

WE DO RECOVER

This chapter on Recovery hopes to bring to you the joys, the pain, but mainly the promise of finding stability for clean addicts. The experience of many people, from years of being clean, to a few days, expresses the fullness of that promise. We pray that your footsteps will wear out our way from a path to a boulevard, down which untold thousands may find all our joy, and more.

Our disease had progressed to the point where our addictions ruled our lives. We focused on drugs and on a lifestyle built around the getting and using of drugs.

Fear, anxiety, loneliness and anger were constantly with us when we were not loaded. As our disease progressed, we found it less and less possible to use drugs to escape from these feelings.

We eventually lost our clear understanding of right and wrong in the midst of a drugged confusion. We began to realize that the drugs themselves, and the life style associated with using, were keeping us trapped in a vicious cycle of loneliness, self-obsession, misery, despair, pain, emptiness and isolation that set us apart from all others. We felt that we were unique, different, better than, or worse than but always separate. We felt alone. Our pain surrounded us. We could not fill the empty place inside.

We considered quitting and getting out of the trap but addiction distorts rational thought. We found countless reasons why we could not (or even should not) quit. Life would be boring without drugs. We needed drugs to cope with the stress of our lives in the Modern World. All of our friends took drugs. Drugs bought entrance to our Social Circle. They eased communication. How could we live with no drugs, no social life and no friends? Today, we recognize this way of thinking as denial. An attempt to hold onto our old way of life which, even though it was killing us, was more comfortable and less frightening than the idea of changing. Many of us tried to quit alone and we were unable to do so. We reached a point where we said to ourselves "I'm lost, I just don't know what to do.". Despair allows our cry for help.

What we had in common is fear of the unknown.

We did not know what to expect at our first meeting, but hoped to find answers to our despair.

Since addiction distorts rational thought, many newcomers look for ways to disprove the evidence of their addiction. They tell us that they can control their using, or drink, and suffer no ill effects. We can only suggest that they look for the similarities, and not the differences in the stories they may hear at meeting. This^{is} when they should put an effort into trusting the N.A. Program.

At first we were afraid to tell people who we were. We thought that if people got to know us, they wouldn't like us. The sooner we open up, and share our thoughts and feelings, the sooner we will feel part of the group. With sharing, trust in other people begins, and real friendships are made. We find friends who accept us as we are, even after they get to know us. If we are disappointed by one friendship or relationship, we still attempt friendships with other people. By listening in meetings, we find we are not unique or as terrible as we had thought. By working the Steps, we will deal with the guilt of our past, and become the good people we always had potential for.

On coming thru the door, we need to find one person we can trust and identify with. Sponsorship is this relationship between two N.A. members where one is in need of help, and finds another person who can see him/her through times of difficulty. Being sponsored can be the foundation of a deep lasting friendship, or the relationship can be restricted to program communication only. Sponsorship must be honest, open and fearless. A useful sponsor should have a good working knowledge of the N.A. program, and be able to share that knowledge and experience. He or she should be available on short notice, and be willing to help at all times. There is a definite advantage to being sponsored by someone of the same sex; but in areas where we are few in numbers this might be impractical. Finding a sponsor does not have to be a problem if the newcomer is willing to look, and is able to ask for what she or he needs.

Because our using drugs and living confused lives, have left us without any support, a sponsor needs to teach one basic principle : Building a relationship. A sponsor provides the trust that is so vital to our growth. Some of us have tried to keep a lot to ourselves and by-pass sponsorship but the majority of us feel it is too important to miss.

We wonder what joy our sponsors find in dealing with us as newcomers. Is it an ego trip? Just possibly, but the things a sponsor learns from the sponsee are more valuable than false pride. Being awakened at 2:30 A.M., reminds the sponsor humbly of his own calls for help. Seeing a sponsee develop on his own basis, rather than according to strict instruction, is a lesson in humility. There is no doubt that the fundamental development of a sponsee will be according to spiritual principles as well as the dreams of the sponsor. Pride at being a SPONSOR is replaced by inner knowledge of being the right person at the right time. Expressing care and concern for a fellow person, without any selfish motive, is a great gift.

Service work can begin at our first meeting. By cleaning up and emptying ashtrays, we start to feel a part of, not apart from our fellow addicts.

It is important for the newcomer to feel that this is a program to keep oneself clean and sober. By becoming involved in service, our feeling of being on the outside, looking in, decreases rapidly, and we feel one with the group. Service work provides the harmony we need to stay clean. We can continue by putting something in the collection basket, making coffee, and volunteering to help in any way we can. We soon see and feel that the more we give in the program, so much more will we be given. Our Twelfth Step states that we carry the message to the addict who still suffers. Involvement in service shows, rather than says, "How It Works".

Realizing that a new intake of drugs can reactivate and worsen our addiction, we feel that the only alternative to continuing dependence on drugs, is the practice of complete abstinence. Abstinence means chemically free. In a drug-induced stupor, we cannot see or feel the realities we learn to deal with

in our new life. In freedom from drugs, we are more receptive to new suggestions and ideas from other clean addicts.

We learn to deal with pain and joy, without drugs, and grow through both feelings. We tried to stay clean before, but could not. We know that it is possible to stay clean forever, by living one day at a time, and find it much easier that way. It seems that the key is to be willing to take advantage of what N.A. has to offer. Making this choice opens up a new life free of the many problems that using has made for us.

The old feelings and ideas that we bring with us to our first meeting, leave us feeling very negative about our chances. This often means that the only step of the program that we can accept at this time, is the first one. But for complete freedom from our old ways, it is essential that we eventually work all of the steps. Here is where the examples and encouragement of those ahead of us provide the inspiration needed to go on. Each step gives us new tools to build us up to respond to the life we have each day.

We feel that a summary of the gifts that the Twelve Steps of N.A. bring to the clean addict is in order:

Step One is Illumination and surrender. It is said that we will never be the same after going to an N.A. meeting. We have experienced the Truth about ourselves, and no matter what problems face us for the rest of our lives, we can start on a path of giving up our hurts and addictions.

Step Two is Willingness. Many of us wanted to charge on to the action that we could see in the further steps. Why be merely willing? Success has not been a common quality in our lives. Some of us went at many things with great displays of energy. It is all lost effort, without willingness.

Step Three is Faith. We had discarded Faith as a useless Sunday School kind of thing, but simplicity is the keynote here. All you have to do is to want this, and it immediately grows and blossoms. Every day, it is a useful tool.

The important thing seems to be to have a Higher Power of some sort that we can trust, and to recognize that there are powers over which we have no control. A saying that

can apply, is that there are many paths to the top of the mountain, but the view is all the same.

Step Four is Awareness. It is a step into knowing and loving yourself. This is nothing that we wanted before coming here. It is something that we need vitally, as soon as possible, and it is only useful, with the foundations that go before it.

Step Five is Freedom. Giving away yesterday and living in today is the secret of the ages. Not really a secret, but nothing that we ever knew about.

Step Six is Readiness. Another pause for willingness and consolidation.

Step Seven is Deliverance. The nicest part of this, is that God does the delivering. A sense of great relief occurs when we discover that.

Step Eight is Forgiveness. Not only of others, but also of ourselves. This is the beginning of ^{an} action, a setting of a new pattern in our lives.

Step Nine is Humility. The action we take, makes us comfortable in that condition.

Step Ten is Wholeness. It places boundaries to our daily mission; a request for help in the morning, and thanksgiving in the evening.

Step Eleven is Blossoming with beautiful, useful tools.

Step Twelve is Fulfillment. It is shared love in all its glory.

With each meeting we attend, new ideas we heard in our earlier meetings start to take effect on our lives. Our lifestyle changes are because of abstinence from drugs and spiritual growth. Through listening to the experience of others and putting the program into action; life becomes more positive. Genuine smiling and laughing become more regular happenings in our lives. Meetings help us to face the negative aspects of our lives. Our new ideas heard in meetings and our spiritual growth will also give us the common sense to realize that life is not a bed of roses; that we don't have to hide in the toke,

pill, needle or bottle.

Sometimes the confusion and depression that we feel in early recovery are not traceable to any apparent cause. Suddenly we wake up one morning and feel awful. All the bright promises we've seen, all of our joy in the program, is gone. Our addiction to pain is so great that its absence causes us great discomfort. Good feelings seem strange, even uncomfortable.

We may search our hearts and be unable to find any reasons for this change. Are we working the steps to the best of our ability? Are we practicing M.A.L.T. (not getting too hungry, too angry, too lonely or too tired)? Are we talking to our sponsor or others in the program for whom we have respect and trust?

In spite of doing these things, we've lost it. This can bring a feeling of loss and despair equal to, or exceeding that which came, before we entered the program. Now we have this beautiful program, and know there is a new way of life possible for us. Are we insane after all? Maybe we don't fit here, either. The most important thing to remember about these feelings when they come, is that they will pass.

For years we subjected our bodies to mind-altering chemicals. Our entire bodies - not only our brains - learned to function in the presence of these substances. Our bodies learned to maintain a delicate balance of all the factors which operate to keep us alive - while full of intoxicating (poisoning) substances.

Now we have made a decision to remove these substances from our bodies and start on a new way of life. However, it does subject us to stress. At these times we may crave drugs,

Our cells cannot speak. They cannot say, "give me these drugs you gave me for years so I can feel normal". This craving can be translated into crazy thinking, which from our conscious point of view is without cause. This craziness also will pass.

It is all part of growing and becoming who we want to be. The important thing is not to despair. Hang on and go to lots of meeting and have faith. These periods of time may be called

stress cycles and they come at various times in the first years of recovery. The timing depends on the drug or combinations of drugs we had been using. What is predictable about them is that they come less and less frequently, and last a shorter time.

Despite temporary setbacks, the immediate rewards of being clean and sober come as soon as the drugs leave our bodies. We lose the pain of using. We don't have to take our household money to buy drugs. We don't have to fear physical harm from car wrecks, fights and overdoses. We don't abuse our loved ones in a drug induced rage.

As the newly recovered addict enters into the Twelve Steps, he/she finds that they lose the compulsion to use drugs. This in itself is a miracle. Keeping this miracle a live, ongoing process of one's growth in awareness, is our new way of life. It is important for us to remember that not using drugs is an abnormal state for us, and that we have to learn how to live clean.

Above all things, is the need to learn honesty with ourselves and with others. In our daily affairs, we will continually come up against both the negative and positive side of every issue. From years of negative thinking as recovering addicts, we come to realize that we have to eventually break the chain of negative thinking, and begin to think constructively about the problems and issues of our lives.

"As we think so are our actions" is a motto that needs our attention. We need to know and understand our problems, but we need to focus on the solutions. In other words, it's what we focus on that determines its outcome. To get bogged down with a problem and carry it with us day after day, is to go no place, but into frustration and depression. But with rigorous honesty we clean house and seek workable solutions. We turn away from excuse-making, rationalizing, and blaming people, places, and things and situations, and honestly seek real answers. As we learn to deal with ourselves with this kind of self-honesty, we begin to see our own growth, and the true beginning of self-acceptance and self-worth. As we learn to accept who we are and understand ourselves in a new light, our relationships with others also improve. As we give ourselves the time we

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If a decision

need to grow day by day, so do we become more patient and tolerant with others in their growth. As we learn to accept our limitations we accept the differences in others. As we are able to accept our weaknesses and ask others for help, we escape our false pride. No one grows according to the values or expectations of another person. Each of us has the right to be who and what we are. We are learning to accept the responsibility only for our own lives, not the lives of others. Without this sense of self-responsibility, there is no real growth.

We are learning to make responsible decisions. Where once we acted only on impulse, now we see the need to weigh carefully all points in a situation, and then make a thought-out decision. If it does not work out, we do not call ourselves a failure. We try another way until we find something that works. There will always be a certain amount of the unknown, but we have to learn to take risks in order to grow. We do not seek perfection; but rather we seek a constructive management of our daily lives,

Faith in the loving care of God as we understand Him, will carry us through any situation where we are honestly seeking to grow. As we learn to trust God, we also learn to trust in ourselves. Out of this self-trust comes trust in other people. We become less suspicious of others' interactions because we are trusting in our Higher Power to care for us.

We learn to place reasonable demands upon ourselves, so that we can achieve our goals. Sometimes in proving to ourselves that we are O.K., we take on more goals and activities than we can handle. When we overload, we bring ourselves to the point of frustration. We taste personal satisfaction each time we reach a reachable goal. Each goal reached through hard work constructs a solid base towards achieving higher goals.

As we become more comfortable with ourselves, we learn to appreciate the meaning of living just for today. We get over our guilt about the past, and our worries of the future. We enjoy the now, we learn to live with both pain and pleasure. We do not dwell on frustration, for we know that it will pass. We rid ourselves of absolutes, right and wrong, good and bad, everything must be perfect and under my control, success or

failure, and begin to enjoy the fun of doing things. Life has meaning.

In our recovery, we find it essential that we learn to accept life (reality) as it is, not what we want it to be. When we formerly used drugs, our perceptions caused us to see only what we wanted to see. We planned, schemed and continually got ourselves into trouble. We used to make simple situations into problems. We made mountains out of mole hills. We thought we had all the answers. Without drugs, we can now function like useful human beings, which means that we can now begin to accept ourselves and the world around us, exactly like it is. We learn that conflicts are an essential part of our growth. We find new ways to solve them, instead of running from them. We learn how to handle our emotions when problems arise, dealing with what is at hand, and not trying to force solutions.

Spiritual solutions (principles) are practical solutions. We find that selecting a spiritual approach to a problem produces practical results. We learn to depend on a Power Greater than ourselves. Being a part of the N.A. Fellowship, accepting a relationship with God, now yields the comfort of dealing with reality.

The rewards of staying clean are endless. Our relationships with others greatly improve as we begin to understand the meaning of love. We are recognizing that we are growing from an immature need of love, to a mature giving of love. This love is now being expressed in not misusing others or ourselves. Love, patience and understanding will become a larger part of our daily experience.

From worthlessness and self-rejection, there was that first day where each of us walked through a new and strange door and sat down to our first N. A. meeting. For some of you that might have happened only a month ago. For others, it was perhaps several months or years ago. In any case, each of us did walk through that door and into a brand new life. Little did any of us realize what changes were to take place as the results of that first meeting. Little did any of us realize that there was any real hope for our addiction.

As the days passed into weeks and then became months, each of us found that our lives were being changed through

the principles of the N.A. Program. Those principles have been set forth in this Book. As life is growth, and often growth is accompanied with pain, each of us in the program is a miracle and by the Grace of God, continue to be a miracle. Our daily growth- the worlds each of us are creating for ourselves- is a testimony to the fact that the N.A. program does work and for this we are grateful, both to God as we understand Him, and to our brothers and sisters in N.A.. The Power of this program lies in your hands. You call the strokes. it is your growth. The decisions you make are yours. The N.A. principles, with the help of God, are our only way to stay clean, serene and secure. May the joy of your strength reach out and save the life of another.

TODAY IS THE DAY
THAT STARTS THE REST OF OUR LIVES
YESTERDAY IS GONE
TOMORROW ISN'T HERE YET
SO LIVE FOR TODAY
AS WE DO RECOVER.

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