. It is arrested on a daily basis.

Our using separated us from our feelings, and as the drugs left our bodies, the feelings returned full force. We once again sought comfort and relief in externals. This is the mental aspect of our disease. It is characterized by obsession and desperation. Substitution takes many forms for us. It involves forms of self-gratification such as money, power, prestige, food or sex. As addicts we have used and abused practically everything. We are capable of making anything self-destructive. Painfully, we have learned that the answers we seek are not external. Just as the drugs stopped working, eventually substitution stops working, and we are left with ourselves.

Lack of faith, hope and trust; inability to relate to others as equals; and our obsession with self are the spiritual aspect of our disease. This part of our disease is the most devastating since it permeates our entire beings and our relationships with reality. (**Add more on spiritual aspect of

our disease. Include: our disease is self-centered rather than spirit centered; total self-centeredness; feeling superior/inferior; low self esteem; how we set ourselves up to repeat our mistakes; we can't live in contradiction to our self-image.]

With the First Step, we embark on a spiritually based formula for living that allows us to be free from active addiction and the bondage of self. The Steps assault all three aspects of our disease: the physical, the mental and the spiritual. The key to freedom is the awakening of spirituality within us. This can only occur in the absence of obsession and compulsion. Our First Step admissions begin a process of surrender, commitment and acceptance that takes time.

As we begin to recover, one of the first things we encounter is denial. We may find ourselves denying that we were ever addicts. We have a disease that tells us we don't have a disease. We break through this denial by working the First Step.

All of us felt very alone and isolated, often having the desire to stop using but not knowing that recovery was possible. When we came into Narcotics Anonymous, we began to realize that by our own power alone we couldn't do what had to be done in order to save our lives. Our powerlessness was shown to us by the way we continued to use in spite of our own will and desire to stop. The admission of powerlessness is essential to recovery. The term "willpower" has no meaning for us when we try to control our disease. We are not only powerless over specific drugs, but over our disease of addiction, with it's most obvious symptom being obsessive and compulsive use of drugs.

It is not a sign of weakness to admit that we're powerless. Expand on these topics: 1. Fear of vulnerability 2. Fear of giving up illusion of control 3. Strength in admitting powerlessness

Before coming to N.A.. we felt so miserable we just couldn't go, any further without help. We needed relief. We came to see that we could no longer use to sustain our lives. It was a surrender to the truth that we were addicts. We didn't want to admit this, or even say it. This was because we didn't want to close the doors on all the options.

Our powerlessness, physical and emotional pain, unmanageability and disease brought us to Narcotics Anonymous. We often thought one certain drug was the problem and that substitution would relieve that problem. Even when we knew that using was causing us problems in one or more areas of life, we believed that we knew how to stop on our own. In the search for peace and happiness outside of ourselves, some of us changed our environment, friends, lovers and jobs in futile efforts to quit or control our using.

Most of us viewed temporary periods of abstinence as meaning that we could control or quit our use of drugs. We told ourselves repeatedly that we could stop if we really needed to, yet it was very difficult for us to be aware of all the times we wanted to stop--and couldn't. When we did try to stop using on our own, we found it never seemed to last for very long. After realizing we were still miserable during our periods of abstinence we returned to using. We came to the point where a part of us wanted to stop, yet another part of us felt that we could not live life without our drugs. Most of us were also convinced that we could stop using if something "out there" would change. But these changes weren't the answer.

Admitting powerlessness is only the first part of Step One; the second half states, "that our lives had become unmanageable." When we don't pay attention to daily responsibilities or when we

push people away from us it is a direct result of our disease, just as when we steal, lie, cheat, or take more than our fair share. We can see these occurrences as clear examples of an unmanageable life. Our unmanageability goes much further. We were also unable to manage our feelings and thoughts. Seeing our unmanageability helped us learn more clearly what addiction meant. Our disease has influenced the way we have looked at our lives, ourselves and others. Recovery offers us the opportunity to see everything differently. We began to see that everybody else wasn't to blame for the way we were living. For the first time most of us started taking responsibility for making things better for ourselves. In the beginning it meant not to use.

We saw that people and possessions did not work to "fix us" or make us feel okay, and we then considered that we were the problem. Our differences are much less important than our similarities. We are alike in our physical reaction to drugs, our emotional reaction to life, and in our lack of spiritual understanding.

Until we accept that we are powerless over our addiction and that our lives have become unmanageable, we have difficulty finding meaning in the rest of the steps. The First Step involves the admission that we have the disease of addiction. This helps break through the denial and allows us to begin to recognize our powerlessness. Then we begin to take steps toward recovery.

The First Step is about getting honest. Being honest with ourselves is difficult and an ongoing challenge in recovery. The honesty we heard in meetings broke through our denial. We came to see the unmanageability of our lives. We had so distorted our views of ourselves and our lives that we couldn't distinguish between what was real and what was not. We faced the truth about ourselves. Our pride, ego and self-deception block our ability to come to terms with our unmanageability. We came to see that we really didn't have any control over our addiction. It affected every area of our lives--the way we thought and felt and behaved. Our rebelliousness, and the need to feel we had some kind of control died hard. We didn't want to face our powerlessness. The bottom line is that through willpower, we could not stay clean. It can only be through abstinence and honest admission of our powerlessness that our addiction is arrested and recovery begins.

We stay clean and experience recovery by going to meetings and developing a relationship with a sponsor and other members of the fellowship. We gave up the illusion that we could handle drugs, that we could use. That started a process that, for many of us, gave us the miracle of being freed from our obsession to use again. It is only by being honest that we became open minded and willing to surrender to the principles of Narcotics Anonymous and begin our recovery. Unless we are tired of living and feeling the way we were, there is little chance of recovery. We must believe, above all else, that there is hope if we stay clean and apply the Twelve Steps in our lives.

Many addicts have also found that writing about powerlessness and unmanageability can be a very effective tool. This is suggested because it is easier to see on paper how addiction has affected our lives. Our sponsors point out how the humility we gain through admitting complete defeat provides a foundation for our ongoing surrender.

In N.A. we address the cause of the problem, addiction, not just the apparent symptoms, drugs. We get and stay clean so we may recover from the disease of addiction. The way we are able to

be clean and to stay clean is by practicing the Twelve Steps. Our goal is not just simple abstinence, it is recovery. We didn't learn this by reading it or saying it. We learned it by experiencing it. We learn to live by these steps. We accept these steps as our way of life.

Working the First Step frequently causes emotional turmoil within us. Feelings common to people struggling with this step include: hopelessness, despair, helplessness, desperation, futility, worthlessness and loneliness. Getting stuck in these feelings is self-defeating and binds us to our disease. We cried out in our frustration for help. The program of Narcotics Anonymous offers us a solution to our dilemma. We realize that if others can make it so can we.

After admitting our powerlessness we can understand the necessity for abstinence. We begin to realize the miracle of choice. We now have the freedom to choose between fighting our addiction or surrendering to recovery. This choice can be the difference between life and death. The direction of our lives is determined by our choice. In surrendering to Narcotics Anonymous and the spiritual principles of the program we have hope. No longer are we living in our disease but we are now willing to attempt to follow the suggestions offered to us by our sponsors and other recovering addicts.

We have identified the problem--we are powerless over our addiction and our lives are unmanageable (even after we get clean). We now need to use the solution--Narcotics Anonymous. The answers to powerlessness and unmanageability are in coming to believe. The admissions we make in the First Step are a commitment. Fulfillment of that commitment begins with the Second Step.

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STEP TWO

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

Upon coming to Narcotics Anonymous, some of us had little difficulty with the First Step. It became obvious that we were powerless over our addiction, in fact, it is an insane power greater than ourselves. It controlled our every waking moment, our every thought, word, and deed. Many of us had felt crushed and defeated upon admitting powerlessness and recognizing our unmanageability.

Few of us come to Narcotics Anonymous with a belief in a Power greater than ourselves that could restore us to sanity. However, in our experience, we have learned that such a Power is vitally important to our recovery. Most of us have tried using external changes to stop using and achieve some form of peace or sanity. These escapes included doctors, jobs, different towns, friends, and lovers. None of these methods were sufficient for us. Still others of us came to N.A. with a preconceived idea of a vengeful God who controlled our lives through reward and punishment. At

other times, because of feelings of guilt or fear associated with our actions, we chose to ignore or forget any belief in this Power. Our pain and desperation force us to become willing to believe in some kind of Higher Power.

At first, this seems an impossible task. As addicts, we have no defense over the insanity of our addiction. Self-knowledge and willpower have not kept us clean. We begin to see that no human power can take away our addiction. Our strength has to come from a Power greater than ourselves. We then become more open to the concept of a Higher Power as being a source of hope and our willingness to accept that help is also evident to us.

The Second Step may seem overwhelming, especially for those of us who had turned our backs on a Higher Power or felt as though a Power greater than ourselves had turned it's back on us. Some of us really fought this step and hurt ourselves by fighting it. Still others of us vigorously deny that a Power greater than ourselves has ever existed. In coming to grips with this step, we find we have to change some of our strongest convictions.

Many of us do not have a lot to lose at this point. To continue would mean misery or death. We are truly in a tight spot: We know we cannot handle using anymore, and yet we are powerless to save ourselves. Not wanting to die, we become willing to open our minds. There is nothing else to do. Faced with the simple choice -- believe or die -- some of us don't have time to figure it all out; we grab at the first feasible concept of a Higher Power and hang on. Once we stop resisting the concept of a Power greater than ourselves, the door to faith can be opened.

Being as honest, open-minded, and willing as we can be is indispensable in doing this Step. It takes honesty to admit that we are not the greatest power there is and to admit that we need to be restored to sanity. It takes open-mindedness to consider what powers greater than ourselves we can trust. It also takes willingness to work this step. A willingness to believe that there is a Higher Power who can restore us to sanity is all that is asked of us by Step Two.

When we first heard about a Power greater than ourselves, most of us associated it with religion. We had always figured spirituality and religion were the same, but we began to find out differently. We began to see that spirituality was seeking a Power greater than ourselves. It didn't

necessarily have anything to do with religion as we had understood religion. We found that even our members who had the most trouble with religion were able to come to believe in a Power greater than themselves. All we had to deal with here was finding a way of life that gave us hope that there was some Power greater than us that could work for us and restore us to sanity.

Many of us had some very bad experiences with religion. We had looked there for answers. We hadn't seemed to be able to find any that worked for us. It wasn't until we came to Narcotics Anonymous that we began to get a different picture of a Power greater than ourselves. Our first contact with that Power was not from talk but from the warmth we felt in the presence of people who made us feel welcome. We saw the honesty when they shared their stories, that showed us they had been where we had been. From their faces we could see that they had found a way out, because their faces didn't look like the ones we were used to seeing. A lot of us have an understanding now of a Power greater than ourselves as the force for good we see working in our lives and the lives of the other people in the Fellowship. There was a happy sparkle in their eyes.

For some of us the idea of being restored to sanity meant becoming a different person. But we learned that the Second Step meant we would become better at being ourselves. We would be more outgoing than we were, but we might not ever have all those qualities we admired in others. We found the ways to express ourselves in meetings and in our lives that were appropriate for us.

Most of us have been acquainted with a Higher Power which we would sometimes call upon in desperation or crisis. Sometimes we called upon that Spirit in desperation, frantically bargaining for our lives, "If You'll only bail me out this time, God..." Disappointed at how short-lived our reprieve from that crisis was, we became disillusioned with any concept of a Higher Power who would answer our pleas for help.

One of our most difficult tasks is to change that concept to one of a Power which is loving, forgiving and caring, one which wants only the best life for us. This became easier as we talked and shared with others who had experienced the benefits of the Second Step and who had achieved an understanding of a Higher Power

Words are ineffective in explaining how we came to believe. For each of us it's been different. But when we had a desire to find a Power greater than ourselves, it became apparent to us. For some, it was a magic moment of realization, profound and even mystical. But most of us built belief in a Higher Power a little bit at a time. For many of us, this belief was long in coming because of our lost ability to have faith in anyone or anything other than ourselves. Step Two says "We came to believe", not that we have to believe everything right now. Faith is built slowly but surely through ongoing recovery and a willingness to look for a Higher Power working in our lives. The roads are many, and wider than we may think, to a belief in a Power greater than ourselves.

Our understanding of a Higher Power is up to us. It can be anything we conceive it to be. No one told us what to believe or criticized our belief. This freedom to find a Higher Power of our own understanding was totally different from what most of us had experienced before. It was one more example of the love and acceptance we found in our N.A. groups and in working the program. Unlike some of our previous approaches to spirituality, we didn't feel we had to pretend to be good and hide what was bad. We should feel comfortable with our Higher Power and be able to make the statement that our Higher Power cares about us.

N.A. has many members and our collective Spiritual energy is certainly greater than that of any individual member. What is impossible for one alone is often light work for the many, because the many are a Power greater than yourself. The freedom that we found in N.A. was a great help to those of us who were lost in self and so far out of touch with reality. We needed plenty of time and patience before we could start to get out of ourselves. When we first dimly heard people talking about some power, we knew that they were serious, but we couldn't figure it out. We started looking for some power that was greater than us. When we look around us with an open mind, we see and feel a positive power all around N.A. We realize that the miracles of recovery, so common in Narcotics Anonymous, are concrete manifestations of this benevolent Power. We can call it love, or the Fellowship, or it can be called God. It doesn't matter so much what we choose to call it individually, what matters more is that we find that we do have a positive power in N.A.. that is working to help us to help each other. If you can accept the fact that a large number of addicts like yourself have found a way to live clean through the steps of Narcotics

Anonymous, then you only have to believe. Step Two is a principle of hope which has made our recovery possible.

"We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could *restore us to sanity*." Each of us, as a result of our own experience, has a different idea of what sanity and insanity mean. The wording of the Second Step states that we can be restored to sanity, implying that we were insane. We may have trouble seeing we needed to be restored to something we didn't think we had lost. When we first came in, many of us angrily defended our sanity. This part of the Second Step was a big problem for a lot of us because we related the word insanity to a mental institution. We do not have to be in a straitjacket to be insane. Our Basic Text gives us one definition of insanity, which is "repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results." We kept thinking it was going to work out differently,-and it never did. We kept thinking we were going to be able to handle it this time and we never could. A few of us knew right off that we were insane. We kept looking for a way to pursue our insanity. We toyed with the idea that it might be easier to keep on being insane. We knew how to do that. For those of us who thought we were sane how were we able to come to see our insanity? We started listening to other people talk about their insanity in meetings. We realized we were just like them. We started relating and talking to our sponsor and writing on this step. As we began to get things down in black and white, a clear picture of our insanity emerged. Our insanity was that we thought we could handle drugs. Our insanity was what our addiction led us to do to get drugs. Our insanity was our inability to see ourselves or our lives clearly. It was insane to do a lot of the things we did that made us feel such shame. That guilt set up a whole, vicious cycle. Also we would sit there, contemplating our lives and how we were not going to use drugs anymore--using while we were thinking about not using!

We saw our insanity in the way we would put using before anything. We put our drug use before our family, before our job, before God, before everything. We see now that we had to think this way. We had to have an iron-clad justification to do what we did. When we wrote down all the things we had done and looked at them in our First Step, we finally began to see how insane it was that we would put our using before everything else in our lives. When we examine our behavior, we see that we have been unpredictable, irresponsible, irrational and unreasonable. We were unable to make rational decisions while in the midst of obsession and compulsion. Our ability to concentrate on realistic priorities was affected. That is the insanity we are talking about here.

Another problem we had with understanding how insanity applied to us, was that we thought what we did was natural. We thought what we did was just a normal thing that came with our lifestyle. It was all the people out there who were abnormal. While we were in the middle of it, it was hard to see our own insanity. We were too close. We totally accepted it as a part of us. This was the continuous type of ritual we went through.

Another aspect of our insanity is the belief that we are self-sufficient. We isolated ourselves from other people and felt that we were different. Often this behavior occurred well before we ever took our first drug. When we started using, we seemed to get some relief from the pain we felt. But as our disease progressed, our insanity simply got worse, and using no longer stopped the pain. Seeing our disease in these terms gives us the opportunity to consider "restoration to sanity" as the experience of "coming home." We rejoin the human race through the Fellowship of

Narcotics Anonymous. We find the willingness to give up our painful isolation, and allow ourselves to be "a part of rather than "apart from."

Facing our insanity was the beginning, the beginning of taking some responsibility for our recovery. So it was our responsibility to ask for help or to do anything else we needed in order to be restored to sanity. And since we had done such a good job of messing up our lives, it was going to have to be something besides us restoring us to sanity.

This was why we needed to find people in the Fellowship we felt close to. We had to ask one of them to sponsor us as soon as possible so we could be guided through the early, perilous times. Identifying with each other in this way gives us our first real hope--the hope that we can be restored to sanity.

This Step is all about facing the issue of some Power greater than ourselves. There was no way we could be restored to sanity unless we came to believe in a Power greater than ourselves. We had spent our whole lives being locked up inside ourselves. So when we came to N.A. it was hard to consider anything else in the world. To think of the idea that there was any other power greater than ourselves was almost incomprehensible. The power we depended on and trust in the past was our own. Now we were being asked to come out of ourselves and throw away all of those old ideas. We didn't want to throw them all away, but we had to because our lives depended on it.

We faced a simple, clear principle: If the disease is progressive, and we have it, then we desperately need a Power greater than ourselves to restore us to sanity before our addiction devours us.

Restoration to sanity allows us ongoing recovery from our addiction. The Second Step offers us lives made whole and new. Being restored to sanity brings a needed balance to our lives. There was also the principle of faith. When we came to N.A. we didn't have any faith in ourselves, any faith in God, any faith in any kind of system. It wasn't until we began to see other people recovering right in front of our eyes that we started to have some faith in N.A. If they could do it, maybe we could do it, too. Faith gave us the courage to take chances and live a life of new meaning and opportunity. As our days, months, and years of being clean began to grow, our faith also grew, because we witnessed and experienced things we had never experienced before. We had gone through things that we couldn't have gotten through without a Higher Power helping us, a Power greater than ourselves. We didn't get faith because we thought we should get it. Instead, our faith grew naturally in us as a direct result of a whole set of experiences we had and saw other people having. Putting our program into action had helped us get through some hard times. It was then that our faith really started building.

Lack of faith had always been our problem. We always questioned. Now we finally began to quit questioning. We saw that if a Power greater than ourselves could remove this horrible obsession, then it could make us sane and restore us to sanity. That's when we started, little by little, to be restored to sanity. We saw, too, that it was working the First Step as thoroughly as we could that made us spiritually fit to work the Second Step. It has been said that in our addictive minds whatever we focus on seems to grow and become larger. The more we practice what limited faith we have, the more we seem to have.

Faith offers us freedom and faith gives us the courage to take chances and live a life of new meaning and opportunity. This new life is what is meant by being "restored to sanity." Once we begin to practice Step Two, we are soon rewarded with a faith that becomes deeper and more meaningful as long as we continue to be willing and open-minded. The more we exercise and practice what limited faith we have, the more we seem to have.

We'd hardly be human if we didn't doubt sometimes and waver on the road of recovery. When this happens, we need to know that we're still accepted in N.A. and not be afraid to talk about it. Coming to believe is a gradual process which requires continued practice. As we begin to find some order in our lives, we come to accept that a Higher Power is supplying all our needs. We come to meetings and experience recovery.

As we stayed clean and tried to practice the N.A. Program, it began to happen to us. We didn't know it then, but everyday we stayed clean was a step in the direction of being restored to sanity. Being restored to sanity meant we began to experience some spiritual principles.

There are no doubt countless spiritual principles in these steps, and we came to understand that being restored to sanity meant putting these principles into action in our lives.

For some of us, the spiritual principles that were embodied in these Twelve Steps could be our Higher Power. At first we were just able to intellectualize these principles. With time, we began to believe them. And gradually we began to live by them. When we began to live by them, we began to experience the change. We realized that we were being restored to sanity and were coming to believe in a Power greater than ourselves.

We found this was a program of action. We could sit and talk about these things forever and it wasn't going to do anything. It was only when we began to apply these principles to our everyday lives and see them work that we began to find out what the truth was.

As our faith increases and our relationship with the God of our understanding strengthens, we begin to develop confidence in our life. We no longer awake each morning in terror, anticipating another day of disasters, because we have experienced the miracle of staying clean and we know it is not due to our own power. When we do feel the old familiar panic again, we simply wait for it to subside, because we now know in our hearts that, "this too will pass." As long as we stay clean, we need never suffer the horrors of addiction again. Already we have seen our lives improve in countless ways, and we are beginning to get a glimpse of the life God has planned for us--a life which includes real friendship and love, service, contentment, fulfillment and a measure of peace.

Of course we still have problems, and probably act largely on self-will. We see now that we can place our confidence in our Higher Power and utilize God's power in all of our daily affairs. That led us on to the Third Step.

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STEP THREE

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

Step Three calls for a decision. To make a decision is to start a course of action. We trust that a Power greater than ourselves can provide us with the daily strength to stay clean and recover.

Many of us have had great difficulty in making any kind of decisions in our lives. We experience anxiety whenever choices confront us, because our perfectionism demands that we make the "right" choice. Following through on the decisions we do make may also be hard for some of us. In Step Three we learn that making a decision requires awareness, commitment and action.

This Third Step was ego deflating for all of us. When we were new it was difficult for us to see how hard it had been for those with a lot of clean time. It was difficult to see that they too had gone through this process some time ago and were now more at peace with it.

We didn't realize it at the time, but the fact we were even able to think about making such a decision showed the changes that had already taken place in us. In the process of coming to meetings and working our First and Second Steps, we were learning how to think differently and look at situations differently. We were really changing. We were really changing because we were becoming more responsible. We had found some people we could talk to and ask for help with the Third Step. And by now most of us had a sponsor to help us.

As we worked the Third Step, we each came to a clearer understanding of God just for ourselves. Addicts who fail to incorporate a belief in a Power greater than self often return to active addiction. In the Second Step, we learned that a Power greater than ourselves could be the N.A. group, Fellowship, literature or any Power greater than self. Before we can take Step Three, we must come to terms with the lack of spirituality in our lives.

For many of us, prayer has not been a word common to our vocabularies, let alone our actions. It has been difficult for some of us to feel comfortable in prayer. We can simplify the concept of praying to be a gesture of acknowledgment of what we have come to believe in through the Second Step. We learn to feel more comfortable in our requests for guidance with daily practice. When we turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him, we put our decision into action.

We found that it wasn't the words that we used that made the difference, it was what we did and what our attitudes were. We found that if we just identified some Power greater than ourselves and used that Power throughout the Steps, we could recover. We just had a message and a truth that worked for us.

We later saw that when we first came into Narcotics Anonymous, we were already believing in a Higher Power, yet we didn't realize it. We were believing that here was a group of people that could help us. If we didn't believe that Narcotics Anonymous was a Higher Power that could help us, we wouldn't have kept coming back to the meetings. Behind our belief in the power of the meetings was our Higher Power.

Making a decision to turn our wills and lives over to the care of God is one of the most important decisions we can make. For this reason, newcomers are often advised to not make any major

decisions during their first year of recovery. Since decisions are difficult for us, there may be some major decisions, especially in early recovery, that may be better to delay action on. These kind of decisions could include a change of employment, residence or financial matters. We have learned that honestly and carefully talking these decisions over with our sponsor is a good idea for us. We then can make a more balanced and rational choice if these decisions are absolutely necessary for us to make at the time. We can begin to exercise the opportunity that is available to us of surrendering our self-will and asking for help.

Willingness is all that is needed to begin on Step Three. Turning our will over to this Higher Power makes it possible to receive the serenity for which we all strive. This means we no longer struggle with situations over which we are powerless. We find ourselves letting go of the things we cannot change. We are fully conscious of where our wills, plans, and designs have taken us, in the past. When we sincerely ask God as we understand Him to take over the care of our wills and lives, we begin to see results.

Some addicts find that writing about the willingness to work Step Three increases our awareness. At times when we take back our will and find ourselves again trying to run the show, we refer to our writing and remember the decision we made. Turning over our wills and lives relieves us of the burden of managing our lives alone. A way that has worked for many of us is to talk about this step and share what we have written with a sponsor. Our self-obsession is diminished when we ask for help.

In praying for our continued willingness and as a manner of consciously putting ourselves into the care of our Higher Power, many of us use the following simple request which is found in our Basic Text:

"Take my will and my life. Guide me in my recovery. Show me how to live." Once we've made this decision we begin, to the best of our ability, to consciously turn over our will as situations arise.

Although we may not use these particular words, it is the expression of this idea to the Higher Power of our own individual understanding that makes it possible for us to develop a working relationship with that Higher Power.

Surrender is the underlying principle of the Third Step. For some people, surrender brings up a host of fearful images: Defeat, loss of control and failure. Yet we say in Narcotics Anonymous that to surrender is to win. How can this be?

We win when we surrender because we give up our attempts to control our addiction, our delusions that we can manage our lives alone, and our insanity. We receive the power, strength and guidance that make it possible for us to continue to recover and lead responsible and productive lives.

Most of us suffered before we became willing to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of the God of our understanding. Becoming honest enough to admit the need to surrender is often painful.

We see clearly that any life run on self-will can only bring suffering. "Running the show" was a favorite pastime of ours, even though people, places and things constantly disappointed us. "If

only", "maybe" and "next time" comprised a large part of our daily dialogues. We couldn't even run our own lives, yet we attempted to run the lives of other. In Step Three, we make the decision to stop that destructive pattern of thinking; we make a commitment to begin a lifestyle of recovery.

When we surrender our will and lives over to the care of God as we understand Him, we gain a way of living in the world that provides us with much happiness and peace within. For most of us, this new way of life is unlike any kind of experience we have ever known.

As we learned to surrender, and sought to align our will with God's will for us, we found there was a whole new life out there that we had never before dreamed could exist. The steps teach us to live a life based on spiritual principles instead of ego.

We also realized that it helped us to work and practice the Third Step when we looked at each of the other steps. We needed to free ourselves so that new things could come into our lives. Each of us saw that we were always the biggest obstacle standing in our own way. We got to the point where we had to surrender. Only after we decided to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God could we approach the remaining steps with a confidence that our Higher Power would guide us. We had to let go of some of our old, negative ways of looking at the world before something better could take their place. We were getting rid of the old ideas to make a space for the new ideas.

One mistake many of us made with this step was to do nothing and call that surrender. We found we had to take a very active role. We did the footwork but then left the results up to God.

Total acceptance of the principle of surrender develops gradually throughout our recovery.

When we have problems in our daily lives, we turn to our Higher Power for help. Just as we practice Steps 1 and 2 on a daily basis, so we need to reaffirm our Step 3 decision every day. Situations may arise with which we have difficulty coping: people who disagree with us or don't act

the way we wish they would, or needs and desires we feel are unfulfilled. We have already exerted a great deal of energy trying to shape things as we saw fit. Now we have the opportunity to apply the action of the first three steps to our lives.

At some level of consciousness, we may intuitively understand that the problem has something to do with us. Even if we have been unjustifiably wronged, *we* are the ones who are unhappy about the situation. The problem lies with us. Our experience has demonstrated over and over again that the only people we can change are ourselves. At this point, we realize that changing our attitudes is necessary.

"Turning it over" simply means letting go of our old ideas and allowing our Higher Power to take charge of our lives. By using this spiritual principle, we often find new ways to deal with problems that once seemed impossible. We gain a newfound freedom by which we can share our burdens with this Power we're learning to trust. We step aside; we give up attempts at control: we let a Higher Power shape our reality.

In reviewing our First Step, we appraise the problem, admitting our limitations and powerlessness. From our self-centered feelings, we contemplated what it means to be restored to sanity. Frustrated, disappointed, and maybe even a little frightened, we turn to our Higher Power. We affirm our belief that God can restore us to sanity and provide some relief. We make a decision to turn the situation over to His care.

We began to understand that the words "care of" were key words in this step. Part of that "care of" was being given back the freedom to follow our conscience. We came to believe that a part of Step Three was developing a conscience. Once that happened to us, we no longer had to act on our disease. We had the disease of addiction, but it was being arrested. Now we are in the recovery process. In the Third Step we became willing to have God's will for us revealed to us. Once we took it, we became ready to listen to God's will for us.

Our problem was our inability to live life on its own terms. Our developing conscience and sense of responsibility helped us see that. Sometimes, the very worst things that happened to us had the most positive benefit over the long run.

We learned over a period of time that this was the step that would keep us sane on an ongoing, daily basis. No matter what happened, we had to realize that we were not in control of things. We didn't manipulate the world. We didn't run the people around us. We had been powerless all along and hadn't seen it. Now we finally saw what we had been doing and we learned to let it all go.

Belief in a Higher Power and making the decision to turn our will and our lives over to this Power enables us to experience personal growth and freedom. We find that God's will is simple. God's will is doing the best we can with the opportunities put before us. It is a calm or peace within, bringing freedom from the inner turmoil which signals self-will. We believe our Higher Power wants us to be creative, spontaneous, vital, joyous, cooperative, loving and free-not to be burdened by the everyday ups and downs of life. We ask for God's guidance and strength.

Most importantly we believe that God's will for us is to be happy, to share this joy with other addicts, and to learn to accept "life on life's terms," without using, even over the most painful problems. At times we felt out of place and often behaved inappropriately. When we became willing, we opened ourselves to the possibility of change.

Our belief in a Higher Power and our decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of this Power enable us to experience personal growth and freedom. This decision is the key that opens our hearts and minds to let this Higher Power enter. Through the trust and faith gained in this step, we begin to fulfill a spiritual void. We come to rely on something other than ourselves. It is upon this spiritual fulfillment that a foundation for recovery is built.

And that's why all of us in this Fellowship were faced with making that decision over and over again, every day of our lives.

Even though we may have no idea what life has in store for us, we believe that with the help of a power greater than ourselves to guide us, it will be better than anything that we could provide for ourselves. Our fears and frustrations with life can be lessened and we can feel some peace and comfort about what is to come, not being preoccupied with our future.

Many of us feel that Step Three is the key that opens our hearts and minds to let a Higher Power enter. We come to rely on something other than ourselves. It is upon these spiritual principles that a foundation is built for recovery.

We have found that God's will is really quite simple. It is that we do the best we can at the tasks put before us. It is that we experience a calmness or peace within, and freedom from the inner turmoil which signals self-will. Our faith has led us to believe our Higher Power wants us to be creative, spontaneous, vital, joyous, cooperative, loving, and free, not to be burdened by overreaction to the everyday ups and downs of life, but to ask for God's guidance and strength, and to follow our hearts. Most importantly, we believe that God's will for us is that we stay clean, and that we share the joy of recovery with other addicts.

We live a spiritual program of recovery which keeps us clean. A whole-hearted decision to apply this step in our lives increases our willingness and improves our ability to work the other steps. After we decide to turn our wills and our lives over to a Higher Power, we can approach Step Four with the assurance that we will be successfully guided through it.

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STEP FOUR

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

The Fourth Step is an action step; it is a cleansing of the mind and spirit. The decision we made in Step Three is an important one, but it will have no lasting effect unless it is accompanied by an honest appraisal of our innermost faults and defects. Making our moral inventory, we learn about the true nature of our addiction. Using drugs was only a symptom of our disease. In Step Four, we look at the things which prevented us from being happy.

We do this by taking an inventory of ourselves. This personal inventory is similar to the one businesses take. It is to see which items are useful and which are obsolete, what works and what doesn't, and what can be done to improve the quality of our lives.

Step Four was a step to freedom. It was here that we began to take a look at ourselves. We did this in order to identify our liabilities, defects of character, and assets. All the reasons we thought we had to use needed to be put behind us.

We had hesitated looking at the things we had been trying to run away from all our lives. We got to the point where we wanted to see ourselves and get comfortable. We wanted to know who we were. What kind of person were we?

Arrogance and fear have caused us to rationalize every possible form of destructive behavior and thought. Our problem is not only the behavior, but also the rationalization. Without taking personal inventory, we go on doing what we have always done. We need to bring our patterns of behavior out into the open so that we can examine them. We need to look at ourselves and our behavior to see what is unproductive and blocks our recovery.

Before actually writing Step Four, we need first to keep in mind that by having done the three steps, that we have come to believe in a God of our understanding who can give us the strength to do a fearless moral inventory. We work closely with a sponsor while writing our inventory. Once we are ready to begin, we ask that the God of our understanding will give us the, honesty, strength and willingness to complete Step Four.

We need not be apprehensive when we begin this step, as it clearly offers relief from the years of unresolved guilt experienced by many addicts. Too often we approach this step with such low self esteem that we thought ourselves incapable of doing an inventory. The job may look too big for us, which in fact it is. We realize that this is not a step we can complete on our own. Now that we have become willing to practice the first three steps of Narcotics Anonymous, we exercise all our new faith in a Power Greater than ourselves. This indeed will give us more than enough strength to take inventory of our lives. Our new-found faith will remove the fear we lived with for so long and give us the courage to explore thoroughly the nature of our defects and the behavior that resulted from them which were established during our active addiction and carried into our early recovery.

When we are ready to begin, we asked for guidance and start writing. It is extremely important that we work closely with a sponsor.

A sponsor, or friend whom we trust in the Fellowship, can share their experience with us as we reach this step. We often feel comforted by our sponsor's identifying our defects in the items we put on paper which caused so much grief in our lives. If we face our fears to begin a thorough inventory, we can begin by listing our fears and the reasons for them. It is important to remember that a God of our understanding is with us as we write our inventory. If the God of our understanding protected us through our insanity during active addiction which we are now writing about; there is nothing to fear in putting it on paper. We do Step Four as if there were no Step Five. We begin to see the greater freedom that lies ahead.

Many of us found our first Fourth Step was the hardest one to do. We made countless false starts, or we filled up countless pages with writing that had nothing to do with this step. We read all we could find on doing the Fourth Step and talked to everyone who said anything about their Fourth Step at meetings. We were just putting off getting started.

We really had to tell our whole story. We found it was very important to get all that down. We had to be searching and fearless, looking carefully at ourselves. Our sponsors told us that we needed to write (in some way record) our Fourth Step. Just thinking about it was not enough. We found that we needed to write a lot..

Some addicts try to cut corners by making a simple self-examination. Some may try to talk out problems with another person, rather than writing a complete inventory. These avoidance methods may bring temporary relief from pressing problems, but these solutions are inadequate.

Our experience has shown that a written inventory is the best assurance of self-honesty. Writing about our fears, resentments, character defects and assets gives us a perspective we can gain in no other way. It is difficult to deny justify or rationalize our behavior when it is written on the page. If we lie on paper, we recognize it and work towards deeper honesty. These are some of the immediate advantages of a written inventory.

In taking our inventory we take a good long look at what has occurred in our lives. We feel that fear, in its numerous forms, is what crippled us. Since it is difficult to understand the cause of our fear when we are experiencing this fear, we concentrate on the various forms it takes.

It makes no difference at this point in our recovery how small our problems seem to be or how often we have thought or talked about them. At this point, it is important to emphasize that being thorough is not the same as being perfect.

The best way most of us found to start our Fourth Step was to pray and ask God to help us. As we wrote our inventory, our Higher Power was usually the only one in the room with us. We wrote in confidence and privacy. Since God helped us through the madness we were now writing about, we didn't have to be afraid of putting it down on paper. Nothing that we wrote on that paper hurt us. It was all a benefit to us. There was something revealed we needed to see, something that avowed us to grow and be free. We soon realized that greater freedom lay ahead for us as we got more honest in our Fourth Step inventory.

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something that allowed us to grow and be free. We soon realized that greater freedom lay ahead for us as we got more honest in our Fourth Step inventory.

Once we had gone through all our turmoil about what a moral inventory was, we were faced with the problem of starting to write. We did lots of procrastinating here, too. We would sit down to write and we would forget a pencil. We would get a pencil and find we had the wrong paper. We would get the pencil and paper together and then we would have to get our coffee. There was so much pain and guilt that would be coming out and we knew it. So there was almost no end to our procrastination.

The more we revealed, the better it was. It was important to put everything down that gave an accurate picture of us. This was the first time we had to really face ourselves and what we had done to others.

A lot of us got concerned with the format. We found that that didn't matter. What mattered was that we needed to be as honest as we could be. We found we had to stop and search to get down to how we really felt.

How did we know when we were through writing? They told us we would know when we were done. That seemed pretty strange to us at the time. Then we found through our own experience it was true. We just had to get our story down so we could see a true picture of ourselves.

We finally saw we had played a part in the things that had happened to us. People were abusive to us but we often gave them good cause or permission to act that way. We manipulated people and then were surprised when they didn't do everything the way we wanted them to.

We needed to have a turning point in our lives. We needed to be able to look at the past, accept it for what it was, and let it go. What happened, happened. If we didn't do that, our past kept hurting us. A lot of old feelings influenced how we lived in our today's. So getting our past out in the open and accepting it clearly could set us free. It would let us start on new, clean ground.

One of the most painful things about that first inventory was confronting all the lies that we had been telling our whole lives. It was so hard to sit down and finally tell the truth. We finally got away from all the terrible things we thought had happened to us. We saw we had manufactured a lot of that. Those were our reactions. It was our disappointments at being let down because we didn't get what we wanted. Seeing that clearly was the whole point of the Fourth Step for many of us.

What is a moral inventory? In a moral inventory, our goal is to get an accurate picture of ourselves. What happened with us? What are we like today? Our sponsors shared with us that in order to get a true picture of ourselves, we had to take a look at every area of our lives. We had to look at sex. We had to write about relationships. We had to look at crime and things we hurt people with. We had to write about our inadequacies, our insecurities. What kind of moral person were we? Were we giving persons? Or, were we takers? Were we loving persons? Or, did we have a lot of hate in us?

As we began to write down the answers to these questions, we began to get a good picture of the kind of person we were morally. We saw there were a lot of things wrong with us. Many of us couldn't give. We couldn't share. We didn't know much about how to love.

Any method we use will be effective if we are searching and fearless.

The outline below suggests a structure for examining ourselves. It contains the basic elements which comprise our self-appraisal. This is where we identify and examine our feelings. We refer to the Basic Text and jot down words which trigger an awareness of our feelings. Writing serves as a means for drawing a picture of our feelings.

I. REVIEW YOUR FIRST THREE STEPS: Review your first Three Steps with a sponsor.

II. WRITE ABOUT YOUR RESENTMENTS. Our resentments caused us discomfort, putting us in a negative frame of mind which tended to breed further resentments. We were angry about what happened and kept a mental grudge list. We regretted the clever things we had not said. We planned retaliations for things that may or may not have happened. We were obsessed with the past and future, and therefore cheated ourselves of the present. We need to write about these resentments now to see the part we played in forming them.

A. LIST THE PEOPLE, PRINCIPLES, AND INSTITUTIONS YOU RESENT. Most of us started with our childhood, but any order will work as long as it is complete. We included all the people (parents, mates, friends, enemies, etc.), the organizations (jails, police, hospitals, schools, etc.), and the concepts (religions, politics, prejudice, social groups, etc.) at whom we were angry.

B. LIST THE CAUSES OF EACH RESENTMENT. We explained the reasons for our anger. Was our self-respect or pride hurt? Was our safety threatened in any way? Was our livelihood attacked? Was a personal or sexual relationship hurt or threatened? We listed whomever or whatever we resented, the cause of the resentment, and -how it affected us.

C. WITH EACH RESENTMENT, TRY TO SEE WHERE YOU WERE MISTAKEN AND WHAT YOU COULD HAVE DONE INSTEAD. Try to forget about the other people's mistakes, and concentrate on your own. For each situation, we answered these questions: Where have I been selfish? Where have I not been completely honest? Was I thinking only of myself, manipulating toward my own ends? Was I afraid? What part did I play in the situation, in what way was I to blame for the situation? We write our personal inventory, not the other people's. We make a list of our faults, not theirs. We realized ourselves are not perfect. Where others have wronged us, we must realize that we need to stop expecting perfection from them. This allows us an opportunity to look at ourselves which is critical to our recovery.

III. WRITE ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIPS. We list the many ways in which each of us has been intolerant. At times, we probably refused to allow others the privilege of voicing or even having an opinion, and this attitude caused indifference or hostility. We had a need, generated by pride and fear, to "always be right." We were unnecessarily critical of others; yet when constructive criticism was directed towards us, we were less than receptive. Every suggestion was met with either irritation or despair. Did we listen only to ourselves? When were we intolerant of others? When did we feel superior to others and correct them?

A. LOOK AT EACH PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP. Examine the positive and negative aspects of each one, being honest about your assets and liabilities. Avoid spending time on the wrongs others have done. We focus on our mistakes, and concern ourselves with areas where self-centeredness seemed to prevail. We must look within and honestly appraise our motives. This is our inventory and if it is to succeed, we need to list our faults, not those of others. Self-pity is

one of the ways we manipulated others for our benefit. Indulging in self-pity is asking others to change or to bow to our demands; it is looking for a way to avoid responsibility. We ask ourselves these questions: When did we use self-pity to get attention? Did we lie or "stretch the truth" to make ourselves look more pathetic? Did we make others feel guilty by feeling sorry for ourselves? Did we bill ourselves as victims of life and everyone around us?

This list may include but does not have to be limited to: family, friends, lovers, workmates, God, self and other members of the N. A. Fellowship. Everyone feels down at times, but addicts can not afford to feel sorry for themselves. When we didn't get what we wanted, did we choose to pout or complain? Were we so consumed with self-pity and our own suffering that we had very little perspective or understanding of others? Did we exaggerate our problems? Could we feel any concern for others when so consumed with self? Were others frustrated by our negativity? As addicts, our emotions often run to extremes-past the point of what is appropriate. We must now find a way to change our actions or be driven back to active addiction.

B. WRITE ABOUT YOUR SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS. This may include deep relationships or short affairs, spouses, lovers or others.

We all have sexual needs and desires. Our sexual needs are natural.

We answered these questions about each relationship: Did I manipulate and lie to others to meet my own needs? Did I care about the other person? How did I demonstrate that? Did I feel better or less than my partner? Did I sell myself short? Did I end up feeling worthless, used and abused? Did I think that only sex would make me happy and fulfilled? Did my relationships end in pain and unhappiness both for myself and others? As with everything else, we need to ask direction from a Power greater than ourselves. With this in mind, sexual relationships can be a fulfilling and joyful experience.

IV. WRITE ABOUT YOUR FEARS. We answered these questions about our fears: Why do I have this fear? Am I afraid because I trust upon myself? Am I afraid of fear itself?

Self-sufficiency may seem to be a good lifestyle, until we meet barriers greater than ourselves. Some of us were very confident and self-assured, especially when we were using. But it never conquered our fears, or any other problem. At best it hid them, sometimes so deeply that we did insane things without really knowing why. We begin to see that our fear originates within us, and we are responsible for its numerous forms.

There is a better way. We are now on a completely different foundation: Instead of being self-reliant, we are God-reliant. Instead of depending on self, which is limited, we trust in a Power greater than ourselves, which is limitless.

We need to examine ourselves in close detail in order to modify those attitudes which have not worked for us, for our peace of mind. We are trying to build a happy life in recovery, and Step Four is our first clear-cut attempt at that. A part of Step Four is looking at our fears. We Est them and fund them to be unreasonable. Some of our fears include: Fear of rejection, abandonment, responsibility, commitment, growing up, success, failure, life without drugs. If we have looked closely, we have found that we are afraid of almost everything. Our fears have kept us from doing the things we want to do and becoming the people we want to be.

If we are as honest as we can be, many of our previous fears will be cast aside once and for all. Our liabilities may destroy us if we have a lack of faith in the God of our understanding. With a loving God's help, we are guided through our confusion.

What are the results that come from making a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves? Our Basic Text says: "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."⁵ The results of living the Fourth Step are freedom from the past, freedom to be ourselves, and knowledge of who and what we really are.

If we have written a thorough inventory, we end up with a large amount of information about ourselves. We have carefully examined our resentments and begin to understand how worthless and deadly they really are. We realize their power to destroy us, and now seek a better way to live. We grow toward freedom, peace of mind and balance.

Throughout these pages we have learned that God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. By taking the remaining steps, we will begin to realize that through God and our own efforts, we can remove the various forms of self-centeredness that have kept us from a greater spiritual awareness. If we have sincerely taken the first three steps and followed through with a searching and fearless moral inventory, we become aware of some strong realities about ourselves and are ready to move on. We do a Fifth Step right away while the inventory is still fresh.

Those of us who took this approach to the Fourth Step saw that it wasn't our needs that got us into trouble. It was the ways we were going about meeting those needs. If we needed approval and the way we tried to meet that need was by bullying people and monopolizing conversations trying to be the life of the party, that defeated the purpose. If we wanted financial security and we were running up a bunch of bills we couldn't pay, then that need wasn't going to be met.

A few of us worked this step from a somewhat different perspective than most. Some of us looked at our lives and what it was we wanted from them. We saw we all had needs that, for the most part, we deserved to have met. All of us had needs for love and affection and approval and productive work. All of us had certain basic financial necessities.

As we watched other people do their Fourth Steps, we came to see that there were different approaches to this step that worked. Each of us had to find a way to work the step that gave us a true picture of ourselves. Our sponsors were usually able to provide the guidance we needed.

If we wanted to feel comfortable with ourselves yet we were jumping into bed with anyone who asked us, we couldn't feel very good. If we wanted an education but didn't do anything to work towards that, what did that mean? What did that say about us? If we wanted a good relationship, what were we doing to get it? If we were fighting with our partner all the time, obviously that was no way to get it. What were we willing to do differently? Maybe we needed not to have such high expectations. Maybe we needed to be more tolerant, more patient.

We saw that humility was truth. We tried to write down the truth, about ourselves. This was usually our first attempt at letting somebody else know the good things we felt about ourselves. After a couple of years in N.A., we had learned to share about all the crazy things we did and the way we lived. We even managed to make each other laugh about it instead of crying about it, which was a blessing.

A method that worked for some of us to see our lives as they were and find the ways we were defeating ourselves. We wanted things to be different. But we wouldn't take responsibility for changing them. If we waited long enough, maybe that would happen. . But we found things worked better in our lives if we took responsibility for what was happening to us and changed the things we could change.

There was so much going on inside us when we first got clean. There was all the pain and anger and resentment. It took years for it all to reappear. We believe we learned of it gradually because the loving God of our understanding knew our capabilities. Something we would hear at a meeting or a convention would trigger some old feeling or event that we had forgotten all about, so that we could work on it.

We always found that some story we heard, or some situation we were in, made us aware of the pain and hurt inside that showed us there was some more work on the Fourth Step that needed to be done. Sometimes we knew about some problem and held on to it as our secret. We didn't want to tell people everything. Sometimes our secrets weren't known to us yet, they were still buried too deep inside for us to see; they needed time to surface. They all needed to go. We were as sick as our secrets. Holding on to them was saying we were separate from others and they couldn't be trusted to know us. That was why Step Four asked us to be searching and fearless. How else could we have ever hoped to get at the secrets that were keeping us separate and alone, away from the real connection with our fellow human beings and our Higher Power?

Most of us found that the our first Fourth Step was just the beginning. We knew that ideally, if a person could do this step perfectly and completely, it would be a one-time job. But that would have meant we would have been able to get at all our resentments, all our angers, all our character defects, all the feelings about people in our lives sod all the shambles of our lives. Who could have faced all. of this when they first came into N.A.? We worked it to the best of our ability at the time but that was not as good as our ability was a few years later. Although the Tenth Step talked about continuing to take a personal inventory, we also found we had to go back and write Fourth Steps again when our past resurfaced.

We found another value in writing additional inventories later in recovery. Most of our early inventories were written on what was wrong with us. We couldn't sea much good in ourselves. Some of us found in later inventories that it helped to make a commitment to ourselves and our sponsors that we would spend as much time searching and meditating and thinking about strengths as we did about things that we wanted to change or improve. That made a big difference to us. By this time we were beginning to have some feelings of self worth so we could stick to that commitment.

For some of us, it was really difficult for us to see the good. And even if we saw it, we weren't going to tell anybody about it. And it was interesting for us to find how a lot of people perceived us. But it wasn't until we started working on the good in ourselves that we would go and ash the people around us. We saw a lot of things we admired in other people. It wasn't until some time later we were able to see we had early signs of the same qualities even if we didn't have them fully.

Our first Fourth Step was a necessary one. We were afraid at fast to take it and most people were when they thought of it: searching, fearless, and moral, taking your self-inventory. There was

something threatening about it at first. Of course, after we had taken it, there wasn't anything threatening about it anymore. We looked forward to challenging ourselves by recognizing something that we didn't particularly like. We became aware of our defects. We learned that if we let go of them, many of them would be taken away in God's own time. We also found that the things we asked for would be given us in God's time and way. That's what led us up to taking the Fourth Step again, over and over. So it wasn't the same burden as it was the first couple of times we did it.

The Fourth Step was simple. It was a lot easier than living the way we lived before. That was a hard life. Hustling, running, lying, hospitals, suicide attempts. It was madness. The Fourth Step looked inviting compared to that.

When we do the steps, we get results. Here we know what we are going to get. We are breaking out of the isolation. We are no longer alone. We are with the God of our Third Step. And now we can be sure we have really taken the Third Step. Because, as one of the old-timers was so fond of saying, we know we have taken the Third Step when we finish up with the Fourth Step, because it sure wasn't our will to take a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. So now that we have taken Step Four for the first or tenth time, we are ready to do Step Five.

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STEP FIVE

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

Recovery is more than just staying clean. When we have made a moral inventory, what are we to do with it? We have listed our resentments, fears, dishonesties and other character defects. We have brought all this material out of our past and put it down on paper. We are beginning to understand ourselves better than we have ever known ourselves before. Although we may have mixed feelings about our inventory, it is important to take Step Five immediately. Over a period of time we saw that if we wanted to recover, we had to work the steps.

We would hardly be human if we didn't experience some anxiety about this step. We are probably not used to being honest with ourselves or anyone else, and now we're asked to be honest about ourselves with another. It is a good idea to discuss our reservations with our sponsor, whose guidance and experience can be very helpful. Attending step meetings and studying the Basic Text can also provide many useful insights. We approach Step Five willingly because we need the relief that comes from sharing our secrets.

We have gained much knowledge of ourselves and we can feel alone with that knowledge. Through the process of sharing our inventory with God, ourselves and another human being, we break out of this isolation. We have been alone with our problems for far too long. We have a choice today to be free.

If we do not go on with Step Five and reveal our findings to God, ourselves and another human being, the process of self-justification reoccurs. Our recovery is affected and our egos take over. The longer we hold on to our Fourth Step, the longer the insanity goes on and the greater our chances of relapse.

The longer we held on to our Fourth Step, the longer the insanity went on. We realized that once we had done Step Four, it was best for us if we went right on to Step Five.

The key word in Step Five is "admitted." We saw that word also in Step One. Our first admission was of powerlessness, and that admission enabled us to begin our recovery. Now we have discovered some new truths about ourselves which need to be admitted in order to continue with our recovery. "Admit" is a potent word which seems to carry with it a certain amount of ego-deflation. None of us likes to admit anything unpleasant about ourselves. It can be a very humbling experience. We admit to God, ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs because it is the only way we can continue in our recovery.

As we begin to relate in an honest way to another person, we find that they can see a lot more about us than we tell them. As addicts, we never before were able to honestly admit how we were feeling; being secretive was a large part of the denial of our disease. Admitting our feelings in Step Five is a vital part of our recovery. Being entirely open with another person is a big step in the right direction.

We found talking to another person about what we had done was humbling. Oddly enough, we found it was easier to talk about some of the bigger things we had done than some of the little ones.

It is important to remember we are making our admission to God and to ourselves, as well as another human being. Doing so is a crucial part of the step, not just an afterthought. We may ask, "is it really necessary to admit these wrongs to God?" Some may believe that their Higher Power already recognizes their defects. However, we find that by sharing our inventory with God, we are better able to accept help.

When we admit our wrongs to the God of our understanding, we experience God's unconditional love and acceptance, and our trust becomes stronger. Our Basic Text tells us that although our Higher Power already knows us well, "the admission must come from our own lips to be truly effective."

What about admitting our wrongs to ourselves? Is this really necessary? It would be easy to rationalize that we already know our defects. Didn't we, in fact, write the Fourth Step inventory? Again, by being honest about who we really are with ourselves as well as God and another human being, we begin to face our problems directly and reverse our old pattern of running away. Even after we were clean for awhile, trusting was still very difficult for some of us.

It is important that we select a person whom we trust, and with whom we feel comfortable discussing all areas of our lives, even our deep-set secrets. This is, of course, easier said than done. As addicts, we have spent years in building walls around ourselves. The use of drugs was only one of the means we used to keep people out of our lives. If we allowed anyone into our lives, it was strictly on our terms. All our relationships were conditional. We found it difficult to trust people. We have had years of practice at shutting people out and now we must make an

enormous effort to let someone in. We start with just one person and this marks the beginning of our ability to reach out to others.

We should also be careful to choose a person to whom the release of Fourth Step information would not prove harmful. Often, close friends or members of our immediate families would suffer if we discussed our Fourth Step with them, so we exercise caution here.

When we are ready to take this step, we look for a person with whom we are willing to share our experience without reservation. We make no requirement about this personal decision; however, it is suggested we use a sponsor in Narcotics Anonymous. Taking it with someone who has more recovery than us, helps us put our Fifth Step into perspective with the remaining seven steps. Furthermore, we often feel that only another recovering addict can fully appreciate the life-and-death nature of this step. Our sponsor may already know a lot about us and probably has experienced many of the same feelings. So even when the details of our life stories vary, another member is not likely to be shocked or uncomfortable with what we've thought and done in our past. They will very likely share a piece or two from their own past, and perhaps of problems they've overcome. This acceptance is essential to our recovery.

For those of us who did this step with our sponsors, we found that most of them shared with us things they had done that were similar to ours. They shared how they had judged themselves harshly before doing the Fifth Step. This helped us ease our own judgement of ourselves. They talked to us about getting our minds off our old ideas of what was moral and getting our eyes on God and what His will was for us. They shared the experiences that they had gone through.

We move steadily forward, setting aside our pride, ego and fear. As we continue, we find a new kind of humility—a sense of relief, not embarrassment. As we reveal our past, we usually feel genuine acceptance. We may also find ourselves experiencing new dimensions of honesty.

If we leave something out of our inventory because we are afraid to share it, we are the ones who suffer. The other person is not affected by our omissions. However, we need to remember that we are preparing ourselves for a new way of life. We want to break out of our isolation and move in a spiritual direction. Admitting the exact nature of our wrongs to another person lessens the overwhelming burden we have carried for so long. We must first recognize our defects of character in order to do anything toward correcting them. We must be willing to take action and accept direction to expect any change in our lives.

Sometimes we start by saying a prayer together to ease the tension. This is also a good time to turn our fear and anxiety over to our Higher Power. We gather up all of our honesty and courage and begin to share our Fourth Step inventory. We discuss everything in the inventory, leaving nothing out. We read to our sponsor's exactly what is on our papers. We heed to take the words we have on paper and transfer them into feelings and talk about our feelings.

We saw that what we needed to reflect on here were not the wrong things we had done, it was the nature of those wrongs. We saw that there was a difference between the nature of our wrongs and our wrongs themselves. We could list in a day's time all the things we have done that we consider wrong. The exact nature of our wrongs is harder to identify. The nature of our wrongs is the opposite of the principles of the program. Our Fifth Step revealed that much of the wrong we did stemmed from defects of our character.

There were things in our inventory we would never have told another human being if it weren't for this program. Again, we did that for the freedom it would afford us. Once those secrets had been told, they no longer had to be a big deal. We were free of them and the fear that people would know that about us. Now someone else did know that about us and they didn't think any the less of us, they still loved us.

When we were finally able to tell these things about ourselves, we felt a wave of relief. We felt as if we had lost a lot of weight that had been burdening us down a long time. Some of us though, hadn't felt this big relief right afterwards. We had heard others say how they had felt such great relief. Even though some of us didn't feel that relief, we realized that was really not why we took the step. We didn't take it to feel good. We took it because we needed to take it. We needed to let somebody else know the way we were.

We no longer have to regret or hide our past because we have faced and admitted it. We have told the truth at last, and have finally found some of the freedom we have heard experienced members talk about.

We felt lonely before we came to the program. After a while, we weren't lonely anymore. We stopped being lonely because we finally found out who we were. We didn't have to look to people, places, and things to fill our loneliness.

Perhaps for the first time, we begin to understand that the pain and desperation we suffered in our using brought us to the doors of Narcotics Anonymous. We experience a tremendous relief knowing that we are finally where we belong. If we had any doubts or reservations before, taking the Fifth Step makes clear to us the truth that we are addicts and cannot manage our own lives, and that we have a home and an opportunity to recover in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.

After we had written out our Fourth Step and taken our Fifth Step, we began to see the patterns in what we had done. Those patterns revealed the nature of our wrongs to us. Also, we saw those patterns were still affecting the things that happened in our recovery. It was still pretty much the same pattern. We were still self-destructive and we were still self-centered and unkind. It wasn't yet our nature to love people and extend ourselves. We found that those weren't things we were capable of changing in ourselves. So we talked with our sponsors about acceptance of ourselves. The Fifth Step and learning about acceptance carried us through this early stage.

Some of the things we learned about ourselves here in the first five steps we put into practice in our daily lives. We started to feel some goodwill in our hearts.

We grew in trust. After we had taken this step that demanded some real trust from us, we grew in our ability to trust. We had revealed the exact nature of our wrongs and developed a bond with another person. It was a bond that was based not on manipulation and self-seeking, but on honesty and trust. It was a bond that would grow stronger over the years. We told people about what we had gained from our Fifth Steps and the trust we had found in another human being.

They shared with us how they had gone on to the next step. We were asked to reflect on what we had found out about ourselves in this step.

This step was a big turning point for so many of us. It made a big difference in the way we did and saw everything in our lives. More and more we were doing what we had to do. We often couldn't see the virtue in that. Often we didn't see that there were principles we could gain from doing things, not because we were going to get something back by doing them, but because it was the right thing to do.

We begin to understand why we acted and felt the way we did, and we are hopeful for change through application of the succeeding steps. We began to experience goodwill and trust and some of the other principles that everyone talked about. The spirit of Narcotics Anonymous started to become a way of life.

The Fifth Step helped us gain more freedom. It allowed us to clear away the shambles of our lives. Now we were able to hold up our heads and be human beings again. The only way we could get the beat was to give the best, to do the very best job we could do. Then we were ready to do the Sixth Step.

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STEP SIX

*"We were entirely ready to have God remove all
these defects of character."*

In the Fourth Step, we wrote a "searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves." In Step Five, "We admitted to God, ourselves and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs," and began to see ourselves as we really are. It is a relief to know that we are human, and that we have positive as well as negative traits in our personality. Our awareness of our assets and of our problems has been heightened. But unless we find some way to be rid of the character defects which have caused these problems, our new awareness will only make us uncomfortable. We now realize that we need to be free of these character defects which stand in the way of our recovery. We may be reluctant to give up some of our defects. Becoming entirely ready to have God remove all our defects of character is the ideal toward which we strive. We realize that all of them won't be removed at once, but we are willing. Our new awareness has involved some painful discoveries. For relief, we look to Step Six. The awareness we gained in Step Five prepares us for action and change in Step Six. When we become aware of something, we need to act on it.

By taking our Fifth Step we became aware of our defects. We were great at thinking we were worse than a lot of people and better than a lot of others. These things had become deeply ingrained in us from the way we had lived in our active addiction; they had become an accepted part of our lifestyle. The Sixth Step was asking us to be entirely ready to have God remove these defects. One more time the steps were presenting us with a challenge to the disease.

Being entirely ready to have our defects removed is more than thinking about it or intending to have them removed. It is actively demonstrating the desire for their removal. Some of us do not like change-even if it is for the better. It is our nature to hold on to and nurture our defect, which may lead to relapse. In the case of dishonesty, it helped to stop in the middle of a lie, or a rationalization or some other kind of "half-truth," and immediately admit that we were doing it. As we proceeded on with the steps, we found ourselves telling the truth in our conversations. This was a step in our progress toward honesty where it counted most-honesty with ourselves.

Many of us thought that we were our character defects. We feared that if we gave them up, there would be no person left afterward. Even though we may be very uncomfortable, our old ways are familiar. Surrendering our old behavior leads us to changes which can be frightening. The remedy for this fear is faith. We need to ask for the fear to be removed, and faith will see us through this step.

The first five steps give us emotional and mental strength. Here, in Step Six, we are again faced with the need for God acting in our lives, so we can get down to the specifics of what we faced in only a general way in Step Two. By being entirely ready to have God remove our defects of character, we are discovering more about the process God will use in restoring us to sanity.

Reviewing the principles of Step Two furthers our readiness to have God remove all our defects of character. We remind ourselves that we have come "to believe that a Power greater than ourselves" can restore us to sanity. We reaffirm our relationship with that Power. Strengthening this spiritual connection makes it much easier for us to reaffirm the surrender we found in the first three steps.

Our disease told us that we didn't need to give up everything. But we knew we couldn't listen to the voice of our addiction. We had to listen to our sponsors and the other recovering addicts in N.A.- They told us we had to be ready to have our defects of character removed so we wouldn't go back to living and feeling like we had before. We got out paper and pencil and started to write down the defects that we had found in our inventory. We were preparing to say good-bye to the familiar parts of ourselves.

We were confused at first about how to become entirely ready. We wanted something to happen like a bolt of lightning or a big sign that told us we were entirely ready. Sponsorship helped us through. N.A. is a simple program. Some of us needed to have its simplicity pointed out to us so we wouldn't get lost in complications. We were willing to listen to sponsors and our fellow members with an open mind and heart for help with the steps.

Our total self-centeredness kept us from seeing the connection between our defects and the things that had happened in our lives. We were finding our way through the denial of our addiction. We saw how blind we had been to ourselves and to our lives. The word defects was new to us as it applied to ourselves and our addiction. We had to look it up in the dictionary. We made a list of our defects so we could ask God to remove them.

Those first inventories, if they were "searching and fearless," freed us to go on with the rest of the steps, unburdened by the dark secrets of our past. As our recovery progressed we began to gain a greater insight into ourselves. As we took more inventories, we got down to the real core

of it. Although we saw how even our more subtle defects limited our freedom, being entirely ready to let go of them became difficult. They were so much a part of who we were.

Some of us have justified and denied our character defects for so long that we have begun to confuse the denial with reality. This behavior is typical of our disease. When we are afraid to let go of the lies, we need faith in a Power greater than ourselves to sustain us in this difficult transition. The change we desire will not happen all at once. When we become willing to begin the process we grow spiritually. Willingness is an important foundation of our recovery and the spiritual principle of Step Six.

The defects we did not want to let go of were the defects we were familiar with. A part of us wanted to get rid of them because of the consequences in our lives. When we surrender and go on with the steps, we find that we gain more freedom and inner peace.

We do not have to hurt to become ready; we have a choice today. We can pray for willingness and surround ourselves with other recovering addicts, who provide a supportive and positive atmosphere. We see addicts who are able to freely share with each other, both their pain and their gratitude. We watch the way a power greater than ourselves works in the lives of our fellow addicts. We hear examples of new ways of dealing with reality. We see people who have come to accept themselves as human beings. We can learn to trust others and learn from their example. They tell us we must keep moving forward in our recovery.

It is important that we know what our character defects are before we proceed. If we still are not able to clearly identify them, we return to our Fourth Step to see how our fear, self-centeredness, guilt and dishonesty were the cause of most of our problems. We see that it is the pain of our disease and the hope for a better life that helps us to become willing. Those defects which may have kept us alive during active addiction become harmful to us in our recovery. Where we once needed to lie about where we were and why we were there, we now no longer need to deny we were with addicts with the desire to recover from our disease. We strive to do more than just survive. We begin to live.

The Twelve Steps offered us a spiritual solution. Our readiness was aided each time we saw the defects being removed from other people. Just like them, as we gave the steps a chance, we saw them work for us and do what we had thought was impossible. Our defects were being revealed to us, and we were getting ready to have them removed.

In trying to become entirely ready to have our defects of character removed we learned that we couldn't judge others by the defects we had. We have found that we are not always the best judges of our own recovery, to say nothing of judging anyone else's recovery. We learned to listen with empathy to those who were struggling with defects, instead of judging them. We began to recognize their assets where once we were only able to see behaviors we didn't like.

What this awareness did was to get us to the point where we realized we could no longer afford the luxury of our defects. This helped us develop our conscience. It was the strangest thing for us when we saw we had started building something that many of us had abandoned a long time ago.

As we worked on the Sixth Step we kept seeing it at a deeper level. When we started to do something, a defect that had previously been hidden from us would be magnified. When we got angry, jealous or envious, we had the labels for these feelings, so there wasn't the excuse of

ignorance. We were learning to define our defects, to get in perspective what it was that we were going to ask God to remove.

Step Six is an action Step. One action we take is to be aware of our defects in our daily lives and make a conscious decision to not act on our defects. Another action is to put more effort into making our assets a part of our lives. As we become more comfortable with these new behaviors, we begin to see how much we can gain from Step Six and our fear of letting go of our character defects is lessened

We are simply unable to remove our own defects. That realization again brought us to a deeper understanding of our First Step—we are powerless over our addiction. Our defects are symptoms of our disease. We found our defects are parts of our personality that, taken to extreme, have become distorted from what God intended them to be. Our character defects are actually natural traits that were used in a negative way by our addiction so that we could survive.

We looked at our past attempts to exert power over our defects. How many times have we tried to change, and how often has it worked? Most of us tried repeatedly to fix ourselves, to apply willpower to change and to overcome our obsessions. But just as we failed to solve our own drug problem, we failed in trying to remove our own defects. It was only after experiencing complete emotional defeat that we became willing to turn to a Power greater than ourselves for help.

We have admitted our powerlessness and inability to manage our own lives. It is apparent that we cannot remove our own defects of character. How many times have we tried to change the way we feel? How often has it worked? Step Six does not say, "We were entirely ready to work very hard to remove our defects of character." In the Third Step, we made a decision to turn over our wills and lives to God's care, knowing that it is by taking the remaining steps that we actually surrender. Alone, we are powerless over our own defects of character. We need the help of a Power greater than ourselves.

Once we got out of self-centeredness, we were able to see that everything that happened to us could benefit our recovery. A vital part of our recovery was learning to love others. We learned to ask God to show us how to love others because we didn't know how. We didn't even know how to love ourselves. We saw how the defects in our character were keeping us from truly experiencing love.

Honestly facing ourselves, admitting our faults, and getting ready for some real changes in our lives felt like a strange way to live at first. We were able to see that if we were really going to change, then having these unfamiliar feelings was necessary.

We needed to honestly evaluate the depth of each of our character defects, so we could be entirely ready to have God remove them. We found that honesty was one asset our addiction had eroded. Without it we couldn't work the steps.

Through the inventory process we identified some areas of pain. We came to conclusions about character defects that were causing us difficulty. We saw traits we had that were hurting us and others. We saw that when we hurt other people, we hurt ourselves. We didn't want to do that anymore. We saw that our pain was a motivator that made us face our defects. Facing our defects opened us up to honesty, acceptance, compassion and humility. We came to a point where pain wasn't our main motivator. We wanted something more. We wanted to feel that clear connection

with our Higher Power. We wanted to be in the flow of life, feeling the peace that was greater than any understanding.

The only way we could have freedom from ourselves was to give up our self-obsession. We couldn't worry about what was or was not going to happen. Surrender gave us that readiness to have our defects removed. It gave us freedom from ourselves. We gave up our old ideas of what sanity was, which character defects should be removed, or what direction our lives should take.

We can &How the God of our understanding to work in our lives by becoming entirely ready for the results of that work. We can ask ourselves some questions to see if we are ready. What are my defects? What are their manifestations? What purpose do I think they serve? Why would I choose to continue holding on to them? Am I ready to let go of them?

With renewed faith and a clearer understanding of our strengths and weaknesses of character, we need to move on. We need to actually ask for the changes to be made in our lives. We are enjoying a new sense of ourselves and experiencing the joy of having found positive parts of ourselves. We want this to continue. We are ready to work Step Seven and ask for our shortcomings to be removed.

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STEP SEVEN

*"We humbly asked Him to remove our
shortcomings."*

For us, the key word in this step was "humbly." Most of us hadn't been humble very often. We had spent most of our lives in defiance. Some of us didn't even know what the word "humbly" meant, and others of us thought it meant being lowly, groveling, and subservient. Now we were at a crucial turning point in our lives and we had to be humble. We saw that gaining some humility was necessary if we were going to live a clean life and walk a spiritual path. But where was that humility going to come from? When we asked God to remove our shortcomings, we asked for freedom from any shortcomings which limited our recovery. We asked for help because we could not do it alone.

We prayed that our will would be aligned with God's will for us. We asked that we could be aware that God was in control and not us.

In Step Five, we uncovered the basic defects of our character. In Step Six, we became entirely ready to have God remove them all so that we could experience continued spiritual growth and recovery. Now, in Step Seven, we humbly ask our Higher Power to remove these defects, or shortcomings.

"Humbly" is a key word in approaching Step Seven. Understanding this concept may present an obstacle, since humility is not one of the typical characteristics of addicts. We may not know what the word means or perhaps associate it with being embarrassed or inferior and many of us confused it with the word humiliation. In Step Seven, we see that if we are going to live a clean life and learn to walk a spiritual path, we must gain an understanding of humility. Humility means, among other things, a realistic evaluation of ourselves. Humility is not a denial of good qualities, for in truth it is the admission of all qualities--both good and bad. We admit our faults and work to remedy them; we admit our abilities and accept and use them as a gift from the God of our understanding.

Humility is as much an admission of our assets as it is of our defects. No longer can we confuse humility with false pride, that self-centered trait in which we attract attention by belittling our own good points. "Oh, it was really nothing," is not a true statement when applied to a job well done. It is not appropriate to degrade ourselves and deny our true abilities. Using and strengthening our God-given attributes is part of being restored to sanity; To deny our strengths is to deny the power of God in our lives today. We therefore should not be falsely proud as we approach Step Seven. Instead, we muster as much humility as we can, and become willing to work this step. Knowing that God is with us, we do our best, accepting that this will be an ongoing task.. We honestly acknowledge that this is an ongoing task, and humbly, gratefully thank God for the opportunity to improve our attributes and start weeding out defects from our lives.

This whole thing about being humble was puzzling. At first we thought it was self-negating. But then we found that humility was as much an admission of our assets as it was of our defects. So we found that we couldn't confuse humility with false pride anymore. That was just our self-centered way of attracting attention. A lot of us had belittled our own good points by saying, "Oh, it was really nothing," when we did a job well. But we realized that it wasn't truthful and it wasn't appropriate to deny our true abilities. Using and strengthening our God-given attributes was part of being restored to sanity and was "really something." When we denied our strengths we were denying the power of God in our lives. So we found that we couldn't be falsely proud and work Step Seven. We had to be humble in order to walk a spiritual path. Knowing that God was with us, we got willing and did our best. We thanked God for the opportunity to improve our attributes and let Him start removing the defects from our lives.

If we are absolutely honest in the evaluation of ourselves, we are humble. Humility is self-honesty and the absence of false pride. Humility is the root of faith, hope and tolerance. We find that all spiritual principles are based on and reinforced through humility.

Some of us thought that the way for us to get humility was through humiliation: It was all self-created, self-imposed, self-perpetuated. It was nothing that anyone did to us. It was all stuff that we had done to ourselves. After enough humiliation, we would humbly ask God to remove the shortcoming that was causing us all the trouble. And we believed that God would remove it. As we looked back on where we had come from, we saw that we hadn't become perfect, but we were much better. We were changed in the ways we needed to be changed in order to render service to our fellow addicts. Our own lives were changed in the process.

We found we couldn't compare our recovery with someone else. If we did, it came out we were either less than or better than. Following this idea, each of us was able to see how much we have

grown. We saw that some of our selfishness, self-centeredness, and other defects that used to make us insane didn't make us as crazy anymore. They were becoming weaker.

Humility is something for which we strive, but never fully achieve. It is recognizing that we are not perfect. Becoming humble is the result of a gradual change in our attitude. We learned through our painful experience that we could not live on our own power, and became willing to ask for help. In becoming humble, we let go of our false pride and self-importance. We turn away from a life of self-centeredness and self-gratification, toward a life of spiritual growth and progress.

For us, to be in a selfless frame of mind, there had to be a humble kind of approach to people and to the Seventh Step. We weren't real good at that. Ego mania was probably our biggest problem, so humility didn't come naturally.

We had to ask God to remove our shortcomings by acting differently through prayer, and we demonstrated our readiness. Our active demon of willingness was a powerful prayer. We believed we could become new people and act differently, but only a Power greater than us could change our nature. As we realized we could change only our actions, we became humble. And the God of our understanding often removed our defects and shortcomings, when we humbly asked through our actions and prayers.

This step is about asking God humbly because only God can supply what we need. We cannot remove our character defects by ourselves. We need to be freed of these shortcomings so we can develop spiritually.

Shortcomings limit our recovery--when we ask God to remove our shortcomings--we are asking for freedom. We ask our Higher Power to help us become better people and to help us continue to live free from the obsession to use. We ask for help because we found that we could not do it alone. Some of us make the mistake of asking God to remove our shortcomings and then setting out to remove them ourselves. But we are reminded of the message, "I can't; God can." We tried and failed, and it hurts to admit defeat. The more we can apply the spiritual principles of surrender, the faster the healing will take place.

For most of us it took a lot of pain to finally get to the point where we became humble enough to ask the God of our understanding, to help us.

For some of us, the N.A. Program was our Higher Power. We were willing to turn our will and our life over to the care of a power greater than ourselves. We knew that there had to be some kind of change. We also knew that we could not do the change alone. We had to become willing to ask God to remove our shortcomings.

The word "ask" is surely different from "tell" or "demand." Why is it important to ask God to remove our shortcomings? If we tell God to remove our defects, we are trying to maintain control. In taking Step Seven, it is not for us to decide how we "ought" to be. Our experience has shown that the results are usually disastrous when we tell a Power greater than ourselves what to do. If we persist in these directives, we are apt to discover other character defects. False virtue can be a subtle trap when we pretend to be what we are not. Although it may seem that we degrade ourselves by admitting our weakness, the truth is that we are letting go of painful and

destructive behavior patterns, and opening new doors. The doors reveal a new freedom—the freedom we need in order to change.

Let's talk about shortcomings before we get into this Step. Are shortcomings the same as defect? The answer is yes and no. As strange as that might seem, it is true. We say they are the same because they have their root in the defect. We say they are different because the shortcoming is the action out of the defect. For example, let take the defect of impatience. At 7:00 pm you are waiting to pick somebody up for a meeting. You are doing them a favor and going out of the way. You arrive on time; they don't. At this point our defect of impatience begins to make us angry, frustrated, and resentful. These shortcomings are born of our defect. Many of the same shortcomings are born from different defect.

Now we come to the question, is there a difference between Step Six and Seven? Just what is a character defect and a shortcoming? For most of us, we feel there is a common thread between them - our self will. Both of these steps are addressing what our will had done for us in the past and more importantly what our will is doing for us now that we are clean. Both steps are showing us that we need to have a personal change in dealing with that will. So for some, there is no difference, but for others in the Fellowship this was not enough. We saw that a character defect is something we have, like anger, resentment or self pity and a short coming is what those defects block, like love, understanding and realistic self worth. Still, for others there is another insight to all of this. In Step Six we are asked to be entirely ready, in other words, prepare our thinking to have our defects of character be removed. Then here in Step Seven we take the action by asking God to remove our shortcomings. So, for those of us, we see that a character defect is the way we are thinking and a shortcoming is the way we act based upon that kind of thinking. What ever your perspective on the question, these steps show us the consequences of holding on to our self will, defects of character and our shortcomings in relationship to our recovery. It is important to realize that there are two steps to work in succession here and vital to know that both Step Six and Seven will work us.

Our shortcomings were evident in the way we looked at things. We had to ask for a lot of help when we came up short. We asked for the strength and courage not to need to know, not to need to understand, just to accept. We saw how deep our short-sightedness went. We saw all the mental twists we had from the disease of addiction. And we saw the emotional separation from other people and ourselves that needed to be mended by God. We saw that we were powerless to do this ourselves.

We have discussed the necessity of cultivating humility, and understand why we need to ask God to remove our shortcomings. Now our Basic Text says, "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 or show intense willingness." Still others will pray in accordance with their own belief in a Higher Power.

We found we had to do some footwork on getting a defect removed. We found we just couldn't expect to have God come in and zap us. One member had always had a real problem speaking in front of groups. He wanted God to raise his hand, march him up to the podium and do the talking for him. Nothing happened. He kept praying about this and praying about it but nothing happened. He finally realized he needed to raise his hand and walk on up there. God would help him out once he was up there, but God was not going to do anything about raising his hand. He had to do the footwork.

Our experience has shown that applying the spiritual principles of Step Seven is necessary to recover. In order to continue in our recovery we require a change in character, which can only be accomplished through practicing Step Seven on a daily basis. We humbly ask our Higher Power to keep our defects as they are taken from us. Once in a while, we may panic and grab the wheel; but when we do, our shortcomings shift into automatic pilot, ready to put us back in the ditch.

We had to work over and over again on our willingness. We had to become willing to have our defects removed. It was a two way street. . We were going to have to do some things and ask God to do some things. One thing that got in our way was our lack of trust. We didn't trust that God would remove our defects of character. But even worse, even if God could change our personalities, we didn't trust that God knew enough about what He was doing that we would end up a better person once our defects were removed.

Losing faith can be a danger. We may grow impatient with our growth and progress. Old defects seem to leave us slowly, and we see new ones far too often. We have not asked God humbly, or we aren't really willing to let it go. If a shortcoming isn't removed, it simply means we have more work to do. We aren't being punished; it just means that we have to work a little harder on one or more of the previous step. We change slowly, day by day-not all at once and not without help from the God of our understanding, and from others in the Fellowship. We will never be perfect, but we can recover. We do the best we can, always remembering who we are and where we came from.

Most of us took the Seventh Step on an ongoing basis. We found we needed the spiritual principle of the Seventh Step in order to stay clean. As addicts, we needed a change of character in order to recover. The only way this could happen was by practicing Step Seven on a continual basis. It worked better for us if we worked through the steps on anything that stood in the way of our being of service. So year after year, we found ourselves working our way through the steps again, each time at a deeper level. And each time we gained more freedom.

Because we are human, we have shortcomings. We are only human. Being willing to live a spiritual program enables us to move toward our goal of recovery. We either move forward or backwards. We cannot stand still. As we change our attitudes, we begin to apply the principles of Step Seven.

We accept ourselves as we are, and try to develop spiritually. This means we accept ideals which we strive for. We recognize that we are only human and realize that we will never finish the process of spiritual growth. There will always be areas where we fall short, but we keep reaching toward our goal. Only a well-grounded, realistic view of ourselves and others will enable us to accept this world as it is. That is true humility.

In time we had that change. We didn't think like the person we had been. We didn't talk like that person. We didn't live like that person. There had been a change in us, and it was because we had surrendered ourselves to this program, to our Higher Power, to the God of our own understanding.

We found that being humble meant that we could accept ourselves the way we were. It didn't mean groveling or putting ourselves down. It was an honest recognition of ourselves. It was making peace with our assets and our liabilities, the sum total of what we were with our strengths

and weaknesses: It wasn't being grandiose or taking undo credit for our accomplishments or the good things about us. We knew that any power we had was God's power.

All of us in the N.A. Fellowship found that developing our relationship with a God of our understanding was going to take a lot more work than we thought. Most of us were getting over our early fear of that relationship. We knew that was what was going to take us further into compassion, love, friendship, and positive regard for people, for ourselves and God. WE knew that these were principles that we needed in order to stay clean. They seemed at one time unattainable but we saw other people in the Fellowship who obviously had them. We knew that there was away for us to get them.

We have asked our God to remove our shortcomings by acting differently than our addiction would have us act, we show our willingness to have God remove our defects. This active demonstration is a powerful prayer. We believe we can become new people and believe in new ways, but only a Power greater than us can change our nature. Realizing we can change only our actions, we become humble.

We found that being humble meant that we could accept ourselves the way we were. It didn't mean groveling or putting ourselves down. It was an honest recognition of ourselves. It was making peace with our assets and our liabilities, the sum total of what we were with our strengths and weaknesses. It wasn't being grandiose or taking undo credit for our accomplishments or the good things about us. We knew that any power we had was God's power.

Working Step Seven had given us a new freedom and a new strength that we would need when we got into the next step. We had begun to realize that there were some things from our past that we needed to set right. So now it was time, and we were ready to go on to the Eighth Step.

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STEP EIGHT

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

Step Eight continues the process of freeing ourselves from our past. When we made a searching and fearless moral inventory in Step Four, we were able to see and admit our faults. We also received the benefit of seeing where we had caused harm to other people. It was through this process that we began to see the need to make amends. We develop willingness as we realize we cannot live clean lives while carrying the guilt and fear of our past.

A part of us wants to see this step as something we can do and then be done with it, but it doesn't work that way. The longer we worked the program, the deeper we see into this step and the more insight we gain into the way we live, and the way this affects the lives of others.

We can draw from our previous experience in working the steps. . Remember our first difficulty in Step Three--making a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a Higher Power? We soon discovered how to ask our Higher Power for the needed strength to carry us through this confusing period. We utilize the tools we learned in the previous 'steps and ask God to guide us in doing the Eighth Step.

Denial is the most subtle symptom of our disease, and it can be arrested only through honesty and thoroughness. We are responsible for our recovery and Step Eight is an important part of that. We cannot change what we did when we were using. By working the steps, we have the ability to take responsibility for our behavior which has harmed ourselves and others.

One obstacle we faced was our own denial. Denial is one of the chore subtle symptoms of our disease, and it takes thoroughness and honesty to overcome it. To avoid any part of Step Eight because of our fear or embarrassment or false pride is to stagnate in our recovery or even risk relapse. As our Basic Text says, "although we are not responsible for our disease, we are responsible for our recovery." Step Eight is an important way for us to take that responsibility. We cannot change what we did or what we were; but today we are clean, and today we are able to take responsibility for our behavior that has harmed ourselves or others.

Some of us were so fearful when we reached this step, that at first we were unwilling to write a list. We should work Step Eight as if Step Nine does not exist. To project ahead at this point would cause unnecessary fear and make this step more difficult. We were reminded, however, that taking the steps leads away from using, and that ignoring the steps returns us to the painful addiction which brought us to N.A. In trusting our lives to the care of our Higher Power, we proceed as fearlessly as we are able.

As a result of the fast Seven Steps, fundamental changes have begun to happen within us. We get ready to share with the victims of our old lifestyle our joyful recovery from addiction-not only to drugs, but to insane behavior. Our recovery is becoming evident not only physically, but mentally and spiritually we have a new way of living.

In some cases, we are unable to determine if someone belongs on our list. Whenever we are unsure, we ask ourselves this question: "Have I wronged this person in any way? If we are still unclear, we examine our feelings to see if fear or pride cloud our judgment. For this reason, it is wise to discuss the matter with our sponsor or another experienced member of the Fellowship. One objective of Step Eight is to continue clearing away the ruins of our addiction so that we can experience peace within. If we harbor doubts, we will not have peace. On our list, we are careful to include each person's name and indicate exactly what we did to cause them harm.

We saw that there was no way most of us could make a complete list the fast time we did it. It helped us see that the Eighth Step was a process just like all the steps. All we needed to do was pray for God's help and ask for our sponsor's help and we would get the strength and the knowledge we needed to go through the process. Also, we found that working the other steps helped develop us spiritually so that we were stronger and more able to work this step.

To avoid Step Eight because of fear of embarrassment or false pride is to block spiritual growth. As we look at all the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual damage we have caused throughout our addiction, we see a need to free ourselves of the pain, remorse and twisted

relationships. We also see that our list must be thorough in order to receive the spiritual healing we need. Along with this comes the harm which results from being dishonest: Denial of an uncomfortable fact is soon compounded by other denials, until we find that we are risking relapse.

One important thing that our sponsors helped us with was to focus our attention on the fast part of the Eighth Step. At this point, all we were being asked to do was to make a list of people we had harmed. Our willingness to make amends was not the issue in the first part of this step. All we had to do here was make a list of people we have harmed, being careful to include each person's name and indicating exactly what we did to cause them harm.

Before we proceed in making a list, it is important that we understand the terms used in Step Eight. The words "harm" and "amend" are key words in this step. The N.A. Basic Text defines "harm" as follows: "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."¹⁰

Another important word is "amends." In Step Eight, we are not merely listing people to whom we will say, "I'm sorry," when working Step Nine. The word "amends" does not mean "to apologize." A common definition of the word amends is "reparation for loss or injury... compensation."

The word "amends" was not clear to all of us at first. Were we just to make a list of people we needed to apologize to? To most of us, that seemed pretty empty. How many times did we feel remorseful after glimpsing the results of active addiction? How hollow were the words, "I'm sorry." For most of the amends we needed to make, especially to the repeated victims of our continuing insanity, "I'm sorry" just wasn't enough.

Our experiences with the Eighth Step were varied. Some of us had an easy time writing our list, while others of us had a hard time fording names to put on it. Some of us couldn't think of who we had harmed or in what way we might have harmed them. We went back to our Fourth Step and looked for names but still didn't find that many. We found though, as we continued in our Eighth Step, names of people kept coming up, and we realized we had to make amends to them.

Others of us wrote long lists that went back to childhood. We figured we had harmed everyone we had touched. Some of us had been so destructive that we couldn't force ourselves to think about it. We were overwhelmed at the thought of making the list and couldn't force ourselves to start.

The only way a lot of us could begin was to ask the God of our own understanding for help and then get a pencil and paper and start. The first name on the list was one most of us missed, and that was ourselves. We had hurt ourselves very much over the years. We thought we were having fun at first, and later thought this was just our lifestyle, and that there was no other way of life open to us. Now we saw differently and we saw how we had wasted so much time and money and so many opportunities. All those lost years couldn't be regained. But if we faced our past clearly in this step, we could get the most out of our experience and benefit from it.

In Step Eight, we list the names of all the persons we have harmed. Thinking about it doesn't get the list written. We need to sit down and write it. We may refer to our Fourth Step inventory, adding any additional people we've harmed. We consider our friends, neighbors, family, and employers, especially people who were close to us. At other times during our addiction there were faceless people in our memory that we harmed never really knowing many of them and some whose names we just can't remember. A "faceless people" entry should be included on our list. It is important that we see clearly when, where and how we have harmed these people in and out of recovery. It is also important to place ourselves on the list because in our addiction we've harmed ourselves most of all.

Just as in Step Four, we had to be thorough in making our list. We should be sure to include amends that need to be made to institutions, partners in relationships, people we took advantage of financially, or stole from. We need to trust our sponsors to guide us in preparing our list in these sensitive areas. The humility we found in the Seventh Step gives us the ability to write our list honestly.

Our families were usually at the top of our list. We felt a lot of guilt and remorse about the harm we did to our families. We couldn't take back the tears that were shed for us. What most of us could do, just for today, was to see to it that this kind of thing didn't happen again.

Some of us had difficulty seeing how we had harmed anyone other than ourselves in our addiction. But when we honestly look at our behavior, we begin to acknowledge the harm we did to others. For instance, have we exploited people, been distant, or judgmental? Have we taken advantage of others or abused the trust which they placed in us? Have we deceived others or withheld affection? Have we turned our backs on those who were close to us? Were we partially or 'totally responsible for broken relationships? We need to ask ourselves these questions in order to see that we can no longer blame situations for our behavior. Our disease played a part in initiating our wrongdoing, but now that we are recovering, it is imperative that we become willing to make amends for any harm we caused. By doing this, we are able to stop inflicting harm and begin to enjoy improved relationships with others.

When we finished our list, we went over it with our sponsor to help fill in names we had missed or remove names that didn't belong on our list. Then, and only then, were we ready to look at our willingness to make amends at all. We also examined our willingness to make amends to certain people who we felt had harmed us much more than we had harmed them.

In the earlier steps we recognized the effects of our disease on ourselves. In Step Eight we recognized the effects of our disease on other people. In some ways, the Eighth Step was a reaffirmation of the First Step. Usually the First Step was a recognition of the effects of the disease on ourselves. We thought we were the only ones who were feeling all this pain. We were the ones who were experiencing it, therefore we recognized it. But in our self-obsession, we didn't realize how other people were affected. In Step Eight, we saw how our disease had affected other people by identifying our part. We become aware of how we had a negative impact on other people, exactly how we had hurt them. When we realized that, we became truly willing to make amends.

Some of us had to look especially hard at the issue of willingness. Many of us could face serious consequences if we made direct amends for everything we did. What were we to do here about

being willing? The key here was doing what we needed to do to stay clean. We needed to be willing to do anything it took to stay clean and continue on with our recovery.

Some of us, especially at first, had 'a lot of trouble with willingness. We felt so much anger and resentment and hurt that we didn't feel any willingness to make amends; we thought we could skip over this step, or at least the willingness part of it. But the steps were like a ladder with rungs three feet apart. If we stretched as hard as we could, we could make it from one step to the next. But if we tried to skip a step, then we were faced with a six-foot step on the ladder and we couldn't make that.

We came to realize that becoming willing to make amends required making some real changes in our attitudes, in our thinking, and in our behavior towards those we had harmed. Most often an apology was a necessary start in making those changes, but there was so much more. Then our amends have their full impact, not only in those relationships, but in our lives and our ongoing recovery.

In many cases, the only way we became willing to make these amends was through prayer and meditation and through realizing that, by making these amends, we were opening the door to a real freedom for ourselves. We got a new freedom that meant we didn't need to be enslaved by the our past.

We were reminded again at this point that the disease of addiction was much more than just using drugs. If that was all it was, we wouldn't need the Twelve Steps. We would have just quit using and our lives would have been fine, but it wasn't that way with us. There was a whole lot more. That's why we had to go through a complete cleansing and rebuilding process. Being willing to make amends was a part of that.

When we contemplated a negative reaction to our amends, we became angry, afraid or self-righteous. It was then we saw we had the wrong attitude. We had to become truly willing to make the amends. Our attitude had to change towards those people. At first, we may have wanted to make amends just to make amends and get it over with. But that didn't work. We had to come to the point where we were really sorry for what we had done. Only when we could come to see that it was a wrong thing that we did to them could we become willing to make those amends.

We saw that willingness worked even when someone had died. If we came to see our wrong clearly and were sorry we did that wrong to them, the work was mostly over. The fact that some people were dead didn't mean we shouldn't include them on our list. Most of the release we could get from these amends came from really seeing how we wronged them, being truly sorry for what we did, and being completely willing to go to any length to make amends to them all.

Getting through to the willingness to make the amends, to where we were truly sorry, represented a greater spiritual growth than we realized. We started out at the First Step all locked up in self-will and blaming everyone and everything around us for our troubles. Now, here we are in Step Eight, taking responsibility for all our actions. That was a lot of growth on our part.

There is an enormous spiritual benefit and emotional growth to be gained here. If we said that we could see we'd done some harm to this person, but we were not willing to do anything about that, we were really robbing ourselves of some recovery, and we were blocked. If we made a list of

people we had harmed and were not willing to make amends to them, then we needed to examine our resistance.

We see that by making the list, we are already becoming willing to face these people. Just as in Step Two we gradually came to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, so we eventually become willing to make amends to all those we have harmed.

Looking at the list each day helps us to become willing to make amends. Through experience, we have learned that we can bury our list in a drawer, but we cannot bury the guilt and remorse we feel. As we grew in honesty, we become more aware of the harm we have caused and develop the willingness to make amends to them all.

We acknowledged that we'd made a mess of our lives, and that we had hurt a lot of people. We have become willing to take responsibility for that and to take responsibility for our actions. There is always hope for anyone with an honest desire to work the steps.

Part of our difficulty was our inability to relate to other people, to understand them, to have empathy, love, and affection for them. As we learned to love and forgive ourselves and others, we found we could be loved and forgiven in return. By working the Eighth Step, we begin to shed more of the old thought process and behavior that kept us sick and we surrender to more change.

Many of us pray for the willingness to continue. By the time we have come this far, we have made a deep commitment to recovery; this commitment includes continuing with the remaining steps. At times we are unable to produce this willingness from our own resources, but we have established a relationship with a Higher Power who can provide the resources we lack. In praying to the God of our understanding, we reaffirm our decision to place our wills and lives in God's care. When we contemplate the wonderful miracle of our recovery and the infinite love of our Higher Power, we find that we need not be fearful. We can stand firm on our faith and look ahead to freedom. Knowing that we would make a situation right if we could allows us to put the past in perspective. We find our willingness grows until we can trust our Higher Power enough to go on to Step Nine.

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STEP NINE

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

With the willingness we have gained through the Eighth Step, we are now ready to take action and make direct amends. The first thing we do is talk to our sponsor. In taking Step Nine, we approach those we have harmed and attempt to repair the damage we have caused. We find that we have to be as direct and thorough as possible; being vague or glossing over unpleasant issues won't help us. In our addiction, we often denied and ignored the consequences of our actions. Now, in recovery, we take Step Nine so that we never have to fear our past again. With God's help, using the principle of this step, we can now begin to clear away the wreckage that has cluttered our lives and the lives of others.

As we begin our amends, we will need to have faith in our Higher Power, our sponsors, or other experienced N.A. members. It is recommended that we exercise prudent judgment in approaching all persons we have harmed. Our sponsors told us that our actions on this step would affect other people. Some of us didn't hear this in time. Others of us heard it, but chose to ignore it. In some cases in order to ease our own conscience, we caused more harm than good. We proceed carefully, realizing that not everyone understands that addiction is an arrestible disease. Some people will be skeptical about our recovery, and be displeased by hearing from us once again. Others will notice a welcome change in us immediately. However, to a greater or lesser degree, all will probably have difficulty understanding the havoc we created. Whatever their initial response, we need to face these people and be willing to accept their reaction. We remember that we created our problems, and then imposed them on the people we now approach. We must proceed quietly, faithfully and steadily ahead. Although we realize that some wrongs can never be fully corrected, we begin to take responsible action towards the well-being of ourselves and of others.

It was very important for us to hear stories like this because it showed us how blind we could be in our relations with others. So one of the first things we learned was that we had to check every move we made on this step with our sponsors. This was especially important the first time we did Step Nine. If we didn't check with our sponsors, we found we rarely saw the ways we would hurt somebody else by making our amends.

The Ninth Step is not about us being able to sleep well at night when we have caved in some other person's world. Our sponsors felt that amends like that should be made in front of the mirror to ourselves and to God. We realized that there were many cases when we were going to have to learn to live with ourselves if we had harmed someone.

We were still self-centered people. A lot of times all we were thinking about was how we could feel better. We had to be taught that a lot of the people we would be making amends to were people we had very mixed emotions about. We had to find a way to make our amends without causing a new problem for people where we would have a new amend to make. Our sponsors told us, "You're involving other people now. You can't run on self will anymore."

To protect us from acting on self will, many of our sponsors asked us to go over each of the amends we were planning to make. We told how we had harmed each person and what we were planning to say to them. We needed to work closely with our sponsors and follow their suggestions. Those of us who followed our sponsor's suggestions were more protected from harming others again.

Many of us found that our own names were at the top of our amends list. A big part of our amends to ourselves was staying clean and working this spiritual program. It wasn't until we practiced this program and worked the steps that we were able to see how much we had abused ourselves, and it was then that we were able to stop doing it.

Some of our amends lists hadn't been thought out carefully enough in Step Eight and we had to watch for that here in Step Nine. Some of us still had some names on our lists that no longer needed to be there. Our sponsors helped us here by teaching us that some amends were unnecessary, and they guided us in weeding out any names that didn't belong in the amends process.

We realized that was the key. Making amends meant facing our wrongs, looking at them realistically, and correcting them. We had to do our part and be willing to put ourselves in a situation where we could be humiliated and not let that stop us. We couldn't just think about how sorry we were, we had to take action. We couldn't be vague or brush over certain issues, because that wouldn't help us. We had to show ourselves and God as we understood Him that we were truly sorry. Even though some of our wrongs could never be fully corrected, we had to take some responsible action towards the well-being of ourselves and others. Once we had made amends to these people, we told ourselves we would try to never harm them again.

When approaching the people we had hurt, we acted on a spiritual basis. But that didn't mean we thrust our spiritual principles in their faces. Instead, we utilized our Higher Power to give us the strength to stand face to face with the people we had harmed. We explained our situation--that we were practicing a set of principles to recover from addiction, and that to do so we had to make restitution for harm done.

When approaching those we have hurt, we proceed on a spiritual basis. We do not assume an attitude of self-righteousness that will somehow wipe away all past wrongs. We do not use God as a scapegoat. Rather, we use the guidance and strength of our Higher Power in doing what we avoided for so long--facing the very people whom we had hoped never to see again. When necessary, we explain that we are practicing certain principles to recover from addiction, and that to do so we must make restitution for harm done.

Our amends may involve anything from an honest discussion to a bit of hard labor to paying back money owed. Whatever amends are necessary, we make ourselves available and ready to complete them. Let's consider the types of amend we will probably need to make.

Some of us owed such astronomical debts that we froze at the prospect of paying them. At this point, we are reminded that we need to be accountable for our past actions. Our addiction precipitated our actions, but it does not excuse them. We are also reminded that in the N.A. Program, we live just for today. Just as our recovery began one step at a time, we go on and take the first steps toward repaying past debts.

Once again, we emphasize that we are practicing the spiritual principles of the Twelve Steps. In this and all matters, we seek guidance from a Higher Power. We pray for the strength to continue on the right course, and ask for the willingness to do whatever is necessary--regardless of our fears. We have found this attitude to be absolutely necessary, for to turn away from the principles of N.A. is to fall once again into the grip of our addiction.

Our families and loved ones usually head the list. It helps to remember that just by staying clean, we are making some amends to them. We should also consider that being too direct may hurt them more. This is why Step Nine states, "except when to do so would injure them or others." It is not our intention to bring up events and statements that would hurt, injure, or harm others. In some instances, making people aware of situations they knew nothing about would cause unnecessary pain. It is not fair to inflict more harm on others simply to relieve our own guilt. We need to be considerate of other peoples feelings and lives, and avoid creating new harm or unnecessary pain in their lives today. We will therefore need to exercise the utmost caution in making amends to those closest to us. Some of us felt a need to make amends to people who were dead. This problem seemed insurmountable. We found a solution by talking with others. Some of us wrote letters, others went . to .the cemetery and still others did community service. The point is, we were willing to make the effort in making these amends.

Our employers, businesses, and co-workers also suffered as a result of our addiction. We obviously didn't work up to par or handle our responsibilities efficiently while we were using. Some of us robbed our employers of productivity and may have recklessly abused expense accounts and other privileges. Clearly, we used our employers for our own selfish pursuits.

Another area that should be approached with extreme caution is making amends to people from our past who am still using. We share our wrongs in these relationships with our sponsors who helped us decide if an amend should be made. In some cases we were toll to ask our Higher Power for forgiveness and leave our old using friends alone. Other times, however, the amend needed to be made. The important thing to remember is an amend is an amend and that we were not there to get emotionally involved again.

Making amends to our families was another area where we had to be careful. We had to consider that being too direct might hurt them more. Step Nine told us to make direct amends "except when to do so would injure then or others." Even though we wanted to be as honest and direct as we could be, we couldn't bring up situations that would hurt or injure others. We couldn't cause unnecessary pain by malting people aware of situations they knew nothing about. Once again, we couldn't inflict more harm on others simply to relieve our own guilt. We had to be considerate of other people's feelings and lives, and avoid creating new harm or unnecessary pain in their lives. We had to exercise caution in making amends to our families and the people closest to us.

Financial amends are often difficult for those of us who spent money foolishly. Missed payments and amends are frequent results of our financial unmanageability. Relentlessly, in addiction, we ignored our responsibilities and bought more drugs. We cared about little else as long as we continue to use, and found many excuses to justify our behavior.

Financial amends can really be hard for those of us who spent money foolishly. In our years of active addiction, we lined up a whole army of debts: child support, alimony payments, car payments, overdrawn credit cards, and overdue rent payments. Some of us lied about payments "in the mail," or refused to answer the phone without a special signal or code. Our addiction humiliated and embarrassed us until we finally saw how hopeless we really were. When we carve to the Ninth Step in our recovery, some of us froze at the aspect of making financial amends. But our sponsors reminded us that we had to be responsible for our past actions. Thank God, they also told us, that in the N.A. Program we live just for today. Just as our recovery began one step at a time, so could we begin by taking the first steps in repaying past debts.

Just like all of our other amends, it was important to discuss our financial amends with our sponsors. In paying back money we owe, we consider the ramifications. Here again, we had to consider the words "except when to do so would injure them or others." In some cases, our families were financially dependent on us and we had to be careful not to threaten their livelihood in our attempts to clear our conscience. Some of us had to budget our money very carefully to start making financial restitution for our past wrongs. We informed our creditors of our intention to make good on our debts and arranged a reasonable pay-back system. For some of us, it took several years to clear our debts, but the small amount we paid each month added up, until one morning we woke up and realized that we had completed the amends.

Our experience has demonstrated that many of our creditors are willing to co-operate once we exhibit a willingness and commitment to change our old ways. As long as we correct our past deficiencies and do our best not to repeat them, matters normally work out satisfactorily. We apologize for our outstanding obligations and pay them back on a mutually agreeable schedule. At times, it may be worthwhile to hire a lawyer or financial advisor who can help us adjust our budgets to accommodate our creditors' requests.

One of the greatest amends we could make was to quit using. Some of us could never replace all the money that our families and others had spent on us. And there were times when we couldn't have replaced all the money we stole from others. We probably would have been penniless the rest of our lives.

Ninth Step amends to members of the medical profession are another area which can be troublesome. For many of us, doctors represented just one thing: A fix. Returning to face physicians and nurses requires prayer. Some physicians may be so horrified to think that they could have been abused by a seemingly needy patient that they refuse to hear us out. Perhaps they simply are unable to comprehend our tale of addictive horror and subsequent relief in recovery. Others will be glad that we are doing something positive about our addiction and wish us well.

We suggest talking with our sponsors or other experienced members before embarking on our medical amends. While we never flee from those we listed in our Eighth Step, we may again have to practice some of the humility which we began to absorb in Step Seven. An alternate way to make our medical amends would be to help a clean addict who has to undergo surgery or other serious medical procedure. We can do this by sharing our time and clean energy with that person, offering understanding and compassion for their pain as they maintain their recovery. Remember again, that prayer and honest sharing with other members will bring us the necessary direction we need to continue this vital aspect of our recovery.

The question of legal matters often arises, since many of us have committed crimes of some nature. Our past crimes may vary from petty theft to felonies, and we know that we are liable for them. Many of us feel misgivings when pondering the question of whether or not to turn ourselves in to the authorities. It is obvious that we have done wrong and need to repair the damage; it is also clear that avoiding amends will send us back to active addiction.

After seeking guidance from our Higher Power, we listen carefully to the advice of experienced N.A. members. Often, we find it necessary to seek legal counsel. Turning these problems over to a professional, who is trained in the law, can provide great relief.

As addicts, some of us had a thin line to walk in making some amends because of their effect on us or others. Some of us could have spent the rest of our lives in jail by making amends. We had to work with our sponsors to see where that thin line was drawn. Most of us found it wouldn't have served any purpose to go to prison, but we saw that we had to be entirely ready to do so if it was necessary to maintain our recovery.

So many of our amends involved people we couldn't ever hope to find. One man used to knock derelicts on the head and take their money. So he put money in an envelope and sent it to a local mission. That was one way of making amends. The most common way we made amends to these unknown people was by putting it in the basket at meetings.

A common example to avoid in this Step was making amends to the spouse of a person with whom we had had an affair. We thought no one would be so foolish. But a few of us were that foolish and did just that. One of our early members had been going out with his best friend's wife for quite a while. He really felt guilty about it. He told his friend he was sorry for what he had done. Of course it was a disaster. So then he went to his sponsor and told him what he had done and what had happened.

The Ninth Step is not about us being able to sleep well at night when we have caved in some other person's world. Our sponsors felt that amends like that should be made in front of the mirror to ourselves and to God. We realized that there were many cases when we were going to have to learn to live with ourselves if we had harmed someone.

We began to realize that a part of making amends for many of the injuries we had caused others was simply to not do it anymore. To do the same thing again to someone else would be like slapping somebody in the face and saying, "I'm sorry," and then turning around and slapping them again. We saw that we shouldn't make an amend in such a way that we needed to make a new one.

There were some people on our lists who we needed to leave alone. In some cases, this was the best way we could make amends to them. This was an essential lesson for some of us to learn.

COMMITTEE NOTE: The beginning of this example was deleted. Please decide what change you want.

The N.A. member felt badly and went to his sponsor. His sponsor told him, "Just leave him alone. Don't do him any more favors. He doesn't want another lawn mower so you can take it again." That was a harsh truth to learn, but it was one a lot of us had to learn. "Just leave him alone."

One woman went back to make an amend to a man she used to live with. They wound up in bed and the romance started all over again. He was still using. She started reading him N.A. literature and telling him about the meetings. He would promise to go to the meetings, but he never went. It was a fiasco, all from wanting to make an amend. He had no intention of getting clean. She finally realized that an amend was an amend, and to just leave it there. She didn't owe anyone her blood anymore.

We found the most important way we could make amends to all the people who were still in our lives, and to society in general, was to quit using, to face our addiction, and to live the Twelve Steps so we wouldn't go out and use again.

In Step Eight we had worked on becoming entirely ready to make the amends. But when we started snaking the amends in Step Nine, many of us found that we hadn't done a very good job of getting entirely ready. We found we wanted a pat on the back for making the amends. We wanted to look good. After we had made a few amends, a lot of fear came up in us. We saw we had the wrong attitude. We were going around and making amends to people because we wanted them to praise us. "Gee, what a great thing you're doing. We're so proud of you." Then we were surprised when that wasn't what we got. There were some people we made amends to that didn't really care. They didn't want to bear it. As far as they were concerned, we were intruding on them once more.

Then we realized that there were many, many people we were not going to be able to talk to. The important thing for us was to become willing, to become entirely ready, to make amends to them. We found our attitude had to change about many people. At first, a lot of us made amends without feeling sorry for what we had done. We had to ask ourselves, "Am I making this amend for the pat on the back, or am I doing it because it was a wrong thing that I did and I am admitting that wrong?"

We explained to them that amends were something that we had to do for ourselves, for our own peace of mind. It was our way of showing ourselves and the people we had hurt that we were truly sorry, that we had changed. We helped out where we could and we minded our own business.

We even saw that gossip, which seemed like such a little thing, was harming others. And when we harmed others, we harmed ourselves.

For many of us the principle behind the Ninth Step was forgiveness. We said "I'm sorry" very easily, and we said it all the time. It was a way of life for us. Because it was so easy for us, some of us couldn't make our amends by telling people we were sorry. Instead, what we had to do was to ask them to forgive us. There was a big difference in that for us. It was very humbling for us to ask for forgiveness. It was not easy for us to say, "Will you forgive me?"

Asking other people to forgive us was hard, but it was even more important to forgive ourselves. And we had to forgive the other person too, because sometimes we had blamed them. But when it came to making amends it wasn't a matter of who was right and who was wrong.

We saw this applied particularly to the people who loved us. We couldn't afford to take them for granted anymore and expect them to automatically forgive us and accept us the way we were. Some of the people we loved weren't easy to live with, but neither were we: We found we needed to talk to each other when we made a mistake. And not only did we need to apologize, but we needed to learn forgiveness.

We found that the ability to forgive ourselves and ask other people to forgive us was something that was really important. There was a lot we gained from it because it carried through into all the different areas of our lives. It helped us come face to face with ourselves. We could look in the mirror and know if we were doing something that wasn't right for us. And we found we didn't

end up being unfair or unjust with ourselves. We didn't need to carry the old feelings around with us anymore and have all the world on our shoulders.

A lot of us looked at our lists and searched for the easiest amends to do first. We may have figured the emotional ones would be easiest, financial ones would be tough, and some of the others would be impossible. Making an easy amend gave us the courage to go on and make the harder ones. And there were other of us who needed to take the amends just as they came on the list. We saw that if that was the way they came out of us in the Eighth Step, that was the way we were going to have to do them in the Ninth Step. If we just took them as they were on the list, there was less chance of our disease taking over and deciding for us, and we were able to make amends in a saner way. We also saw more clearly how working on amends was- a process too. Whichever way we chose to follow, we trusted that God and our sponsor would guide us in making our amends. Working one step had made us more spiritually fit to work the next, and in the same way, making one amend made us more spiritually fit to do the next one. We also had to realize that when we made amends, some would be accepted and some wouldn't. We were finishing up dealing with our past.

We began to see that the amends process is never over. We found that through the years people who had disappeared showed up, and we could make another amend, or an amend we hadn't realized needed to be made became apparent.

If we have been thorough about the Ninth Step to the best of our ability, we will gain a clear conscience as a result. It is not important that we be forgiven, only that we be willing and straightforward in rectifying past harm.

Like all of the Twelve Steps, Step Nine is for us and for our benefit. By practicing this step and making amends, we sever many remaining ties that could bring us guilt or remorse over our past. Many report that the Ninth Step is where they find true release from the past. We are almost always met with approval in our new style of living and thinking, and are frequently wished well as we leave these appointments.

In rectifying our errors to the best of our ability we found freedom from the shackles of our past. We were finally free to live in the here and now without fear or guilt. We began to feel good about who we were and where we were going in our recovery. Nothing we had done in working the Ninth Step had harmed us at all. We felt free. And we had the last three steps to help us stay free.

We will finally be freed of our past-free to live in the here and now without fear or guilt. Continued effort on Step Nine leaves us feeling good about who we are and where we are going. Step Ten allows us to use the principles of all the steps we have taken up to this point.

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STEP TEN

*"We continued to take personal inventory and when
we were wrong promptly admitted it."*

The Tenth Step provides a way to assess and maintain our recovery. It is an active part of our new way of life and sets the stage for ongoing recovery.

We have worked the first nine steps as well as we could, and we go back to them as often as we need. We have been relieved of a lot of the problems of living. In order to maintain that relief and grow in the program, this step is important to us. We need the Tenth Step to maintain spiritual growth. We know that it is only through contact with a God of our understanding that we have been given recovery- and a new life. To keep that new life on a daily basis, the Tenth Step is indispensable.

The purpose of the Tenth Step is to maintain a fit spiritual condition. We know that it is only through conscious contact with a Power greater than ourselves that we have been given recovery and a new life. As we worked this step we came to love it. We found that tating our personal inventory regularly made our lives a lot easier. That way we avoided the need to frequently get into the lengthy inventories, and we didn't have to carry that stuff around with us. Most of us had a lot of trouble admitting we were wrong before we came here. We had to learn how to say, "what I just did was wrong, and I'm sorry." That was a big lesson for us, and it sure made life a lot easier.

In order to reap the benefits of living clean, it is necessary to continue to practice the principle of self-assessment. Although we may not always recognize problem areas such as fear and anger, they can be driving forces with the potential to throw us into relapse. Addicts suffer from the disease of addiction, which is deeper than the symptoms of drug use. Recovery is maintained through total abstinence and living by spiritual principles. We therefore apply Step Ten to every area of our lives.

There is no area the disease does not affect. For example, fear is frequently present in every aspect of our lives. It is also important to examine areas where we grow angry or our beliefs are tested. The areas we don't want to question are usually those which most need to be examined. From our experience, we find that the principles of the program can and must be practiced continuously. The process of taking inventory of ourselves is essential. As addicts, we are prone to fear, anger, vanity, complacency, and doing the wrong thing at the wrong time. These character defects can drive us into a place where we cannot remain clean. Since we want to stay clean and recover, we do what the N.A. program suggests. It is the only way we know for addicts to change. We must change to live. We learn to accept others because we have learned that resentments and intolerance can kill us. Acceptance through practicing the N.A. way of life is a big change from the denial and hostility of our past. In living by spiritual principles we grow spiritually. Our old ways of selfishness and fear are gradually replaced with love for ourselves and other people. Again, the priority is recovery: just for today, we don't use. Why do we continue to take personal inventory? How long do we continue to take personal inventory? How often should we do it? Is it necessary to write the inventory, or can it be done verbally or mentally? These are some of the questions frequently asked by members approaching Step Ten.

We found when we were most healthy, we were doing Step Ten, on a regular basis. We were grateful that we continued to take inventory. At first we did it because we were told to do it. But then, when we did what we were told, we found that we gained freedom.

We thanked God we were aware enough to do it regularly. We were able to see and know what was going on. And we knew what we were up to. We didn't con ourselves as we used to.

The Tenth Step gave us perspective on each day. It helped us live just for today. We didn't carry everything over into the next day. Doing an ongoing inventory throughout the day and a final inventory at the end of the day, helped us keep in touch with ourselves, our progress and where we were at.

When we first started doing Step Ten, some of us would write every day, and then go over what we wrote with our sponsor. Sometimes we used the N.A. information pamphlet, Living the Program. We learned about the process of Step Ten. We learned to evaluate the day, 'to look over the things that we were happy about and the things we weren't happy about. We took a look at our actions to see where we were wrong and what we could have done better, so we would have an ideal to strive towards the next time. The Tenth Step is similar to the Fourth Step except that it is usually shorter and we admit our wrongs right away. When we have negative feelings about the actions or attitudes of ourselves or others, we try to see where we were wrong, and consider what we can do differently should the situation occur again. We pay special attention to see if our actions are based in guilt, as the emotions of fear, resentment and self-centeredness can kill us..

We ask ourselves some of these questions: "Am I doing my best? Am I being honest? Am I still growing, or am I slipping back into the old fears and resentments?" It is the purpose of the Tenth Step to help us answer these and similar questions. Those defects of character which we discovered in our Fourth Step are deeply ingrained in us. Now, we check for the surfacing of defects by doing Step Ten regularly.

We found we did this step in all of those ways. We spent some quiet time and took our inventory. We went over our day's activities. Had we had trouble with people, been in arguments, or had any of our defects come up? Did we do something dishonest. Did we do something to give us an uncomfortable feeling?

The strongest indicator was how we felt in our gut. We learned to recognize that sick feeling deep inside that alerted us to the fact that something was wrong. Once we were alerted, we could check ourselves out to see how much and in what ways we had contributed to the problem. Another way we used the inventory was with a particular area in our lives. When one problem area showed up in our lives over and over again, most of us went back to the Fourth Step and took an inventory in that area. Then we continued on with the Fifth Step and on through the rest of the steps again.

One area we might have had problems with was our personal relationships. Some of us saw we had difficulty developing healthy relationships because they come from relating with each other on a feeling level. We recognized this and saw we needed to start talking about our feelings. We made decisions about where we were going to start. Then we kept following up on that in our daily inventory, looking for how we were doing and what was happening. Another thing we

learned to watch carefully in our personal inventory was our own thinking. Self-defeating thinking would creep in without us being aware of it. We would find ourselves thinking, "If only I had this much money or if only I could do this." "If circumstances were different, if situations were different, then I would be okay." Finally we would catch what we were doing—we were giving importance to external things. Then we would tell ourselves, "Hey, that's distorted thinking. There isn't anything out there that can correct what's in here." So we would find a little spot where we could stop and meditate. We took some time to think about the things we had learned in Narcotics Anonymous—some of the things we had experienced since we got clean. And the fear and the emptiness started to go away.

It is very easy for recovering addicts to slip back into the distorted thinking of addiction. Our experience has shown us that guilt, fear, self-centeredness and resentment are some of the things that often lead us back to using. By practicing Step Ten regularly, we are alerted to the presence of our shortcomings and can then take appropriate action to have them removed. This is one of the reasons that sponsors usually recommend taking personal inventory on a regular basis. It is also recommended that we do the inventory on paper. This is because it is easier to recognize and admit our faults when we write them. In this way, we identify and correct inappropriate attitudes and actions before they have become firmly entrenched patterns.

Resentment is another problem which prevents us from living in the present and shackles us to the past. Because we are human, we all experience anger at times. However, when we hold onto anger, it turns into resentment which causes turmoil within us. Very soon, we find resentment affecting our present as well as our past. It has been said that resentment is anger turned inward. If we are to experience ongoing recovery through spiritual growth, we learn to forgive and accept the wrongs others have done to us and accept responsibility for the part we have played. Frequently, in our Tenth Step, we identify fear at the root of destructive actions and thoughts. Our experience with previous steps has shown us repeatedly that the remedy for fear is faith. When we identify fear in ourselves, we humbly ask God to remove it. By turning the fear over to the God of our understanding, we demonstrate our faith. Having knowledge of God's power in our lives, we carry on, trusting that all will be well.

Another familiar trait discovered often through personal inventory is self-centeredness. This characteristic seems to typify addicts more than any other. However, by the time we reach Step Ten, we no doubt realize how desperately we need to be rid of self-centered, self-seeking motives. Self-centeredness leaves no room for God's will. We watch for self-centeredness as we do our Tenth Step. When we identify self-centered motives underlying our actions or feelings, we ask humbly to have this defect removed. We proceed in the direction of God's will.

We finally come to realize that there is another way of looking at the situation. One way of imposing our will on the world is thinking that we are right. That power doesn't belong to us, and finally we don't want it.

When we sit down to write, we carefully review the events of the day. We list the things we felt good about as well as those which distressed us. Looking at our assets is just as important as looking at the defects because it helps us see where we have made progress, and builds self-esteem.

Often, we include in our continuing inventories a "gratitude list." It is very difficult to be unhappy and grateful at the same time. If we dwell upon resentment or turmoil in our lives, we begin to feel and act in disharmony with our surroundings. Becoming grateful gives us a step towards spiritual growth and freedom from guilt and self-centered fear.

We look at our actions during the day and we practice the principles we have learned, looking at where we were wrong, considering what we could have done differently, and the amends we need to make. We find it helpful to admit to another human being where we were wrong.

We also do spot check inventories. When we find ourselves in a situation and don't feel comfortable, we do an inventory right away. Maybe we were in a discussion with some people and it started getting heated. We learn to stop mentally.

We have discussed the necessity of taking a continued inventory. Spot check inventories, taken as needed, can also bring positive results. Inventories of this type are targeted at daily events and situations which seem to throw us off balance. Practicing the Tenth Step, which emphasizes examining ourselves, prevents an accumulation of our shortcomings. When problems arise, we have a spot-check process by which we can maintain balance. We have the tools we need to get through difficult times.

This highlights the preventive aspect of the Tenth Step. We can ask ourselves as we go through the day and especially when we become upset or uncomfortable, "Am I slipping into an old pattern, fear or resentment? Am I too tired or too hungry? Am I confused? Am I taking my anger out on someone who has nothing to do with my present feelings? Am I taking myself too seriously? Am I isolating from the Fellowship?"

It is something that we gradually build into our daily living and thinking. It is a gradual process which weaves its way into our patterns of regular living and thinking. Daily inventories are the most effective tools for chipping away at long-term habits of dishonest thinking.

Many of us have never before experienced honesty on a deep level because we covered up our feelings early in life by fantasizing or otherwise escaping, and then later by using. We must learn to recognize and accept our emotions, so that we can discover and become our true selves. Our lives are so much simpler when we know who we really are.

The more that we got into our disease, the more we used, the more isolated we got. It was us against the world. We need to guard against the return of those attitudes in recovery. They sometimes came back upon us, even when we aren't using. Ultimately, if we let those attitudes continue long enough, they could lead back to active addiction.

There is value in relating a Tenth Step verbally to another person. We have found a sponsor or spiritual advisor to be of great assistance when we need guidance. Often, when sharing with this person, we continue to be reminded that we are not alone in our efforts to achieve ongoing recovery.

When we have identified our wrongs, we act quickly. Step Ten tells us that when we are wrong, we "promptly admit it." Our experience with Step Nine taught us that admitting our wrongs and making amends when necessary removes the guilt we feel. It also conditions us on an emotional

and spiritual level to allow change to occur. When similar situations arise in the future, we will find ourselves able to act differently than before.

Prompt admission of our wrongs, whether they have been intentional or not, has an immense value. We are freed from our endless self-justification. The results of continuing our personal inventory are shown as we become more patient and tolerant. We become more willing to give rather than take from life.

If we did something wrong, it is important for us to take care of it right away. It seems if we don't take care of it right away, we get crazy.

The "promptly admitting" part of this step is hard for most of us at first. We have spent so much time in a way of life where the ends justified the means that we carry a lot of that over into our life after we get clean. In the past, if we trampled over somebody in getting what we wanted, we just went back to them and said, "I'm sorry." We expected that would be all right and they would just forget about it. We had to be confronted by people telling us that wasn't good enough. It doesn't do any good to say we are sorry when we don't intend to change and stop doing it. So a lot of us have to be careful about misusing apologies.

We found this step called for a lot more than saying we were sorry. Promptly admitting we were wrong means risking looking like a fool. Sometimes we would take a stand we felt strongly about and then see we were wrong and have to admit it. We grow in humility because we were able to admit when we were wrong and to do it promptly.

We learned to be gentle with ourselves. We saw areas where we fell short, so not being perfect became no big deal. We saw things to be grateful about each day. One problem some of us had was expecting more of ourselves than we were really capable of. We would beat ourselves for every little thing that we did. We ended up making mountains out of molehills. The steps were designed to free us from self-obsession, not to promote self-obsession. We had to learn to quit taking ourselves so seriously.

The Tenth Step also reminds us of our humanness. It shows us our need to accept other people and accept ourselves. It forced us to pay attention to what we are doing. The deeper we get into the program, the more we find that our Higher Power is with us. That deepening awareness helps us to try not to waste too much time each day. We try to pay more attention to what we are doing, saying, thinking, and feeling.

Responsibility became a big word for us in this step. As we became more responsible for ourselves, we took responsibility for our actions. It wasn't our past or our parents who were to blame for what we did--we did it. We took responsibility with the help of our Higher Power. If we were not responsible for ourselves, and responsible for our actions, we were saying that everything that was wrong was outside of ourselves, and wasn't really ours to change.

As we practiced this step, we saw we were learning more responsibility. When we messed up, we took responsibility for it. We came to the point where we weren't comfortable when we had hurt another person's feelings. There had been a time when it really didn't bother us. We had thought, "Well, that's too bad, that's their problem." We didn't feel that way anymore. Now it bothered us to know we had hurt another person's feelings. Somehow we had to make that right.

This step is our way of keeping things straight. The first nine steps had cleared up the past and put it in perspective for us, and this step helps keep it that way. Without this step, the consequences of our remaining defects of character would build back up to the point where we would really have a lot of insanity in our lives. This step keeps us from that. It keeps our recovery clean, and that doesn't mean just not using, it means feeling clean inside-feeling good about ourselves and about the world. We feel a part of the world rather than apart from the world. We are not in isolation and loneliness anymore.

When these situations arise, we now have a process by which we can recover physically, emotionally and spiritually. We have the tools we need to get through any situation and stay clean. It took us a bag time to understand the depth of "just for today." At first we only used that idea when it was convenient, or when we were forced to.

Then, finally, the meaning of the Tenth Step became clearer to us through the practice of it. We found we were living just for today, and we made the most of every day. We do an inventory each night to clean it all up before we close our eyes. We saw it was something important for us to understand and share with the people we sponsored and in meetings. It was something that had taken us so long to even figure out--what was a day of time anyway? We came to see that each day of time was really our whole life wrapped up in one little package. And we saw how immense a day was once we were really living it.

The Tenth Step means taking responsibility for living in the here and now. We come fare to face with ourselves.

The effectiveness of an inventory depends on our willingness to apply it continuously. The word "continued" is a key word in Step Ten; this is an ongoing process.

Our continuous application of the principles of Step Ten will give us greater serenity. The effect is a lessening of self-will, which provides more room for spiritual growth.

Continuing the inventory process in each phase of recovery helps us monitor ourselves. It gives us a way to deal with any pain we bring upon ourselves or others. It helps create stability in our lives because we learn to pay attention to the little things so they don't get blown out of proportion or build up to a relapse.

Now that we are clean, we have recognized the advantage of keeping our affairs in order. We can recognize ourselves as the heart of the problem. We must remain teachable if we are to recover. We do not entertain the thought of ever achieving perfection. However, we must strive for progress in our lives so that we can live happily and be at peace with ourselves.

It will become more evident as we go forward that it is pointless to become angry or to get hurt by people who, like us, may be suffering from the pains of growing and living. By practicing a personal inventory, we assure ourselves a measure of serenity and peace of mind. It is at times such as these that we know the Twelve Steps have truly worked to change us into happier and more loving individuals. We have achieved a regular method of inventory. Now we are prepared to practice our new awareness of God's will for us. Now we seek further guidance through the practice of Step Eleven.

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STEP ELEVEN

"We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out."

In the Eleventh Step, our program of recovery begins to have more meaning. The purpose of Step Eleven is to improve our conscious contact with the God of our own understanding. It was one of the keys we needed to find peace and have a joyous, contented life. Through practicing Step Eleven, we got the help we needed not only to stay clean but to grow spiritually.

Our experiences with the first ten steps cleared the way for a better understanding of the Eleventh Step. It took a lot of practice, but we worked our way through our early problems. We changed as we continued to practice the steps. One of the things that was hard for many of us was to have a Higher Power to believe in and pray to. Gradually we came to believe in a Power greater than ourselves that we could trust.

Whenever we had difficulty with prayer, we tried to remember that the Eleventh Step says "praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out." It didn't matter how we worded our prayers, but we found that they were always more effective if they fit with that part of the Step. We found that the word "only" did not limit us. In fact it kept our prayers in harmony with the spiritual principles that were making us free. We needed to practice prayer and meditation to maintain and improve our conscious contact with God. There are many ways to pray and meditate in order to increase our conscious contact.

When we start our day most of us ask for the knowledge of our God's will for us and the power to carry that out. We set aside time for ourselves; time we spend being quiet with our Higher Power. We may do some reading in the morning. It doesn't take long, and it seems to make our day go better.

In this way, we maintain our recovery on a daily basis, and we apply the spiritual principles on which Step Eleven is based: The practice of prayer and meditation.

The more we improve our conscious contact with the God of our understanding, the more often we pause and ask for knowledge of our Higher Power's will for us. When we get our own selfish motives out of the way and pray for guidance, we begin to feel a calm joy. We begin to experience an awareness and empathy with other people when we are practicing spiritual principles. Our confidence and strength are restored.

Prayer helps us to let go of our fear and distrust and live in faith. Over a period of time, as we pray for guidance, we begin to feel peace. And we begin to experience an awareness and empathy with other people that we never thought possible.

The Eleventh Step can be a means of looking for our Higher Power's will for us. Instead of giving a lot of thought to why things happen, we now look for what we can learn. In the course of our daily lives, we tend to forget to keep things simple. We want everything settled yesterday. Using the Eleventh Step in our daily lives gives us the inner strength to deal with any situation we face.

We begin to recognize conscious contact as a state of feeling the presence of our Higher Power. Some of us experience an all-consuming feeling which builds our faith, erasing all human fear. For others, the feeling of contact may be more elusive or subtle, and may be as simple as believing that everything will be alright. In whatever way we experience conscious contact, a feeling of acceptance and an end of turmoil seems to come for all of us. All our lives we had looked for feelings of peace and safety; we come to experience them in our recovery.

We practice prayer and meditation until they become a routine part of our lives. In this way, we live by spiritual principles that give us the peace we need to live clean. We practice accepting God's will for us with humility, surrender and gratitude. We ask our Higher Power for guidance when we recognize the selfishness and fear in our thoughts, motives and actions. Seeking God is a personal experience.

In order to improve our relationship with the God of our understanding, we seek contact when we feel good as well as when we feel bad. As we pray and meditate consistently, great changes take place. Spontaneous prayer throughout the day is just as important as beginning and ending each day with prayer. Prayer brings us peace and restores our confidence and strength. It helps us to live in faith and keeps us from the despair of fear and distrust.

Praying helps us worry less and frees us from the need to control outcomes. Praying reassures us because we are acting on our belief in a Power greater than ourselves. We have found that prayer, together with meditation, is one of the most powerful tools of the N.A. Program. It helped some of us to have a special time and place where we could go to meditate. We also found it was important for us to keep communicating with our Higher Power all the time. It was not just in the morning and at night, it was throughout the day.

Many of us did not understand prayer or said we didn't need it. We were told to pray anyway. The people around us said we didn't have to believe in prayer - or understand it - for it to work. It was like gravity. Even if someone didn't believe gravity, or understand it, they still fell when they jumped off a rock. It was the same thing with prayer.

We do not tell anyone how, when, or where to pray. There are some members whose way of life is in itself a form of prayer. Their ability to give of themselves reflects their gratitude and is a powerful example for others.

Many times in asking for the power to carry out God's will, we realize we have already been given the resources-that we simply have to put them to use. If we find ourselves blocked, we ask our Higher Power to give us the courage and strength to go on. When we act in love and humility, we will be amazed at the things we are able to accomplish.

In developing our conscious contact with a Power greater than ourselves we practice accepting conditions as they are. We strive to practice prayer and meditation until these become a routine part of our lives. In this way, we begin to experience and understand the peace we need to grow in our recovery. As a result we begin to feel this continuing conscious contact with a personal God of our understanding. When we honestly make an effort to practice the way of life we learn in Narcotics Anonymous we receive guidance. When we live the program, we have a choice. We are not perfect and will make mistakes. By making them, we learn to rely on our Higher Power's guidance. We work just that much harder to benefit from our experiences, and to accept ourselves the way we are.

The Eleventh Step says we are to pray *and* meditate. We believe it says prayer *and* meditation because when we pray to God we are talking and when we meditate, we are listening. It is important to do both.

Prayer and meditation are a uniquely personal part of our program. There are many different forms of meditation. The important thing is to find what works for you. The purpose of meditation is to quiet the mind and renew the spirit. When we become open and receptive to our Higher Power, or voice within, we find our conscious contact is improved. When we actively listen to the people around us, we are practicing a form of meditation. Meditation is active listening.

Using quiet time in whatever way we choose, we learn to settle inside ourselves, and listen to our Higher Power. This brings us the peace and comfort we need to go on with faith and hope. We all have the capacity for meditation; the key is to make the time and have the willingness to allow it to happen.

There is no right or wrong way to meditate, and no one method is necessarily better than another. Each of us must experiment and discover the methods which work best. We are all different in some ways and our meditations vary, just as our conceptions of a Power greater than ourselves vary.

Some of us became aware of the times when we had been screaming to God for help and completely blind to the answer that was right in front of us. In our self-centeredness, we weren't paying attention. We wanted God to appear in person and help us with our unique pain. We didn't realize that God has many different ways of helping us and communicating with us.

One way our Higher Power communicated with us was through people who came into our lives. We had some of the most important messages delivered to us by some of the most unlikely people.

In seeking God's will for us, we come to an understanding of what our purpose is. In recovery, our sense of purpose is different from what it was when we first came to N.A. We made many mistakes trying to interpret God's will for us. Through prayer and meditation we got some idea of what God's will for us was. As we progress in our recovery, our Higher Power's will becomes clearer. We seek that will in a deeper way and benefit from the mistakes we had made earlier.

Our commitment to recovery and the N.A. way of life is strengthened as our conscious contact improves. Step Eleven prepares us to carry the message of Narcotics Anonymous to other addicts.

We found it was important to have conviction about what we were supposed to be doing. We weren't wandering around anymore, changing who we were from minute to minute, dependent on who we happened to be around. Because of this conviction in us, there was a clearer path to follow. At different times our paths had to do with being of service to others, perhaps working with people on our jobs or some other thing that seemed our special lot in life.

If we remove the spiritual principle of a loving Power greater than ourselves from the program, we wouldn't have a program. Some of us thought there were two parts to the program. We saw there were certain actions we had to take as one part, and we saw the spiritual principles as another part. We thought we could do the things we needed to do such as staying clean and carrying the message. We could worry about the "spiritual part" later. Once we experienced at the spiritual principles of the program, there was no separation.

We couldn't stay clean without our Higher Power's help. We couldn't carry the message to another addict or continue our recovery without a Higher Power doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. It was all spiritual. It was all an increasing awareness and closer conscious contact with the God of our understanding.

When we practice prayer and meditation on a regular basis, we find a new relationship with our Higher Power. When applying this step we open the door to a faith deep within which allows us to meet adversity with serenity. We are not cured of the disease of addiction; however, this step enables us to experience courage and strength to face whatever is put before us.

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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."

The spiritual awakening we all share is simply an awakening to our own spirituality. The steps are a path to this spiritual growth. The last part of the Twelfth Step describes a process, a spiritual awakening that is the result of living these steps. Our effort in practicing the steps has been a process. We who were hopeless had found hope. We grew as we went through this process. Elements of our spiritual awakening include hope, gratitude, faith, humility, and freedom from addiction.

In living these steps, we first begin to let go of character defects. With the help of a Higher Power, we begin to lose the fear of facing ourselves and others. We develop a solid base from which to work and live. We find that we can go most anywhere and do most anything, with the assurance that . _ we can deal with situations by applying the spiritual principles of Narcotics

Anonymous. With this new attitude, we are able to help the addict who still suffers and have a real basis for living and enjoying life.

The idea of a spiritual awakening may seem foreign to a newcomer. Many of us come to the program full of resistance, defiance, and a conviction that there is no way we can really become spiritual. However, those who preceded us developed a spiritual way of life and peace of mind that we are fording. Through this step, life takes on a new meaning.

We knew then that we were still addicts but. We didn't have to fight the obsession on a daily basis.

The discovery of a Power greater than ourselves sometimes comes quickly, sometimes slowly. Some of us have awakened spiritually with an alarming sense of a Power greater than ourselves. Others have shared a slow, gentle reviving of spiritual awareness. In any case, in one way or another, we have all come to believe.

It is a slow, gentle reviving of spiritual awareness. We develop a spiritual way of life and find peace of mind in the process. We are different people because of working the steps, going to meetings and carrying the message.

The ability to accept life on life's terms was an essential part of our spiritual awakening. We could either accept it or we could stay miserable. We found a profound difference between total abstinence and recovery.

We learn not to isolate ourselves. Our fear turns into faith. God becomes a source of nurturing. Self esteem replaces our poor self image. We learn to appreciate and develop the talents which God has given . us. Were willing to admit when we are wrong. We become willing to strive for self-improvement and take responsibility for our actions. We learn how to love ourselves and others. We see ourselves more honestly and in a more realistic light, rather than wasting our time on delusions and fantasies. We learn to take better care of our health. We become more open-minded towards other people's opinions, rather than worrying about what people think of us. We forgive ourselves for our imperfections, developing a more balanced view of ourselves.

Now, more and more, we are able to live a balanced life. Our bodies, minds, and spirits are in harmony, and our lives show the difference. As we look around the meetings, the members who are working the steps are different people than they had been when they first got clean. Their eyes are open to life as it is, not as they want it to be.

We began to believe we had been spiritually 'awakened as a result of practicing the Twelve Steps. Sometimes we even took it for granted. It was only occasionally, when something reminded us to bolt back, that we were aware of how far we had come. The steps had changed us and they could change the newcomer.

We needed to surrender our old ideas so that we could become more familiar with the new ideas of the program. We believed that our self-destruction and self-centeredness could only be replaced with spiritual principles. But we had to take the action and apply the spiritual tools we learned from studying and practicing the steps. Praying for guidance, making choices, and accepting the world as it is were some of the ways we applied these principles.

Usually, the greater the effort a person made, the more profound the change was. We knew people who were able to stay clean by just working the First Step, or Steps One and Twelve. They were often miserable people. There is nothing more miserable than addicts without drugs, unless we have found something else to fill that void.

We saw that having had a spiritual awakening meant we now had the knowledge and acceptance that it was God's power working in us and through us to make a difference in other people's lives. We didn't make the difference. God made the difference. God worked through us. The same way other people had been put in our lives, we were put in other people's lives.

Now we got a new kind of excitement every time we talked to someone about recovery. We saw that doing the Twelfth Step was putting spiritual principles into action. Carrying the message can be as simple as telling somebody our story. and then following up with whatever came next.

We backed up our message by putting into action what we were saying. What we were saying to them was that recovery was possible. It comes from all of us together.

At first, we had felt a tremendous responsibility to make sure the message was received. We took it personally when somebody went out and used again. We felt it was our fault or somehow we hadn't done what was right. We didn't have that kind of power.

Regardless of whether or not the person stayed clean, our member had stayed clean and had planted the seed of recovery. He knew what his limitations were and had no expectations for the other person to do or be anything.

All of us can learn from that. We can neither get somebody clean nor make someone stay clean. All we can do is carry the message. We might be the only example of N.A. recovery that someone ever sees. Our recovery speaks for itself.

Usually, by the time we achieve this state of mind, no one has to tell us to share our new life with the still-suffering addict; we are more than eager to help that person, giving away that which has been freely given to us. All we have is our experience, strength, and hope. As recovering addicts, we offer what no one else can; ourselves and our recovery.

There were so many ways we saw we were carrying the 'message. As one member put it: "I remember that whenever I carry the message, the only message I have was given to me from God, through other people. God allowed me to hear it and God allowed them to deliver it.

"After I've cleaned up on this level then I can carry some kind of message. Sometimes the message is hope. Sometimes the message is my experience with the disease. I like to carry the message of hope because that's what I'm learning to feel. Other times I'd share a pain and then I'd share my experience about the pain. And people get strength and I get strength.

"When I'm in it, I share the pain. And it is a catalyst for personal growth. Pain is not growth, but it is the thing that touches me inside and helps me to grow spiritually. Whenever any of us shares a hurt, it always triggers some kind of pain in us which frees us even more. It creates a love between us. And a deeper meaning with each other."

Much as we came to see we really had to work all the steps to be spiritually fit to carry the message, we also saw that there were exceptions. We saw people very new in recovery who could help others easily. We saw the whole thing was God's work and we couldn't and didn't have to always understand.

There was another thing we had to watch, too. There were 'always a lot of warnings we heard and passed on about not carrying the message to people unless they were ready. We saw that lot of times we would try to carry the message to someone who didn't want to stop using.

It took us some time to learn that carrying the message meant more than talking to addicts who needed the program. There were many times after we had come into N.A. when we were still suffering. Our fellow members carried the message to us, the message of hope and recovery. Sometimes we would see people who were much newer than us struggling with problems and getting through them. In many cases, they were happier and had a better understanding of what was going on in their lives. By their example, they carried the message to us.

It was the same way with people who had been clean longer than we had. When we saw them struggling and yet saw their faith, it strengthened our faith too. They knew they would be all right, and it gave us the faith to continue our path of recovery.

We found that when we were having a really hard time, the best thing we could do for ourselves was to go to work with somebody else. That took us out of our self obsession. There is no drug that can give us the tremendous feeling of watching someone choose the path of freedom from active addiction.

The most obvious way is by staying clean with the help of God and the N.A. Program. Our new way of life speaks for itself. We gradually come alive as we regain our health and continue to recover. We saw that having had a spiritual awakening meant we now had the knowledge and acceptance that it was God's power working in us and through us to make a difference in other people's lives. There are many ways to carry the N.A. message.

Whenever we talk to someone about the steps of the program, we do it as one addict sharing personal experience with another. We try to avoid arrogance. We avoid pushing any ideas on anyone, but we' do suggest strongly that addicts give themselves a break. We don't set ourselves up as God. We found that in N.A. just for today, we never have to use again. We are simply an instrument of God's will in action.

Before we share with someone, we may say, "God, give us guidance." To insure our own recovery, we should avoid going on a Twelve Step call by ourselves. Whenever possible, an N.A. member with experience working the steps should be included. Any addict can help another addict. Both people gain from a Twelfth Step experience. Regardless of the outcome, the seed of recovery has been planted. We bear in mind what our own limitations are and make no expectations for the other person to do or be anything. In the course of carrying the message, each of us comes to a better understanding of the Twelfth Step. If we have difficulties, we trust our sponsor and the principles of the program to guide us.

Our feelings and past experiences are likely to get in the way if someone close to us asks for help. Not understanding how our program works they are likely to think that we are still judging them from past misdeeds. Part of our continuing humility is to realize that we can't successfully

carry the message to everyone. Because of this we seek another recovering addict who is not so closely involved to share with them.

One member put it this way:

"What I found out in my experience was that working all the steps made me spiritually fit to be able to help somebody and not pass on the disease. I think working the Twelfth Step is giving freely of what one has received.

"When I help others I'm not a do-gooder. When I help others I realize that this is what I have to do to save my life. We make a lot of mistakes in Twelfth Step work by trying to give something away before we have it. Then we may do more damage than good. About all I did in my early days of trying to give the message away was give away my disease, my insanity.

"But I think that Twelfth Step work is to carry the message, not enable the person to stay sick. And sometimes Twelfth Step work is not necessarily taking people into your home, getting people jobs. I think that is personal. I think the purity of the Twelfth Step is sharing the steps with a person. That's sponsorship.

"Twelfth Step work can be helping a person get to a meeting, or sponsorship on the steps, sharing the security of the Twelve Steps. I know in my Twelfth Step work in my early days, I would give people money. If there was an easy way out rather than working with an individual, I had a tendency to take it. Sometimes it was more convenient to do that than other things. And I have to keep checking what I'm doing. I definitely believe that you can only give what you have. There are no shortcuts."

Along with Twelve Step calls, another common way of carrying this message to addicts is through sponsorship. This special bonding relationship that develops between two addicts is based on complete honesty and is unlike any other. The benefits we receive far surpass the time and effort we give to this relationship. A sponsor is a teacher, a guide and a friend. We share experience and information about living the Twelve Steps by opening our lives to those we sponsor and making a commitment to help them develop their personal program based on our spiritual principles. Sponsorship is also discussed in I.P.# _____ "Sponsorship", the N.A. Basic Text, and our service literature.

Some of the people we sponsored would ask us when their spiritual awakening was going to occur. It was too soon for them to see that they had already had some spiritual experiences, and that they would have a lot more. Later they would look back and see it, but when they were asking questions like those, they were still caught up in their old ways of thinking. It was hard for them to see all the progress they had already made.

The longer we practiced the program, the more important we saw it was to carry the message to others. What we learned to do was to watch how other people worked the program. Early in recovery we watched the people who were sticking around. What did they do? All the people we had seen who had been able to have long term clean time got into some kind of service work. They got involved in institutional work or working with other addicts. They helped out at the group or area level. The people who were willing to be of service seemed to be the people who stayed clean. We watched them and we realized how important service was. We found that when we were having a really hard time, the best thing we could do for ourselves was to work with

somebody else. That took us out of our self-obsession. If we helped other people, we helped ourselves. Working with them renewed our program in us. It kept us dear that we were powerless over our addiction.

We found that it was easier to understand the spiritual principle of sharing than it was to practice it. Some of us found that we weren't truly sharing with newcomers, we were just creating a new dependency in them, on us.

We found that working Step Twelve really brought the program all together for us. All the work and all the effort, everything we had put into the other steps, we used to the fullest in the Twelfth Step. We found all the steps were joined when we practiced the spiritual principle of service. It was service to ourselves, to our God, and to our fellow human beings. This helped us see again how beautifully the program was set up with all the parts working together smoothly to help us. One member expressed it this way: "Our program shows itself at its best when we are working with other addicts. We give of what we have."

The Twelfth Step also states that we tried to "practice these principles in all our affairs." Incorporating the principles of all the steps into a spontaneous way of living, personal to us, is a primary consideration of Step Twelve. Honesty, responsibility, service, willingness to surrender, change and love grow in our lives on a daily basis. We set aside our old ideas and keep an open mind, so that we can become acquainted with the new ideas that lead to a new way of life. We believe that self-destruction and self-centeredness can be replaced with spiritual principles.

As for practicing the principles in all our affairs, that would be perfection. And we weren't perfect. "Practicing these principles in all our affairs" is such a simple little phrase, the last few words of the Twelfth Step, but we found those words to be a big order. As we grew in recovery, we found that we practiced these principles in more parts of our lives than we used to. We came to see that the steps were made to be practiced to the best of our ability. But we saw that was a tribute to God, not to us.

We find that by adhering to spiritual principles we are able to live, work, and accept situations in the real world, inside and outside of N.A. We have found that by doing the steps in order, we are able to apply them to our daily affairs. If we practice these principles on a continual basis, we never have to use again. We admit our powerlessness, ask for help, survey our errors, work on our defects, make 'amends and ask for continued guidance. As we apply these principles to our daily thoughts and actions, we find the quality of our lives greatly enriched. The old habit of using is replaced by the new habit of not using, trusting in the God of our understanding, and helping others to get and stay clean.

We saw that it was all of the steps that helped us practice this last part of Step Twelve. If we didn't do a personal inventory, pray, and meditate, we wouldn't know if we were practicing the spiritual principles in all our affairs. We wouldn't be in touch with reality. We needed to do the steps on a daily basis. They kept us in tune with the principles. They also kept us in tune with ourselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We found we could really feel it when we were out of harmony with the program and the people.

The more we practice these principles in our daily lives, the more positive results we will find happening each day. As we learn to be more truthful, others come to respect us for who we are.

We can respect and love others who are close to us without obsessively seeking their approval. We learn how to follow through on commitments. We become responsible members of our communities. We found that meant that we had to take what we had learned in the meetings and practice it outside the meetings, too. One of the most wonderful feelings we can know is that of being a part of humanity, after our many years of isolation. A feeling of well-being rises within us, assuring us that we are right where we're supposed to be.

Practicing principles in all our affairs meant applying the Twelve Steps as needed in our lives. We learned to put this way of life into practice with the people we worked with, our families, and all our other relationships with people. We did the best we could each day, sometimes improving just a little bit at a time. Sometimes we would make big jumps in practicing the principles in all the different areas of our lives. It might have been learning to stand up for what we believed in by being able to say "no" when something wasn't right for us even if it was important to someone else. Or it was learning to work and take care of ourselves. We learned not to blame anyone if something was not going right or if we failed at something. It wasn't anybody's fault. It was just another 'opportunity for us to practice the principles and grow.

"In all our affairs" means our whole life. Here we come face to face with having to take all the things that we have been learning in the program and living in the program and be willing to share those things with others outside of the Fellowship. It was not easy to become willing to practice these principles in all of our affairs. Often we were willing to do this with people in the Fellowship but found that it was different with people outside N.A. We had to come to terms with our resistance in order to work the last part of Step Twelve. When we made a commitment to do this, we couldn't know what the outcome was going to be. We didn't know where all that love and kindness and compassion and attention for those people were going to go. The unconditional love we learned in the Fellowship was one of the most solid things we had `experienced. We saw a need for it in all of our affairs.

As we learned to practice spiritual principles in our daily lives, we saw many positive results. But the most wonderful feeling we found was that of being a part of humanity after so many years of isolation. We learned how to love ourselves and others.

These Twelve Steps form the basis of our recovery and direct us toward a substantial change in our character. It is this change in our personality that allows us to live as more effective and loving people. Our purpose as recovering addicts is to grow up spiritually: To live in harmony with the God of our understanding, with ourselves, and with others. Steps One, Two and Three get us into the spiritual life; Steps Four and Five get us in touch with ourselves; Steps Six and Seven make it possible for us to do away with the unhealthy parts of us; Steps Eight and Nine direct us toward rectifying what we can; Step Ten encourages us to maintain our progress with a vigilant eye on ourselves and our behavior, and Steps Eleven and Twelve draw us close to our God and our fellow members.

The most important part of our lives is Narcotics Anonymous. It may be a very small part of our lives, in terms of the actual time spent, but it is like our hearts. It's one of the things that keeps the rest of our body functioning.

What we have today is the wonderful reality of our recovery. Each day of our recovery awakens us to the freedom we never knew. We succeed now in areas, where we had known only failure.

Many of our dreams, forgotten and obscured by our addiction, return and help us begin to feel the sense of wonder and excitement at the miracle of recovery. A great many things become possible for us. We are able to take our place in the world. "The Steps do not end here: They are a new beginning."

REFERENCE NOTES

1. From Narcotics Anonymous (p.18), 1984, Van Nuys, CA: World Service Office, Inc. Copyright 1982 by WSO Inc.,Inc. Reprinted by permission.
2. Narcotics Anonymous (p. 18)
3. Narcotics Anonymous (p. 18)
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