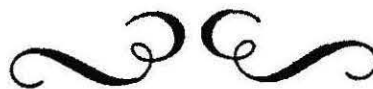


It Works: How and Why

World Service Conference
Literature Committee
Unapproved Literature
For Review and Input

It Works: How and Why

**A Guide to the Twelve Steps and
Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous**



**World Service Conference
Literature Committee
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**Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions
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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Forward

Narcotics Anonymous is a Fellowship of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean. The Program of Narcotics Anonymous, often referred to as N.A., is based on 24 principles. These principles are specifically defined in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions which were originally borrowed from Alcoholics Anonymous and adapted for use in N.A. Thousands of addicts have achieved total abstinence and ongoing recovery through the application of these principles.

In 1982, the book Narcotics Anonymous was first published. In its pages, the disease of addiction was described by recovering addicts who shared their personal experiences, strength and hope. This book outlined a better way of life, and became known as a Basic Text of recovery. It provided general information and discussion about the principles of recovery found in the Program of Narcotics Anonymous.

The present text is intended to provide a more in-depth explanation of the principles of the N.A. Program. The experience of countless recovering addicts has demonstrated that the N.A. Program works. These addicts have shared, through their collective wisdom, that the answer to how it works is the Twelve Steps. The answer to why it works, is the application of the Twelve Traditions. Appropriately, this text is entitled IT WORKS: How and Why.

IT WORKS was designed to be used as a supplement to the Basic Text. There are 24 chapters; each addresses one of the 24 principles of the program. Numerous quotes from the Basic Text appear, and are referenced with page numbers so that readers may refer to the original source. In conjunction with the Basic Text, it is hoped that this book will furnish addicts, with a desire to stop using, a practical means of achieving total abstinence and ongoing recovery.

Because addiction is a threefold illness, affecting us physically, mentally and spiritually, any discussion of the principles of recovery necessarily involves discussion of a Power greater than ourselves. Throughout these pages, you will find reference to God, a Higher Power and God as we understand Him. We use these phrases interchangeably, to mean only one thing: A Power greater than ourselves who does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. The Fellowship of N.A. encourages you to search out and discover for yourself, a God of your own understanding. In using the term "God, as we understand Him," we do not mean to imply male gender. We use these words only for the sake of simplicity, and acknowledge that each individual is entitled to develop and believe in his/her own personal concept of a Higher Power.

The information for this text was drawn from the experiences of recovering addicts throughout the United States. Particular

effort was made to solicit participation from N.A.'s earliest members, who shared valuable knowledge and perspective, especially with regard to the Twelve Traditions. The contributors for this book are too numerous to acknowledge, and in fact decline special mention in the spirit of anonymity. We therefore humbly dedicate this book to the entire Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. We speak to its newest and yet-to-be members, without whom there would be no opportunity to share the miracle of recovery. We also speak to its older members, to whom we are eternally indebted for showing us the way to a better life. With these thoughts in mind, this book is offered, in a spirit of humility and gratitude, in the hope that all addicts may find recovery through the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous.

In loving service,

WSC Literature Committee

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THE TWELVE STEPS

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

Addiction is a physical, spiritual and emotional illness with symptoms of alienation, denial, physical dependency and feelings of inadequacy. Powerlessness means the inability to control events--using. Recognition that we don't have power. Unmanageability in trying to control others, stealing, lying, cheating, using material possessions to "fix" us. Nothing worked--we tried to get the outside together, but the inside fell apart. Hitting bottom is crucial to spiritual growth.

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

Step One left us with a void because we can't keep ourselves clean. We couldn't use anymore and had nowhere else to turn. We had only our insanity to lose. It is necessary to admit defeat before we can become open-minded. We had to get rid of old ideas about God. Coming to believe means being willing to believe. There is a variety of paths to faith. Usually, belief comes a little at a time. Restoration to sanity gives us a relationship with God so that we can proceed with faith.

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"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--action. This is a major decision in the beginning of recovery. Surrender may be painful, but to surrender is to win. We were unsuccessful at running the show--self-will leads to using. Willingness is all that is required. Turning it over is letting go of old

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ideas, sharing burdens with our Higher Power. God's will is doing our best, sharing recovery with other addicts, accepting life on life's terms. In practicing Steps One, Two and Three daily, we go to God with our everyday problems.

Step Four 32

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

The first three steps pave the way for the Fourth Step. We rely on our Higher Power and our sponsor. In being searching and fearless, we strive for self-honesty. There are many ways to write an inventory, but it is most important that it be written. We write about assets and liabilities - humility, kindness, forgiveness and tolerance as well as relationships, resentments, self-pity, dishonesty, pride and fear. We learn to identify the patterns of addiction which chained us to our past. This self-knowledge, accompanied by more action, brings freedom.

Step Five 44

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

Admission prevents self-justification and rationalization. Choose another human being - a sponsor is usually best, but anyone we trust will suffice. We admit our shortcomings to God, to ourselves and to another human being. The exact nature of our wrongs are the character defects and addictive behavior patterns we discovered through writing. The results include not regretting our past anymore, a sense of belonging in the N.A. Fellowship, improved self-esteem and self-acceptance.

Step Six 53

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

The knowledge we gained through Steps Four and Five can be painful - Step Six offers relief. Awareness necessitates action. Fear may be manifested in trying to dictate which defects are removed, or resisting letting them go. We combat fear with faith. Willingness is the foundation of recovery, and is necessary to spiritual growth. We realize it is an

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ongoing job and that there are different levels of willingness. We couldn't remove these defects by ourselves, but God can. We ask ourselves some questions to see if we are ready before proceeding on to Step Seven.

Step Seven 61

"We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."

The goal of Step Seven is an improved relationship with our Higher Power. Humility involves a realistic evaluation of ourselves and realizing that we are not perfect. A change in attitude - letting go of self-aggrandizement. Humbly asking for freedom from defects: "I can't, we can." Shortcomings are human failings. Applying Step Seven is an ongoing process. If we lose faith when our defects aren't immediately gone, we go back to the previous steps - slow, continuous progress; action and prayer.

Step Eight 67

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

The purpose of Step Eight is to free ourselves from the guilt of the past, experience spiritual healing. Need to be thorough. In countering fear - trust our Higher Power, draw on strength gained through previous steps. We consider where, when and how we have harmed our friends, neighbors, family, employers, and people close to us. Making the list begins the process of becoming willing.

Step Nine 73

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

Being direct and thorough. In active addiction, we were not responsible for consequences. Now, by being responsible, we no longer have to fear the past. We exercise prudent judgment, realizing that some wrongs can never be fully corrected. As a result, we experience a clear conscience, are able to stop rationalizing. We sever our ties with the ugly past, and we begin to feel good about who we are.

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Step Ten 82

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

Through the previous steps, we cleaned house. Step Ten keeps it clean. Necessary because hidden fears lead to relapse. We recognize guilt, fear, self-centeredness and resentment. We don't want to use, so we must live by spiritual principles. Regular practice--daily basis. Reviewing day's events, assets and liabilities, seeing where we were wrong, making a gratitude list. Promptly admitting wrongs, asking God to remove our defects, forgiving ourselves and others.

Step Eleven 93

"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."

Asking for God's plan for us and guidance; we experience peace and joy. Looking for God's will gives us inner strength to face problems. We develop conscious contact by practicing accepting conditions as they are, and by practicing praying and meditating several times a day. Prayer is asking God for help in good times as well as bad. We begin and end our days with prayer, as well as praying spontaneously throughout the day. The answers to prayers sometimes come mysteriously. Through meditation, we communicate and utilize a Higher Power in our lives. We become open and receptive to the voice within, and gain serenity and a renewed commitment to the Twelve Step way of life.

Step Twelve 100

"Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of those steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

The Twelve Steps hold answers to all our living problems. They provide a basis for enjoying a life and serving others. A spiritual awakening is the result of the preceding steps. May be a sudden jolt or gentle awareness. In carrying the message, we share our experience, strength and hope. We demonstrate recovery by living it. Practicing these

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principles in all of our affairs is being willing to change. We set aside old ideas and apply the steps to our daily affairs. We gain a new strength and find God as a source of nurturance. We strive for self-improvement and take responsibility for our actions. We become more open-minded to new ideas, experience respect and love, and become able to live clean and grow.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS

Tradition One 108

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

Common welfare--what is best for the group, not just one individual. We depend on each other for our lives. "I can't; we can." Recovery requires upheaval in spiritual, physical and mental makeup. The N.A. Fellowship provides an endless supply of answers to all our living problems. We cannot recover alone. We don't compete between ourselves, we help each other. Unity keeps fellowship strong. The Twelve Traditions are a matter of life and death for us.

Tradition Two. 114

"For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern."

Most of us have a history of rebelling against authority. Now, in N.A., we give up the struggle because it caused only pain. Group conscience means we set aside our personal differences and join together under God's will. How is God's will revealed? Listening is a very important part of the expression of God's will. We ask to be freed from the rampages of self-will and self-importance. In this way, we avoid group opinion.

Tradition Three. 121

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

There are no dues, fees or other requirements. There is only one: A desire to stop killing ourselves with drugs. Sex,

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race, etc. are irrelevant in the disease and in recovery. We look for similarities, not differences. N.A. is a program of complete abstinence, although our doors remain open to addicts still using.

Tradition Four 127

"Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or N.A. as a whole."

We use autonomy to fulfill our group purpose which is to carry the message to the new member by providing a safe environment for recovery. We are governed by an Ultimate Authority, and don't infringe on the freedom of other groups. In order to improve the group's effectiveness, we support N.A. as a whole. This is accomplished through the other levels of service at the area, regional and world levels. By adhering to the Twelve Traditions, we help to strengthen N.A.

Tradition Five 135

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

A group is two or more addicts sharing their experience, strength and hope. It provides an opportunity to discuss recovery and learn from each other. It provides a suitable and reliable environment for recovery and is the most effective means of carrying the message. It is easy to get diverted from our primary purpose by business or other matters. But we are responsible to addicts who seek recovery. We therefore choose our group's trusted servants carefully, keeping in mind that they fulfill the group's purpose: Carrying the message of recovery.

Tradition Six 141

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

We need this tradition to protect N.A. from legal and financial problems and to avoid controversy. Endorsement means to sanction, approve or recommend and can be either implied or direct. This tradition becomes especially important in practicing the Twelfth Step where we may feel a

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need to refer a suffering addict to a treatment facility. N.A. doesn't finance outside enterprises because ownership creates influence and exacerbates our self-serving instincts, causing us to lose sight of our primary purpose. Tradition Six provides an end to controversy and confusion, offering a chance at recovery for addicts who seek it.

Tradition Seven. 149

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

Each group has certain monetary obligations in order to provide a meeting site, refreshments and literature. All of these obligations are supplied by the members. Being self-supporting makes us feel a part of our N.A. group, allows us to maintain autonomy and helps us develop responsibility. We decline outside contributions because nothing else works for us. Accepting contributions would obligate us to our benefactors and open us to outside influence. We therefore cannot afford this practice because we must hold on to our freedom. This tradition has implications for the larger service structure of N.A. We see that all of the service committees and boards abide by the Twelve Traditions.

Tradition Eight. 158

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

N.A. is a program based on one addict helping another. There is only one requirement for membership. Each member who has applied the principles is equally qualified. N.A. contains members who work in professional fields. Their professional status is based on their education and skill, not their recovery. Members who work in fields which interrelate with N.A. use the Twelve Traditions as a guide. They must also be careful not to confuse their professional work with Twelfth Step work. Service centers are an important tool in effectively carrying the message of recovery: They provide referrals for Twelfth Step calls, public information, literature and telephone hotlines. They may be staffed by volunteers when available, however, increased growth often necessitates hiring workers to provide increased services. It is stressed that one addict helping another is strictly a volunteer commitment and not the same as a special worker.

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We realize that all we have been given in N.A. has been free. We safeguard our traditions to ensure the same is true for all addicts.

Tradition Nine 163

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

"N.A. as such" is recovering addicts meeting in groups and is not organized. We have no need of bosses or leaders in N.A.; we follow the spiritual principles because disregarding them brought us suffering. The service boards and committees make a unified fellowship possible. They don't dictate; they simply make suggestions and act to carry the message of N.A. As individual members, we need to take responsibility for our recovery and actively participate in N.A., rather than assuming "someone else will take care of it." The principles of the program are based on surrendering management and control to a God of our understanding. It is for these reasons that N.A. is not organized. We realize that individually we can't meet the needs of all addicts who reach out for help, and that with a minimum of organization in our service structure, we can be more effective in carrying the message of recovery.

Tradition Ten 171

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

Tradition Ten saves us from ourselves. We all have opinions on everything and there are many potential opportunities to draw N.A. into controversy. This would result in confusion and divert us from our purpose. Having no opinion on outside issues includes political, educational, medical, psychological, social, and religious matters. We sacrifice our personal opinions when speaking for N.A. Tradition Ten is vital to ensure the unity and growth of N.A. It allows us to concentrate our energy on recovery from addiction, eliminating controversy and dissension, strengthening N.A. as a whole.

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"Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films."

The attraction is that we live drug-free. Recovery and identification instill in addicts a desire for total abstinence. N.A. offers all addicts a clean life and ongoing recovery. Promotion contradicts the spiritual nature of the program. It is usually misleading and self-glorifying. Our recovery speaks for itself; N.A. needs no promotion. Our relationship with society must be maintained responsibly. The media links us with the general public, but this area can be sensitive. It is best to utilize guidance through a public information committee or handbook. The maintenance of anonymity protects the Fellowship from being judged by the actions of individual members. It protects members from our own grandiosity and keeps us focused on our purpose. In addition to all of this, it provides personal freedom and recovery for all.

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"Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities."

Anonymity, the opportunity to give without recognition, is the basic guiding principle of all the traditions. It is based on honesty and humility. Anonymity further fosters an atmosphere of caring and trust, allowing us to give to others through dependence on a Power greater than ourselves. Anonymity applies to every member of N.A. We listen to the message, not the messenger. By practicing this principle, we cultivate unity and prevent conflicts. The principles of the Twelve Traditions protect our Fellowship and provide a shelter in which to recover from the disease of addiction.

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Introduction

This book contains 24 chapters which discuss and explain the principles of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. These principles form the basis of the Narcotics Anonymous Program. The Twelve Steps are the basic framework by which our lives change from addiction to recovery. The Twelve Traditions provide for groups what the Twelve Steps do for individuals. The widespread growth of Narcotics Anonymous and the recovery of thousands of addicts point to the beneficial necessity of holding to these principles.

The Twelve Steps offer us a solution to the disease of addiction, and an alternative to the miserable existence we have known before. Through practicing and applying each of the Twelve Steps, we discover the gift of recovery. This miracle is a gift in every sense of the word: It is unconditional and perhaps undeserved. As we stay clean and take each of the Twelve Steps, we realize that it is truly a privilege to apply these principles.

Before beginning the steps, an addict must have a desire to stay clean. With the willingness to avoid the first fix, pill or drink, total abstinence and recovery become possible. Living the Twelve Steps enables us to stay clean. In this way, a miracle happens: The obsession for drugs is lifted, and we experience recovery.

Never before were we able to go beyond the areas in our lives where fear stepped in and we stopped. There were always times when fear and terror would overwhelm us and we knew we could not go on. We all experienced a quitting point. However, most of us, even in the depths of our active addiction, wondered what was on the other side of that imaginary line we could never cross.

The Twelve Steps initiate the process of being restored to sanity. A Power greater than ourselves takes over. At the points where we always retreated before, we become able to stand face-to-face with this Power. Through this Power, we are given a healing surge of life which carries us through our fears and anger. It ignites in us the will to live and the desire to know the truth. We seek the spiritual truth about ourselves, about our fellow human beings, about God, as we begin to understand Him, and about the universe in which we live.

Addiction is a lonely disease of isolation. Through the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous, however, we find that we no longer have to be alone. When we examine the steps, we see that each of the first eleven begins with the word "we." This tells us to seek counsel and companionship as we embark on our new path. We find it helpful to use a sponsor or other experienced N.A. member in taking the Twelve Steps. We draw on the experience of those who came before us to guide us in applying these principles. These addicts freely share with us what was freely shared with them: Recovery from addiction. They guide us

and teach us, through example, how to live by these dynamic principles.

In the process of taking the steps, we may view them as a privilege or as a problem. As long as we apply them, our viewpoint is not important. We may cry; we may complain or feel sorry for ourselves; we may even get angry. However, from the experience of addicts who have held both postures, relating to the steps as a privilege rather than a curse is infinitely more helpful and serene. Viewing the steps as punishment leaves us unnecessarily critical of ourselves. In this misguided attitude, we may inadvertently bludgeon ourselves with the spiritual tools which were meant to heal us. However, if we gratefully and willingly grasp the opportunity to apply these principles, we find more energy and peace with which to live the Twelve Steps.

When we first come to Narcotics Anonymous, many of us want to recover any way we see fit. By the nature of our disease, we are close-minded and distrustful, and most likely find it difficult to take suggestions. We may try to apply some of the N.A. principles, while disregarding those which are more demanding or uncomfortable.

Through painful experience, frequently accompanied by relapse, we find it is absolutely crucial to abandon our familiar, self-centered ways and begin accepting direction. This is the only way we achieve the open-mindedness and humility necessary to begin recovering. As we surrender self-will and

begin concerning ourselves with our groups and other recovering addicts, we find that the wisdom of accepting direction is practical in applying the Twelve Traditions as well as the Twelve Steps.

The traditions exist in order to keep the N.A. Fellowship true to its purpose of recovery. In this way, the philosophy of N.A. is not changed. Adherence to the principles of the Twelve Traditions ensures the growth and continuation of the Fellowship. When problems arise, we apply the Twelve Traditions exactly as they are written - not the way we think they ought to read. If we faithfully follow these principles, the N.A. Fellowship grows in an atmosphere of love and acceptance; we are able to assist other addicts in recovery. We therefore avoid chaos, controversy and disruption, which could threaten the recovery of addicts everywhere.

When any of the Twelve Traditions are violated, tact and diplomacy must be utilized in addressing these sensitive matters. Most addicts have been wrong so many times in the past that we become self-righteous, and thrill at the opportunity when we are right for once. We may be tempted to rush into a discussion, hurling accusations and demanding judgment. However, this attitude is self-defeating, and frequently causes more harm than good. If we have applied the Twelve Steps in our lives, we have begun to develop a basic understanding and compassion for ourselves and others. We have seen that the need to always be

right rarely leads to contentment or beneficial solutions. We now draw on our rudimentary ability to be tactful in approaching these difficult situations. While we acknowledge the need to protect our Fellowship through application of the Twelve Traditions, it is also important that this vigilance be balanced with diplomacy and understanding.

In resolving actions which violate the Twelve Traditions, we keep in mind that no N.A. member ever intends to harm the Fellowship. Since our very lives depend on the N.A. Program, imperiling N.A. is, in effect, imperiling our own existence. Most of us realize this on an intuitive level, and may react violently or fearfully to events which we perceive as threats to the welfare of N.A. It is very helpful to remember this concern when we see mistakes. Just as we did not choose to live miserably in active addiction, we understand that no recovering addict consciously chooses to disrupt the N.A. Fellowship. With this perspective, we approach the person or persons involved in a spirit of helpfulness and cooperation. We avoid antagonistic confrontations, striving instead for cooperative efforts in solving our common problems. We allow them time to think over our suggestions, being careful always to treat them with respect and dignity.

If we are unable to solve problems using sincere tact and diplomacy, we look to the experience of other members lending advice and guidance. Just as we utilize a sponsor in practicing

the Twelve Steps, it is also helpful to solicit the advice of experienced members in questions of the Twelve Traditions. We may prepare a factual, objective letter for our area service committee, or region if necessary. However, it is always best to resolve problems before this level if possible, keeping foremost in mind the welfare of the group and N.A. as a whole.

The spiritual principles of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are not subject to negotiation. They need no interpretation. Hence, this book does not offer interpretations of these principles, but rather explanations and instructions on their application.

The principles of the N.A. Program are the keys to freedom from addiction. Our experience has shown that there are no boundaries on that freedom, as long as we refrain from using. May a loving Power greater than yourself be with you as you learn to apply the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. As you practice these principles in all of your affairs, you will find a freedom and joy you never knew existed. These spiritual truths are the sum of the Narcotics Anonymous Program, and it is through them that IT WORKS!

Step One

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

Addiction is a progressive disease which affects us physically, mentally/emotionally, and spiritually. "The physical aspect of our disease is the compulsive use of drugs: the inability to stop using once we have started. The mental aspect of our disease is the obsession, or overpowering desire, which leads us to using even when it has destroyed our lives. The spiritual part of our disease is our total self-centeredness." 1 Drugs became a physical and emotional necessity. Our lives became centered around the getting and using of drugs. In this pursuit, we became alienated from the rest of society. This disease is so subtly cunning that one of its symptoms is the denial that we have it. Other symptoms are physical deterioration, various specific and vague fears, guilt, feelings of inadequacy and emotional pain. We often thought one certain drug was the problem and that substituting another type of chemical 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. We changed our environment, lovers, and jobs in futile efforts to quit or

control our using.

Until we can fully accept that we are powerless over the disease of addiction, and that our lives have become unmanageable, we are incapable of finding meaning in the rest of the steps. The first step involves the admission that we have the disease of addiction. This stops the process of denial and allows us to recognize our problem. Then we begin to take steps toward recovery.

It makes little difference how or when we realized we are powerless over our addiction. A more important point to us is the acknowledgement that, before coming to N.A., we felt so miserable we just couldn't go any further without help. We needed relief - now. Powerlessness indicates an absolute inability to control events in our lives. At various times in the past, temporary abstinence was probably forced upon us by fear, institutions or lack of money. Some of us interpreted these temporary periods of abstinence to mean that we could control our use of drugs. We told ourselves repeatedly that we could stop if we really wanted to; yet it was very difficult to admit the times when we wanted to stop but couldn't.

"Powerlessness means using against our will."2 The admission of powerlessness is central to recovery. It is not a sign of weakness, but simply a recognition that when it comes to drugs, power is not something we possess. The term "willpower" has no meaning for us when we try to control our use of drugs.

As we progress in our recovery, we will realize that power is not one of our human characteristics, but rather it is an attribute of God.

Admitting powerlessness requires breaking through our denial. Many of us tried switching drugs when our "drug of choice" became troublesome. Even switching from one to another didn't help, and we found we couldn't stop if we wanted to. We were not only powerless over specific drugs, but over our disease of addiction, which made us use drugs compulsively and obsessively.

Even after we stop using, we encounter denial. We may find ourselves denying that we were ever addicts. Some people say, "We have a disease that tells us we don't have a disease." We must break through this denial to take the First Step. Our addiction has most likely been pointed out to us numerous times by others. However, only we can make this deeply personal realization. Denial of the problem as well as justifying and rationalizing our actions are all part of the disease of addiction. Some of us clung to the notion that life had "dealt us a bad hand," rather than admit that we were addicts and could not manage our own lives. Our basis text, Narcotics Anonymous, says that, "when some of us have doubts, we ask ourselves this question: 'Can I control my use of any form of mind or mood-altering chemicals?'"³ Honestly appraising ourselves is infinitely safer than going out to try some "controlled using." Once we can break through our denial, we begin to see our

powerlessness and we begin to recover.

Honest admission does not come swiftly or easily for many of us. Our pride, ego and dishonesty block our ability to come to terms with the failure to control our drug use. The bottom line is that through willpower, we could not stay clean. It is only through honest admission that our addiction is arrested and recovery begins.

Learning that help was available and that we could once again live with some semblance of sanity was great news to us. We were tired of using drugs and of the pain they brought us. We had tried every imaginable excuse to justify and rationalize our addiction. Drugs had simply stopped working the way we wanted them to. Most of us had nowhere else to turn when we came to Narcotics Anonymous for help. We were amazed to learn that just for today we never have to use again.

Admitting powerlessness is only the first part of Step One; the second half states, "that our lives had become unmanageable." Unmanageability is a direct result of addiction. It is another symptom of the disease. While practicing our addiction, we probably did not realize that through our actions, we were trying to control the outcome of every situation to fit our self-centered desires. We did not realize that when we didn't pay our bills or were late with our rent, and when we pushed people away, it was a direct result of our addiction. Many of us stole, cheated and lied to get drugs.

It doesn't matter whether we "hit bottom" in the gutter or in a mansion; what matters is that we had no power over how we felt. We lived in the dark reality of fear. We lived in self-pity because we were convinced that no one understood us. We realized on an emotional level that we were somehow different from non-addicts, not only in terms of our using, but also in terms of how we felt. Yet we couldn't understand ourselves any better than they. Our confusion and the unmanageability of our lives drove us deeper into depression and hopelessness.

Whether we were homeless and penniless, or still had nice homes, families and material possessions, we came to realize that our lives were unmanageable. 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. Some of us had to be institutionalized and broken before we could admit defeat and reach out for help. Still others of us came to N.A. feeling we weren't "as bad as" others we met. However, the clean addicts in N.A. showed us that we could recover without going through the pain of further active using and its consequences of jails, institutions and death.

We admit powerlessness and complete defeat because we have tried everything we could think of and still we suffered. We realize that we have applied all of our resources, and nothing has worked to relieve us of our addiction.

Often powerlessness and unmanageability are realized through

the help of an experienced sponsor who guides us through the Twelve Step recovery process. Many addicts have also found early in recovery that writing about powerlessness and unmanageability can be a very effective tool. This is suggested because it is easier to see on paper how drugs have affected our lives. Our sponsors point out how the humility we gain through admitting complete defeat provides a foundation for our ongoing spiritual development.

We can only stop the progression of our addiction by abstaining from drugs. We stay clean and experience recovery by going to meetings and developing a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves. It is only by being honest in Step One that we become open-minded and willing to try the remaining eleven steps as a means of recovering from our hopeless addiction. Unless we are truly tired of living 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.

In N.A., we treat the cause of the problem: Addiction, not the apparent symptoms: Drugs. We get and stay clean so we may recover from the disease of addiction. Our goal is not just simple abstinence, it is recovery. After admitting we are powerless over our addiction and that our lives have become unmanageable, we are then ready for Step Two.

We go on to Step Two, but we are never finished with Step One. The reality of our addiction is with us each day.

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 drugs--that drugs were, in fact, an insane power greater than ourselves. Although perhaps not comprehending it fully, we knew we were addicts and out of control. But the Second Step may seem insurmountable. Some of us have turned our backs to our Higher Power. Others fear their Higher Power has turned Its back to them. 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. At first, this seems an impossible task. Going back to the First Step and contemplating our powerlessness over our addiction helps by lowering our defenses. It makes Step Two more approachable.

Step One is the admittance step and Step Two is the acceptance step. After admitting we are powerless over drugs and recognizing that we cannot manage our lives, many of us feel crushed and defeated. In this state of broken despair, we become willing to accept help. Self-knowledge and willpower have not kept us clean. We begin to see that no human power can take away

our addiction. As addicts, we have no defense against the first fix, pill or drink. Our defense has to come from a Power greater than ourselves.

Many of us do not have a lot to lose at this point. What do we have to live for? To go on as we were 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 choose to come to believe. 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 conception 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.

Some of us, on the other hand, have not lost complete control of our lives. Perhaps we are still in the experimental stages of our addiction. We still have material possessions, families and friends. We are fortunate to realize we are addicts before we lose everything. Although it is difficult, it is necessary to admit complete defeat because we can only receive help when we are open to it. An undefeated addict is not open. In the First Step, we learned that the admission of powerlessness and unmanageability is the foundation upon which our recovery is built. When our actions and feelings begin to cause us more pain than we can tolerate, we become willing to recognize the need and ask for help.

Few of us come to Narcotics Anonymous with the belief that a Power greater than ourselves can 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 drugs and achieve some form of peace or sanity. These escapes included doctors, jobs, different towns, friends, and lovers. Yet the results were nil. Our pain and desperation forces us to become willing to believe in some kind of Higher Power.

Being as honest, open-minded, and willing as we can be with ourselves is indispensable in doing this or any of the Twelve Steps. 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 are greater than ourselves which we can trust, and in which we can have faith. It also takes willingness to take this step. A willingness to believe that there is some positive force or power which can restore us to sanity is all that is asked of us by Step Two.

Most of us have been acquainted, at some time in our lives, with a Higher Power or Creator. Sometimes we called upon that Spirit in desperation after an overdose, 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. 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. It is only when our lives became too painful to continue that we became ready to ask for help.

Still others of us came to N.A. with a preconceived idea of a vengeful God who controlled our lives through reward and punishment. One of our most difficult tasks was to change that conception to one of a Power which was loving and forgiving, one which only wanted the best life for us. This became easier as we talked with others who had experienced the many benefits from successful acceptance of the Second Step and who had achieved a conscious contact with a Higher Power through daily practice.

For those of us who perceived our own human power as ultimate in determining our direction in life, the acceptance of a Power greater than ourselves was a challenge. For us, "acting as if" and accepting that others had the right to believe as they did somehow worked to create enough willingness and humility to accept it. Eventually each of us realized, perhaps at the cost of bitter pain, the need to move from our position at the center of the universe into a sense of joining with others in the fellowship.

Our understanding of a Higher Power is up to us. The needed Power can be the group itself or it can follow a religious tradition. The only thing we want to emphasize is that you

should feel comfortable with your Higher Power and be able to make the statement that your Higher Power cares about you. 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 what you see in order to experience Step Two.

N.A. has many members. Our collective Spiritual Power 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. Just look around with an open mind and you will see a positive power all around N.A. You can call it love, or the Fellowship, or you can call it God. It doesn't matter; by looking and listening as openly as possible, you find that N.A. has the power to help addicts.

Agnostics, atheists, believers and the devoutly religious are all subject to the disease of addiction. We all could see ourselves somewhere within this range when we first got to N.A. Narcotics Anonymous does not demand any specific belief or faith from any of its members, and neither does this step. Step Two is a principle which has made our recovery possible. If you have a desire to stop using, then we suggest these steps as a program of recovery. They have proven themselves in our own experience and lives.

"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 do not have to be in a straightjacket to be insane. Our basic text tells us that, "insanity is repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results." 4 When we examine our behavior, we see that we have been unpredictable, irresponsible, irrational and unreasonable. Our minds are not sound when we are obsessive or compulsive.

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 drugs 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."

We can choose to see sanity as freedom from the need to use drugs today. Restoration to sanity allows us ongoing recovery from our addiction. Our belief that a Power greater than

ourselves exists and can produce a change in us, allows us to change. The Second Step offers us the sanity through which our lives are made whole and new. Being restored to sanity is bringing back health and balance to our lives.

Simple words are ineffective to explain how we came to believe. For each of us it's been different. 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 that, "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. That's where our freedom begins.

Faith offers us freedom. Faith is not an easy word to define, but we know from our experience that those of us who have it function better than we could while using drugs, or existing without them. 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 take 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.

A man once talked about his "magic magnifying mind." He said that whatever he focused his mind on seemed to grow and become larger. We find this is true for many of us. If we concentrate on our hopelessness and helplessness, we begin to feel worse and worse until we become overwhelmed. However, if we turn our attention to the newfound friend we have in a Power greater than ourselves, and the bit of faith we are developing, we find that this faith also grows and becomes stronger. 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 the universe, most of us come to believe that a Higher Power is supplying us with all our needs. We come to meetings and experience recovery. We receive the power to overcome the desire to use, and realize that clean living is the beginning of a new life.

When the cry for a clean life is in our hearts, it is heard. A spiritual awakening does come from willing and open-minded recovery. When we become willing to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, our hearts and minds become fertile ground for the seeds of character change. We find that we can trust our Higher Power as one who is loyal to our best interest. As we

lose our fear of God, we lose our fear of life. We feel new hope and gain a desire for ongoing recovery in our new life.

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.

We found that when we had a true desire to find this Power, it became apparent to us. We realized that the miracles of recovery, so common in Narcotics Anonymous, are concrete manifestations of a benevolent Power. As we began to utilize this Power through prayer, we found an unending source of strength and direction. Although many of the world's injustices and tragedies which disillusioned us in the past may not change,

we found that reliance on a Power greater than ourselves provided the acceptance and tolerance we needed to face life on life's terms.

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. With promptness and determination, we give up our control and make a decision to surrender our lives to the God of our understanding. We trust that a Power greater than ourselves can provide us with the daily strength to stay clean and recover.

To make a decision is to start a course of action. In Step Three, we are not turning our will and our lives over to the care of God; rather, we make a decision to do those things which will result in our gradually surrendering to our Higher Power.

Many of us have had great difficulty in making any kind of decisions in our lives. This is a human trait, and very typical of addicts. 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. However, in Step Three we learn that making a decision implies awareness, commitment and action.

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

a "major" decision? This question can often be difficult to answer and should be discussed with a sponsor. Delaying major decisions may be necessary because it usually takes about a year to completely detoxify our minds and bodies. Years of chemical abuse to our bodies and minds causes radical mood swings, making it difficult for us to make reasonable decisions. Therefore, we advise new members to delay making major decisions in their day-to-day lives, concentrating instead on the one decision which promises to improve their entire life: To turn their will and lives over to the care of God as they understand God.

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

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.

However, 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 recover and lead responsible and productive lives.

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 this Power 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 spiritual deficiency of our addiction. 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 others. In Step Three, we make the decision to stop that destructive pattern of thinking; we make a commitment to commence a lifestyle of recovery. When we surrender our will and lives over to the care of God, 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.

Willingness is all that is needed to start on Step Three. If necessary, we can pray for this willingness. Honest and sincere attempts in pursuit of a Higher Power will result in new awareness and willingness.

Turning our will over to this Higher Power creates space to receive that 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 handle. We are willing to stop playing God.

We do not make this Third Step decision lightly. We are

fully conscious of where our wills, plans and designs have led and left us. When we sincerely ask God to take over the care of our wills and lives, we had better be ready. When we are sincere, we always see results.

"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 were previously impossible to solve. In this way, we gain a newfound freedom by which we can share our burdens with this Power we've learned to trust. Our reliance continues to grow if we place faith in our Higher Power. We step aside; we give up attempts at control; we let a Higher Power shape our reality - these are some of the ways we can "turn it over."

Some addicts find that writing about the willingness to take Step Three increases our awareness. At times when we retrieve our will and catch 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 from the burden of managing our lives alone. A way that has worked for many of us is to take this step with a sponsor. We may choose to pray on our knees, but this is not necessary. Our obsessive concern for self is diminished if we ask for help, and are willing to be helped. Some of us have used this prayer:

God,

I am now willing to put my life into your care. Align

my will with Yours and help me to recognize and carry out Your will. Open my heart so that I may be a free and open channel for Your love. Take away my fears and doubts, that I may better demonstrate Your Presence in my life. Thy will, not mine, be done.

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

Belief in a Higher Power and a 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 really quite simple. It is doing the best we can at the tasks put before us, and not comparing our best with another person's best. It is a calmness or peace within, and 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--to not be burdened by the everyday ups and downs of life, but to ask for God's guidance and strength and follow our hearts. Most importantly, we believe that God's will for us is to be happy, and to share this joy with other addicts.

God's will may not necessarily be for whatever happens--wars, tragic accidents and the like. But God's will is that we addicts learn to accept "life on life's terms" without using, even over

the most painful problems. As we incorporate this new attitude into our approach to life, we find our place in the order of things. This is a brand new experience for addicts. In active addiction, we were always out of place and behaved inappropriately. When we become willing, only then do we open ourselves to the possibility of change.

Just as we practice Steps One and Two on a daily basis, so we need to reaffirm our Step Three decision every day. When we have problems in our daily lives, we turn to our Higher Power for help. These problems may arise in situations 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. In reviewing our First Step, we realize we are powerless over these situations. We have probably already exerted a great deal of energy trying to shape things as we saw fit. Frustrated, disappointed and perhaps a little frightened, we turn to our Higher Power.

At some level of consciousness, we may intuitively understand that the problem probably has something to do with us. Even if we have been unjustifiably wronged, we are the ones who are unhappy about the situation - therefore, 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.

In our Second Step, we contemplated what it meant to be restored to sanity. Situations such as these are prime examples of the Second and Third Steps in action: We appraise the troublesome situation, acknowledge our own limitations and powerlessness, affirm our belief that God can restore us to sanity (and provide some relief from our self-centered feeling); and we make a decision to turn the situation over to God. When we "turn over" our problems to God, we do so in the full knowledge that it is because our own power and wisdom have fallen short. Even after exhausting all our resources, if we still find ourselves unable to adequately control or manage our daily lives (as all addicts do), then it makes good sense to ask our Higher Power to do it for us. Even though we may have no idea what God has in store for us, we believe that it is better than we could provide for ourselves.

Many of us feel that Step Three 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 need. We come to rely on something other than ourselves. It is upon this spiritual fulfillment that a foundation is built for recovery.

Step Three allows us to grow in our understanding of spirituality. As our relationship with our Higher Power changes and grows, we find new opportunities to trust this Power in our lives. We have time and energy for real life. We find something

to replace our obsession with drugs and self.

We live a spiritual program of recovery which is what keeps us clean. The Third Step makes it possible to take the remaining steps. A whole-hearted decision to apply this step in our lives will increase our willingness and improve our ability to work the other steps. After we decide to turn our lives over to a Higher Power we can approach Step Four with the assurance that we will be successfully guided through it.

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 a confrontation with our innermost faults and defects. In Step Four, we look at the things which prevented us from being happy, that kept us using drugs. Chemical abuse is only a symptom of our disease. In Step Four, we learn about the true nature of addiction.

We do this by taking an inventory of ourselves. This personal inventory is similar to the ones 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 whole operation.

In Step Four, we do much the same with ourselves. We take a good long look at what has occurred in our lives. We are convinced that fear, in its numerous forms, is what crippled us. But since it is difficult to step back and look at fear directly, we concentrate on the various masks it wears.

Pride and fear have caused us to rationalize every possible form of deviant 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 first three steps, we have come to believe in a Higher Power who can give us the strength to walk through the fear of doing a fearless moral inventory. Another suggestion is that we work closely with our sponsors. Once we are ready to begin, we pray that the God of our understanding will give us the honesty, strength and power to complete Step Four.

We need not be apprehensive when we begin this step, as it clearly relieves the years of pent-up guilt experienced by many addicts. Too often we approach this step as if we are not good enough or clever enough to take an inventory. The job may look too big for us, which in fact it is. We realize that this is not a task 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 Higher Power. This indeed will give us more than enough strength to inventory our lives. Our new-found faith will cast out the fear we lived with for so long and give us the courage to explore thoroughly the patterns of our behavior patterns which we established early in life, set

virtually in concrete during our active addiction and carried into our early recovery.

A sponsor, or friend whom we trust in the Fellowship, can share their experience with us as we reach this all-important phase of our recovery. We often find comforting similarity in the items we put on paper which caused so much grief in our lives. If we remain too fearful to begin a thorough inventory, we might begin by listing our fears and the reasons we have them. Eventually, however, we will see the need and become willing to thoroughly search within. It is important to remember that a Higher Power is the only one in the room with us as we write our inventory. No one else sees it as we write it. We write in confidence; this is very private. Since God got us through the madness we are now writing about, what is there to fear in putting it down on paper with no one else to see it? We quickly perceive that greater freedom lies ahead as we get braver and enlarge our inventory.

We hear over and over about the importance of the Fourth Step. In the beginning, most of us had a hard time understanding how one step could be that much different than any of the others. Since Step Four represents our first honest attempt to reveal to our true selves the assets and liabilities in our lives, it does carry a lot of weight.

In our recovery, we begin to realize that our only real hope of staying clean is in the maintenance of a comfortable state of

mind. In Step Four, we look at how we have felt about people, places and things in our lives.

In this examination, we see the results of our character defects. When we identify these liabilities or defects, we place ourselves in a position, for the first time in our lives, to step aside when trouble comes. We begin to avoid emotional and chemical turmoil.

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 the written inventory is the only means which assures self-honesty. Writing about our fears, resentments, and character defects gives us a perspective we can gain in no other way. When we write our inventory, we achieve self-honesty. We can no longer 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 a written inventory can bring.

Step Four calls upon us to be searching and fearless, to look carefully at ourselves, including the deceptions we have used. We search within, as if entering a dark house with a single candle to guide us. We move ahead, despite our fear or resistance to the unknown. We need to be willing to illuminate

every corner of every room of our minds as if our life depended upon it, for in fact, it does.

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.

We have discussed the necessity for a searching and fearless moral inventory. When we are ready to begin, we sit down and start writing. It is extremely important that we work closely with a sponsor.

If your sponsor suggests using a specific guide or reference, by all means follow it and stick to it. There are many methods of writing inventories, and no one way is right for everyone. Any method we use will be effective if we are searching and fearless.

The outline below provides a structure for examining ourselves. It contains the basic elements which comprise our self-appraisal.

I. REVIEW YOUR FIRST STEPS: If you have written out your first three steps, you have already made a good beginning. In looking at your behavior both before and after active addiction, patterns begin to emerge. The first three steps provide the necessary preparation and foundation for making a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

A. LOOK AT EACH SITUATION TO SEE HOW IT AFFECTED YOU.

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.

B. IN EACH SITUATION, TRY TO SEE WHERE YOU WERE WRONG OR

WHAT YOU COULD HAVE DONE INSTEAD. Keep in mind that this may include character assets as well as liabilities. In looking at our actions, it is important to see how we behave differently in the future. Now that we are clean in Narcotics Anonymous, we discover some assets. Willingness to take the steps, faith in a Higher Power, gratitude, and open-mindedness are all assets we develop by staying clean. If we are searching, we will surely uncover some good points about ourselves. It is important to consider our assets because as human beings, we are composed of both assets and liabilities.

II. WRITE ABOUT YOUR RESENTMENTS. Our resentments caused us discomfort, so we formed still more resentments. We were angry about what happened and kept a mental grudge list. We regretted the clever things we had not said and planned retaliation which may or may not have taken place. 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 CAUSE(S) 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 WRONG 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? Though I may not have been all wrong, 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

ignoring nothing. Situations in in which we are sure we are right require close observation. 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 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 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?

Everyone feels down at times, but addicts can ill 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 sympathy 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, and part of recovery is learning to deal with these needs in a constructive rather than destructive manner. Our sexual needs are one of God's gifts and we deserve to have them met, but not at some-one else's expense.

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 always end up in pain and unhappiness both for myself and others? Like 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 cannot depend 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 drugged. 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 in 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 Higher Power, which is limitless. The more we attempt to follow God's will, and rely on God, the more we are given the ability to meet hardship with peace and happiness.

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 list them and find 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, and 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 withhold any faith and trust in our Higher Power. With God's help, we are guided through a maze of confusion which often confronts us.

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 read again and again that "we can't, God can." By taking the remaining steps, we begin to realize that through God and our own efforts, we can remove the various forms of self-centeredness that have kept us from spiritual awareness. If we have sincerely taken the first three steps and followed through with a searching and fearless moral inventory, we have accepted some strong realities about ourselves and are ready to move on to Step Five.

Step Five

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

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 the private parts of our lives and put it down on paper. We now know ourselves better than we have ever known ourselves before. Although we may have mixed feelings about our inventory, it is important to be willing to take Step Five immediately.

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

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 are asked to be honest about ourselves with another. However, we can be anxious and willing at the same time. It is best to discuss our reservations with our sponsor, whose guidance and experience can be very helpful. Attending step meetings and studying the basic text also provide many useful insights. We approach Step Five willingly because we

need the relief that comes from sharing our secrets.

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 recurs. Our recovery is halted and our egos take over. The longer we hold on to our Fourth Step, the longer the insanity goes on.

We have completed the previous four steps to the best of our ability. With this basic foundation toward our ongoing spiritual recovery, we look forward to the relief that completion of our Fifth Step brings. The weight of our guilt, hostility and anger will be lifted from us. Many of us were able to accept ourselves fully for the first time upon doing the Fifth Step.

The key word in Step Five is "admitted." We saw that word also in Step One. Our first admission was of powerlessness, and it 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. However, our experience has shown that the humility we gain through humbling ourselves before God and another human being, is exactly what is needed to counter the self-justification and rationalization we have fallen prey to for so long. 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.

An easily neglected aspect of this step is the process of making our admission both to God and to ourselves. Doing so is a crucial part of the step, not just an afterthought. As we continue in our ongoing recovery, we realize that the most important relationships we develop are first with God, secondly with ourselves, and thirdly with other human beings. It is for this reason we must be honest about who we are with each of these three.

We may ask, "Is it really necessary to admit these wrongs to God?" Some may feel that their Higher Power already recognizes their defects. However, we find that by sharing our inventory with God, we are better able to accept God's help in our lives. Leaving God out of this process would be like having a serious quarrel with a loved one: We know they love and forgive us; but until we actually unburden ourselves and our guilt to them, we deny ourselves the relief of really hearing and feeling that forgiveness. So it is crucial to actively take God into the Fifth Step room with us. When we admit our wrongs to God, we experience God's unconditional love and acceptance, and our trust in God becomes stronger. Our basic text tells us that although God already knows us well, "the admission must come from our own lips to be truly effective."⁶

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 age-old pattern of running away. We also prepare ourselves to learn the spiritual principle of forgiveness by forgiving and accepting ourselves for who we really are. The healing value of the forgiveness we receive from ourselves as well as from God, coupled with the honesty and humility we gain, make us ready for the remaining steps.

We have contemplated the spiritual benefits we stand to gain through the Fifth Step, and understand why we need to go through with it. We have developed a certain amount of willingness. Now, how do we actually go about it?

Some members begin by reading their inventories aloud with their Higher Power in mind. Others have held silent discussions with their Higher Power, admitting their faults and fears. Another method for admission to ourselves involves reading the inventory outloud before a mirror. Whether or not you utilize any or all of these methods, the most important thing is to share the inventory with another person. This assures an effective Fifth Step because when we sit down with the person we have chosen, there are only three beings present: God, ourselves, and another human.

When we are ready to take this step, we look for that "special" 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 substantially 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 already knows 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 of Narcotics Anonymous 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 in the program. This acceptance and lack of judgment is essential to our recovery.

It is important that we select a person whom we trust implicitly, and with whom we feel comfortable discussing all areas of our lives - even our deepest secrets. This is, of course, easier said than done. As addicts, we have spent years in building walls around ourselves. Drug abuse was only one of the devices 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 could not trust people. We have had years of practice at shutting people out. We must

make an enormous effort now to let someone in. We start with just one person.

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

We carefully choose someone whom we feel will be objective and non-judgmental. This person has to be someone we trust completely. As addicts, we have found it difficult to trust anyone, including ourselves. We now have the opportunity to develop the trusting attitude which has always been missing from our lives. The trust which is strengthened by taking our Fifth Step with a person close to us is therefore reinforced in our relationship with God and with ourselves. It marks the beginning of our ability to reach out to others, both to give and to receive. It is the beginning of a spiritual experience.

Now that we have the three of us--God, ourselves and another human being--in one room with our Fourth Step, we begin. We can start by saying a prayer together to ease the tension. This is also a good opportunity to turn our fear and anxiety over to our Higher Power. With all the honesty we can possibly muster, we begin to share our Fourth Step inventory. The material we set down in our inventory describes the exact nature of our wrongs.

We disclose the inventory in its entirety, being careful not to leave anything out.

We move steadily forward, ignoring our pride, ego and fear. As we persist, we find a new definition of humility--not a groveling, embarrassing confession, but rather a deep sense of relief in unloading our past, and we feel genuine acceptance as we do so. As our pride falls aside, we find ourselves feeling new dimensions of honesty deep within.

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. This information may not necessarily relate to specific acts, but rather to our emotions. For example, they can see in our faces how we feel when we speak of certain individuals. They can also see when we are upset even when we try to conceal it. As addicts, we never before were able to admit how we were feeling; being secretive was a large part of the denial of our disease. Admitting our feelings now in Step Five is a vital part of our recovery. We were emotionally sick in our using, and we need emotional healing in our recovery. Being entirely open with another person is a big step in the right direction. Sharing our Fourth Step material with a God whom we have come to trust, with ourselves, and with a carefully chosen human being is a safe place to begin opening up.

The recipient of our Fifth Step usually expresses no judgment whatsoever and encourages us to proceed with our story. Perhaps

they will share some "secret" of theirs to lighten the self-imposed pressure many of us feel.

If we leave something out of our inventory because we are afraid to tell another person about it, we are the ones who suffer. The other person is not affected by our omissions. It is easy to walk in, read the Fourth Step to someone, and walk out. However, we try to remember that we are preparing ourselves for the future. We want to break out of our isolation and move into the real world. 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 deficiencies in order to do anything toward correcting them. We cannot wish them or will them away. We must be willing to take advice and accept direction to expect any change in our lives. When we are willing to ask for the guidance, we soon gain clear recognition of what and who we are.

Every Fifth Step is successful as long as the information in its accompanying Fourth Step is a complete disclosure of our lives, thoughts and motives up to the present. After release of these problems we've carried for so long, we can take ourselves to a meeting and share the freedom we feel with the weight lifted from us. We have carried this cargo to the depths of our despair and have no desire to drag it any further. For the first time, we have honestly admitted who we are and where we've been. We no longer have to regret or hide our past because we have faced it

and admitted it. We have told the truth at last, and it has set us free.

Perhaps for the first time, we begin to understand that the pain and desperation we suffered in our active addiction was absolutely necessary to bring us to the doors of Narcotics Anonymous. If we had not found N.A., we would never have found relief from our suffering. At this point, we may actually begin to feel gratitude for our disease because it led us to seek a better way of life. 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 truths 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.

We begin to see ourselves with compassion and experience a new feeling of self-acceptance. We begin to understand why we acted and felt the way we did, and we are hopeful of change through application of the succeeding steps. We have our list of character defects and perhaps some additional observations from the person with whom we shared. Guided by our Higher Power, we now prepare to examine Step Six. Moving continually forward on our spiritual path takes us farther from the old ways of thinking and living, and brings us closer to a peaceful recovery, beneficial to both ourselves and others.

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 ourselves and of our problems has been heightened. But unless we find some way to rid ourselves of the fundamental defects which have caused these problems, our new awareness will only make us uncomfortable. We realize now that we need to be free of those personality traits which stand in the way of recovery.

Our new awareness has involved some painful discoveries. For relief, we look to Steps Six and Seven. We see that the awareness we gained in Step Five prepares us for action and change in Steps Six and Seven. When we become aware of something, we need to act on it. We want to be rid of our defects of character because we don't want to go back to how we felt and lived before.

Being entirely ready to have our defects removed is more than thinking about it or intending to have them removed. It is

actively preparing or demonstrating the desire for their removal. We became entirely ready because we found that we had to be completely willing in order for this step to work. Half-hearted attempts do not work for us.

Some of us do not like change of any kind - even if it is for the better. It is our nature to hold on to and nurture our defects. This is a practice which kills addicts. However, a lot of us still continue wearing this mask of self-denial. Why, if we have truly made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God, would we even question letting go of our defects? Because we are afraid, and it is a longstanding habit.

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. Forfeiting our old ways leads us to new and unknown ways which can be frightening. The remedy for this fear is faith. Our fear will be taken from us by our Higher Power. All we need to do is ask for the fear to be removed, and faith will see us through this step.

We have come to believe that God has a plan for each of us. However, God does not deliver it unless we choose it for ourselves. The Sixth Step suggests the attitude for us to take toward our defects of character: That we be entirely ready to have them removed. What could be more simple? Only a sick person would object to the removal of character traits that have

"caused pain and misery all of our lives."7

It is essential that we surrender completely and become entirely ready to have God remove all of our defects of character. If we persist in holding on to our old behaviors, we miss the point (and the benefits) of Step Six.

We hear some people in the program say, "We are not yet ready to give up everything." We advise them to go back and take a good look at their basic surrenders in the first three steps to see if a sincere surrender is there. If it isn't, we suggest that they go back and strengthen their surrender before even looking at this step.

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 positive, new relationship with that Power. We remind ourselves that restoration to sanity is achieved as our character defects are removed. Strengthening this spiritual connection makes it much easier for us to reaffirm our surrender of the first three steps. Such spiritual reorganization makes experienced sponsors all the more important because by taking us through the first five steps, they know our readiness and willingness for Step Six. Some of us have justified and lied about our character defects for so long that we have begun to confuse the lies with reality. This behavior is typical of our disease. When we are afraid to let go

of the lies, we need faith in a Higher Power to sustain us in this difficult transition. The change we desire will not happen all at once, but we must be willing to begin the process.

"Entirely ready" means becoming totally willing. When we become willing, we grow spiritually. Willingness to try is an important foundation of our recovery and the spiritual principle of Step Six.

How do we become willing? Some of us become entirely willing when we hurt badly enough. We do not have to hurt to become willing; we have a choice today. We can simply pray for the willingness we need and then proceed confidently, knowing that God has granted our request. We can also surround ourselves with other recovering addicts, who provide a supportive and positive atmosphere which sparks our incentive for recovery. Acknowledging that we are easily influenced by changes in our lives, we can utilize the strength of the Narcotics Anonymous Fellowship to help us change in the right direction. What ever means we employ, we must keep moving forward in our recovery, lest we drift backwards toward our addiction.

Until we let go of all our defects, we will not experience the full freedom from self that Step Six offers. We all have character defects. It is important that we know what they are before we proceed. When pondering our character defects, the first one we usually think of is our addiction. Our disease has reared its ugly head in so many instances in our lives that we

realize it will take an act of God to change us. When using drugs, our addiction was primarily apparent in our usage. There were also other bizarre behaviors which were manifestations of our disease, but the drug usage was the most obvious symptom. The expression "take away the drugs from a drug-crazed maniac, and you still have a maniac" has some meaning for us. We do not label ourselves maniacs; however, we saw in our Fifth Step that destructive behavior accompanied our addiction.

Our defects manifested themselves in a variety of ways. Our attempts to control events in our lives contributed to our sickness. We were so driven by our impulses that we considered little else. We see that our most overriding flaw is in serving our own selfish desires. We are propelled by our desires. It was our exaggerated impulses and desires which led some of us to the avenues we explored during active addiction - the jails, emergency rooms, lousy hotels or boarding houses, et cetera.

We review every facet of our personality, uncovering the defects. We must be willing to have God remove all of them - the glaring ones as well as those less serious. It is natural to want to be rid of those defects which humiliate us, cause us pain or isolate us from the rest of society. But what about those defects which are considered more socially acceptable? At this point, we search our hearts and take an honest look at all of our character defects. Even those we may consider "minor" present obstacles to ongoing recovery. Anything taken to an extreme is a

defect of character.

We may be reluctant to give up some of our defects. But 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.

To help us realize the implications of Step Six, we consider this question: Who can or will remove our defects of character? The answer, of course, is the God of our own understanding. 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 felt? How often has it worked? Just as we failed to solve our own drug problem, we failed to remove our own defects. 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 control. Step Six deepens our surrender to a Higher Power. It reminds us that we are not powerful enough to remove our own defects of character. If we were, there would be no need for this step. We wouldn't need to ask God to do something we could do ourselves. The truth is, however, that we cannot do it ourselves. Alone, we are powerless over our own defects of character. We need the help of a Higher Power.

This realization was a long time in coming for many of us.

We may have skipped over this step, or missed its full significance. We have probably tried again and again to fix ourselves, to apply willpower to our addictive personalities and to combat obsessions with people, places and things. After experiencing complete emotional defeat, frequently more painful than anything we had experienced in our addiction, we became willing to turn to our Higher Power for help. When we feel we are ready, we ask ourselves: "Do I know what my defects are? Do I have enough faith in God to reaffirm my Third Step decision? Am I tired of the pain and isolation enforced by my addiction and character defects? Am I really willing to let God change me?"

If we still are not able to clearly identify our character defects, we return to our Fifth Step and see how our fear, self-centeredness, guilt and dishonesty were at the root of most of our problems. We recall reading in the Fifth Step that we can be both anxious and willing at the same time. Once again, we see that it is the pain of our disease and the hope for a better life that seems to make us willing.

When we are able to answer all of the above questions positively, we know that we are entirely ready and have taken Step Six. Even though we may be anxious, we are ready and willing to have God remove our defects of character. As a result of Step Six, we feel more comfortable with ourselves and closer to God.

Step Six tells us that God can remove our defects of

character, while in Step Seven we humbly approach God, asking that our defects be removed. This leaves us with a new peace and serenity while restoration of spiritual health continues. We are starting to enjoy freedom in our new way of life. If we stop here, we will return to our former isolation, and be only a little better off than before. We want to continue with the steps in order to achieve growth in our recovery. With this thought, we move to Step Seven.

Step Seven

"We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."

Spiritual growth and a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves is the foundation and purpose of all the Twelve Steps. In Step Seven, we strive to move toward a closer, stronger relationship with our Higher Power. In Step Five, we uncovered the basic defects of our character. In Step Six, we became entirely willing 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 lowly, groveling, meek or subservient. In Step Seven, we see that if we are going to live a drug-free 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 our Higher

Power.

If we are absolutely truthful in the estimation 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 fortified and reinforced through humility.

Humility is recognizing that we are not perfect. It is something for which we strive, but never fully achieve. Humility is being able to accept things as they are, and when we cannot change them, seeking God's help in changing the things we can.

Becoming humble is the result of a gradual change in 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.

In this step, we ask God humbly. We are in need of what only God can supply. Alone, we cannot remove our character defects, which are the same as our shortcomings. We need to be freed of these shortcomings so we can develop spiritually. We ask God for what we need - the freedom that only God can provide.

Why is it important to ask God to remove our shortcomings? The word "ask" is surely different from "tell" or "demand." 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 another character defect - dishonesty. 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.

When we ask God to remove our shortcomings, we ask for freedom from any shortcomings which limit our recovery. We ask our Higher Power to help us be better persons 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.

Of course, our shortcomings are human failings. We are only human. But we must be willing to live a spiritual program in order to move toward our goal of recovery. We either move forward or retreat. 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 may never meet. We recognize our human failings, or shortcomings, 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 ideal. Only a well-grounded, realistic view of ourselves and others will enable us to accept this world and its creatures. That is true humility.

There is something which at first glance seems to be paradoxical in this step: We are asked to be humble. Our first impression of that word is probably self-negating. But then we remember what was discussed earlier in this chapter - that humility truly 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, and is "really something." 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. We are on a spiritual path with the reconciliation of opposites, such as false pride and humility, as

our goal. Knowing that God is with us, we do our best. 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.

We have discussed the necessity of cultivating humility, and understand why we need to ask God to remove our shortcomings. Now to actually do it, "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." 8 Most of us said a prayer, similar to this:

"God, I am ready for You to take me as I truly am, and do with me as you will. If it is your will, I ask that you take away all the shortcomings that prevent me from being of use to You and others. Please give me the power to follow the path that You set for me. Please guide my steps."

Our experience has shown that applying the spiritual principles of Step Seven is necessary living clean. In order to stay clean, 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.

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. If a shortcoming isn't removed, it simply means we have more work to do. We have not asked God humbly, or we aren't really willing to let it go. We aren't being punished; it just means that we have to work a little harder on one or more of the previous steps. We change slowly, day by day - not all at once and not without help from the God of our understanding, and from our friends in the Fellowship. We will never be perfect, but we do recover. We do the best we can, always remembering who we are and where we came from.

We have asked our God to remove our defects by acting differently than our addiction would have us act. This active demonstration is a most powerful prayer. We believe we can become new people and act differently, but only a Power greater than us can change our nature. As we realize we can change only our actions, we become humble. A Higher Power can remove our defects and shortcomings, if we humbly ask through our actions and prayers.

Step Seven gives us the tools to artfully dislodge the wreckage of our past. In Step Eight, we blueprint a massive remodeling of our former faulty relationships, laying a firm foundation for our new clean way of life.

Step Eight

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

Step Eight begins 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 become willing to start amending the harm we have done to people. We develop willingness as we realize we cannot live clean lives while carrying the guilt and fear of our past.

As we look at all the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual damage we have caused throughout our addiction, we see a need to rid ourselves of the pain, remorse and twisted relationships. We also see that our list must be rigorously thorough in order to receive the spiritual healing we need. Lack of thoroughness simply breeds more of the same. If we are haphazard, our lives again become so confused and entangled with half-measures that the oblivion of drugs seems the only way out. Along with this comes the harm which results from not being honest with ourselves: Denial of an uncomfortable fact is soon compounded by other denials, until we find that we are denying the disease of addiction.

Denial is the most subtle symptom of our disease, and it can be arrested only through honesty and thoroughness. To avoid Step Eight because of our fear of embarrassment or false pride is to slip our necks willingly into the noose of addiction. The N.A. Basic Text says that, "Although we are not responsible for our disease, we are responsible for our recovery."⁹ Step Eight is an important part of how we are responsible for our recovery. We cannot change what we did when we were using. But now that we are clean, we have the ability to take responsibility for our behavior which 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 were reminded, however, that taking the steps leads away from using drugs, 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.

We can draw from our previous experience in practicing the steps. Remember our first difficulty in Step Three--making a decision to turn our will and our lives over to 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.

Before we proceed, 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 "amend." In Step Eight, we are not merely listing people to whom we will say, "I'm sorry," in Step Nine. The word "amend" does not mean "to apologize." Webster's Dictionary defines the word "amend" thusly: "...to put right...to change or modify for the better: IMPROVE...to reform oneself..." 11 How many times during our active addiction did we wallow aloud in remorse after glimpsing the results of one of our destructive runs? How hollow were those words, "Man, I'm sorry. I really screwed up." None of those old apologies ever provided the change in attitude necessary to alter our sick behavior. By the next day, week or month, we were repeating the very same actions - frequently, to the same people, victims of our continuing insanity.

Step Eight means that we prepare to take the fundamental changes which have begun to happen within us in Steps One through Seven, and bring those alterations to the people from our past.

We get ready to share with the victims of our old lifestyle our joyful release from addiction - addiction not only to drugs, but to abusive behavior. Our recovery is becoming evident not only in our bodies, but in our new way of living.

In Step Eight, we put down 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 additional people we've harmed. We consider our friends, neighbors, family, and employers, especially people who were close to us. It is important that we see clearly when, where and how we have harmed these people. It is also important to see how we have caused harm to ourselves. In our basic text we read that "we did many people great harm but most of all we harmed ourselves." 12

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. Have we been, for instance, exploitive, 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 with these people? We need to ask ourselves these questions in order to see that we can no longer blame situations for our behavior. It is true that our addictive personalities

probably played a part in initiating our wrongdoings, but now that we are recovering, it is imperative that we make restitution for any harm we caused. By doing this, we are able to stop inflicting harm and begin to enjoy improved relationships with others.

In some cases, we are unable to determine if amends are due. 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 are clouding our judgment. When we have doubt about the necessity of an amend, it is wise to discuss the matter with our sponsor or another more experienced member of the Fellowship. The object 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.

Once we have made our list of the persons we have harmed, we begin the process of becoming willing to make amends to them all. If we look at ourselves, we see that by just making the list, we are becoming willing to face these people. Just as the Second Step worked in our gradually coming to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, so too do we eventually become willing to make amends to 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 grow in honesty, we become more aware of the harm we have caused and develop the willingness to make amends.

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 on with the remaining steps. We probably 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 into 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. Willingness offers immediate benefits. Becoming willing to make amends to everyone we harmed is sometimes an end in itself. In some cases, if a person is dead or inaccessible, the very willingness to make the amend frees us from the guilt we carry. Knowing that we would make a situation right if we could, allows us to put the past in perspective. Even though we may not feel totally ready for Step Nine, we find our willingness grows until we can trust our Higher Power enough to go on.

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. 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 brushing 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 the guidance of our Higher Power. Some of us sought guidance from our sponsors or other experienced N.A. members. It is recommended that we exercise prudent judgment in approaching all persons we have harmed. We proceed carefully, realizing that not everyone understands that addiction is an arrestable disease. Some people will be skeptical about our recovery, and be displeased about 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 wildly 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 our- selves and of others.

When approaching those we have hurt, we proceed on a spiritual basis. This does not mean that we thrust our newfound spirituality in the faces of these people. We do not use God as a scapegoat, assuming an attitude of piety which will somehow wipe away all past wrongs. Rather, we utilize the guidance and strength of our Higher Power in doing what we avoided for so long - standing face to face with the very people whom we had hoped to never see again. We explain our situation: That we are practicing certain principles to escape from addiction, and that to do so, we must make restitution for harm done. We are honest about our regrets, and explain that we are willing to do whatever is necessary in order to make the situation right.

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 some of the types of amends we will probably need to make.

Our families and loved ones usually top 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." With our newfound honesty, it is still not our intention to bring up events and statements that would hurt, injure, or harm others. In some instances, making these people aware of situations they knew nothing about would cause unnecessary pain. We cannot inflict more harm on others simply to relieve our own guilt. We must be considerate of other people's 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 had already died. 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

wrecklessly abused expense accounts and other privileges. Clearly, we used our employers for our own selfish pursuits, with little regard for resulting profits or losses.

Financial amends are often difficult for those of us who spent money foolishly. Child support and alimony payments may head a dismal parade which we lined up by years of drug abuse. Car payments, over-run credit cards and rental arrears are even more frequent features of our financial fiascos. Relentlessly, in addiction, we ignored our responsibilities and chose to buy more drugs. We cared about little else as long as we could maintain that constant high, and found many excuses to justify our behavior. We may have lied about payments "in the mail," or refused to answer the phone without a signal or code. Unfortunately, we may have allowed these problems to progress to such a point where our creditors found it necessary to repossess our belongings. It seems that we simply had to reach such levels of humiliation and embarrassment to see how dependent we were on drugs.

Some of us owed such astronomical debts that we froze at the aspect of facing and making amends to them. At this point, we are reminded that we need to be responsible 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.

In paying back money we owe, we consider the ramifications. The words, "except when to do so would injure them or others," may refer to those who are financially dependent on us. We are careful not to hurt ourselves or our families financially, but we do need to make a reasonable start. We may need to budget our money very carefully in order to commence making financial restitution for our past wrongs. By informing creditors of our intentions to make good on our debts, we can arrange a payback system which won't threaten our existence. Some of us took several years to clear our debts, but the small amount we paid each month added up, until one morning we awoke and realized that we had completed the payments.

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

The question of legal matters often arises. Many of us have committed crimes of some nature, just by the fact of our illegal addiction. Our past crimes may vary from petty theft to felony

charges, and we know that we are liable for them both legally and morally. 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. However, when we compared the pains of addiction to the hardships of jail or prison, the distance between the two was not very comforting.

Once again, we emphasize that we are operating through the power of the Spirit in practicing 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 the consequences. 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.

Prudence must be the better part of valor, as countless N.A.'s will attest. 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. And it is actually more humbling than "facing off" with an old enemy, because we must admit that we are not in a good position to run our own 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 fervent 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. In this case, the more humbling amend may be learning that we do not make all our amends in lock-step regimentation. It may be that the best way to make our medical amends will be to put ourselves at the disposal of 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 abstain from mind or mood-altering medication. This may be a very appropriate way to make our medical amends. 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.

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 wrongdoings. In recovery, we soon learn the distinction between right and wrong, and just how important it is to "come clean" with God and with ourselves.

Whatever excuses we may have used in the past, we find now that we must get honest and stop rationalizing our behavior. Like all of the Twelve Steps, Step Nine is for us and for our benefit. By practicing this step and making amends, we sever any remaining ties that could bring us guilt or remorse over our past. Many N.A.'s report that the Ninth Step is where they find true release from the past, and a real surge forward into a spiritual mode of living. Having inventoried our defects and having placed them in God's hands, we are able to become emotionally as well as physically clean. We approach our former enemies and feared ones with a spirituality which may emanate from us more visibly than we realize.

In most cases, the people we approach will be so surprised to see us alive and clean, that the shock value will reaffirm to us the depth of the first eight steps. We are almost always met with approval in our new style of living and thinking, and frequently are wished well as we leave these appointments.

In some cases, the damage we caused will have left scars too deep to fully heal. At such times, we keep utmost in mind that

our primary goal in Step Nine is to rectify our errors to the best of our ability, freeing ourselves from the shackles of our past, and preparing us to serve God and the people about us more fully.

We will finally be freed of our past - free to live in the here and now without fear or guilt. Completion of Step Nine leaves us feeling good about who we are and where we are going. With the Ninth Step completed, our affairs are now, like us, clean and in order. How do we keep them that way? Step Ten paves the way, utilizing the principles of all the steps we have taken up to this point. We are now ready to begin practicing the "maintenance steps."

Step Ten

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

By taking the first nine steps, we have humbly placed our past in God's hands. Our housekeeping is complete and our affairs are in order. Now, Step Ten lays the foundation to maintain a clean slate for a clean future; it provides the means by which we can tidy up after ourselves on a daily basis. It becomes an active part of our new way of life.

In order to reap the benefits of staying clean, it is necessary to take continual inventories of ourselves. Hidden fears and needs are driving forces with the potential to throw us into relapse. Although we may not always recognize fears or anger, they still influence our lives. Addicts suffer from the problem of addiction which is deeper than the symptoms of drug abuse. Abstinence and recovery are attained only through living by spiritual principles. We therefore apply Step Ten and all the steps to every area of our lives.

There is no area the disease does not affect. In fact, 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 conclude

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 fear 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 such as ourselves to change. For us, we must change or die. 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. As time goes by, we grow in spiritual health. Our old ways of selfishness and fear are gradually replaced with love for ourselves and other people both in and out of the N.A. Fellowship. Again, the main event is staying clean; just for today, we don't use drugs.

Why do we continue to take personal inventory? Is it necessary to write the inventory, or can it be done verbally or mentally? How often should we do it? These are some of the questions frequently asked by members approaching Step Ten.

The necessity of the Tenth Step is in maintaining a fit spiritual condition. We know that it is only through contact with a Power greater than ourselves that we have been given recovery and a new life.

Our experience has shown that there are only four things which will lead us back to using. These are: Guilt, fear, self-centeredness and resentment. All other defects are simply manifestations of these four. It is very easy for recovering addicts to slip back into the distorted thinking of addiction and fall prey to one or more of these. By practicing Step Ten regularly, we are alerted to the presence of these shortcomings, and can then take appropriate action to remove them. It is for this reason that sponsors usually recommend taking personal inventory on a daily basis. It is also recommended that, at least in the beginning, 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.

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." Someone once said that it is impossible to be unhappy and grateful at the same time. If we dwell upon resentment or upset in our lives, we begin to feel and act in disharmony with our surroundings. Recognizing blessings for which we are grateful

automatically gives us a step towards spiritual fitness and freedom from guilt and self-centered fear.

The Tenth Step is similar to the Fourth Step except that it is usually shorter and we admit our wrongs right away. If we have negative feelings about the actions or attitudes of ourselves or others, we use the same process as in Step Four. We try to see where we were wrong, and consider how we can act differently should the situation occur again. We pay special attention to see if we are guilty, fearful, resentful or self-centered, for we know that emotions like these will certainly 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 probably deeply ingrained in us. Now, we check for the surfacing of defects by doing Step Ten regularly.

When we have identified our wrongs, we act quickly. Step Ten tells us that when we are wrong, we should "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 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 developing unnecessary problems. The results of continuing our personal inventory are shown as we become more patient and tolerant human beings. We become more willing to give rather than take from life, and more able to love our fellow human beings.

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 to fear is faith. When we identify fear in ourselves, we treat it as we would any other character defect - we humbly ask God to remove it. By turning the fear over to our Higher Power, we demonstrate our faith and take action for the removal of fear. Secure in the 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 and leads only to grief and active addiction. When we identify self-centered motives underlying our actions or feelings, we return to Step Seven immediately and ask humbly to have this defect removed. Once we have asked, we must

proceed confidently in the direction of God's will. We are sometimes asked to do things we'd rather not do, but we quiet our self-centeredness by forging ahead, trying as best we can to act unselfishly and be of service to our Higher Power.

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 and relish anger, it turns into resentment which seethes within us. Very soon, we find resentment affecting our present as well as our past. If we are to experience ongoing recovery through spiritual growth, we must learn to forgive and forget the wrongs others have done to us.

There are many occurrences in life which seem unfair to us. We are sometimes unjustly blamed, misunderstood or judged. We may feel disappointed that life has not offered us the opportunities we desired. In situations such as these, it is understandable to feel anger. However, we cannot afford to harbor anger and resentment within us, for it leads back to death and destruction through active addiction.

There are times, too, when we feel angry or resentful towards ourselves. Perhaps we failed at something or did not honestly try our best. We all have human failings and we sometimes feel ashamed of our shortcomings. However, we dare not let this shame turn into false pride because it will cause resentment towards ourselves. Instead, we treat ourselves with compassion, and

forgiveness just as we know God does. If God forgives us for our failings, shouldn't we also follow this example and forgive ourselves? Practicing the art of forgiveness provides spiritual healing and brings us closer to a Power greater than ourselves. It also gives us greater understanding and compassion which we can apply to our dealings with other people. When we feel we have been wronged, we try to forgive the other party, knowing that we have been forgiven for our wrongs.

There is value in relating a daily inventory 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.

We have discussed the necessity of taking a continued inventory. Quick 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 spotcheck process by which we can maintain balance. We have the tools we need to get through difficult times.

This highlights the preventative 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? Is my thinking getting cloudy? Am I displacing my anger toward one person, against someone else who has nothing to do with my present feelings? Am I taking myself too seriously? Am I isolating from the Fellowship?"

When these situations arise, we now have a process by which we can stay clean both emotionally and physically. We have the tools we need to get through any situation and stay clean. We review our daily necessities; Getting food when hungry, resting when tired, sharing with another member or still-suffering addict, attending a meeting when we are angry, lonely or obsessed with our problems. We can call another clean N.A. member before we use drugs, and we can begin to get the kind of help we really need - the help of each other while we learn how to help ourselves with the principles of this program. The tools we have been given in N.A. give us a way of avoiding grief before we bring it on ourselves or others. The steps and other tools of N.A. are a sort of vaccination against insanity - provided that we use them on a continuing basis.

Rigorous honesty is the most important tool we have in learning how to cope with the past and live in the present. Although honesty at first seems difficult to practice, it is most rewarding. We practice honesty under all conditions because it is the antidote to our diseased thinking. When we are honest we lose the fear of being cornered. Our lack of fear and our

new-found faith serve as a firm foundation for courage in the future.

Being honest does not come naturally for addicts, and we do not expect to be totally honest overnight. It is a gradual process which weaves its way into our patterns of daily living and thinking. Daily inventories are the most effective tools for chipping away at long-term habits of dishonest thinking.

The situations that seem the hardest in maintaining our honesty have produced the most rewarding results. When we are honest in really difficult situations, the feelings of happiness and serenity are overwhelming.

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 get to the bottom of each emotion we have and face it, so that we can discover and become our true selves. Our lives are so much simpler when we know who we really are.

"Cash register honesty" is a good beginning in developing self-esteem. Self-esteem is based on facing and living by the truth. When we honestly evaluate what we really have, we can learn to appreciate it. We can carry the gifts of recovery with us everywhere. We honestly chalk up our achievements and put our house in order, giving ourselves room to grow. We begin to straighten out our messes, and in doing so, we gain both strength and a better knowledge of ourselves.

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

We look at our actions during the day and we practice the art of 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.

Our continuous application of the principles of Step Ten will benefit us richly through an accumulation of serenity. The effect is a lessening of self-will, which provides more room for spiritual growth. We see it as a beginning toward becoming responsive to spiritual principles.

Continuing the inventory process in each phase of recovery helps us monitor ourselves. It gives us a way to deal with any grief 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 built up to a relapse.

Now that we are clean, we have recognized the advantage of getting our affairs in order. We can recognize ourselves as the heart of the problem. Negativity has been our way for many years, and we are not able to change into saints. Any thought that we are going to be perfect has to be smashed. We must remain teachable if we are going to remain clean. We do not entertain the thought of ever achieving perfection. However, we

must strive for stability 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 life.

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 rhythm of inventory. Now we are prepared to keenly hone our new awareness in on God's specific plans for us. We seek that guidance through the practice of Step Eleven.

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, the program of recovery that we've been practicing in order to stay away from drugs suddenly begins to come alive and to have more meaning. The whole purpose of Step Eleven is to improve our conscious contact with the God of our own understanding. There are many ways of doing this. By this time we are probably pretty familiar with prayer. Most of us began praying immediately upon beginning the N.A. Program.

The work of the preceding steps clears the way for this step. We find ourselves changing as we continue to practice our program, with new reality of ourselves constantly being disclosed. To maintain our recovery on a daily basis, we use the principle on which Step Eleven is based: The practice of prayer and meditation.

God has a wonderful plan for each of us which will bring us more happiness, fulfillment and joy than anything we can conceive. The more we improve our conscious contact with God through prayer and meditation, the more often we pause when doubtful and say, "God, I don't know what to do. Please show me which way to go." When we finally get our own selfish motives out of the way, even just once in a while, and pray for guidance,

really meaning it, we begin to find peace. We begin to feel a calm joy. We begin to experience an awareness and an empathy with other people that would never be possible under the influence of drugs.

The Eleventh Step has come to be an attitude of always looking for God's will for us in the circumstances of our lives. Instead of giving a lot of thought to why things happen to us, or what we could do differently, we now ask to be shown what the lesson is. In the course of our daily lives, we tend to forget to keep things simple, and we build our problems into unmoveable mountains. Patience is not one of our strong points. We want everything settled yesterday, and to our satisfaction. We are experts at making ourselves so frustrated that we lose perspective completely. Using the Eleventh Step in our daily lives gives us an inner strength to deal with the problems we face.

One way to develop our conscious contact with God is to practice accepting conditions as they are, and trust that they will improve. We strive to practice prayer and meditation several times a day, until these become a routine part of our lives. In this way, we begin to face life on life's terms, and that gives us the peace we need and want to live clean successfully.

As a result, we begin to have a continuing conscious contact with a personal God of our understanding. We enjoy an increasing

assurance of God's will for us and the spiritual power necessary to effectively carry out that will.

There are many forms of prayer to seek the guidance and direction of God's will for us. We strive to accept God's power with humility, surrender, and gratitude. We recognize the selfishness and fear in our thoughts, motives, and actions, and appeal to God for help. Seeking God is a personal experience.

When should we pray? Most of us have no trouble praying when we are fearful or worried. But what about when we are content and happy? The Eleventh Step talks about improving our conscious contact with the God of our own understanding. In order to improve our relationship with God, we seek contact in good times as well as bad.

In the beginning of the day, most of us ask God, "Grant me the honesty, openmindedness and willingness to seek and accept Your will, and the power to carry that out." As prayer and meditation are applied repeatedly, great changes begin to happen. A peace and serenity unlike any we have ever known begins to take hold.

Spontaneous prayer throughout the day is just as important as beginning and ending each day with prayer. There are many times we find ourselves praying. It feels good, because it brings us peace and restores our confidence and strength. It helps us to live a life of faith and keeps us from the despair of fear and

distrust.

We can never pray too much. Praying relieves us of the need to worry over problems and control outcomes. Praying reassures us because we are acting on our belief in a Power greater than ourselves. We have found that prayer, coupled with meditation, is one of the most powerful tools we have.

We do not pretend to be able to tell anyone how, when, or where to pray. There are some members whose way of life suggests that many of their actions and even their attitudes are a form of prayer. We're referring to their ability to give of themselves and their attitude of being grateful. Many of us have sought more through prayer than we did meditation, until we have learned the practice of meditation.

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 consistently use the gifts and abilities God has given us, we will be amazed at the things we are able to accomplish. If we find ourselves blocked, we ask our Higher Power to give us the courage and strength to go on.

If we ask in earnest, and make an effort to utilize the way of life that we learn in Narcotics Anonymous, we will receive guidance in our endeavors. Whether or not we act on the guidance is up to us; but as always, once we live the program, we have a choice. We are not perfect, and can and will make errors. But

by making errors, we learn to rely on our Higher Power's guidance, and work just that much more diligently to learn from our experiences, and accept ourselves more. That may be just what we need that day to keep clean, and that is why we are here, living this way of life.

Basically what prayer and meditation means is a communication. Our experiences with meditation have been beneficial in the outcome, as we have been rescued from serious lapses in good judgment by simply asking for a second and divine opinion. The Eleventh Step is, after accepting our powerlessness and seeking and finding a Power greater than ourselves, an active utilization of that Power in our lives. The working of this step can open up lines of communication to our Higher Power in ways we didn't think possible.

How do we meditate? There are many different forms of meditation. The important thing is to find a system that works for you. The purpose of meditation is to quiet the mind and rejuvenate the spirit. When we become open and receptive to the Higher Power, or voice within, we find our conscious contact is improved. Meditation is active listening.

The quality of our meditation is in direct proportion to the amount of effort put forth. Utilizing quiet time in whatever method we choose, we learn to journey to that place inside where we can listen to the whispering of spiritual wisdom. 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 the willingness to allow it to happen.

Some members sit or lie quietly and concentrate on listening to environmental noises, or to their heartbeat. Some members focus on phrases from the N.A. literature or prayers, allowing the deepest meaning of each phrase to penetrate their consciousness.

There is no right or wrong way to meditate, and no one method is necessarily better than another. Each person must experiment and discover the method(s) which work best for him/her. We are all different in some ways and our meditations will vary, just as our conception of a Power greater than ourselves varies.

When we utilize the process of prayer and meditation on a regular basis, we find a new relationship with our Higher Power. Oftentimes, we experience surges of faith accompanied by courage and strength to undertake whatever tasks are put before us. We feel a new sense of calmness deep within which allows us to face adversity with serenity. Although some of us may have thoughts of using, these pass through our minds quickly.

Our commitment to abstinence and the Twelve Step way of life becomes strengthened as our conscious contact improves. No longer do we concern ourselves with self-centered wants and desires, because instinctively we know that we have truly been given a new life. Step Eleven is our final preparation for carrying the message of Narcotics Anonymous to other addicts on

an ongoing basis. We are ready to begin Step Twelve.

Step Twelve

"Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of those steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and practice these principles in all our affairs."

The steps are a path to a Higher Power. The Twelfth Step is the one that opens us up to living. The steps seem to hold many answers for us that we can use. 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 of facing other people. Eventually, when we sincerely use this program of action in our daily lives, we became able to face our Higher Power, ourselves, and our loved ones. We develop a solid base from which to work. This means that we can go anywhere and do anything, with complete assurance that we can handle whatever we have at hand. With this kind of attitude, we are able to be of help to the addict who still suffers, and have a real basis for living and enjoying life.

The first part of the Twelfth Step describes a process, a spiritual awakening that is the result of living the preceding eleven steps. Most of our efforts in practicing the steps has been a process. In the Second Step, we eventually came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to

sanity. We who were hopeless had found hope. In time, we became willing to make amends to those we had harmed, and found freedom as a result. We went through a process and grew. Elements of our spiritual awakening include help, gratitude, faith, humility and freedom from addiction.

The discovery of a Power greater than ourselves sometimes comes quickly, sometimes slowly. Some of us have been awakened spiritually with a jolt or surge of that feeling of the presence 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 in a spiritual energy.

The idea of a spiritual awakening may seem like nonsense to a newcomer, but it is a most profound promise. Most of us come to the program full of resistance, defiance and an inner conviction that there is no way we can really become spiritual. We were never ones for accepting things on blind faith. However, those who preceded us developed a spiritual way of life and accompanying peace of mind that we have since found. Through this step, life takes on a new meaning, a new joy and a quality of being and feeling worthwhile. In time, we have been guided to a new life and place in the world and in our hearts.

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 given to us. All we have is our experience,

strength, and hope. One of the most spiritual acts we can do is to share what only we as recovering addicts can offer the still-suffering addict: Ourselves.

The most obvious way in which we carry the message 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 physical health and continue to recover.

There are many other ways in which we carry the N.A. message. Whenever we talk to someone about the steps of the program, we do it as one friend sharing personal experience with another. We try to avoid the arrogance of self-deception. We avoid pushing any ideas on anyone, but we do suggest strongly that addicts make an honest attempt to give themselves a break. We don't set ourselves up as God. We share our experience because that's all we have. We tell what happened and how we got clean in the Fellowship. We share that our problem was not stopping, but staying stopped. We found that in N.A. just for today, we never have to use again. At this point, we take our newcomers to a meeting. We are simply an instrument of God's will in action.

We can all start returning gifts to our Fellowship by volunteering to empty ashtrays and clean up after meetings. Some of us feel so good yet so guilty about being accepted from the very start that we take great joy in helping out in even such basic, but necessary ways. After a period of clean time, many people enjoy taking on other group service commitments.

Doing the Twelfth Step is putting love and commitment into action. There is no drug that can give us the tremendous feeling of watching someone choose the path of freedom from addiction.

Before we share with someone, we may say, "God, please help me." To insure our own recovery, we should never go on a Twelve Step call by ourselves. Active addiction is something we should never face alone. Whenever possible, a clean N.A. member with experience working the steps should be included. Although any addict can help another addict, the true message of N.A. recovery can be carried only by those who have completed the first eleven steps. Both people gain from a Twelfth Step experience.

Someone said once that he had never made an unsuccessful Twelve Step call. This sounds arrogant until we consider what "success" really means. Regardless of the outcome, we have planted the seed of recovery. 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 our own understanding of the Twelfth Step. If we have difficulties, we trust our groups and the principles of the program to guide us.

If there is someone in our family who we think needs help, we get a recovering addict who is not so emotionally involved as we are to talk to them. Our feelings would probably get in the way and we could appear angry, or form resentments. We let someone else talk to them. The family member, not understanding

that our past is now in God's hands, is likely to think that we are still judging them for some misdeed of years gone by. Family problems helped many of us rationalize our own thinking and using in our old way of life. We must remember that a family member who appears ready for Twelve Stepping may still view us as in the past. Inviting an unrelated addict to share on such a basis is also a part of the continuing humility we get to help us keep growing close to our Higher Power. "I can't carry the message to everyone," is pride-shattering to admit. This later evolves into a statement of strength, as we learn to focus our energies on the people and Twelfth Step activities most suited to our God-given talents.

The Twelfth Step also states that we "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 change and love grow in our lives on a daily basis.

We set aside our old ideas, so that we can become acquainted with the new ideas that lead to a new way of life. We believe that the old self-destruction and self-centeredness can only be replaced with spiritual principles. We must take the individual actions and spiritual tools that we have learned from the continuing study and application of the steps. Praying for guidance, making choices, and increasing acceptance of the world

as it is, can incorporate the skills and growth of many different and seemingly unrelated steps. Our growth is essential to developing a new life which is workable, comfortable and serene.

The last part of the Twelfth Step means to live the steps in our everyday lives. We find that by doing this we are able to live, work, and handle all the situations in the real world 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 try to practice these principles on a continual basis, we never have to use drugs again. We admit our weaknesses, ask for help, survey our errors, discard our defects, make amends and ask for continued guidance in situations. At first we do this painstakingly. As we integrate these principles into our daily thoughts and actions, we find the quality of our lives enriched beyond our wildest fantasies. This is reaping what we sow. The old habit of using drugs is replaced by the new habit of not using, trusting in the God of our understanding, and helping others to get and stay clean.

As a result of our spiritual awakening, a transformation takes place within us. We find a new source of strength which we can use. Now we can realistically begin to practice spiritual principles in our daily affairs. We reach the end of isolation of self. Our fear turns into faith. God becomes a source of nurturance, and we seek our Higher Power rather than condemnation. Self-esteem supplants our poor self-image. We

learn to appreciate and develop the talents which God has given us. We're willing to admit when we are wrong. We become willing to strive for self-improvement and as a result, 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 forgive ourselves for our imperfections, developing a more balanced view of ourselves. We become more open-minded towards other people's opinions, rather than worrying about what people think of us.

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. The more we practice these principles in our daily lives, the more positive results we will find happening each day. The most wonderful feeling we can know is that of being a part of humanity, after our many years of isolation. A surge of well-being rises within us, assuring us that we are right where we're supposed to be.

These Twelve Steps form the basis of our recovery and direct us toward a substantial change in our character structure. In the final analysis, it is this change in our personality that allows us to live as more effective people. Our purpose as

recovering addicts is to grow along spiritual lines: 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 promote in us the desire to do away with the twisted, 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 two main outside supports: Our Higher Power and one another.

What we have today is the wonderful reality of our recovery and all that this means to us. Each day we live clean awakens us to the freedom we had all along but failed to realize. We succeed now, where we had known only failure before. Many of our dreams, forgotten and obscured by our addiction, return and help us regain the sense of wonder and excitement at the miracle of living clean. A great many things become possible for us. Since we live clean and grow, we are able to take our place in the world. "The steps do not end here: They are a new beginning."

Tradition One

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

Our common welfare is at the top of the list in the Twelve Traditions because as long as the ties that bind us together are stronger than those that would tear us apart, all will be well. If we break down "common welfare" to its simplest form, it means shared happiness, well-being and spiritual prosperity. Common welfare is that which is best for the group, not just for one individual. Before deciding on something, we can first think, "Would this help the group as a whole, or is it just to fit the needs of one person?" To make sure that there is stability in the group, we should be able to disagree, but not have to be disagreeable. We need to think about the welfare of N.A. first, not just the welfare of ourselves.

Believing that we have a common welfare is not always easy. As suffering addicts, we came to this program thinking only of our personal welfare. Most of us had never experienced the kind of attention and personal care that we found in the N.A. Fellowship. But in N.A. we learn that by helping each other, abstinence and ongoing recovery are possible. There is a spiritual center in the midst of every N.A. meeting held in accord with the Twelve Traditions. It lies in the fact that we

are people who literally depend on one another for our lives.

In N.A., we are accepted and loved for who we are. The individual is precious to the group, and the group is precious to the individual. In order to recover, we seek out the people in N.A. who live by spiritual principles. We try to share what we have with newcomers. Some of us get involved with service committees in the Fellowship. When we travel, we visit N.A. members in other places and share with them. We study ourselves through the steps, our sponsors and others in the program. We depend on Narcotics Anonymous for our lives. We know that if N.A. dies, we will die. It is up to us to preserve our Fellowship so that we will have a place for the recovering addict.

Upon reaching the doors of N.A., we found that we were destructive, desperate individuals. Full of anger, fear, self-pity and self-loathing, we found ourselves in the midst of people who once felt as we did. We asked them how to recover and we were told to give up our old ideas, habits and ways of life. It is often frightening to take risks and try new ideas such as honesty, trust and acceptance, but we leaned on those who went before us to share their strength. They gave us hope that if this new way of life worked for them, then it would wrk for us too.

A great deal of energy comes from the realization that every N.A. member is important. Together, any good thing is possible.

Through N.A., we reach out the hand of recovery. We do whatever is called for to stand on our feet and reach out to others who would die without N.A. Today we have the spirit and enthusiasm to help others.

There is much to learn in recovery. In order for an addict to stop using drugs and live clean with any measure of happiness or productivity, a major upheaval in the person's physical, mental and spiritual make-up is required. The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions offer the keys we need to make the great change from active addiction to total abstinence and ongoing recovery.

Self-centeredness, a symptom of addiction, impairs our ability to see beyond ourselves. Only by practicing what seems at first "blind faith" can we stay clean long enough to have the scales of selfishness lifted from our minds and eyes. As our personal recovery evolves, it may slowly begin to take on the positive characteristics of the group. For all of us, it means drastic change, growth and a new way of life. It is the process which leads to a spiritual awakening, to happiness and serenity.

The N.A. Fellowship is a priceless gift with its seemingly endless supply of answers to our daily living problems. We get these answers in countless forms: The Twelve Steps, sharing at meetings, talking with our sponsors, sharing with newcomers or others addicts, praying, meditating and reading our N.A. literature. These are all vital parts of the program.

Once we have taken the First Step and admitted to ourselves

that we are addicts, we then sense that our very survival depends on the unity and strength of N.A. Unity means we are all working toward a common goal: Recovery from addiction. As individual members, we need never compete with one another. We are there to lend support and to help each other. We compare ourselves only to ourselves, never against one another. By combining efforts, our Fellowship thrives and becomes stronger. By working against each other, our Fellowship could be torn apart. "True spiritual principles are never in conflict."¹³

In recovery, we need always remember that we cannot do it alone. But somehow when we help each other, it works. As addicts, we know the truth in the statement. "If we don't hang together, we'll all hang separately." The common welfare of the groups is based upon helping ourselves by helping others. Sharing and caring for each other are some of the tools we use in helping to create unity.

Following the traditions of the program strengthens the unity of the group and N.A. as a whole. This ensures that the Fellowship stays alive and free. Those who keep coming back notice the bonds that tie us together. If unity is strong and stable, addicts have a chance of recovery. Stability is vitally necessary for us because where we came from, instability was our way of life. We are now able to do things as a group that we were unable to do alone. We learn the value of the principle of unity when we consider other traditions.

If we have no unity, we have no personal recovery. Unity comes from communicating and working together for the common welfare of the group. Without unity, there is no group; without the groups there is no N.A. We must ensure the unity of N.A. for the common good of our Fellowship so that the decisions we make and the actions we take may help all of N.A., not just one member or one group. These are the bonds of N.A. unity which hold us together. Without this unity, none of us could recover from the devastating effects of our addiction.

Unity is the function and the result of the Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous. The principle of unity is expressed in each of the Traditions.

Our Traditions state the experience of those who come before us, and voice what we should always do and what we ought never do. It is no accident that the words "should," "ought" and "never" reoccur throughout the Twelve Traditions. The fact that unity is the function of the traditions is an aspect of their design and origin.

The word "we" appears throughout this book and all of the N.A. literature. "We" is the first word of the first eleven steps. The "we" that we find in the principles of Narcotics Anonymous is the basis of our recovery, and is an integral part of our unity. Some of us never felt "a part of" anything in our lives before coming to N.A. We felt alone even in a crowd of familiar people. We had built walls of false self-sufficiency

and distrust of others that made us feel "apart from" everyone. Gradually, we found that as a part of N.A. we could find an alternative to the misery of our disease. We therefore understand the importance of "common welfare" and "unity." They are two of the ties that bind us together. This is the "we" of our program.

The First Tradition expresses a powerful spiritual principle. The spirituality of the traditions is the truth behind the statement: "Personal recovery depends on N.A. unity." Another way of saying this is that for us, the Twelve Traditions are a matter of life and death. Living clean would not be possible for us without each other. Because we could never remain clean by ourselves, our individual recovery depends on N.A. unity.

Tradition Two

"For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern."

Tradition Two talks about the word "authority." "Ultimate" means highest, or fundamental. However, many addicts come to N.A. full of rage against authority and authority figures. We have reacted adversely to authority most of our lives and usually came out on the short end of these encounters. In our sickness we often treated spiritual principles as rules, and defiantly searched for ways to work around them. However, we now know that our self-will caused many of the heartaches and miseries which drove us to the doors of Narcotics Anonymous. The Second Tradition's main theme is to quiet this struggle within ourselves and with each other.

"Group conscience" is the term by which we designate our collective will. It is the way we voice our hope that we will all adhere to and practice God's will. In Narcotics Anonymous, we set aside personal differences and join together under God's grace. In Tradition Two, the word "conscience" is used, rather than "majority." We search our conscience, carefully considering important issues in view of the N.A. principles, before reaching decisions. We then reach these decisions together.

Our groups are variously balanced between newcomers and members who have been clean for some time. The principle of

Tradition Two is that every member has an equal part in the group conscience. New addicts are coming in daily, and as the heart of our program grows, each group conscience is an expression of a loving God.

God's will is revealed through each of us. If we stop long enough to listen, we will hear that voice within. When we first come to the program, we find it difficult to be still and listen. We sometimes see confusion in groups. However, growth and experience can often lend a clear solution. An awareness then comes over the group and things settle down again. We realize that this insight comes from a Power greater than ourselves, who makes it very simple so that we can accept it.

Anyone who is willing may involve themselves in service. If by chance they find themselves trying to control the group or attempting to conform the group to their will, they receive a rude awakening. The beauty of the group conscience is that anyone may voice feelings and/or opinions; but in the final analysis, decisions are reached by the group as a whole. No one person or group of persons can control N.A.; the group conscience would stifle them before they got up any steam.

The important matters in any group conscience are our common welfare, the good of each group and Narcotics Anonymous as a whole. Occasionally, we have seen individuals, often with the best intentions, sway the group with their opinion. This is understandable since many of us are so enthusiastic about staying

clean and about N.A. We feel the surge of new life and we rightfully credit N.A. Some of us feel a desire to evangelize and further our own individual causes as we see fit. When we exhibit these periodic rampages of self-will, the Fellowship may be blatantly affected. When we feel the temptation of power and self-importance, it is best to ask God to direct us in carrying the N.A. message of recovery.

The word "may" is a key one in the Second Tradition. It does not say: "God's will is always expressed in our group conscience," but that God's will may be expressed there. Since we are cautious of group opinion, we see that it is only through constant vigilance of the principles of the program that God's will may be expressed. We can trust that God will provide guidance, through the group conscience, if we truly seek spiritual answers.

In order for N.A. to function efficiently, we delegate authority and responsibility, trusting our members to serve us well. These members, entrusted with certain jobs, make decisions based on research, experience and the N.A. principles. When we first arrive at N.A., we may be overwhelmed by the organization we see. There are group secretaries, treasurers, leaders, etc. We see many trusted servants at the group, area, regional and world levels. The service structure of N.A. can look quite complex if we forget to keep it simple. However, N.A. is different from other organizations because it is all geared

towards helping the members. We trust our leaders to apply the N.A. principles in their work, seeking the best information available, considering the consequences of their actions, considering minority opinions and working for N.A.'s common welfare.

Some addicts react suspiciously to our service boards and committees, as if they had the power to govern our groups. They do not. Other people interpret the Second Tradition as if it said, "We have no leaders." But this tradition does not say that we have no leaders; it describes what our leaders are: They are trusted servants who do not govern. Without responsible leadership and guidance, we would be lost in chaos and self-will. In N.A., we are led by example and suggested direction, never governed by mandate. We willingly follow the example of those whose lives demonstrate the application of spiritual principles: Service to God, N.A., and still-suffering addicts; service gladly rendered and obligations willingly met; God-centered rather than self-centered. The word "trusted" implies integrity, responsibility, knowledge and leadership.

If we have been entrusted with a position of service, we need to make every effort to be unbiased in presenting issues to our groups. We present the pros and cons of each question simply and objectively. The group conscience will be best for all, if we ask a Power greater than ourselves to direct our group's conscience.

After being part of the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous and experiencing the ongoing miracle of recovery, we conclude that either God does or does not direct Narcotics Anonymous through the group conscience. As we witness this principle in action, we surrender to the fact that God is expressed in our group conscience. When we surrender our will, we are better able to accept God's will as expressed through the group conscience.

If we are new in the program, we may not have a concept of a Higher Power. We may therefore place our faith in individuals whom we see exemplifying the principles of the program. It is only after we come in contact with a belief in a Higher Power that we finally realize that what transpires within the Fellowship and groups is not always preordained by the members themselves, but by the authority of a loving God as expressed in our group conscience.

All the committees, officers, and representatives serve the Fellowship. No one of them may dictate to the Fellowship. The committees suggest; they don't make laws or enforce rules. There are many positions open to those who desire service, from the group's coffeemakers to the trustees.

The term "trusted servant" is self-explanatory. These individuals are selected for service positions by the group conscience. They carry out the group conscience, and serve--often without recognition. Although these elected representatives are not the standard-bearers of the group, they

are entrusted to serve.

Our leaders do not govern. This is a very important aspect of the Twelve Traditions. Narcotics Anonymous is a spiritual program, not a political or social club. Leaders are only trusted servants who help to keep each group or the Fellowship running smoothly. They serve to the best of their ability in sharing the message of recovery. They are given positions of trust by a group conscience. We can have faith in our trusted servants because we have faith in the Higher Power who directed us to choose them.

Because we trust in God's loving authority in our lives, every day clean is a gift of life. A loving God, group conscience, and trusted servants all add up to freedom for the group. Coming from a bondage of self-will, we are lifted to a higher place of gratitude for our new freedom today.

We come to realize that when we are entrusted with positions of commitment within our group and Fellowship, we are entrusted to perform these positions through love to further our common welfare. As individual members, our spiritual foundation is very important in our involvement with service. When we do service in any capacity, we are often touched by the overwhelming trust our fellow members place in us. We are careful not to violate their trust because we realize that service to the Fellowship is a necessary part of recovery. We cannot afford to neglect the principles of the program when participating in service work.

Though sometimes misconstrued, the privilege of service is never misplaced. Every attempt to share the message of recovery is appropriate because it is directed towards a purpose more than just we, as individuals, may comprehend. As long as we place God's will ahead of our will, all will be well.

Tradition Three

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

What is a desire to stop using? Some of us got to N.A. completely broken, and were looking for any way out of the life we were living. Others were uncertain that drugs were a problem at all. Coming to meetings does not automatically signify membership. Any addict can ask him/herself these questions: "Do I have any desire to stop using? Do I want to be a member of Narcotics Anonymous?" We answer these questions to our own selves, not to anyone else. We are also free to change our minds at anytime. Clean addicts encouraged us to come to meetings even if we were still using, but they told us that complete abstinence from all mood-altering chemicals was the only thing that had ever worked for them. So a desire can be shown simply by attending meetings.

The words "membership" and "desire" are highlighted words in this tradition. What is membership in Narcotics Anonymous? Membership is belonging. We have a saying, "You are a member when you say you are." This is a Fellowship whose membership does not require any type of accomplishment or payment. There are no dues or fees in N.A. You don't have to do anything to attain membership. You have only to desire abstinence from

drugs. The fact that a desire to stop using was all that was required opened the doors for many of us.

What would become of N.A. if we were to place terms and conditions on membership? Without Tradition Three, some of us would fight to keep our program from being diluted by those we thought didn't belong. We might use such prejudices as race, color, creed, handicap, sexual orientation, religion or lack of it, national origin or even height or weight to exclude those we thought undesirable. These aspects of the human condition are totally irrelevant to drug addiction and recovery from this disease. We need to remember that if we had been barred from N.A.'s doors, we might well have died.

We are made up of all different kinds of people. Anyone may be a member, no matter what background, if they have a desire to stop using. No matter what drug you used, if you have a desire to stop, and you want to be a member, then you are a member. This gives us the choice of allowing ourselves and others the right to remain here. No one knows the dark and lonely path we have walked; yet we all share what we find here through this tradition.

At first it may be difficult for some of us to relate to people who used differently than we did, but we are told to, "Look for the similarities rather than the differences." If we keep an open mind, we see that the feelings we experienced while using, and in our recovery, are very much the same. We have no

right to judge someone else's right to membership.

Some members of our Fellowship have been able to see and face their own addiction only after seeking help for the sake of a spouse, child or other loved one. Whatever road we took to find our way to N.A., we came to believe that it was our own personal Higher Power who ultimately got us here. The saying is: "No one comes through these doors by mistake." We are welcomed into the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous simply because we have a desire to stop using. Many of us did not desire to stop using at first, but by attending meetings our outlook changed, and we gained a desire to stop using.

No one asks for our credentials. We paid our dues "out there," but that is our business, and we don't have to prove it. Many of us lost our jobs, homes, cars, families, etc. Many of us wondered if this was the right place for us. Did we use enough drugs? Would we be accepted if we only smoked pot or took prescription pills or drank alcohol? Do we have to have a police record or a litany of trips to mental institutions? These questions were quickly answered through the love and acceptance of the Fellowship. When this tradition registers in our brains, it gives us the freedom to belong and stay if we choose to. We are all in the meeting for the same reason: We don't want to use drugs anymore, and we need help in living clean.

Narcotics Anonymous "is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs."¹⁴ Even so, our doors remain open to those addicts

still clinging to forms of denial. These may include our brothers and sisters who, for instance, stop shooting narcotics, but hold to the use of other mind-altering chemicals in a last-ditch effort to keep getting high. There are some, too, who use over and over again. They, too, may recover -- if they come back before completing the self-destruction which is the essence of active addiction. No one can be kicked out of our Fellowship. If we closed our doors to those who weren't able yet to stay clean or may not be ready, we would be aiding in their death by preventing their recovery. As long as they bring no drugs or paraphernalia into meetings, all addicts are welcome.

While we may get frustrated with perpetual newcomers, we must first thank the God of our understanding, that our own obsession/compulsion to use has been arrested just for today, and then quickly remind ourselves that the only requirement for N.A. membership is a desire to stop using.

Desire is not a thinking process, but rather a feeling process which requires fulfillment of its own. It is not a want or a need; it is a longing. Almost everyone has felt a longing for something or someone in his/her life. While many of us have felt a desperate need to belong, our lack of self-worth and fear of failure usually prevented us from risking involvement. But even when we didn't think we could meet the demands of a gang or other groups, we found that we could live up to N.A.'s simple membership requirement: A desire to stop using.

When we first arrived at Narcotics Anonymous, most of us knew that we were sick and had to do something different. We were lonely; we had no self-worth and knew nothing of being clean. All we knew was that we needed help, and had nowhere else to go. Most of us had already tried everything else. When we first heard Tradition Three, it brought relief. We didn't know what would be expected of us nor what we would have to do to achieve happiness. Truthfully, many of us did not want to stop using drugs; addiction was all we knew. It is not required to be clean to attend N.A. meetings, but it is strongly suggested. We found that all we needed to keep coming back was a desire to stop using. Some of us didn't think drugs were our problem anyway. We had tried to blame our using on life's situations, but we soon found that this was not the case. In our hearts, we eventually realized that drugs just didn't work anymore.

Our desires may be obscure and buried deep beneath our defenses and fears, but the longer we stay clean, the more intense our desire for recovery becomes. We choose the N.A. Program as our philosophy for life because it shows us, one day at a time, how to live in this world without using or abusing ourselves or others.

Most of us come to N.A. to escape the suffering of active addiction. We stay to experience the joy of living. We pray that the doors of Narcotics Anonymous will remain open to anyone and everyone who stumbles in. Our primary concern is that

newcomers have a safe haven to come to, and that they find recovery through the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous.

Tradition Four

"Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or N.A. as a whole."

The autonomy of our groups is one of our most precious possessions. But what does it mean to be autonomous? In N.A., autonomy defines the individuality of the group. It allows the group to develop its own personality and grow. Just as individuals learn from their mistakes, so does each group grow and become stronger through its experience. Each group is an individual society. Together, these units make up a fundamental part of N.A. as a whole. Autonomy permits each group to make its own decisions about its methods of carrying the message of recovery. In this way, the group takes responsibility for fulfilling its primary purpose.

There is a difference between autonomy and anarchy. Anarchy occurs when an individual or group acts selfishly, without concern for the welfare of others. Autonomy, on the other hand, describes the process wherein a group acts to take care of its needs, carefully following the Twelve Traditions, demonstrating a concern for the welfare of its members and other people involved.

The purpose of each group is to carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers, and to provide a safe environment for recovery. How the group fulfills this purpose is part of its autonomy. The group chooses its meeting time and place, format and trusted servants. This is accomplished through

group conscience, as established in Tradition Two. Each group must follow the Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous in order to grow and survive.

The principle of autonomy ensures a healthy group, which flourishes and attracts recovering addicts. How does a group remain healthy? Experience has shown that a group fares best if it stimulates participation by all group members, rather than being dominated or influenced by individual personalities. Accepting responsibility as a group, providing N.A. literature, and utilizing group conscience are other factors which benefit the group. A strong, healthy N.A. group follows the concept of trusted servants, carefully selecting and encouraging experienced members to accept positions of responsibility, and being accountable to the group. The group concerns itself only with its primary purpose, and does not dictate to other groups or service committees. It participates in area and regional activities, striving always to be supportive and cooperative, assisting other groups and N.A. as a whole. Applying Tradition Four in this way keeps a group healthy and creates an atmosphere of recovery.

The group is the first place most addicts learn about the N.A. Fellowship. The effectiveness of our groups depends on how well our groups follow the Twelve Traditions. Where Tradition One shows us the importance of unity, Tradition Four reminds us of the importance that the individual group plays in the recovery

process. The Fourth Tradition allows us to step back and question if we are honestly following the Twelve Traditions and fulfilling our primary purpose. This provides us with an opportunity to do our own housecleaning.

Some N.A. groups apply autonomy by appealing to specific types of people (i.e., professionals, men, women, young people, gay/lesbian, etc.). However, N.A. groups do not close themselves off to any addict who may need to attend a meeting. In appealing to special groups, we need to remember that no N.A. group should ever attach its name to any other group inside or outside of N.A.

An example of this is illustrated by groups who rent meeting space in facilities which treat addiction. A natural inclination may be to name the group after the facility, such as "the General Hospital Group." However, this practice serves to confuse newcomers and prevents the group from developing a personality or sense of autonomy from the facility.

Narcotics Anonymous groups are located throughout the world. We speak many languages and meet in a wide variety of facilities. Were it not for the varied flavors of our groups, some of us might become bored with regular attendance. How many times have we tired of hearing "the same old thing," and then attended a meeting only to hear a new twist on a familiar theme: This is a positive way our groups display their autonomy.

A group's autonomy also allows the members of the group to get to know one another on a personal level. A bond develops

between us first in our group, and later with other groups around us. Finally, we learn it is all right to be a part of Narcotics Anonymous, no matter who or where we are.

Without sacrificing our individuality, we can meet with representatives of other N.A. groups. In this way, we exchange ideas and improve our effectiveness in carrying the message, which is the primary purpose of every group. Such communication serves another purpose; by giving us experience in the principles of the Twelve Traditions. Just as we use a sponsor to guide us in practicing the Twelve Steps in our personal recovery, so we can benefit from the experience of other members and groups in practicing the traditions. In our lack of knowledge, it is possible that we might inadvertently break traditions. Fortunately, other groups and members help us by making us aware of any such errors, so that we don't bring harm to any group or N.A. as a whole. This is the value of our autonomy--to become a **part of** rather than **apart from** each other.

When we use our autonomy for the good of the group, we must be careful that our actions do not hurt other Narcotics Anonymous groups. What are some matters affecting other groups? Spreading gossip from one group to another or drawing members from another group are two practices which could harm other groups. We are careful, too, not to unduly influence the group conscience. If the group experiences troubles or conflicts which cannot be resolved, we encourage the group to seek help from the area

service committee, rather than involve other groups or members.

Some would ask, "Doesn't autonomy mean we can do whatever we can?" To this, we answer "Yes, we do have this freedom. But we need always remember our freedom as a group stops wherever it violates the freedom of other groups or N.A. as a whole." The Fourth Tradition encourages each group not to be self-governing, but to be governed by an Ultimate Authority as expressed in the group conscience. While autonomy is a very good thing, it can also become a potential danger if it is used as an excuse to violate the Twelve Traditions or to cut the group off from communication with the area or region. We follow Tradition Four, with the other traditions, to maintain the unity of N.A. on a group level and on all levels. We can use a simple rule of thumb: We make sure that our actions are clearly within the bounds of the Twelve Traditions; we don't represent anyone but ourselves; we don't dictate to other groups or force anything upon them; and we take the time to consider the consequences of our actions ahead of time. Then we trust that all will be well.

Group autonomy should always be high on the list of priorities, but if the group matters affect N.A. as a whole, this needs to be held above all other considerations. Some of the matters affecting N.A. as a whole include developing and reviewing new literature, following the suggested fund flow and participating and supporting N.A. at all levels of service. By getting involved in N.A. service boards or committees, we

demonstrate our support through action. Each group exercises its autonomy in choosing to become involved with the rest of the N.A. Fellowship.

The actions of a group do indeed affect other parts of the Fellowship. A positive effect enhances personal recovery and N.A. as a whole, while a negative effect stunts our growth and makes the Fellowship unattractive to the newcomer. Therefore, group autonomy should always be within the framework of the Twelve Traditions. In this way, we increase the group's effectiveness, strengthen N.A. as a whole, and provide new opportunities to carry the message of recovery.

Some people believe that being different is practicing autonomy. At times, group autonomy has been used to justify the violation of the N.A. traditions. However, the Twelve Traditions cannot be manipulated or compromised without consequences. We read in Tradition Three that "true spiritual principles are never in conflict; they complement each other."¹⁴ When there is such a conflict, the spiritual principles of the traditions are violated and therefore affect N.A. as a whole.

Some members hide behind the misconception that the Twelve Traditions are only suggested, and use that fallacy to justify their distorted version of autonomy. It is an unhealthy motive that brings the attempt to control to the front. Experience has shown us that an Ultimate Authority expressed through the group conscience, always prevails. In keeping with a trusted servant

concept and encouraging the members to take responsibility for their group, the need to feel a part of N.A. as a whole becomes fulfilled.

An example of a group's decision which affected N.A. as a whole follows: One group, in the name of autonomy, decided to reproduce approved N.A. literature because it was cheaper than buying it at the regular price from the area, region or World Service Office. This may seem all right on the surface, but if we look deeper, we find that this hurts us all in the end. Actions such as these do not allow funds to flow in the necessary manner for the production of new literature, so that N.A. may reach as many addicts as possible.

In considering this and similar examples, we see that we have to hold true to our Twelve Traditions. The history of N.A. proves that by following our traditions, N.A. works. N.A. has experienced certain trials and tribulations throughout its growth, but it has survived and prospered. It has, in fact, flourished and become stronger because of the integrity gained through holding fast to the Twelve Traditions. Since recovery is our goal, we follow the past experiences of the Fellowship with regard to our Fourth Tradition.

Some members travel in their recovery. This provides the opportunity of meeting other recovering addicts throughout the worldwide Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. This experience often precipitates an awareness of the freedom the Fourth

Tradition gives Narcotics Anonymous. We see that N.A. works in many different cities and countries, regardless of the building, meeting format or language used. We see and hear the N.A. message carried through one addict helping another. We become grateful for the autonomy of Tradition Four, and willingly accept the responsibility which it requires. At this very moment, somewhere, the N.A. message is being delivered. The proof of N.A.'s validity is in the fact that our members stay clean. We do recover!

Tradition Five

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

An N.A. group meets regularly at a specified place and time, and follows the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. Our N.A. literature tells us that a group is made up of two or more addicts who meet to share their experience, strength and hope about recovery from addiction. The primary purpose of an N.A. group is to carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers.

The Twelfth Step, which emphasizes the principle of giving, tells us that we cannot keep what we have unless we give it away. Through honest sharing in meetings, we carry a message of life without drugs. We share when we feel good, bad or indifferent; we share for the purpose of showing addicts that we can live in today's society and face all of the problems and joys of life without the use of drugs.

N.A. groups provide us with a chance to discuss recovery - we share our daily experiences in learning to live by spiritual principles, and benefit from the wisdom of long-term members who have learned to apply the principles of recovery. A meeting may be the only place where newcomers feel safe during a 24-hour period. We find unconditional acceptance at N.A. meetings, and gradually turn away from our destructive, addictive behaviors and embrace a better way of life.

By sharing the recovery we have found, we gather strength and commitment in our new way of life. We share how we strive to live life on a spiritual basis. This is the message--a new way of coping with old fears and reactions. Seeing and hearing recovery in action reassures other members of the group who may share similar feelings, and keeps us on the path of recovery. We share the difficulties as well as the good times and most importantly, the principles we have come to practice which make recovery a way of life. Each of us can learn from one another. It is important that we share, regardless of whether or not we sound "good." We carry the message of recovery, and someone may need to hear what is being said--"good" or "bad." We trust in our Higher Power to guide us when we share. Our groups enhance the recovery process by providing a suitable and reliable environment for sharing.

Being complex human beings, with a multitude of feelings, each of us can benefit as long as we keep an open mind. Listening to other addicts' experiences, even if our stories vary, allows us to learn from their mistakes. Hearing another addict share their progress can open the door for us to accept positive changes in our lives. If we share our feelings and experiences, and how we use the principles of N.A., then we are fulfilling the intent of this tradition.

Groups have proven to be the most successful vehicle for Twelve Step work. There are different ways to carry the message,

but there is only one message, and that is recovery through the Twelve Steps. Groups carry the message by providing a place to meet with a positive atmosphere of recovery. The members carry the message by sharing, welcoming newcomers, and staying clean.

The members of N.A., by the grace of a Power greater than ourselves, are given the ability to show that there is a productive and happy way of life without drugs. We need to take seriously our part in carrying the message. If we let personalities, conflicts or petty power struggles cheat the newcomer of his/her rightful place on recovery's path, we defeat our primary purpose--carrying the message. In each group we attend, we see clean, recovering addicts. This is Tradition Five in action.

Let us consider the term "still-suffering addict." Some addicts come in and out of the doors of N.A. Some do not return. We may hear that they are in hospitals, in jails or dead. These people carry the message in its most painful extreme. Their tragedies show us that addiction does not work. However, these addicts are not the only ones who suffer.

Addicts may vary a great deal in their lifestyles or experiences, but our feelings are remarkably similar. We came into the program defeated and confused, wanting to believe that there was a way we might be able to live without drugs. We listened at meetings and eventually came to an understanding of the N.A. Program. At times, we replace faith with doubt, become

confused or impatient. We also feel great relief and joy as we progress in our recovery. Attending meetings and sharing these feelings is a way of carrying the message.

Sometimes, when we get a few months or a few years of clean time, we think we no longer have to listen, share or even attend meetings. However, we must put aside our pride and ego. We have been blessed with some recovery and serenity; we must not forget where we came from, and the nature of our disease.

Because we are addicts, we don't have the capacity to stay clean without living a spiritual program. Our strength, experience and hope of a new way of life attracts the addict who still suffers. A suffering addict need not always be a newcomer to N.A., indeed it may be a person with many years of recovery. Each addict has the potential for suffering, no matter how long we've been clean. Open sharing of grief or other pain encourages honest disclosure by all members of their personal conflicts. Such openness strengthens each member's recovery. We receive courage and strength to continue on the path of recovery through attending meetings and hearing the message of recovery.

There are times when a group becomes diverted from its primary purpose. For example, business matters can cause a group to get bogged down. When a group starts to collect a sizeable amount of money, it can be very tempting to divert our attention towards financial matters and material gains. The tragedy is that because the primary purpose was neglected, some suffering

addict may not hear the message of recovery and therefore die. We must keep uppermost in mind that even though we still have bad days and problems, life clean is a lot better than when we were using. If we remember how we felt when we entered N.A., we never forget to share the message of hope.

The responsibility of the group in carrying the message can vary with the duties given to members of that group, especially its elected trusted servants. It is important for each group to choose the most responsible members to run the meetings.

There are no menial tasks in Narcotics Anonymous. The people who set up the meetings and make coffee are just as important as the group service representative or secretary. If a newcomer were to go to a meeting at a scheduled time and place and find an empty room, the results could be disastrous. How many potential members of N.A. have been diverted from the program because a steward could not act responsibly in opening a meeting on time?

There will always be an abundance of people who need the N.A. Program. As individuals, we are limited in our ability to carry the message of recovery. Our experience has shown that the group setting is the most effective vehicle in our Fellowship for carrying this message. N.A. groups "bring addicts together so that the magic of empathy, honesty, caring, sharing, and service can do their work."15

A group's primary purpose is to carry the message--not the addict. Groups should refrain from lending money, trying to help

with marriages or relationships, finding jobs or housing, or becoming involved in legal matters or medical problems. The message of recovery is based on spiritual principles. There may be members of the Fellowship who can help with personal matters, and they should be consulted in private, perhaps before or after the meeting.

Groups hold two basic types of meetings: Those which are open to the public, and those closed to the public--for addicts only. Meetings vary widely in format from group to group. Examples include participation meetings, speaker meetings, question and answer, step studies, topic discussions, and combinations of these. Whichever format a group uses, the function is always the same: To provide a positive environment for personal recovery and to attract such recovery.

We need always remind ourselves that it is a privilege, given to us by the grace of God, for any of us to be of service to our Fellowship in any way. By all rights, many of us should not be alive, and yet we are recovering from addiction and able to help others. We never know when we might be the only example of recovery a suffering addict may see.

As members of N.A. groups, we do the best we can to share the message of recovery, trusting that God will direct us and help us. Even if our attempts to carry the message prove unsuccessful, they benefit our personal lives. We freely give away what was so freely given to us.

Tradition Six

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

This tradition sets up some guidelines to protect N.A. as a whole and its individual members, and to preserve and ensure our primary purpose: Carrying the message to the addict who still suffers. Controversy arises when members endorse or announce outside enterprises, and this damages the atmosphere of recovery in our meetings. Financing, endorsing or lending our name to outside facilities or enterprises also opens N.A. to legal and financial problems. We must always remember that this is our program - addicts helping addicts. We are not related to facilities that treat addicts, even if we hold our meetings there. Our purpose is not to become rich or influential, but to stay clean and help the addict who still suffers.

The Sixth Tradition tells us to avoid the power struggles associated with endorsement. The underlying principle is letting go of our old ideas of money, property and prestige, and grasping new standards of spiritual and emotional growth.

The Sixth Tradition may seem hard to understand. But when we really take a look and try to understand, its simplicity amazes

us. We can see the danger of endorsement, financial support and letting others use our name. We can see how easily such involvements have led to abuse of money, property and prestige, and we have seen the painful results of this abuse.

Let us take a closer look at what this tradition really says. First, a group ought never endorse. To endorse is to sanction, approve, or recommend. Endorsements can either be direct or implied. We see direct endorsements every day in politics and advertising. A direct endorsement is often used to persuade someone to do something, such as a famous person endorsing a certain product, or a candidate advocating particular views. An implied endorsement is one which is not stated, and is harder to define. How many times have we seen a television star advertise a certain product? The implication is that anyone who buys the product will be as rich and famous as the television star. Sometimes athletic equipment is provided to professional athletes to wear because their fans will believe it is the best, and this benefits the equipment company's sales. This is not usually stated formally; but in these examples, the television star and athletes are implicitly endorsing those products.

Many organizations wish to use the N.A. name in connection with their services. Allowing this would imply endorsement and therefore violate Tradition Six. Hospitals, recovery houses, and probation and parole offices are some of the related facilities we deal with in carrying the N.A. message. These facilities

treat addicts, and often refer them to N.A. Some of us may have undergone benefitted from treatment, but we are careful that if we recommend a facility to someone, we make it clear that we do so personally, and not as a member of N.A. We must be careful that when we cooperate with these organizations, we clearly state our policy of non-affiliation to everyone concerned. We are a separate entity, and we do not wish to be associated with any related facility. Each facility has its own successes and failures. We do not wish to be applauded or criticized based on someone else's actions.

"An outside enterprise is an agency, business venture, religion, society, organization, related activity or any other fellowship. Most of these are easy to identify except for the other fellowships. Narcotics Anonymous is a separate and distinct Fellowship in its own right. Our problem is addiction. The other Twelve Step Fellowships specialize in other problems and our relationship with them is one of cooperation, not affiliation."16

In carrying the message of recovery, we must be careful to keep it simple and within the framework of N.A. Our experience has shown that sharing an ambiguous message by referring to outside enterprises can be detrimental to recovery and result in confusion. "The use of literature, speakers and announcements of other fellowships in our meetings constitutes an implied endorsement of an outside enterprise."17

It is best for N.A. not be involved with outside functions because many problems can arise. We have seen that the best way to avoid these problems is to steer clear of any situations which may distract us from our primary purpose. We choose to not participate in conflicts for power and influence.

Narcotics Anonymous does not own or endorse any related facilities, nor does N.A. finance enterprises of any nature. Ownership of anything creates influence, which in turn fosters the very self-serving instincts which are contradictory to the philosophy of the N.A. program.

When money or property are involved, we easily lose sight of our principles. The suffering addict may not seem important if she or he is compared to getting a large sum of money. When prestige is involved, people's egos and pride cause problems. We are not concerned with prestige in N.A. because we reach out to every addict who wants help. To strive for prestige would be disastrous because it would cause us to stray from our primary purpose, which is to carry the message to the suffering addict. After all, our purpose is not to be the most important or the best, but to stay clean and recover.

We allow others, outside of N.A., to struggle for control, while we concentrate on our priority of recovery. Endorsing or lending our name to any related facility or outside enterprise relinquishes some of our responsibility for our own recovery. We've tried the easier ways, and that's how we got to N.A.

It is not difficult to see how the N.A. program could become diversified, diluted or misrepresented to fit the needs of related facilities or enterprises. One example of this concerned a meeting held in a recovery house which was primarily attended by N.A. members who had once been residents of that recovery house. The recovery house held regular fund-raising functions for their facility, and announced them at the N.A. meetings. In-house residents, as well as other new members, had difficulty distinguishing between which announcements were for N.A. and which were the recovery house announcements. The non-N.A. announcements constituted a violation of Tradition Six because they implied an endorsement of the recovery house.

In another area, several members began attending prayer and meditation groups held at a local church. These members gained much from the sessions and began telling other N.A. members about them. Soon many N.A. members became involved in the prayer and meditation groups and began distributing flyers for them at N.A. meetings. In this instance, new members often wondered if N.A. was a prayer and meditation group. Again, this violated the Sixth Tradition by endorsing an outside enterprise.

Another example involved a birthday celebration announced at N.A. meetings, although the person celebrating the birthday planned to do so at a meeting of another Twelve Step Fellowship. By announcing activities planned for another fellowship, this comprised a violation of Tradition Six.

A final example occurred at a large speaker meeting in a rapidly growing area. This group frequently used speakers from other Twelve Step Fellowships. The secretary of the group thought it was necessary because the area contained many newcomers who needed to learn how to apply the Twelve Steps and practice the principles of the program. The secretary therefore felt it was important to choose speakers with considerable clean time and speaking experience. This example illustrates a violation of the Sixth Tradition, through affiliation with an outside enterprise.

What are some better ways of handling these troublesome situations? A first step would be to privately approach the individual involved. Take time to think of an alternative which would be within the Twelve Traditions before approaching the person. For example, in the case of the secretary using speakers from other Twelve Step Fellowships, explain how this violates Tradition Six. Acknowledge that it is often difficult to find experienced N.A. speakers in some areas, and suggest that a solution may be to find long-term N.A. members from another area who are willing to travel to carry the message of recovery. In the instance of the recovery house, it would be wise to suggest that the house place a bulletin board outside the meeting room and post its announcements there.

With the members of the prayer and meditation group, consider sharing about the group verbally on an individual basis, rather

than distributing printed flyers. Announcements could also be posted on a bulletin board outside of the meeting room.

Suggest and encourage the N.A. member celebrating the birthday in another fellowship to celebrate it in N.A., too. Explain how much you would appreciate it, how helpful it is for newcomers to see recovering addicts commemorate recovery birthdays in N.A., and that it gives newcomers in N.A. hope and inspiration. If the member wants to celebrate the birthday in another program also, that celebration should be discussed only in that program. N.A. and other Twelve Step Fellowships are separate, and activities or meeting events in one should not become affiliated with the other.

We work for an end to confusion and controversy - for recovery and unity. N.A. needs to remain a separate entity. Lending the N.A. name or financing other organizations would defeat us in our main purpose, sap our energy and divide us. N.A. is a place where an addict can go to be with other addicts and learn the process of recovery. We want to keep our program as simple as possible, and the Sixth Tradition ensures this. By keeping financial matters simple, our freedom will not be impaired.

Standing firmly on the principles of the Twelve Traditions and surrendering to the group conscience becomes a valuable recovery experience. This cannot be learned by running away. We are responsible for our recovery and for our actions. We

practice the traditions for our own welfare and the protection of N.A.

Let us never lose sight of this goal. Let us strive to keep the principles of the program foremost in mind, so that the many addicts who need and want this new way of life will have a chance to recover.

Tradition Seven

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

Each group in N.A. has certain monetary obligations which are necessary in fulfilling its primary purpose. Some of these include rent for the meeting site, refreshments and literature for the members. In order for a group to survive, funds must be obtained. Where do they come from? They come from the members of the group. As members, we donate what we can financially to help the group meet its monetary commitments. As members of Narcotics Anonymous, we remember what was given to us freely, and we consider it a privilege to give back freely.

This may seem somewhat paradoxical, because there is no requirement in N.A. that an addict contribute anything - financially or otherwise - to an N.A. group. We know from experience, however, that the individual giving to the support of the whole is basic to the spiritual growth of us all. By contributing to the group, we begin to feel more a part of that group. This also seems to aid in our individual participation within the group.

To be self-supporting financially is also to keep in line with the other traditions. In Tradition Four, we discussed the principle of each group functioning autonomously except in

matters that affect other groups or N.A. as a whole. By being self-supporting, we maintain our autonomy. In Tradition Six, we explored the necessity of N.A. maintaining a policy of non-affiliation with organizations outside of our Fellowship.

Independent of outside support, we begin to rely on ourselves for our continued existence. It frees us from the temptation to become caught up in power, property and prestige. At the same time, it protects us from compromise from within or without. The Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous is, quite simply, supported by itself. This is true not only in terms of financial donations, but also in terms of personal commitment.

Being self-supporting as a group has personal value to the individual member. Giving instead of taking, paying our own way instead of cheating, and doing our share instead of tagging along are often for many of us, our first real attempts at becoming responsible.

Some people do not have money at times. This is understandable. However, we as a Fellowship must be aware that we cannot continue to allow others to pay our way in our recovery. When we contribute to our group to the best of our ability, we make our Fellowship stronger and participate in our own recovery. We are a part of N.A. This makes the group more important to us. We know that when we work for something, it means more to us than something just given to us. While we do not buy our way into N.A., we choose to support it with our time

and money, because the price of accepting outside support is too high.

Our N.A. groups support themselves primarily because experience has taught us that nothing else works. When we deviate from this policy, we begin to undermine the simple effectiveness of one addict helping another. Dependence upon outside contributions carries the danger of stripping away the independence of the Fellowship. No matter how well-meaning outside benefactors might be, any outside aid cripples, then ultimately removes the self-worth developed by our own support.

Nowhere does it seem easier to become obligated than to someone to whom we are financially indebted. To become dependent on outside financial support is to risk outside influence. This creates danger, however subtle, to compromise, to curry favor, to divert our primary purpose. The people who want to help us are frequently interested in our success. N.A. offers them an answer to the tragedy of an addicted member of their own family or association. We have found that many of our would-be benefactors have their own perspective of how N.A. should function. These "strings" sooner or later would choke us. There have been many examples of our groups accepting this seemingly necessary help, only to find their primary purpose or their autonomy threatened.

One group accepted free rent of a church basement and experienced pressure to call the God of our understanding by a

certain name. One group was invited to carry the N.A. message to a local detox center on the condition that the N.A. members help the residents with their job and apartment hunting upon release. Another group accepted a cash gift from a member's parents, but later was expected to guarantee that their daughter would not cause any further trouble. One group accepted items from a department store for their raffle, only to feel pressured to help with the store's advertising. Yet another group was offered free publication of their meeting times and telephone number in a local newspaper if they would just agree to a feature article with pictures. These are clear violations of our traditions.

There are other instances, more subtle and harder to define, that ask us to depart from our traditions. Our purpose here is not to discuss the integrity of our would-be benefactors, but to emphasize that N.A. can not be disrupted by outside control, or we each stand to lose all we have received through N.A. We acknowledge that funding from outside endowments might seem beneficial, but we must maintain our freedom to help addicts the N.A. way. We do not accept outside contributions because we want to hold on to the freedom we have. We decline all outside contributions for our own sake.

Another consideration is that addicts are often overly dependent people by nature. One of the reasons we practice the Twelve Steps is to recover from a lifetime of sick dependencies on people, places and things. We learn to depend on a Higher

Power, Narcotics Anonymous, and ourselves for our new way of life. Group practice of the Seventh Tradition weans us of dependency on others to meet our needs. We would do our Fellowship woeful disservice if we sold our groups to anyone outside the Fellowship in order to obtain the support which we can and should provide for ourselves.

When financial existence is independent of outside contributions, it creates motivation, self-esteem, caring and pride in our Fellowship. By supporting our local meetings or assisting in an N.A. fundraiser, we are also contributing to our personal recovery.

Some people maintain that as long as we uphold these principles in general, we can afford an occasional exception. After all, couldn't we carry the message farther if we had all the money needed to stock our groups with literature, to rent better meeting places or to publicize N.A.? In fact, aren't there N.A. groups who cannot even afford to fulfill the most modest financial responsibilities? Sometimes the offers of free rent, refreshments, transportation or donations for our fundraisers from outside the N.A. community seem like windfalls to us. But our experience disproves this. Accepting these offers clearly violates this tradition.

Tradition Seven does not say, "declining outside contributions except free refreshments for our dance, or except good prizes for our raffle." No; it says, "declining outside

contributions." There are no exceptions! We have found that with prayer and ingenuity we can find a way to stay in operation within the definition of this tradition, and avoid losing our independence. It is better to struggle and trust that our Fellowship will grow in God's time, rather than violate one of our most important traditions by depending on sources outside of N.A.

We know of one group, for example, that resolved prohibitive rents by agreeing to pay one-third of their monthly collection instead of a fixed amount. Another group does routine chores for the church in lieu of rent. Another situation involved a group meeting in a facility which could not accept monetary compensation for rent. Possible solutions include donating N.A. literature as rent, or considering the meeting as a Hospitals and Institutions meeting. If a church or community center won't accept money for rent, we can donate a new coffee pot or replace some furniture. In other instances, when total payment is not possible, a token compensation should be made to stay within the principle of the Seventh Tradition. However we do it, the important point is that we must be "fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions."

In our discussion of the Seventh Tradition, we have referred mostly to the N.A. group. The groups and members are the foundation of Narcotics Anonymous. However, the larger service structure of N.A. is created by the members and groups and is

directly responsible to them. These service committees also have the Twelve Traditions as their spiritual basis and rely on the groups' contributions of time and money for their existence and operation. The members support the groups, who support the areas, who support the regions, who ultimately support the World Service Conference.

Let's see how this happens: When a couple of recovering addicts get together and start an N.A. group, especially in a locale where N.A. is new, the group is usually broke and without most of the basic necessities. If the group secures a meeting place, it might do so on a promise to pay the rent as the money comes in. The group members borrow a coffee pot and scrape together some N.A. literature. They may rely on public service announcements on local radio and T.V. to announce their meetings. They may post flyers on bulletin boards of community centers and laundromats. Many groups have been very imaginative in their low-budget methods of carrying the message. The first N.A. telephone number usually belongs to one of the members, who soon begin to wonder if his or her privacy will ever be returned! At first, everything is done for nominal sums.

In spite of these hardships, the group eventually gets underway. They meet regularly, attract new members, choose trusted servants, pass the hat, and bank the meager collections. Whatever money the group collects is spent on rent, literature and refreshments. The group establishes a prudent reserve as

soon as possible.

When the group expands and splits into other groups, an Area Service Committee is needed. This committee may operate a helpline, print meeting lists and stockpile literature. Now the members are not only participating in their recovery by contributing to their own group, but also supporting their area.

The area then joins a region and begins offering it support. Regions provide public information services, contact and compile listings of hospitals and institutions that might treat still-suffering addicts, participate in WSC committees, and sponsor conventions. These services promote unity in the region.

Through communications provided through the region, the areas become aware of services needed and provided at the world service level that cannot be practically provided by the members and groups individually. These include the World Service Conference, the World Service Office and the World Service Board of Trustees. The World Service Conference provides a forum for exchanging information between regions and subcommittees, and tabulating results of issues requiring Fellowship-wide group conscience. Our World Service Office is the central contact and distribution point of N.A., linking our widespread members and groups into a single Fellowship. This contact is maintained through correspondence and our newsletters. The Trustees contribute to the continuation and growth of N.A. as a whole and serve as a resource for our Fellowship. The costs of these services

(telephone, rent, printing and mailing) are dependent on contributions channeled from members to groups to areas to regions to the world service level.

"Every N.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions." In this tradition, we have looked at the positive values that participation in our recovery engenders, the dangers of making ourselves vulnerable to outside influence and the expansion of the concept of the N.A. group to include the entire N.A. structure.

The primary emphasis of Tradition Seven is on financial self-support. This principle has a wider application in our local groups and in our Fellowship. There is no maximum amount of support for any N.A. member to give to this Fellowship. Each of us has a lot to give - our strength, caring, wisdom, time, energy, money or hospitality - and there is always an addict somewhere who needs and wants what we have to offer. Looking for ways to give rather than to receive is the difference between feeling helpful instead of helpless. As our understanding of the spirituality of our traditions develops, we see more clearly that one addict helping another is the effort each of us makes to assure that the help which was here for us will be here for those after us seeking recovery. Through this effort, we ensure that we ourselves continue to recover.

Tradition Eight

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

Tradition Eight has two main aspects: The nonprofessionalism of Twelve Step work, and the technical needs of our service centers. The N.A. Program is based on the concept of one addict helping another. By sharing our experience, strength and hope with the addict who still suffers, we offer a program of recovery in which we ourselves are the living examples. N.A. has been called a "hip pocket program" because we carry it wherever we go. We don't require any equipment or special facilities; the only training necessary is experience in working the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of N.A. No individual member is better qualified than any other to carry the message of our spiritual recovery from addiction. We do not hire therapists or group leaders, and none of our members is paid to attend meetings or do service work. Instead, we share from our hearts that which has been given freely to us. In return, we are given the gift of life.

Our experience has shown that addicts sharing their own experience and knowledge about the Twelve Steps and recovery seems to be more effective than many of our dealings with non-addict professionals. In N.A. we have learned that the

therapeutic value of one addict helping another is truly without parallel.

As they recover from addiction and become employable, many of our members are interested in the helping professions. They seek special training in order to gain professional skills which enable them to earn their living working in special care facilities. Some of these include drug rehabilitation centers. Through their training, these members become professionals in their particular field. As a Fellowship, we respect the right of any member to individual growth and development. All of our individual members are challenged to work and be of service in any way a Higher Power sees fit to direct them.

Tradition Eight does not say: "N.A. members may not be professionals"; it says: "Narcotics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional." The Eighth Tradition gives our members the freedom to work in any professional or non-professional field outside of Narcotics Anonymous. However, those who work in the professional field of drug rehabilitation use the Twelve Traditions to guide them in their relationship with Narcotics Anonymous. They are careful not to use the name of Narcotics Anonymous to attract members into a particular hospital or recovery house, because this would affiliate N.A. with an outside enterprise. Nor do they use the N.A. name to solicit funds for their professional work.

It is our experience that N.A. members employed in the rehabilitative professions must take care to ensure that they do not confuse their work activities with Twelve Step work. Specifically, eight hours of paid labor--even in the field of recovery--does not and cannot become synonymous with effort given from the heart to carry the message of recovery in serving N.A. Aside from our professional endeavors, it is tantamount to our recovery that we freely give what was freely given to us.

To complete our examination of Tradition Eight, we need to define an N.A. service center. It may be at the area, regional or world level. Service centers serve the groups in the geographical area which supports them. Their function is that of a business office--a central point for referral of Twelve Step calls, distribution of public information, maintaining an inventory of literature, and operating a telephone helpline.

In carrying the message, many tasks need to be done. Volunteer work is the backbone of our service, but volunteers work only to the best of their abilities. Some of us offer our services to N.A. as committee members, coffee makers and so forth. We volunteer our talents to benefit Narcotics Anonymous. If we have the ability to type, keep track of funds or otherwise be useful to the Fellowship, we gratefully do so to partially repay the debt we feel we owe to N.A. Some of us, however, do not have the skills to perform some of these tasks. The principle of the Eighth Tradition takes this into consideration

and tells us that we may employ special workers in our service centers. If no member in our area has the skills or is able to volunteer services for these necessary functions, it may be necessary to hire a special worker so we can effectively carry the message of N.A. Without the help of these special workers, we might be unable to respond to many addicts who reach out for help.

In their enthusiasm, some of our members give too freely of what they don't have--money--in copying materials to distribute, opening postal boxes for N.A., etc. So, in the course of carrying the message, it is sometimes necessary to reimburse trusted servants for unusual expenses incurred. These may include monetary burdens resulting from tasks assigned by service boards or committees at the group, area, regional, or world level. It is the responsibility of the service boards or committees at the group, area, regional or world level to develop their own procedures and policies concerning the expenditures through the application of the Second Tradition principle of group conscience.

The Eighth Tradition addresses the use of paid help in our service centers. In our infancy, we used volunteers. But as we grow, we need such professionals as answering services, typists and clerical workers to carry on the administrative needs of our Fellowship. The purpose of service centers is to provide administrative and logistical assistance to our Fellowship, in

order to further our primary purpose. Service centers are also a contact point for addicts seeking recovery and for individuals outside the N.A. community.

The one-to-one relationship of an addict helping another is the key to understanding the Eighth Tradition. One addict carrying the message to another addict is a volunteer commitment, and should never be done for financial gain. We are simply recovering addicts helping other addicts to recover.

Because of the Eighth Tradition, the gift of recovery we receive in Narcotics Anonymous is free. When we consider our new life and all that we have to be grateful for, we become even more grateful when we realize that it was freely given to us. This realization inspires us to guard the Twelve Traditions carefully, ensuring that the miracle of recovery is freely available to all addicts who seek it.

Tradition Nine

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

The Ninth Tradition explains how we, as a Fellowship, structure ourselves to provide the services of N.A. What is "N.A., as such?" N.A., as such, is: Addicts meeting together in groups for the sole purpose of recovery from addiction, having no outside affiliations or financial support. The basic units of N.A. as such are the individual members and groups. It is not N.A. as such that is organized, but rather the service structure we create. Our directly responsible service boards and committees are composed of our leaders; those members in whom we have invested our trust. They do the jobs that are required in order to make the N.A. message--recovery from addiction--more generally available.

N.A. groups are unorganized in the sense that there is no authority within them. Secretaries, treasurers, group service representatives, coffee makers, members and newcomers are all equal. No individual runs any group or otherwise governs anything. Our Ninth Tradition says we need no bosses or leaders who govern our Fellowship. Our groups adhere to the spiritual principles of the Twelve Traditions because they must in order to survive. It is the suffering of addiction which disciplines us to this adherence; we need no disciplinarians in N.A.

The service boards and committees we create make it possible for us to be a unified Fellowship. However, even they are not an organization in the sense of being an authority or having power. Service committees at the world level are not "above" or "below" services at any other level of the Fellowship. None has the power to rule, censor, or dictate. Our experience has shown that addicts don't take orders well, especially from anyone viewed as an "authority." These boards and committees simply make suggestions and act in ways which are directly responsible to aid in carrying the message to the addict who still suffers.

The spiritual strength of Narcotics Anonymous is expressed in our groups. Ultimate authority over any aspect of our service structure is always maintained by the group conscience. All service boards and committees would cease to operate without the support and backing of our groups. It is our groups which provide the trusted servants who make up the service structure. One simple example shows us that if groups stopped electing GSR's to area service committees, the regional and world service structures would begin collapsing. Therefore the services provided by N.A. at each level are governed by the group conscience. N.A. is thus immune to outside control or influence, thanks to the Twelve Traditions which give us such an untraditional "organization."

The Ninth Tradition makes Narcotics Anonymous as a whole possible. Without the service structure, our groups would have

no connection with each other--no link, no relationship. There would be no unified "we," just individual groups. Our service boards and committees are all a part of N.A. There is no "us" and "them" or "we" and "they"--it is all "us" and "we." The N.A. member is the foundation of all service in Narcotics Anonymous. We are responsible for creating our service boards and committees, and our trusted servants are then in turn directly responsible to our group conscience. Because each group elects a group service representative to an area service committee, and likewise each area service committee elects a representative to a regional service committee, and each regional service committee elects a representative to our World Service Conference, we have a unified worldwide Fellowship. This service structure is not "N.A., as such," but it is a part of N.A. and is the supporting structure of our Fellowship.

If N.A., as such, were organized in a corporate sense with an authoritative structure, members in charge might see themselves as a governing body. If, by some chance, we accepted this oligarchy, N.A. members would lose the freedom to make decisions for ourselves. We would experience stifled growth and a feeling of uselessness to ourselves and the community. Our responsibility for our own recovery would be eliminated because we wouldn't have to make decisions. They would be made for us. However, by having no governing bodies in N.A., we gain the freedom to choose and be responsible in our recovery. Each

member is encouraged to take part in the Fellowship and contribute to the growth and strength of N.A.

Any attempt to organize recovering addicts personally or collectively would most likely prove futile. Imposing such control would contradict the principles of the program. Individually, we surrender our illusions of management and control of our lives to the God of our understanding when we take the Twelve Steps. Meeting together in groups, we share spiritually in the guidance of our Fellowship as part of the group conscience.

In order to meet together regularly, we form a structure. The group steering committee, composed of its members and led by trusted servants, is the primary example of a service board or committee directly responsible to those it serves. Each of the service boards and committees is different from the rest, because it serves different needs. Each one focuses its activities, such as public information, literature distribution or telephone helplines, on a specialized area of carrying the message of recovery.

Each N.A. group has a structure. Trusted servants of the group do business for N.A., as such. Members are elected to serve in some cases and volunteer in others. Those whom we entrust to lead us are guided by our Ultimate Authority - God as we understand Him - working through the collective conscience of the group's members. Our trusted servants do the business

required by the group to help N.A. survive and grow. They pay rent, answer letters, buy and distribute literature and perform other duties according to the group's desire to provide a suitable atmosphere of recovery. Sometimes the simplicity of this concept eludes us.

Our traditions are really quite simple and clear. We have on one hand "N.A., as such,"--the spiritual principles which make recovery possible, and members who use those principles to recover from addiction. On the other hand, are N.A. service boards and committees directly responsible to those they serve. These include the group officers or steering committee, area service committees, regional service committees, World Service Conference, World Service Board, World Service Office, and other committees. We thus have a clear means by which our principles may remain intact.

As a Fellowship, we conduct business to nurture our program and foster growth. Doing business for N.A is a real necessity. All of the business we do as trusted servants is guided by the same principle of direct responsibility to the group conscience. No matter what the scope or size of the services offered, the same principle applies. Our World Service Conference does not differ substantially from the group renting a meeting place, buying and distributing literature or communicating questions to group members. Our world service arms (the World Service Office, World Service Conference, and World Service Board) implement the

group conscience of the N.A. Fellowship between World Service Conference meetings, just as the group's trusted servants implement group conscience between business meetings. Trusted servants act on the collective decision of the group conscience in carrying out the business of N.A.

Our service boards and committees exist because we create them to provide services according to our needs. Experience has shown that we can best serve N.A. when our service boards and committees are directly responsible to those they serve. Services not directly responsible to those they serve ultimately fail. They contribute to confusion and disunity, and seldom achieve their goal. Directly responsible services, however, nurture growth and unity for Narcotics Anonymous. They help us carry our message. These services are generally successful and help N.A. to flourish.

We have considered unity as one important reason for creating service boards and committees. What are some other reasons? Is even this minimal organization necessary? Could we get along without a World Service Board or a World Service Conference? What purpose does an area service committee serve?

Most of us have long histories of rebelling against authority. It thus is no surprise that some members felt that the entire service structure should be discarded. It took us some time to become aware of the spiritual significance of the work of our service boards and committees. We slowly realized

how much we owed to those addicts who came before us, who worked, through various service committees, to prepare the way for us.

If individual groups could meet all the needs of addicts who still suffer, we would have no need for service boards and committees. The same applies to our members and groups: If we could have stopped using alone, then we would have no need for meetings. But we could never do it alone. We see that there are many services which are beyond the resources of a single group. This book you now hold in your hands and the N.A. Basic Text could never have been written by just one addict or group; they are the result of thousands of hours of effort by countless recovering members dedicated to carrying the message to the addict who still suffers. We see that the organizational structure of N.A. is absolutely crucial if we are to be effective in reaching out to suffering addicts.

We create service boards and committees to help us further our one primary purpose. Our service structure has done and continues to do more to advance our growth than anything else. We surely would not have come so far if not for the willingness and dedication of our trusted servants to participate in service committee work beyond the equally vital individual and group levels of service.

We, as a Fellowship, may only create service boards or committees directly responsible to our members. It is our spiritual duty to see that all service done in the name of N.A.,

all business conducted for N.A., remains directly responsible to the members of N.A. Our very lives depend on it.

Tradition Ten

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

What does it mean that N.A. should have no opinion on outside issues? The Tenth Tradition explains the reason: "hence the N.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy." This tradition is designed to save us from ourselves.

Most of us have opinions on just about everything, and many of us are eager to voice those opinions. We were great persuaders in our addiction, and in our recovery are likely to be even better. We think we know just how things ought to be, what is right and how the world should be run. We are great advice givers and are really good at proclaiming how others ought to live their lives. We may think we could improve on governments, social programs and could really design a wonderful world if given the opportunity.

There are many examples in which the potential exists for our groups or service boards and committees to be drawn into controversy. An example of this would be an N.A. member publicly speaking for N.A. who then expressed opinions on issues outside the principles of N.A. and his or her own recovery. We have seen members use such a platform to state their own views on issues in which they are personally involved, and this can be a source of confusion for those unfamiliar with Tradition Ten. It should be clarified that no member of N.A. speaks for Narcotics Anonymous.

The Program of Narcotics Anonymous speaks for itself.

To state outright that we, as a Fellowship, have "no opinion on outside issues" leaves no doubt as to where we stand. Quite simply, we stand aside or separate when political, educational, medical, psychological, social or religious issues are being discussed.

Narcotics Anonymous has no opinion on any of these outside issues. As individual members we may have opinions; however, when publicly carrying the N.A. message, we have none at all. N.A. has no one person or group representing the Fellowship as a whole. The group conscience of the Fellowship is our only voice, and is sought only on issues pertaining to N.A.

Tradition Ten promises anonymity for the protection of Narcotics Anonymous. It teaches us that we need to sacrifice our personal opinions when speaking publicly as N.A. members. We do not use the Program of Narcotics Anonymous as a platform for our own ideas and personal convictions, nor do we express any opinions on any outside issues.

If individual members acted as spokespersons for N.A., they could quickly be labeled as "experts." Imagine how some of us would react to the sudden label of "expert" after years of being society's outcasts. Most of our egos would explode, and the humility we require for recovery would be severely jeopardized. Addicts might end up quibbling among themselves for the position of N.A. spokesperson, and in the fury, lose sight of the goal of

recovery and helping the suffering addict. For this reason, the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous chooses not to participate in controversy. We do not call ourselves experts at anything; it is only through a Power greater than ourselves that we have the ability to stay clean and help other addicts to do the same.

A break in this tradition occurred in the following manner. An individual member received in-house treatment in a rehabilitation center. As part of his treatment he was introduced to the Narcotics Anonymous Program. This individual believed that without the treatment center, he would not have found N.A. or recovery. Six months after his discharge from the treatment center, he appeared on a radio talk show as part of a public information effort. When asked about his recovery and his involvement in N.A., he spoke at great length about the treatment center. He named it, praised its methods and expressed the opinion that everyone seeking recovery should first go through a treatment center which used the type of therapy his treatment center employed.

As a result of his statements, other treatment centers, which used different methods, stopped referring addicts to N.A. Medical and psychological experts began debating the pro's and con's of the treatment methods. In addition, some N.A. members, who did not go through treatment centers, became defensive about their recovery, and others who had gone through different treatment centers argued the success of their methods. The focus

of all these individuals then became treatment centers, and the N.A. message of recovery was lost.

If N.A. were to take a stand on any outside issue, someone would always disagree with us. Expressing opinions on any issue would alienate addicts both in and out of N.A. The strength and unity of Narcotics Anonymous is also affected by its reputation with the general public. A violation of Tradition Ten would surely alienate professionals in the medical and social services who refer suffering addicts to N.A.

The unity which Tradition Ten ensures is vital for the survival and growth of Narcotics Anonymous, as are all of the Twelve Traditions. The N.A. Fellowship needs to concentrate its energy and resources exclusively on recovery from addiction. This priority does not leave room for discussion or controversy about anything other than recovery. We can never forget that getting and staying clean is the most important thing any of us has ever done. We have to keep our priorities in order.

Addicts recovering in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous need to be free to go through the process of exchanging old ways for new ways. If we were tied up in press conferences, public harassment or the like, addicts would not recover. Breaking Tradition Ten would reverse our progress as well as sever the ties that bind us together.

The strict maintenance of Tradition Ten and all Twelve Traditions ensures unity as well as singleness of purpose. Our

credibility and ability to further our primary purpose are strengthened by eliminating controversy, internal dissension and outside pressures. The spiritual principles which attract us to a new way of life remain strong and are solidified as addicts everywhere seek and find recovery. "As long as the ties that bind us together are stronger than those that would tear us apart, all will be well."18

Tradition Eleven

"Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and film."

This tradition illustrates how Narcotics Anonymous can offer recovery to the suffering addict through means of attraction. What is it about our fellowship and its members that attracts the suffering addict? There are many aspects of our program that are attractive, but most importantly, we are living drug-free lives. Once we enter the doors and are exposed to clean addicts, something magical happens. We are somehow made aware of the love, caring and concern of the members. We hear and see things with which we, as addicts, can identify. The awareness generated through unity and care creates a desire for total abstinence, thereby developing self-worth, esteem, reliance and the desire to become a respectful, contributing member society.

There is no substitute for the adage, "One addict helping another is without parallel."¹⁹ One of the key attitudes which first attracts us to N.A. is hope.

As we go through life, many things catch our attention. If they have something to offer us, we are interested in pursuing them. This is the means by which N.A. attracts its members. What we have to offer is a clean way of life, and a Fellowship which provides an atmosphere of love and concern for all drug addicts.

N.A. has no need of promotion. Members of Narcotics Anonymous are living, breathing examples of recovery from addiction. In effect, this tradition ensures publicly the spiritual condition of our Fellowship. In our dealings with the public, our spiritual condition will be evident.

Promotion of N.A. would take away the spiritual aspects of the program. Promotion is pressure. It is the glorification of a product. It announces only the features of the program, not the spirit of it.

Promotion is pushing--selling something regardless of the price in terms of human dignity or spiritual values. Promoting often is an end in itself, and its use in N.A. would reflect self-glorification. We should never misrepresent what we offer, even if by doing so we might be able to get a few more addicts to attend our meetings. It is easy to make promises. If we bribed addicts with any rewards other than recovery, they would probably flock to our doors. But how many would have a desire to stop using? How many would leave as soon as they found out that we could neither grant nor keep any promises? How many would never come back? How many would die without ever having a chance to find recovery? In order to effectively carry the message of recovery, we do not use promotion to encourage addicts to come to us, nor do we use promotions to make ourselves more acceptable. Our recovery speaks for itself.

Tradition Eleven illustrates that we, as a Fellowship, have

an ongoing relationship with society. If we are to carry the very precious message given to us, then this relationship must be maintained in a responsible and loving manner. Perhaps in no other area does the need for anonymity become so crucial.

The message of recovery can be carried in many ways. If we are to reach the addict who still suffers, we must make our presence known to the general public. To broaden the scope of those we reach, many groups and service committees have turned to the use of radio, press and television. These types of media link us with the general public and can reach segments of society. Our message is best delivered with a quiet dignity, offering the hope of a drug-free life.

There is no need to recruit new members. However, the media may be utilized to let the community know that N.A. exists, that the Fellowship is available. Contact with press, radio, films, and T.V. can be a sensitive area. The N.A. Public Information Handbook helps clarify this issue. These guidelines, which describe how to protect the Fellowship and individuals selected to be in the public eye, can prevent any misconceptions. Public information committees can be established at area and regional levels, where knowledge and experience with the traditions are available. Even where N.A. is completely new and an area service structure has not been established, those wishing to use the media should consult the nearest public information committee or the World Service Conference Public Information Committee.

The maintenance of anonymity serves a two-fold function: It protects individual members from the pressure or temptation to speak for N.A. as a whole. It also protects the Fellowship, as a whole, from being judged by the words or actions of one recovering individual. It is possible that addicts would seek fame just to see their names in the paper. It would be very damaging to N.A. if a member publicly broke anonymity and then relapsed. The public view of the person who had gone to N.A., but had not stayed clean, might result in assumptions that the N.A. program does not work. In a situation such as this, countless future members might then painfully complete the dying process of active addiction.

Another danger of broken anonymity relates to the possibility that an addict could be frightened away by seeing an N.A. member give public testimony. They might think they would be required to do the same if they became involved in the N.A. Program. For this reason, breaking anonymity is against the traditions. The last thing addicts need in our recovery from addiction is a spotlight on our lives.

When we came to this Fellowship, we learned that we were not the center of the universe. We came to N.A. to recover from drug addiction. We remain first to stay abstinent, and then to carry the message that recovery is possible. Any other activity can only take away from what we have to offer. If we can help an addict stop using and find a new way of life, we will all

benefit.

Anonymity is a point of personal freedom and recovery. No members of N.A. should ever place themselves in a position in which they have to make a statement for N.A. as a whole. No one member is N.A., and no one member can speak for N.A. There is no elite class, nor are there any special members. Each of us has our own story and our own recovery. Individually, we are powerless; but as a Fellowship, we bring the hope of recovery to countless suffering addicts throughout the world.

Tradition Twelve

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

The Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous complement each other and are bound together by the principle of anonymity. Anonymity is a basic guiding principle of Narcotics Anonymous. It is truly the foundation of all our traditions. In order to survive, we have to set aside our differences and become a part of a greater whole. What is anonymity? It is an opportunity to give without recognition. We find that giving in this way allows us to feel good about ourselves as we learn to practice the N.A. principles. We see an attitude of anonymity throughout each of the Twelve Traditions.

The principle of anonymity is based on honesty and humility. We honestly acknowledge that we can't take credit for our recoveries or the things which become possible through recovery. The awakening of humility in each of us occurs when we give up trying to manage our lives, and begin to depend on a Power greater than ourselves. Anonymity tells us to listen to the message, not the messenger.

Anonymity is the principle whereby we become willing to place our egos and personalities second to both recovery and group unity. All of us have egos, and it is normal to seek our "strokes" for a job well done. However, most of us got to N.A. because we had problems with our egos; constant praise and

recognition severely pollute the humility which we require for recovery. In recovery, we have found that humility is a spiritual tool to be nourished and cherished.

Developing humility through living the Twelve Steps is the channel which makes anonymity possible. We have experienced great personal regard in giving of ourselves without seeking or expecting recognition. This principle helps us to establish our priorities, with recovery in its proper perspective at the head of the spectrum. As we experience ongoing recovery, we begin to realize that all of our needs are somehow met. Humbly aware and grateful for this prosperity, we become able to give to others.

Anonymity within the Fellowship is important. Gossip and criticism of our fellow addicts destroys the unity of our Fellowship. Have you ever been told that a fellow addict had relapsed, only to find them still clean? Or have you ever sat down for coffee after a meeting, only to hear another member's inventory being taken for them? N.A. is a Fellowship of recovering addicts. We are all growing and we all have character defects. Acceptance of other addicts, including their character defects, is love. As recovering addicts, we need an atmosphere of love and support in which to grow. Members, especially newcomers, need to feel safe within our Fellowship. An atmosphere of trust allows members to share openly. We can help each other by keeping what is shared in a group, or on a one-to-one basis, to ourselves. In N.A., a desire for recovery

helps us keep principles before personalities.

In our recovery, we need to open our minds and practice anonymity in sharing the message. We try not to cloud the message by placing expectations or limitations on what we hear, based on any messenger's length of clean time, sex, color or our feelings about that particular person. A God of our understanding can work through any of us in sharing recovery. If we are able to look past the false pride and ego which have cut us off from others so often in our past, we can listen openly to other people's points of view. Rarely do we fail to benefit in some way from our ability to listen anonymously.

The principle of anonymity is the key to understanding the Twelfth Tradition and how it is the foundation of all our traditions. The First Tradition talks about common welfare and N.A. unity. The placing of common welfare before personal welfare in the group setting is a direct application of anonymity. We surrender our own self-will and place the welfare of Narcotics Anonymous first, because our lives depend on it.

The Second Tradition focuses on one Ultimate Authority. No single person, no personality, has N.A. authority. This is vested in a loving God to whom we have turned over our wills and lives. We trust this God, expressed through the group conscience, to guide our affairs. Group conscience is different than group opinion, which can be influenced by contending personal views. This type of conflict is contrary to the spirit

of anonymity, and often leads to controversy. As members of a group, we can sense the presence or absence of spiritual direction. When we feel it is lacking, we turn to the God of our understanding to act as our Ultimate Authority.

The anonymity of a trusted servant typifies our method of leadership. Each recovering addict is important, but none is so important as the group or N.A. as a whole. Without our servants, willing and worthy, there could be no N.A. Fellowship. We need to bear carefully in mind the principle of anonymity which guides us to serve selflessly. Our names are not important; it is what we are able to do to help others that counts.

The Third Tradition is a statement of anonymity. We do not define who our members may or may not be. We only require that they have a desire to stop using. Nothing else matters. This desire is the one requirement for membership in the N.A. program. We either come with it or develop it before the program will work for us. If we do not surrender to the principle of anonymity but cling instead to our delusions of uniqueness, we are unable to begin the steps, and thus we prevent our own recovery. However, as our understanding of anonymity increases, we find that membership in N.A. and recovery become possible.

Anonymity makes possible the autonomy of our Fourth Tradition. How does anonymity relate to the right of an N.A. group to have the format and style of its choosing? The Fourth Tradition gives each group the freedom to develop its own

personality as a spiritual entity. However, the principle of anonymity, which reminds us to place principles before personalities, puts the personality of our groups in check - the personality of a group must not affect Narcotics Anonymous as a whole. Each group, like each individual, is but a small part of a greater whole. Much of our freedom results from this balance. We experience freedom when we respect the freedom of others. Group autonomy gives interest to our meetings, while maintaining the spiritual qualities of N.A.

Without the principle of anonymity, each group could set itself up as something unique from the others. However, no N.A. group may dictate or set standards for other groups. Without anonymity, our groups might begin competing with each other for members or for recognition. The resulting loss of unity would divert us from our primary purpose and eventually destroy N.A. Because anonymity applies to groups as well as individuals, carrying the message rises above the personality of our groups.

Our Fifth Tradition says that each group has but one primary purpose, to carry its message to the addict who still suffers. This unity of purpose is the tie that binds our groups together. Our groups are not truly different; each has the same spiritual aim. Our individual and group anonymity is the key to maintaining the atmosphere of recovery found in our groups. This atmosphere of anonymous recovery makes it possible for any addict to find help in Narcotics Anonymous.

Tradition Six tells us that we ought never endorse, finance, or lend the N.A. name to any facility or outside enterprise. To violate this tradition would be to lose our anonymity by placing other considerations ahead of our spiritual aims. Just as individuals and groups practice anonymity, so does this principle apply to Narcotics Anonymous as a whole. Our name is safeguarded and kept anonymous and is not linked to any other facility or organization. We refuse to lend our name to anyone or endorse anything. The principle of anonymity reminds us to maintain our integrity rather than to endorse or associate with anything or anyone other than N.A. The suggestion that money, property or prestige have anything to do with personal recovery in N.A. is contrary to all our beliefs and principles. As addicts, we have probably been involved in the past with persons and/or institutions who, despite their money, property and prestige, were unable to keep us clean. If we do not practice anonymity, problems of money, property and prestige would surely divert us from our primary purpose.

Our Seventh Tradition guarantees N.A. members the right and privilege to share in the support of Narcotics Anonymous. Each of us is given the equal opportunity to help anonymously. We also do not allow members to contribute more than their share; to do so would be to encourage the loss of their anonymity. Another way we practice anonymity is in regard to funding from sources outside the N.A. community. Regardless of the identity or intent

of an outside source, we do not accept financial contributions, so that the freedom and integrity of our groups are maintained.

In regard to our Eighth Tradition, we do not single out our members as "professionals." Professionals are defined by their education, background and experience. N.A. members are defined by a desire to stop using. The principle of anonymity ensures that every N.A. member has an equal opportunity to experience personal growth in recovery.

Anonymity further applies to the hiring of our special workers. We do not discriminate against addicts or non-addicts in employing people to serve the needs of the Fellowship. As with any organization, we try to get the best person for the job to ensure the best services. These special workers are skilled and qualified to do things for our Fellowship on a business-like basis. This frees our members in service to focus on carrying the message of N.A., which requires experience and wisdom that can be gained only through recovery. Non-addict special workers provide a special service by performing certain duties addicts could not undertake due to the necessity of safeguarding their anonymity.

Our Ninth Tradition makes possible the creation and operation of service boards and committees. These boards and committees provide services beyond what individuals and single groups can do. We see the principle of anonymity in that these committees are not responsible to any particular individual, but rather are

accountable to the groups and members of N.A. By practicing anonymity, our service boards and committees are protected from individual power struggles.

Another way anonymity applies to our service boards and committees is that although our actions are surely influenced by our personalities, we are directly responsible to those we serve. The work we do for N.A. is important, and it is hear that we see the necessity of applying the Twelfth Tradition. We are able to be of assistance because we are guided by the principle of helping others. When personalities get in the way of carrying the message, our Twelfth Tradition has been violated. A service committee does not reflect the opinion(s) of an individual member, but rather the collective conscience of many anonymous members.

Anonymity applies to members of service boards and committees because none of them has a greater or lesser voice in a Narcotics Anonymous meeting. For example, an elected trusted servant, when attending an N.A. meeting, is not acknowledged in the meeting for his/her position in service, but rather for a desire to stay clean.

The Tenth Tradition limits the growth of powerful personalities and safeguards anonymity by having no opinion on outside issues. Individual members practice anonymity by not representing themselves as spokespersons for N.A. If we maintain our anonymity at the public level, it is impossible to thrust our

Fellowship into public controversy. When controversy exists, people take sides and personalities come forward; as this happens, anonymity disintegrates. The Tenth Tradition prevents this, thus ensuring unity.

In our Eleventh Tradition, we find that the way we relate to society in general is by practicing personal anonymity. By maintaining our personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films, none of us is singled out. No one of us represents N.A., for to do so would be to place ourselves above our common welfare. Our relationship with the public is based on attraction rather than promotion. In this way, we avoid both setting the individual up in the public eye as a spokesperson for N.A., and the self-glorification which could result. In N.A., the recovery and well-being of the members are placed ahead of everything else.

We have discussed how the principle of anonymity is the foundation of all our traditions. We see now that this principle is a guiding force in our spiritual and emotional growth, and in our interactions with others. The Twelfth Tradition reminds us to place principles before personalities. When we see other members experiencing difficulties or upset, we may be tempted to judge. However, we realize that the recovery process is different for everyone, and the members' upset may be perfectly reasonable and appropriate. Judgement and criticism have no place in our program or our services.

We are all imperfect instruments of a loving God of our understanding. While studying and learning spiritual principles may be a lot of work, we develop a willingness to go to any lengths to find lasting remedies for the various difficulties we encounter as we grow. When we become involved in conflicts or disagreements, we apply the principles of the traditions, using a group conscience which looks to the heart of matters, without the influence of personalities.

Anonymity embraces our Fellowship and is woven throughout our traditions. It is one of the basics of recovery. The principle of anonymity protects us from our defects of personality and character. Where anonymity exists, personalities and differences have no power. This immunity from personality clashes is the first shelter most addicts have ever known.

Our lives are reconstructed through the Twelve Steps, with the protection of the Twelve Traditions. Lives once racked with confusion and pain are slowly transformed. A peace of mind and sense of direction come to us as a result of applying N.A.'s Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. We are grateful to those who have gone before us and to the members clean in N.A. today. We do our part to make recovery available to any addict who wants it. We acknowledge the power of a loving God in our lives who provides the strength and guidance we so desperately need. These gifts are ours to keep and enhance, as long as we keep giving them away the N.A. way.

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.
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