

STEP 3 LOS ANGELES DRAFT 3/5/89 (STEP3-2.DOC)

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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.*"

Since we are addicts and not angels, Step Three really is uncharted territory for us: making a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a God of our understanding. Fortunately, we are not unprepared.

Practicing each Step prepares us spiritually for the next one, and the First and Second Steps set us up for the Third. We admit our lives have been run by defective thinking, that we are powerless to do anything about it. We admit we have been insane, believing a distorted version of reality that propels us down the road to ruin. But we do have hope. We are coming to believe there is a Higher Power that can help us. We are not doomed to do what the disease tells us we have to do. We can change. We can in fact stop acting out the insanity.

So now what? It is terrifying for us to stop our old, familiar behavior. If we quit acting insane, what do we do instead? We need help. We need to continue with the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous. They show us what to do and how to live. They open our eyes to our own spiritual dimension. Honesty, humility, acceptance, surrender, faith, love -- the spiritual principles in the Twelve Steps provide a brand-new road for our thoughts and actions to run on.

Laying down this new foundation isn't easy. We are getting rid of our old ideas and making way for the new. That's never easy. We have to practice. But it's the very act of practicing spiritual principles over a period of time that carves out our new path.

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Like all the Steps, Step Three is an action step. To begin with, it tells us to make a decision. This is one of the first mature and responsible decisions many of us ever have made.

We've seen that in our active addiction, much of our decision making was a disaster, because it was dictated by our obsessions and compulsions. So while our denial told us we were in charge, our disease condemned us to make the same destructive choices again and again. At other times, we saw ourselves as victims who had all our decisions forced on us by family, lovers, employers, society. Ironically, we were comfortable in our victimization: as long as our self-delusion convinced us we really had no options, we could blame everyone else for the decisions we felt we had to make.

Now we are asked to make a decision for ourselves. Because we're addicts, we don't do it easily. On unfamiliar ground, we tend to get paralyzed. Which way should we go? What's in it for us? What if we make a mistake? What if we don't know all the options in advance? Before we make the tiniest decision, we want to know the outcome. Given even a simple choice between left and right, we addicts -- who so often risked our lives playing Russian roulette with drugs -- can become frozen with fear of the unknown.

Our fear would have us avoid the Third Step. Our sponsors tell us that's natural. Our fear causes us to resist our spiritual journey. It may disguise itself as an attitude of indifference or intolerance toward the spiritual principles in the Steps. But we're told that a little bit of willingness goes a long way. Just being willing to make this Step Three decision contradicts the close-mindedness of our disease -- the stubbornness, rebelliousness, and defiance that protect our fear and keep us sick.

Willingness opens us up to practicing the spiritual principle of faith. Faith fights our fear-induced paralysis. Faith allows us to make a decision without first knowing the outcome, without any up-front guarantees. In the beginning, we make this decision on blind faith, daring to set off down a path many of us never have travelled before.

The Third Step asks us to step out of the familiar confines of our disease to take a very specific action. It is now our turn. We don't wait for a Higher Power to perform magic on us. We make the decision for ourselves, on our own.

As bizarre as it may seem to all of us at first, we make a conscious decision to have hope. Our hope is nurtured by the evidence we see in Narcotics Anonymous: everything is going to be okay, if we just continue living according to these Steps. The Fellowship tells us we are not responsible for our disease, but we are

responsible for our recovery. Just for the moment, just for today, we choose to take that responsibility. In the beginning, without knowing fully what it is or what it means for us, yes, we make a decision to work this Program. We make a decision to commit ourselves to the Steps. We make a decision for recovery.

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What we decide to do is to take our will and our lives and then to turn them over -to the care of a God of our understanding.- Before we turn them over, we begin learning what they are. We've actually been examining our will and our lives in the First and Second Steps. In Step Three, we continue looking into ourselves, in spite of our natural resistance. We apply the spiritual principle of honesty to keep chipping away at our self-deception and denial. We ask ourselves: What is our will, our self-will? How does it play out in our lives?

Our will is what we want -- what we want to do, what we think we need, the way we want to be, the way we want others and the world to be. And when we act out on our will -- or try to make the world conform to our will -- the result is made manifest in our lives. Our will is what we want. Our lives are what we get.

There's nothing innately wrong with will. Human beings have self-will -- needs, desires, and wants -- and the means to fulfill them. The problem for us addicts is that our self-will often is shaped by self-centered fear, distorted thinking, obsession and compulsion, sick ego and pride, and self-centeredness. Quite a package!

For instance, often what we want for ourselves is at best inappropriate, at worst lethal. But our twisted thinking tells us that what we want is exactly what we need to fix us and make us whole.

Often the way we want others to think, feel, and behave has to do with our own needs and not theirs. But our sick ego and pride tell us that we know what's right for everybody. We are so obsessed with what we want that we're blind to the needs of others. We often have no idea how we really affect other people, so we trample on their desires on our way to fulfilling our own. We can't figure out why they aren't grateful that we're trying to bring them into line.

When it comes to the world at large, often the way we want it to be has nothing

to do with the way it is. But our childish self-centeredness and arrogance tell us that our fantasies are valid. We can't figure out why constantly banging our heads against reality doesn't make reality change.

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In every area -- self, relationships, society -- acting out on sick self-will -- we go down a path of destruction. We are not bad people. We just don't know another way, and we're doing the best we can. We pursue our obsessions to the bitter end, because they are grounded in fear. We are afraid of what will happen if we don't get our way. And we're afraid we won't get our way without manipulating and controlling. We are afraid to be out of control, because we do not trust. Our disease prevents us from seeing the truth: that we are okay and we will be okay, if only we'd stop controlling.

Some of us come to N.A. with a certain amount of clarity on the subject of our own will. We've already been beaten to the ground by our disease. We know how it distorts our self-will, because we've experienced the near-ruination of our lives. We know that our minds are chaotic with static and turmoil, negativity and criticism. We are quite sure that any thoughts or urges or decisions coming out of all that noise must be sick.

But in the beginning of recovery, many of us can see how our addiction works only in the area of drugs. We admit that we have a disease that twists our will when it comes to drugs. We come to accept that as addicts, our will to use is insane. Even so, after we get clean, we may still want to use. When we share that at our N.A. meetings, we are greeted with nods and smiles of recognition. We are told there is nothing odd about a drug addict wanting to use drugs. It's a normal facet of addict self-will -- and it decreases and even disappears with time and the Steps.

It's much harder for us to see how our disease infects our will in other areas of our lives, too -- how, for instance, acting exactly the way we want in our relationships very often pushes people away and tears those relationships apart. Since our disease is a disease of denial, and since we don't get cured overnight, we cannot see our will at work in all aspects of our lives all at once. It takes a great deal of practicing the spiritual principles of honesty, humility, and acceptance to see past our rationalizations, justifications, and excuses all the way to the truth of our self-will.

Our sponsors tell us that continuing with the Steps, we will learn more and more about the nature of our self-will. It's yet another aspect of our journey of self-discovery. As the fog lifts -- as our denial recedes and our humility and self-acceptance grow -- we are able to see ever more clearly whether we're acting from sick self-will or the spiritual principles of recovery.

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For now, we characterize our addict's self-will this way: We want what we want, and we want it now -- and never mind the consequences. Another way to describe our will is this: "I wanna! I gotta! I'm gonna!" An infantile tantrum is our theme song.

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In Step Three we make make a conscious decision to take our will and our lives and turn them over. What that means is acknowledging what our will is -- what we want, what we think we need, the way we want our lives to be, the way we want others and the world to be -- and then letting it go. Working the Third Step means making a decision that before we act out our will, we turn it over and let it go. We acknowledge, for example, that we want to do something self-destructive, but we turn over that want - - and we don't do it.

Of course, we addicts don't turn anything over naturally or gracefully. We resist. We dig in our heels. The very idea of letting it go and turning it over collides head-on with our nature as addicts -- our self-centeredness, our grandiosity, our need to manage and control. Once again, we have to practice spiritual principles that oppose the urgings of our disease. In this case, we practice the spiritual principle of surrender. Applying the principle, we are working the Step.

We have to work on surrender, because our disease tells us that surrender is defeat, that loss of control is failure. Even more extreme, our disease tells us that working the Third Step is dangerous. It assures us that if things don't go the way we think they should go, we'll disintegrate or disappear or die. But we have a new way to answer our disease. We return to the First and Second Steps.

The First Step shows us again that our ability to manage and control our lives is only an illusion. Our Second Step labels as insanity the way we rush headlong to self-destruction -- propelled by sick self-will. And now the Third Step tells us to accept all

this -- to surrender our will, to loosen our tight grip on our faulty version of reality. We relax our hold, release our will, and let it go. We surrender our control, because our control is bound to kill us.

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Turning over our will and our lives also requires practicing the spiritual principle of humility -- the opposite of our self-centeredness and arrogance. We practice humility when we admit that our own disease is the major obstacle in our lives -- that we are the ones in our own way. Humility allows us to acknowledge that we must turn over our will and our lives if we are to experience recovery and a new way of life. Humility teaches us that we are not alone and do not act alone.

Turning it over also is an exercise in the spiritual principle of faith. Faith is the opposite of our need for control. Our addict impulse is for answers first, actions later. In other words, we want no risks, only guarantees. Having faith is not knowing the end result of turning over our will and our lives -- and doing it anyway. Faith is the act of surrendering the outcome, letting go of the results. If we want something different, we have to do something different. We have to risk recovery.

In faith, with humility, we practice surrendering our will and our lives. We turn them over. We take a deep breath, shut our eyes, hold our noses, and take the leap.

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We are not leaping into the void. We are not turning our will and our lives over to chance. Step Three says we make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to something that can take care of us. We surrender our will and lives to the care of God, as we understand him. In the face of our self-destructive nature, which for years demanded we turn our will and our lives over to the care of drugs, this is a promising alternative indeed.

If we're going to turn our will and our lives over to God's care, then we need to continue developing a concept of God we can work with -- a God of our own understanding. That means the nature of our personal God is up to each one of us. We don't need to have a perfect understanding and a detailed portrait of God before this Step can work. We turn our will and our lives over to the care of our God, as we understand him right at this moment.

We urge those of us who are bothered by the words "God" or "him" in Step Three not to worry. Many of us feel that way at first. We are told that those words are just shorthand -- a simple way to identify any Higher Power who does for us what we can't do for ourselves. We find our own Higher Power and call it what we like. There are atheists among us who do not believe in God but do believe there is something greater than ourselves and our disease.

Journeying through the Steps helps each of us develop an individual concept of a Higher Power. We have experienced that our personal understanding of that Power changes, deepens, and grows the longer we apply these Steps to our lives.

Many of us begin developing our concept of a Higher Power from the characteristics described in the Steps. The Steps talk about a Power that is greater than ourselves, that can restore us to sanity -- and here in Step Three, that can be trusted to care for our will and our lives.

The idea of care is alien to many of us who have had bad experiences with being taken care of and even with taking care of ourselves. We may associate being cared for with victimization or unhealthy dependency. Many of us regard being cared for as shameful -- a sign of our weakness and inability to cope on our own. We may feel that in turning our will over to another's care, we are turning our will over to another's control.

That's our disease talking. The spiritual principles of honesty and humility tell us the exact opposite: that it's realistic for us addicts to admit that we're unable to cope alone. And our personal experience with N.A. recovery shows us we aren't coping alone at all. After all, suddenly we aren't using drugs. Some power other than our addiction must be at work. We are being cared for.

Some of our sponsors suggest that we assign another attribute to this Higher Power. That attribute is love. These sponsors talk about a loving God -- about turning our will and our lives over to the care of a loving God of our understanding. Many of us believe the very nature of this Power is unconditional love and acceptance and care. Those among us who grew up fearing and resenting a wrathful God -- or certain that there is no God -- often find this new conception difficult but preferable and worth trying. If an old concept of God doesn't feel right, we work on changing it until we're

comfortable.

Believe in N.A. Believe in the Twelve Steps. Believe in the spiritual principles. Believe that we believe. Some of us believe in a traditional concept of God. Some of us believe there is innate wisdom inside of us that we've been too sick to heed -- a higher consciousness of what is right, good, healthy, and sane. Some of us adopt our sponsor's God until we can find our own. It doesn't matter what our conception of God is -- or whether we call it God or not.

We practice the spiritual principle of faith. We work at believing in something beyond our will and our way, our drugs and our disease. It's the search that matters, the spiritual journey, the growing connection with a Higher Power that helps us in our recovery.

What can we depend on? Whom can we trust? Developing our own personal concept of a God whom we can depend on and trust -- who cares and takes care -- is a very practical action we take in our recovery. It's practical, because it works.

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In Narcotics Anonymous, we know that when we decide to turn our will and our lives over to the care of our disease, the results are jails, institutions, dereliction, and death. But what happens when we make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understand him? It means we make a decision to defy our disease, having faith that we are going to be okay.

The easiest way to see how the Third Step works is by applying it to the area of drugs. For instance, say we want to use drugs. Our denial may mask our simple desire to use -- trick us into confusing our wants with needs. Our disease may tell us that it's a necessity that we use, that we need to have drugs right away, that we are going to do whatever it takes to get those drugs immediately -- that in fact, it's a matter of life and death. But it's not really all that complicated. We don't need to use. In fact, we never need to use again. We just want to use, that's all. That is our will.

What do we do? We go back to the First Step. We admit we are powerless over our disease and the way it twists our thinking. Our powerlessness over our addiction means we don't make ourselves begin obsessing about drugs. We're addicts, and one way

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our disease expresses itself is in the obsession to use. If we then act out the obsession, we are sucked into a vicious spiral of compulsion to use without end. Once again, we admit we're powerless over the disease of addiction, that our lives are unmanageable by us.

We move to the Second Step. We catalogue the insanity at hand: thinking and obsessing about drugs, thinking that we need to use them, thinking we'll die without them, planning the strategies and justifications for using. We acknowledge and accept our insanity -- and we come to believe once again that there is a Power that can restore us to sanity in this area of our lives. We re-experience that hope for recovery. In order to let that Power come into our lives, we move on.

We move to Step Three. We make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God. We acknowledge what our will is in this instance: we want to use drugs. At the very same time that we have a desire to stay clean, we want to use. We do not tear our hair out over what our disease tells us to do. We do not beat ourselves up about it. We do not struggle with it. Whether it's just a fleeting thought or a full-blown obsession, at last we actually can do something positive and practical about it. We work the Third Step on it. We turn it over.

We make a conscious decision that instead of acting out on our will, we're going to turn it over to God's care. We let go of our will to use. One more time, we make a decision that just for today, we won't use, no matter what.

By turning over our will and surrendering our lives, we get ourselves out of our own way. We get our will out of the picture. We make room in our lives for the Power who is greater than ourselves, who can restore us to sanity, and who can take care of us. We ask God to help us with our obsession to use, to help us go through our thoughts and feelings without destroying ourselves.

Recovering addicts in the N.A. Fellowship share with us about some of the results of living the Third Step: We experience that we are not alone. We find that God does help us go through whatever we have to go through without our using. We always survive our obsessions, and they always pass. We really never have to use drugs again. We really can learn how to live beautiful and fulfilling lives clean. When we act on our

will to use, then the drugs and our addiction work in our lives. When we surrender our will to God's care, then God can work in our lives.

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But now what? If we're not going to act on our self-will, what are we going to do? We have found that hearing about recovery and talking about recovery don't change us. Taking action changes us. If we're powerless over what our sick thinking tells us to do, then we need to get some direction. Living the Third Step means asking our Higher Power to show us what action to take instead. Many of us get down on our knees to ask our Higher Power for help with a prayer such as this:

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"God -- I am an addict, I am powerless  
over my addiction, and my life is  
unmanageable. But I have come to believe  
that you can restore me to sanity. I turn  
my will and my life over to your care.  
Please guide me in my recovery. Show me  
what to do. Teach me how to live. Just  
for today, through each moment, help me  
accept your will."

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Just saying such a prayer -- reaching beyond our disease for help  
-- is an exercise in recovery. Even if we're only mouthing the words and acting as if we  
have faith, we are working against the despair and self-centeredness of our disease.  
Asking a caring God for help -- an act of ego-deflating humility -- actually opens us up to  
being helped.

When we ask a Higher Power we can't see or hear to show us what action we  
need to take, how do we get our answers? We have come to believe that God speaks to  
us through those around us. We addicts finally have found people we can turn to for  
help, insight, guidance, and direction -- right here in Narcotics Anonymous. They are  
recovering addicts who have experienced exactly what we're going through.

We get suggestions and directions from our sponsors. We get input from other  
friends in the Fellowship. We get insight when members share their experiences at  
meetings. In the beginning, it seems miraculous. From these sources, we're hearing the  
answers we need -- answers that sound "right" to us.

What should we do right now? The answers to that question never will be: Use  
drugs. Go on a rampage. Destroy ourselves. Lash out at others. Isolate from human  
contact. And plunge ourselves into tension and turmoil. We can say with calm certainty  
that directions like those come from self-will shaped by the disease of addiction.

Instead, if we listen really well, we hear directions like these: Call our sponsor.  
Go to a meeting. Write about our insanity. Reach out to a newcomer. Go back to work.  
Get some rest. Ask for help. Say a prayer. And don't use, no matter what. Our

experience is that directions like these promote recovery.

When we try these actions on, they often feel awkward and don't seem to fit us well. They're not supposed to. They're new. We practice them until they fit a good deal of the time.

What is God's will for us? We do know that a loving and caring God that is capable of restoring us to sanity would want us to be clean, to be free of all expressions of the disease in our lives, to experience peace and security and joy. We believe God wants us work this N.A. Program and to practice the spiritual principles in the Twelve Steps: honesty and acceptance and faith and love. But how does that translate into specific action? What does God want us to do right now?

Wouldn't we addicts just love to be able to figure out every aspect of God's will. After all, that would be the ultimate fix -- an intellectual exercise, producing painless, perfect knowledge in advance. But that's impossible. If we had perfect knowledge of God's will for us, it's we who would be God. We aren't.

We do the best we can, as addicts and as human beings. In time, as we continue to apply these Steps to our lives, the principles of the program are internalized and integrated within us. Then when we ask ourselves, "What action should we take right now? What might a loving, caring God want us to do? What might God's will be?" -- many of the answers well up from deep inside us, from our recovery and not from our disease.

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The scary part about the Third Step is that we don't know what will happen after we do it. We may know the way we want it to turn out or the way we think it will turn out. We may delude ourselves into believing that turning it over means saying, "Okay, God, take me -- I'm yours," and then sitting back and waiting for our wildest dreams to come true. Or we may be absolutely sure that if we surrender our way and do something different, there'll be no end of disaster, defeat, and doom. Both kinds of thinking reflect our disease, not our recovery.

That's where our faith comes in. We turn our will over -- and leave the results to God. That is the exact opposite of the normal addict reflex -- wanting to know exactly

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what's going to happen next. But now we are building new reflexes. We do not know the result of turning our will and our lives over to God's care. But we do it anyway. We have picked a Higher Power we can trust. So we work on having faith that if we turn our lives over to his care, we are all right. And we believe the opposite is true, too: if we don't surrender, we're back on the road to relapse.

After all, it's not as if letting go of the way we lived is letting go of lives filled with happiness, peace, and freedom. Rather we are turning over lives that, with our best efforts, have been totally unmanageable. We have faith that living in partnership with a Higher Power is far better than living by our own power alone.

Even if we have only blind faith -- and even if we're only acting as if we trust in God -- the Third Step works anyway. We do not need to see the force of gravity in order for it to keep us from flying off into outer space. The Program works the same way. We turn our lives over, let go, take action, leave the results to God, and accept those results.

In the area of drugs, that means we make a decision to turn our will to use drugs over to God's care. We ask God to help us not act out on our self-will. We ask God to show us what action to take right now. We take that action. We go to a meeting, call our sponsors -- and just for right now, we don't use no matter what. We work on our faith. Having faith means knowing we are going to be cared for, and we're going to be just fine. As a matter of fact, if we stay clean, we are fine right now, even though we may not feel that way. In the care of the disease, we are not all right. In God's care, we are all right. That's faith.

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The Third Step works in any area of our lives. We acknowledge where our sick self-will is running things, make the decision, turn it over, ask for help, do what we're supposed to do, and leave the results to our Higher Power -- knowing and accepting that everything is going to be all right.

We addicts don't make this surrender easily or lightly -- or totally. As newcomers we often complain, "We turned our will over, but then we took it right back. We turned it over again and took it back again. We must be doing something wrong!"

But we are told we're doing absolutely nothing wrong at all.

There are no sudden saints in Narcotic Anonymous. The Third Step is not a quick fix. We do not turn our lives over one fine day and then do only God's will forever after. It just doesn't work that way. To have self-will is part of being human. To have destructive self-will is part of being an addict.

Now we're privileged to be in a Program where at last we can do something about our disease. Practicing the Third Step over and over is recovery. Every single time we're aware that we're caught in defective or destructive thinking or behavior, we can make the Third Step decision again. That is exactly what we do with our self-will: we turn it over. We keep having the disease -- so we keep applying the Step and keep turning it over, keep working on leaving the results to God.

And we can let go of our self-will only when we are aware of it -- and only when we're willing to do so. Because of our disease, we're often not willing -- and we're even more often unaware.

After all, denial and self-deception are the hallmarks of addiction. With the very best of intentions, we may think we're turning over all aspects of our self-will and every single facet of our lives to the care of our Higher Power. We may think we're doing it, but we're not. There's nothing bad or shameful about that. The fact is, our denial prevents us from seeing all the ways our disease affects our behavior. Denial keeps us unconscious of aspects of our self-will -- how we try to manipulate, manage, and control outcomes in just about every area of our lives. We deceive ourselves with excuses and rationalizations that blind us to our true motives. And we can't surrender our will when our disease convinces us our will has nothing to do with what's going on.

That's why the Third Step alone won't solve our problems. If it did, we could say "We turn it all over," and abracadabra! We'd be one hundred per cent successful at letting go and letting God run every aspect of our lives. Our self-will would match God's will for us all the way down the line. Perfect at last!

Unfortunately, perfection is out of the question. Fortunately, we have the Steps. As we apply them, we learn more and more about the nature of our self-will, how our disease determines what we want and the way we want the world to be. And awareness

of our self-will expands even more as we share with our sponsors and other addicts. When we can't see clearly how an attitude or behavior is hurting us, they can, and they tell us. It's always easier to see self-will at work in someone else.

Living the Third Step teaches us the opposite of living in denial. Living in humility relieves us of the illusion of perfection. And learning what our destructive self-will is teaches us what God's will isn't. the Third Step unleashes a process that punctures our sick pride, deflates our ego, and at last helps get us out of our own way. It allows us to begin to change.

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It's not only denial that keeps us from applying the Third Step. It's also our resistance to change – and that's another example of our self-will at work. We hate change. Being addicts, we reserve some areas of life where we are quite sure we don't need God's help and can handle matters ourselves. We refuse to turn these areas over to the care of our Higher Power. Or we will tell ourselves we are turning them over, but we aren't. We may delude ourselves into thinking that our will is God's will. In fact, our denial often hides our fear.

For example, the area of relationships is a tough one for many of us. We often refuse to let go of even destructive behaviors and painful situations, because of our fear. On the one hand, we're afraid of the unknown. On the other hand, we're quite sure we can predict the terrible and terrifying results of letting go and letting our Higher Power in. We refuse to admit our powerlessness and the unmanageability of the situation. We refuse to surrender. We prefer familiar misery to the potential freedom.

We weave the most incredibly elaborate fabric of justification and rationalization: "What turmoil? What insanity? What damage and destruction? This is the way it's got to be. It's everyone else's fault. If only they did this and didn't do that, everything would be fine!" And when it's suggested that we stop managing and controlling and start surrendering this relationship to the care of a loving God, we resist: "There's nothing wrong here. There's nothing to turn over. Everything's the way it's supposed to be. Not only that, it's already turned over! And, boy, are we powerless! We've been praying about it night and day!"

What's required here is not talking about the first three Steps, but working them. Slowly, gently, and deliberately, we apply the Steps to the problem.

Going back to Step One, we look for the way our disease has been running our thinking and actions. We reaffirm our powerlessness -- over our disease and over every aspect of this situation. We admit that we can't change another person, that our selfish efforts at controlling events and outcomes are fruitless and even do damage. We list the ways our lives are unmanageable: the more we twist things in one direction, the more they go in the other direction. We work on not only admitting but accepting our powerlessness and the unmanageability of our lives.

We go to Step Two and acknowledge our insanity. We examine the ways we've been acting and thinking irrationally in this situation. We admit that our sick pride and arrogance have nothing to do with reality, that our self-centeredness has distorted our perception. It's insane to think we can control the present and predict the future. It's insane to think we always know what's best for us -- we who have had a remarkably good track record at self-destruction. It's insane for us to think that our Higher Power is able to help us do what we've never been able to do for ourselves -- stop using drugs and stay stopped -- but is unable to help us with other aspects of our disease. We re-enter the process of faith, coming to believe that we can be restored to sanity in this area, too.

If we go no further than the Second Step, we get stuck. We eventually continue acting out the insanity over and over again, continuing in pain, continuing in the disease. It is not enough to acknowledge our insanity and God's ability to help us. Acknowledgment is not recovery. Action is recovery. We don't wait until we want to change or feel comfortable with the idea of change. Comfortable comes later. If we have just a wisp of the willingness to act as if we're willing -- we move to Step Three.

We make the decision to surrender -- to let go of the need to run things, to let go of the comforting illusion that we control people and situations. To combat our denial, many of us write on the Third Step. We list the facets of our sick self-will in the area we're looking at. What do we want? What do we think reality ought to be? What are our unrealistic expectations? We catalogue the results of our self-will. We look at our fear of losing control no matter what. We examine our belief that we have the power



and right to transform other people into exactly who we want. We see how our selfish pursuit of self-will -- fueled by our fear, ego, and pride -- destroys love and relationships by insisting we get our own way.

We make a decision to release these attitudes and behaviors -- to stop our self-will tantrum, to stop torturing reality into the shape of our fantasies. It just doesn't work anymore. We surrender. We make a decision to give up our struggle with reality and accept it the way it is. We make a decision to act on faith. Our faith says if we let go, everything is going to be all right. If we don't, it won't.

What action do we need to take instead? We ask God to help us. Letting go of the old behaviors and attitudes frees us to hear other ideas, suggestions, directions. We may make mistakes. But if we share with other recovering addicts and stay openminded and willing, at the very least we don't act out the disease.

Even when we are practiced in working this step, we may undo our surrender. Our fear of losing control may take over again, and we may try to fix that fear again. We resist acceptance. We resist accepting that things may very well be exactly the way they're supposed to be. We rebel.

For instance, if we surrender the illusion we can control another person, that person may in fact stay the same. "Well," we may tell ourselves,, "that can't be right! Obviously God is forgetting what his will is!" We tend to think that having faith means believing that things are going to turn out exactly the way we want. If they don't, we figure God needs our help.

Without even realizing it, we're into the insanity of self-will again. We may think we're in the Third Step, but we really fell out of it. Often our sponsors and friends have to point out that we're back in the old behavior, with the same old stranglehold on reality. We have to ask for guidance again and turn it over again, knowing that God is taking care of us.

Eventually, as we continue surrendering and working the Twelve Steps, acceptance is internalized and grows deeper. With humility -- and the courage we get from our Higher Power -- we accept the truth of our addiction, of other people, of the circumstances of our lives today. Ultimately, over time, we live the surrender. As our

self-centeredness lessens, our fear lessens. We realize we don't have to go it alone anymore. This is not weakness or slavery. It is strength. A friendly relationship with reality gives us the freedom to relax our vigilance, loosen our grip, and live our lives.

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We addicts come to Narcotics Anonymous with long careers in fixing ourselves. We use drugs, jobs, relationships -- money, property, and prestige -- to fix what we think is wrong with us. The problem is, we're fixing only the outside. Our disease is inside of us, and recovery is an inside job.

We do not heal ourselves. We don't know how. It's God's job to change us and heal us on the inside. Our job is to take action and practice the spiritual principles called for in the Steps. When we practice living the first three Steps, our new actions and attitudes take us off the old road of insanity and onto the new road of recovery. We get ourselves out of the way so that God can go to work in us, where the disease is. One inside area where we need healing is our emotions or feelings.

We addicts do not regard feelings as a natural part of our humanity. Many of us think there's something wrong with us when we feel, for example, fear or pain. We are afraid of expressing our feelings. Or we experience feelings only in the extreme -- for instance, if our anger always explodes into rage. Our normal behavior is to medicate, manipulate, or avoid our feelings. We've done that so well for so long.

Now with the first three Steps, we stop acting out the disease. We are saying no to many of the behaviors we use to keep our feelings at bay. That means we start feeling our feelings. They begin to bubble up to the surface. When that happens, most of us don't know what's going on. Many of us are so unfamiliar with our own emotions -- with fear and anger, pain and shame -- that we don't even know what to call them. We may blame other people for the way we feel. We may be so unused to having emotions that we think we're going crazy. We doubt whether we can survive the storms going on inside us. We are overwhelmed. Our sponsors tell us that feeling our feelings is a positive development, but it feels anything but positive to us. We think there must be something wrong.

It's an addict fantasy to think that working the Steps means we're going to feel

perfectly wonderful and serene all the time. The very action of working the Steps produces emotions in us. Our instincts want us to do what we've done all our lives: run from the feelings or fix them.

Our Program teaches us we don't have to run anymore. In the first Three Steps, we acknowledge and name as best we can the feelings we're having. We examine whether we want to act off them in inappropriate, insane ways. Then we work the Third Step on them -- releasing them and turning them over. We ask God to help us to not use those feelings as an excuse to destroy. We ask our Higher Power to show us what action to take instead. And we leave the results to God.

For example, if we used drugs to ward off the fear of talking to people, we will experience that fear when we first get clean. We may know intellectually that we have nothing to be afraid of, but it doesn't matter. The fear is real. We acknowledge it and ask God to help us not act it out, to feel it without fixing it. Somewhere down the road in our recovery, in God's time and in God's way, the fear may be healed. One day, in God's time, fear will not run our lives. In the meantime, we practice experiencing our fear without doing anything about it except turning it over to the care of a loving God.

We remember how the Third Step works in the area of drugs. When we stop using, we don't feel joyous and lighthearted. If we are able to label our emotions at all, we say we're afraid, hurting, angry, ashamed. In any event, we feel bad. We are told that we won't always feel this way, that it will get better -- if and only if we don't take drugs to fix it. We make a decision to stop using drugs to fix our feelings. In faith, we turn our feelings over to a God of our own understanding. We ask him to help us, to guide us, to show us what to do instead of using. We go to a meeting, call our sponsor, reach out to help someone newer in the Program than we. And no matter what, we don't use, no matter how bad we feel. The feelings we have as a result of getting clean don't disappear right away. But in God's time, we do feel better.

Our sponsors tell us that feelings are temporary and do pass, if we let go of them. They share their own experience in walking through feelings without fixing them in any way -- without drugs and without obsessive thinking or other controlling behaviors. It's totally amazing to us addicts the first time we personally experience

that we don't die from our own fear and pain. Whatever our feelings, God helps us go through them. With time and practice working the Steps, we develop a friendly relationship with our own emotions. With humility and acceptance, we come to claim our humanity.

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Working the Third Step lays down the foundation for working the rest of the Twelve Steps and continuing on our spiritual journey. We turn over our familiar stubbornness, arrogance, rebelliousness, and defiance -- the close-mindedness that can lead to relapse by causing us to avoid working the Steps in the first place.

When we live the Third Step and truly turn over self-will, fear, and destructive behaviors, we may experience a void in their place -- an emptiness inside, a sense of loss. This is a good sign. It means we have indeed let go of something. But when we feel that void, we tend to want to fix the emptiness, because our disease tells us there is something wrong with it. That's our disease lying to us, and that's where faith comes in. When we experience an emptiness, if we don't try to fill up the space in any way -- if we just let it be -- God can come through that open door, and the healing process can reach down inside us. Where there was fear and destructive self-will, we now can experience recovery.

Every time we make the Third Step decision -- every time we do not act out our disease in any area of our lives -- every time we say no to our self-will when it's sick -- every time we don't fix our feelings and turn instead to our Higher Power for help -- our self-esteem grows. We are learning how to live. We are learning how to be human. We are learning to have faith.

When we live lives shaped by the Third Step, we also are learning maturity and mature decision-making. It's the opposite of living lives shaped by our disease -- the irresponsible, destructive behavior and the immature self-centeredness, demanding that the world fulfill our wants and needs. Every time we take the Third Step, we acknowledge that we are not alone in the world. We let God into our decision-making process. We build confidence in our own ability to make decisions that harm neither ourselves nor others.

And as we let God into our lives by applying the Third Step, our personal experience of God and our understanding of him grows. As our understanding of God grows, so does our ability to surrender our will and our lives to his care. It gets easier.

But it also requires patience. Recovery is a lifelong process. We keep practicing acceptance and surrender and letting go with faith. That is how we learn new thoughts and responses. That is how the spiritual principles become a part of us.

Our sponsors tell us that as a result of living the Steps, one day we develop deep within us part of the solution to our disease: the self-acceptance, the faith in a Higher Power, the love for others, that contradict the urgings of our addiction. One day our will is aligned with God's will a good deal of the time. One day the spiritual principles have more power in us than the disease does most of the time. One day we accept our partnership with a God who is taking care of us all of the time. That is peace, that is serenity, and that is what we want.

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