




STEP ONE

1
2 *"We admitted that we were powerless over our*
3 *addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable."*

4 As addicts, we have each experienced the pain, loneliness, and despair of
5 addiction. Before coming to NA, most of us tried every available means to control
6 our use of drugs; none of them, however, were successful. We switched drugs, ID
7 thinking that with another substance we might find more control. We swore we
8 would never do the things we watched other addicts do, then found ourselves
9 doing those very things. Despite our best schemes and plans, we found
10 ourselves in a continuing downward spiral. At every turn our disease progressed, addiction
11 overpowering our best intentions.



12 Our experience, as members of Narcotics Anonymous, is that addiction has
13 disastrous effects on every area of our life. Addiction is a rampaging disease that
14 may progress rapidly, destroying our lives in a matter of months, or more slowly, ID
15 years passing before we notice its negative effects, in our lives. It would be
16 impossible to describe addiction in a way that everyone would agree with, but we
17 seem to be affected in three ways. the following ways
18 using. Physically, once we start using drugs, we have a compulsion to continue
19 using, regardless of the consequences. Spiritually, we become totally self-
20 centered as a result of our addiction. Looking at addiction as a disease makes a
21 lot of sense to addicts because, in our experience, addiction is progressive,
22 incurable, and fatal.

23 We found that when we used, we set off a craving for drugs which could never
24 be satisfied. Our self-centered thinking fed this obsession; no power on earth

17
25 could keep us from using more drugs. We could neither take enough drugs to
26 make us feel right nor could we stop using on our own. We found that, no matter
27 how much we used, we could not escape the overwhelming loneliness of our
28 addiction. We were trapped in a self-destructive cycle created by our obsessive
29 thoughts and our compulsive actions.

30 Denial is another aspect of our disease, manifesting itself in many ways. In
31 our addiction, we used denial to protect ourselves against the reality of what our
32 lives had become. We often told ourselves that, given the right set of
33 circumstances, we might still be able to bring our lives under control. Always
34 skillful at defending our actions, we refused to accept responsibility for the
35 damage done by our addiction. We believed that if we tried long and hard
36 enough, substituted one drug for another, switched friends, or changed our living
37 arrangements, or occupations, our lives would improve. These rationalizations
38 repeatedly failed us, yet we continued to cling to them. Our denial let us tell
39 ourselves that we didn't have a problem with drugs, irregardless of all evidence to
40 the contrary. It let us tell ourselves that we could use again successfully. It
41 allowed us to justify our actions, despite the wreckage around us resulting from
42 our addiction.

43 Eventually, however, we arrived at a place where we could no longer fool
44 ourselves. No matter how we tried to deny the disease, we finally realized we had
45 ^{backed} painted ourselves into a corner of utter despair. The overwhelming pain of our
46 addiction brought us to our knees. Many of us recall the moment of clarity when
47 we came face-to-face with our disease. All the lies, all the pretenses, all the
48 rationalizations we had used to justify where we stood as a result of our drug use

49 stopped working. Who and what we were became more clear. We could no
 50 longer run from the truth. Alone, terrified of what the future held for us, we sought
 51 out the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous.

52 Perhaps we arrived in NA without seeing the problems we had left in our wake.
 53 Because of our self-centeredness, we were often the last ones to realize that we
 54 were addicts. Many of us were persuaded by friends or family to begin attending
 55 NA meetings. Other members received even stronger encouragement from the
 56 courts. No matter how it occurred, our longstanding illusions had to be
 57 shattered. Honesty had to replace denial before we could face the truth of our
 58 addiction. It doesn't matter where we came from or how good or bad we thought
 59 we had it; when we finally turned to Narcotics Anonymous and the Twelve Steps,
 60 we began to find relief. ^{helped to} The honest sharing of members of Narcotics Anonymous
 61 made us realize that we had been living a lie.

62 As we begin working the First Step, it is important to ask some basic personal
 63 questions: Can I control my use of drugs? Am I willing to stop using? Am I
 64 willing to go to any lengths to find recovery? Given a choice between finding a
 65 new way of life in NA ^{or} and the jails, institutions, or death we may face if we
 66 continue in our addiction, ^{or} recovery begins to make sense. ^{Our} Our only hope for
 67 a life free from active addiction is a profound emotional and spiritual change. Our
 68 experience shows that it is necessary for us to be willing to go to any lengths to
 69 receive this precious gift of recovery. In recovery, we will be introduced to
 70 spiritual principles. If we faithfully practice these principles, they will transform our
 71 perceptions, and the way we live our lives.

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SUR
 72 As we work the First Step, we find that surrender is not what we thought it
 73 was. In the past, we probably thought of surrender as something that only weak
 74 and cowardly people did. We saw only two choices; either keep fighting to
 75 control our using, or just cave in completely and let our lives fall to pieces. We felt
 76 we were in a battle to control our using and that, if we surrendered, the drugs
 77 would win. In recovery, we find surrender to be something else entirely.
 78 Surrender is the process that enables us to recover. The hardest thing about
 79 surrendering is the fight we put up before admitting defeat!

SP.
 80 No matter how hard we fought, we reached the point where we couldn't stop
 81 using--the point of surrender for all addicts who have gone on to find recovery.
 82 Then, we were able to admit our powerlessness over our addiction, *without*
 83 *reservation*. We gave up completely. Even though we didn't know exactly what
 84 would happen, we gathered up our courage and admitted our powerlessness.
 85 We surrendered the illusion that we could control our using, thereby opening the
 86 door to recovery.

changes here
 87 Many of us begin the process of surrender when we identify ourselves at an
 88 NA meeting with our name and the words, "I am an addict." Once we admit that
 89 we are addicts and *on a daily basis* that we cannot stop using drugs on our own, we are able to
 90 stay clean, one day at a time, with the help of other recovering addicts in
 91 Narcotics Anonymous. The paradox of this admission is evident once we work
 92 the First Step: As a result of admitting our powerlessness, just for today, we find
 93 the strength we need never to have to use drugs again. This reprieve is perhaps
 94 the most profound gift we can receive, for it saves our lives.

95 Once we have admitted our powerlessness, it becomes necessary for us to
 96 seek help from other recovering addicts. Through our collective experience, we
 97 have found that together, one addict helping another, we can accomplish what we
 98 cannot do alone. As we attend meetings regularly, we can find great comfort in
 99 the experiences of those traveling this path with us. Perhaps for the first time, we
 100 find others just like us in the rooms of NA. Coming to NA has been described by
 101 many members as "coming home." We find ourselves welcomed and accepted
 102 by other recovering addicts. We finally find a place where we belong. Through
 103 the Fellowship of NA, we rejoin the human race. *begin*

104 Though we find help from many of the recovering addicts we meet at
 105 meetings, we need to find one special person: a sponsor. We can ask this person
 106 to help us through the steps and find new ways of handling situations that, in the
 107 past, we used drugs over. We listen at meetings until we hear someone we think
 108 we can begin to trust and take direction from, and we ask that person to sponsor
 109 us. The person we ask will guide us through the Twelve Steps, sharing his or her
 110 experience with us. We work with our sponsor and find answers to our questions
 111 about recovery. Each time we find ourselves confused about what to do next or
 112 find we are troubled, we call our sponsor. Through trusting this one person with
 113 our day-to-day living problems, feelings, and fears, we learn about the principle of
 114 trust. Through following the suggestions of our sponsor instead of only our own
 115 ideas, we learn the principles of open-mindedness and willingness. Our sponsor
 116 will help us take the necessary first steps along the path of recovery.

117 Few recovering addicts will say that this path is an easy one, because it's not.
 118 Many have embarked on it and given up. It takes great courage and

*app**S.P.**a sponsor
is a person
who can
help guide**reunite
S.P.
Donso*

119 perseverance to continue in recovery, day after day, year after year. Part of the
 120 recovery process is to move forward in spite of whatever may stand in our way.
 121 Long-lasting change in recovery happens slowly, and we will turn to the First Step
 122 again and again.

123 It is crucial that we take a thorough First Step, for before we can begin our
 124 recovery we must interrupt the progression of our disease. We must remember
 125 that we have only a daily reprieve from our active addiction. Each day, we must
 126 surrender to the fact that we cannot use drugs successfully. Even long periods of
 127 abstinence do not guarantee us continued freedom from the pain and trouble that
 128 addiction can bring. The symptoms of our disease can always return. We may
 129 find that we are powerless in ways we never imagined. No matter how our
 130 disease displays itself, we must take its deadly nature into account. As we do, we
 131 develop a fuller awareness of the nature of our disease. This is a natural part of
 132 the recovery process.

133 Virtually all of us find we need to work the First Step again and again in our
 134 recovery, for many reasons. The disease of addiction can manifest itself in a
 135 variety of mental obsessions and compulsive actions that have nothing to do with
 136 drugs. We may find ourselves obsessed and behaving compulsively over things
 137 we never had problems with until we stopped using drugs. We may ^{once} begin
 138 ^{again seek} seeking to fill the awful emptiness we sometimes feel with something outside
 139 ourselves. Any time we find ourselves using something to "fix" how we feel, it's
 140 ^{high} time to work the First Step again. When our lives seem to be falling apart,
 141 we reapply ourselves to the basics of the NA program. We go to meetings, work

142 the steps, and stay in close contact with our sponsor. We surrender again,
143 knowing that victory lies in the admission of defeat.

144 There is a deeply spiritual nature to our program of recovery. The Twelve
145 Steps of Narcotics Anonymous will take us on a journey that will far exceed our
146 expectations. Working and living the steps will lead us to a spiritual awakening.
147 Step One is the beginning of this spiritual journey. To embark on this personal
148 quest, we must become willing to humble ourselves to this program and its
149 principles, for our future hinges on our willingness to grow spiritually. The pain,
150 unmanageability, and suffering we experience in our lives make us teachable and
151 bring us again and again to the principle of surrender, Our surrender is
152 demonstrated in our admission and acceptance of our disease on an ongoing
153 basis. We have discovered that the foundation of our spiritual growth is in our
154 willingness to utilize the principles encompassed by the Twelve Steps.

155 The love and acceptance we find in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous
156 allow us to begin to recover from our addiction. We start to learn a new way to
157 live. The emptiness from which we suffered begins to be filled through working
158 and living the Twelve Steps. We start to find a solution to our hopelessness. We
159 begin to learn that our addiction is being addressed in all its complexity by this
160 simple program.

161 In Narcotics Anonymous we deal with our addiction, not just the uncontrollable
162 drug use, that is its most apparent symptom. We get clean, we stay clean, and
163 we work the Twelve Steps to find recovery. The Twelve Steps are designed to
164 address every aspect of our addiction. We don't learn this by reading it or saying
165 it, but by living it. The answers we find in the steps teach us how to live. We work

166 the steps in order and continue to work them, just for today, for the rest of our
167 lives. We have found hope for, together, we can and do recover.

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172

173 We have found total abstinence from all drugs to be the only way to begin
174 treating our addiction. Only when we interrupt our active addiction by not taking
175 that first drug can we begin to recover. Abstinence from drugs is not all there is to
176 recovery. Recovery occurs when we apply the spiritual principles embodied in
177 the Twelve Steps of NA to all areas of our lives.¹

*Excellent
TP needs
to be somewhat*

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1. This paragraph was left intact in the draft (on page three, after "living a lie") but, in reading the draft over, I didn't know whether or not to leave it there, put it somewhere else, or just drop it. If we put it back in the draft, it should be placed where the ideas included in it have already been alluded to. If we put it back in, the ideas need to be expanded considerably.

STEP TWO

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

Our surrender in the First Step leaves us with a deep need to believe that we can recover. We've accepted our addiction and seen just how hopeless our lives had become. We've been forced to give up our illusions, and now we need to develop hope and a belief system that will help us in our efforts to change and find recovery.

The solution we seek is spiritual in nature; we find it through working the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous. Our hope lies in developing a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves. We must change, and we have found that we can't do it without a Power greater than our own.

Our Basic Text states, "There is one thing more than anything that will defeat us in our recovery; this is an attitude of indifference or intolerance toward spiritual principles." The fatal nature of addiction doesn't afford us the luxury of this attitude. If we want to stay clean, we cannot let an unwillingness to believe in a Higher Power be a barrier to our recovery.

Belief in a Higher Power does not come easily to all of us. We may first have to let go of our old attitudes and beliefs about a Power greater than ourselves before we can begin to try a new approach. Many of us have ideas of a Higher Power that punishes or condemns us. Ideas of this sort aren't going to help us now. Any Power that can restore us to sanity needs to be not only powerful, but loving, too. Because the concept of a loving Power greater than ourselves may be an entirely new idea for some of us, we have found an open mind

25 indispensable when we approach this step. An open mind allows us to rethink
26 our old ideas of a Power greater than ourselves. Only with the help of this Power
27 can we expect a restoration to sanity.

28 Many of us felt that insanity was too harsh a word to describe our condition.
29 However, if we take a realistic look at our active addiction, we'll see that we have
30 been anything *but* sane. For the most part, our perceptions were not based in
31 reality. We viewed the world around us as a hostile environment and withdrew
32 from it, preferring instead to live a life of isolation. Our responses to most
33 situations were generally inappropriate. We acted irrationally and made poor
34 choices. Despite evidence to the contrary, we felt that we were in control. We
35 ignored or didn't believe the truths that were staring us in the face. Worst of all
36 was the fact that we continued to use drugs, regardless of the negative
37 consequences we experienced. Despite the warning signs that our drug use was
38 out of control, we continued trying to justify it. All too often, the result was that we
39 could no longer face ourselves. When we looked back over our lives, it was clear
40 that we had been anything but sane.

41 Though being restored to sanity is a life-long process, we can see results right
42 from the beginning of our recovery. Initially, being restored to sanity means that
43 we no longer have to use drugs. We see further progress as we begin to make
44 choices that help us rather than harm us. We go to meetings rather than
45 isolating. We call our sponsor rather than sitting alone with painful feelings. We
46 follow our sponsor's suggestions, realizing that those suggestions are in our best
47 interest. We work the steps, a powerful demonstration of sanity. Each day we

48 stay clean, we are a day closer to sanity. We begin to believe that a powerful
49 force *can* and *is* restoring us to sanity.

50 Strangely enough, our surrender in the First Step made it possible for us to
51 feel hope. By admitting our own powerlessness, we opened our minds to an
52 entirely new idea: the possibility that something greater than ourselves might be
53 powerful enough to relieve our obsession to use drugs. It is quite likely that,
54 before coming to NA, we never believed in any power but our own willpower, and
55 that had failed us. NA introduces us to a new understanding: a Power greater
56 than our own that can restore us to sanity. We draw hope from this
57 understanding and begin to comprehend what it means to believe in something.
58 As we begin to believe in a Higher Power, we make a leap of faith.

59 This leap of faith needn't be overly difficult; a small amount of open-
60 mindedness works wonders. If we look around us, we find many reasons to
61 believe. Our belief may be simply that we *can* recover from our lives of active
62 addiction. The freedom from the obsession to use may be our first experience of
63 a Power greater than ourselves at work in our lives. Perhaps for the first time in
64 many years, our obsession with drugs no longer controls our every waking
65 moment. Knowing that we are no longer destined to die from our disease is a
66 powerful belief in and of itself.

67 We find additional hope by listening to other recovering addicts. We can relate
68 to where they've been and draw hope from who they've become. We listen
69 closely at meetings and become willing to apply what we hear to our own lives.

70 "We *came* to believe" implies a process. For some, this process is simple, and
71 it may bring immediate results. Some of us arrived in NA so completely defeated

72 that we were willing to try anything. Seeking help from a Power greater than
 73 ourselves was the best idea we had ever heard. For some of us, ^{the} however, the
 74 process of coming to believe can be difficult, even painful. Some of us have to
 75 overcome the concepts of a Higher Power that linger from our childhood. We
 76 may have been taught a specific understanding of a Power greater than ourselves
 77 that won't serve us well in recovery. If this is the case, we will need to develop a
 78 different concept.

79 It is not necessary that we define for ourselves the entire concept of a Power
 80 greater than ourselves right now. Those of us with many years of recovery find
 81 that our understanding of a Higher Power grows over time. Our belief in that
 82 Power grows, as does our faith in it. We come to believe in a Power without limit.
 83 We find that what this Power can do for us, and the ways it works in our lives, go
 84 far beyond what we originally thought. This is a big part of the ongoing process
 85 of recovery, for just as a flower blossoms from a tightly closed bud, so our coming
 86 to believe often unfolds over time.

87 We come from various walks of life and experience, so it is natural that we
 88 bring with us differing concepts of spirituality. In NA, no one is forced to believe
 89 any dogma or doctrine. This is a program of spirituality, not a religion.
 90 Individually, we cultivate our own beliefs about a Power greater than we are.
 91 However we define this Power, its help is available to us all.

92 In the beginning, many of us turn to the group or the love we encounter in
 93 Narcotics Anonymous as our Higher Power. An NA group is a powerful example
 94 of a Power greater than ourselves at work. Often in desperation, we enter a room
 95 full of addicts who share their experience, strength, and hope with us. As we

listen, we know with certainty that they have felt the hopelessness and remorse from which we, too, have suffered. But there ^{is a} difference: *They* are staying clean. Through their experience, we find hope--but we find much more.

As we observe other addicts practicing a new way of life without the use of drugs, we may come to believe that we, too, can recover. Watching the miracle of other addicts staying clean is compelling proof of the existence of a Power greater than ourselves. We notice the acceptance that recovering addicts who practice this new way of life show each other. We watch as addicts celebrate lengths of clean time that we think will be impossible for us to attain. Perhaps someone hugs us and tells us to "keep coming back." Members offer their phone numbers. We feel the collective spiritual energy of the group, and this helps us start to heal.

As we undertake our search for this Power greater than ourselves, talking with our sponsor and with other recovering addicts can help us. We ask them what their idea of a Higher Power is and how they have arrived at it. We open our minds and become willing to consider the ideas of others.

While it is useful to question others about their spirituality, we must remember that it is a personal search we are embarking upon. Others can help us, pointing out the direction their own paths have taken. We cannot, however, depend entirely upon another's experience in this area. We must come to believe for ourselves. The need for our own sense of spirituality is too vital to our recovery for us to neglect this highly personal process.

For us, part of the process of coming to believe is accepting the evidence we see. As mentioned before, our addiction caused us to deny the truths we saw. But now in recovery, we believe what we see. At first, we make a small leap of

120 faith and try something new, somehow believing that what we try might work.
121 After we've taken a few such small steps toward belief and trust and have gotten
122 results, we become willing to take bigger steps. We find that we are no longer
123 relying solely on blind faith. Our belief is now reinforced with our own personal
124 experience.

125 The longer we stay clean, the more evident it becomes that our addiction goes
126 much deeper than the drugs we used. Much of our problem seems to center in
127 our search for something to make us feel whole. It is a tremendous struggle to
128 stop relying on our own reasoning and ask for help, especially given the self-
129 centered nature of our disease. However, our surrender has made us open-
130 minded. In realizing that we don't have all the answers, we begin to find some
131 humility. We may not grasp the full impact of what being humble means, but our
132 open-mindedness assures us that we have found and begun to demonstrate this
133 valuable quality.

134 Our humility and open-mindedness make us teachable. We allow others who
135 have traveled this path before us to share what has worked for them. This also
136 takes humility, for we must let of go of our fears about how we may appear to
137 others. Some of the strongest directions we may receive from other addicts who
138 have traveled this path before us are to attend meetings, to ask others for help,
139 and to pray, even if we don't believe. Our experience has shown us that belief in
140 a Higher Power leads us in the direction of recovery in Narcotics Anonymous.
141 People tend to live what they believe, and our newfound belief calls on us to live
142 the program. No matter what we choose for our personal Higher Power, we've

143 come to believe that NA works. We live what we believe by continuing on our
144 path of recovery and working the Twelve Steps to the best of our ability.

145 ^{even} After years clean, even when we have been working a program of recovery
146 and seeking change, we sometimes experience periods when life seems
147 meaningless. We may experience a sense of alienation too painful to ignore. At
148 such times, we may find ourselves moving away from sanity, not toward it. We
149 may begin to question our commitment to recovery. We can become obsessed
150 with self-destructive thoughts. We may feel an urge to fall back on what seems
151 easier: the familiar ways of our addiction. But we must resist this urge and make
152 a renewed commitment to our recovery. We sense that we are undergoing a
153 fundamental transformation, even though we may not yet understand its full
154 implication for our lives. As painful as it seems, we must change. If we trust that
155 there is growth despite the pain, we can walk through these difficult periods more
156 readily.

157 ^{these} During difficult times, relying on the Second Step provides us with hope and
158 reminds us that we are not alone. If things don't feel right, we take time to think
159 and seek direction. We trust that, with help from our Higher Power and others, we
160 can be restored to sanity *in all areas of our lives*. We draw upon what we have
161 learned from going to meetings and following directions. We accept that life on
162 life's terms may not always be to our liking or, more importantly, to our
163 understanding. Sometimes we accept that sanity means simply that we don't act
164 until we have a clearer direction in our lives. What worked for us in the beginning
165 remains applicable, no matter how many years we have been clean. We have

found it helpful to return to the basics of this program. Although we may feel despair, there is hope: our Higher Power is always with us.

Along with the hope we derive from working Step Two, we find that our way of thinking is undergoing a radical change. The whole world looks different. Where before we had no reason to hope, we now have every reason to expect a remarkable difference in our lives. Simply by being open-minded, we've opened ourselves to new ideas. We've stepped away from the problem and toward the solution.

Step Two is the beginning of a spiritual remedy for our disease, yet it is only the beginning. We must go on to develop our relationship with the Power we've come to believe in. Being open-minded enough to accept that there is a Power capable of restoring us to sanity, we are led to Step Three.

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Sometimes the paths we choose to follow in our recovery take us away from our spiritual goals. There are times when we may choose to act regardless of the consequences. The price we may pay for these actions often breaks through our denial, and we discover anew that our old ways don't work. While we have found that we always have the freedom of choice in our lives, we learn that part of the recovery process is letting go of the struggle. As we get a new perspective on our lives and our thinking, we make different choices and begin to take better care of ourselves. Although at times we may feel defeated, there is no cause to give up

190 *hope. Where we once lived lives of despair, today we have hope that we, too, can*
191 *recover with the help of the Twelve Steps.* ¹

1. This paragraph was not commented on very much within the input we've received. We are uncertain where to put it within the draft.

STEP THREE

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

The surrender we experience in Step One, coupled with the hope and acceptance we find in Step Two, make us ready and willing to continue on the path toward freedom in Narcotics Anonymous. In Step Three, we put our belief in a Higher Power into action, making a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him.

The heart of the Third Step is our willingness to allow the God of our understanding to work in our lives. Without a willingness to make this decision, there is no chance for recovery. We have discovered that we must be willing to change or we will use again.

The decision we make in Step Three requires that we move away from our self-will. Self-will is composed of such characteristics as closed-mindedness, unwillingness, and outright defiance. Our self-centered obsession, and its accompanying insanity, have made our lives unmanageable. Acting on our own self-will has kept us trapped in a continuous cycle of fear and pain. We wore ourselves out in fruitless attempts to control everyone and everything. We couldn't bear to just allow events to happen. We were always on the lookout for ways we could force things to go as we wanted.

When we first look at making the decision called for in this step, we are likely to have questions, uncertainty, and even fear about what we are being asked to do. We might wonder why we need to turn our will and our lives over to the God of our understanding. Or we may wonder what will happen to us if we place

25 ourselves in God's care. We may fear that we won't be happy with what our lives
26 will be like after working this step.

27 The Third Step is our commitment to our own emotional, physical, and spiritual
28 well-being. When we trust that there is growth in taking action despite our fear or
29 uncertainty, we are able to work Step Three. Even though we do not know how
30 our lives will change after we work this step, we can learn to trust that our Higher
31 Power will care for our lives better than we could.

32 Over time, what began in the Second Step as an exploration of our concept of
33 a Higher Power can serve as a springboard to a fuller relationship with God in
34 Step Three. The decision that we make in this step, and the relationship that
35 results, *will* can revolutionize our existence.

36 This decision is easy to make but hard to live by. It is a decision we can *make*
37 perfectly, but not *live by* perfectly. No one among us has ever made this decision
38 and then gone on to live in perfect harmony with God's will. Because we are
39 human and imperfect, we simply continue to reaffirm our decision on a regular
40 basis throughout our lifetime and then do the very best we can to live by it.
41 Complete and unconditional surrender of our will and our lives is an ideal we strive
42 to fulfill. Although we don't become perfect, we do make a profound change in
43 this step. We are beginning to make a serious effort to live differently than we
44 have in the past. From now on, we are going to be practicing this decision, and
45 the way we relate to the world around us will change radically as a result.

46 In working Step Three, we begin to learn how to stop struggling. We learn to
47 let go and trust God. If we take time to think and seek direction before acting, we
48 no longer have to run on our own self-centered will. Turning our will and our lives

over to the care of our Higher Power provides a solution to the problems created by a life based in self-will, resentment, and control.

The spiritual principles we are practicing will guide us, not just in the Third Step but throughout our recovery. The first three steps provide us with the solid spiritual foundation we will need to work the rest of the steps. We keep our initial surrender alive by actively practicing the faith and willingness required to work the Third Step. In other words, we've admitted our powerlessness and inability to manage our own lives; now we need to give our lives over to the care of something else--the God of our understanding.

We may find the willingness to work the Third Step simply by remembering where we came from and believing that where we are going is guaranteed to be quite different. Though we don't know what this "difference" will entail, we know that it is sure to be better than what we've had in the past. We simply rely on blind faith and believe that this decision is one of the best decisions we've ever made.

Turning our will and our lives over to the care of God is a revolutionary decision. We may very well wonder exactly how we are supposed to put this decision into practice. Because our individual beliefs about a Power greater than ourselves vary so greatly, there are no rules about conducting our lives that everyone in our fellowship lives by. However, we have found some general means that we all can use in finding a personal understanding of how to practice the Third Step in our lives. One is to continue our efforts to develop a personal relationship with our Higher Power. Another is to give up our efforts at controlling our lives. We relax our grip on the burdens we've been carrying and turn them over to the care of our God. Yet another way we can practice our Third Step

73 decision is to continue with our recovery by working the remainder of the steps.
74 Our sponsors will guide us in applying the spiritual principles of recovery to our
75 lives, showing us how to shift our focus away from our own self-interest and
76 toward a more God-centered life.

77 As we get ready to make this decision, we talk with our sponsors, go to step
78 meetings, and take the opportunity to share about it with other NA members. We
79 gather as much knowledge, insight, and experience as we can from these
80 sources, and then we make our own decision. No one can do it for us--we must
81 consciously decide to do this for ourselves. Of course, this is not a decision we
82 make solely with our intellect. In truth, this is a choice we make with our hearts, a
83 decision based much more in feeling and desire than in deliberate reasoning.
84 Though the path from mind to heart seems a difficult one, formally working this
85 step with our sponsor seems to help us make this decision an intrinsic part of who
86 we are.

87 The search for a God of our own understanding is one of the most important
88 endeavors we will undertake in our recovery. We have complete personal choice
89 and freedom in how we understand our Higher Power. We can each find a Higher
90 Power that does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We need this Power,
91 not just because we are powerless ourselves but because *no* human power can
92 relieve the spiritual malady that lies at the root of our addiction.

93 To work the Third Step, we need to pray; prayer and the Third Step are
94 inseparable. Just as our freedom to have a God of our own understanding is
95 unlimited, so is our freedom to communicate with our Higher Power in whatever
96 ways work for us. Anytime we communicate with God, whether it's simply with

our thoughts or aloud at the close of a meeting, we are praying. Most of us ask our Higher Power for direction in our lives through prayer on a daily basis.

Our relationship with our Higher Power grows stronger as we practice faith and daily prayer. In our experience, prayer works. When we are having trouble in a particular area of our lives or when we feel unable to stay clean, our Higher Power can help; we only need to ask. With our prayers, we ask God to care for us. Each time we take this action, we strengthen our faith and our decision to rely on our Higher Power.

Step Three doesn't free us from having to take action in our lives, but it does liberate us from excessive worry about the results. If we want something--a job, an education, recovery--we have to make the effort to get it. Our Higher Power will take care of our spiritual needs, but we need to participate in our own lives; we can't simply sit back and expect God to provide.

Our lives are meant to be lived. No matter how sincere our efforts at "turning it over," we will make mistakes, wander off course, and experience moments of doubt. However, with each setback we are given a new opportunity to renew our commitment to live in God's will rather than our own. We try to align our actions with what we believe our Higher Power would want for us, and then we deal with life as it happens.

Although we strive to trust our Higher Power absolutely, we often place reservations on our faith. We may hesitate working Step Three in all areas of our lives, especially in matters we want to control. Our experience has been that we tend to compartmentalize our lives. Perhaps we think, "I can control my finances just fine," or "My relationship is working, why do I need to turn that over to the

care of my Higher Power?" Working Step Three only in certain areas of our lives short-circuits our spiritual development. We have found that our recovery benefits when we practice the principle of surrender, to the best of our ability, in all areas of our lives. We strive to work this step thoroughly.

Often we are confused about what action to take and are fearful of the consequences. In times like these, a thorough talk with our sponsor and a prayer to our Higher Power for direction in the matter can help us determine the direction in which we need to go. We find our fear is lessened through this practice.

We begin to see positive results from the decision we have made. We begin to notice changes in our lives, perhaps not in circumstances, but in the way we deal with the circumstances of our lives. Because we have made the decision to allow God to work in our lives, we may notice a sense of relief. We are being relieved of a burden we've carried far too long: the need to control everything and everyone. We begin to react differently to the situations and others around us. As we gain acceptance, we cease to rail against "life on life's terms." Maintaining a continual process of surrender, we are better able to live and enjoy life in the moment.

Deciding to turn our will and lives over to the care of our Higher Power is a process, not an event. However, in making that decision, we do make a commitment to practice this step in our lives. When we are tempted to manipulate a situation in our lives, we recall this decision and let go. When we catch ourselves attempting to exert control over someone or something, we stop and instead ask a loving God to guide us.

Relinquishing control is not easy, but we can do it with help. Whenever we are confused about how to act or what to do next, we ask our sponsor to show us how to work this step in our lives. With guidance from our sponsor and daily practice, we are sure to find ourselves learning how to get our egos out of the way so our Higher Power can work in our lives. Each time we are fearful over a situation in our lives, we can turn to this step and find the means to walk through our fear without resorting to our old ways.

Recovery doesn't exempt us from having to live through painful situations. Life goes on and may not always be pleasant. At some point in our lives, we may have to mourn the death of a loved one or deal with the end of a relationship. When such things happen to us, we hurt, and no amount of spiritual awareness will take our pain away. We do find, however, that the caring presence of a loving Power greater than ourselves will help us get through our pain. We rely on the God of our understanding and trust that Power to always be with us. We can cease questioning why painful things happen and trust that walking through the difficult times in our recovery can lead us in the direction of God's will for us. We can grow in spite of our pain, or perhaps in response to it.

Recovery is a process of discovery. We learn about ourselves, and we learn how to cope with the world around us. When we are sincere in our desire to allow God to care for our lives, we begin to gain a sense of serenity. We notice a gradual change in our thinking. Our attitudes and ideas become more positive. Our world is no longer so distorted by self-pity, denial, resentment, and the like. We are beginning to replace those old attitudes with honesty, faith, and responsibility; as a result, we begin to see our world in a better light. Our lives are

guided by our emerging integrity. Even though we make mistakes, we become more willing to take responsibility for our actions. We learn that we don't have to be perfect to live a spiritual life. When we work Step Three with an open mind and heart and do the "footwork" in our lives, God's grace will provide for us beyond our expectations.

As we experience this new way of life, we begin to realize that recovery is a priceless gift. We learn to trust; as we do, we open the doors to intimacy and develop new relationships. Where once we focused only on not using, we now can appreciate the many things that make our lives so valuable. We savor the laughter and the joy we hear expressed so abundantly in our meetings. As God becomes more central in our lives and we internalize the principles embodied in the steps, our view of the world changes profoundly. As our awareness grows, so does our appreciation and faith in our Higher Power.

If we pause to reflect on our lives at this stage of our recovery, we will see that we have experienced dramatic personal growth. While the first three steps have provided the basis for long-sought relief from our lives of chronic misery, this relief is only a glimpse of the growth we can experience through working the Twelve Steps.

The role of the Third Step expands in our lives as we continue working the other steps. Step Eleven asks us to pray for the knowledge of God's will for us, and the power to carry it out. Step Three begins this process; it is here that we start to seek God's will for us. Moving from a life based on self-will to one based on God's will requires us to change profoundly.

a loving God

191 With the help of our loving Higher Power, we are ready to move forward on our
192 journey. The decision we've made in the Third Step is perhaps the most
193 momentous decision we'll ever make in our lives, but without the rest of the steps
194 it becomes *is incomplete* meaningless and empty. There is more work to do. We have found
195 that the spiritual path set forth in the Twelve Steps is the only way to recovery in
196 Narcotics Anonymous. Putting our recovery commitment into action, we work
197 Step Four.

198

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STEP FOUR

We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

By working the first three steps, we have formed a solid foundation for our recovery. Our active addiction cannot remain arrested, however, unless we build upon this foundation. As we worked the Third Step, many of us were puzzled: How can we make sure we were really turning our will and lives over to the care of God? The answer is simple: we work the remainder of the steps, starting with Step Four.

Why take the Fourth Step? After all, we've been able to stay clean so far. But some of us are still haunted by a driving obsession to use drugs. Others find they aren't sleeping very well at night and continue to be uncomfortable with themselves during the day. Still others may think they're doing just fine without a Fourth Step--until it catches up with them. Our experience as a fellowship has shown that, sooner or later, members who don't work this crucial step relapse.

For many of us, our motivation to take the Fourth Step is quite simple: We're working a recovery program and we want to continue. Because our disease involves much more than our drug use, recovery involves more than simple abstinence from drugs. The solution to our problem is a profound change in our thinking and our behavior. We need to change how we perceive the world and alter what our role in it has been. We need to change our attitude. Whether our motivation stems from a desire to move away from our addiction or to move toward recovery doesn't really matter.

3 The Fourth Step is a turning point in our journey of recovery. It is a time for
4 deep personal reflection. The confusion that we attempted to mask with self-
5 deception and drugs is about to end. We are about to embark on a search for
6 insight into ourselves, our feelings, our fears, our resentments, and the patterns of
7 behavior that make up our lives.

8 We may be very frightened at the prospect of examining ourselves so
9 thoroughly. We don't know ourselves very well, and we may not be sure we want to.
0 Our fear of the unknown may seem overwhelming at this point, but if we recall our
1 faith and trust in our Higher Power, our fear can be overcome. We believe that part
2 of God's will for us is to work the steps, and God's will simply cannot be bad for us!
3 We trust that the final outcome of working the Fourth Step will be the continued
4 healing of our spirits, and we go on. Our Higher Power is at our side to light our
5 way on this search.

6 The principles of recovery that we have already begun to practice are the
7 prerequisites for taking the Fourth Step. The honest acceptance of our addiction
8 that we've brought with us from Step One will help us to be honest about other
9 aspects of our addiction. We've developed a level of trust and faith in a Power
0 greater than ourselves, and that glimmer of hope we've been feeling is growing with
1 each day clean. We've paved the way to recovery with our willingness, and we find
2 the courage necessary to take the Fourth Step through living these principles.

3 Honesty is an essential part of this step. Our years of living a lie must end. If
4 we sit down and become very quiet with ourselves, we will find it easier to get in
5 touch with the truth. What we currently know to be true, we put on paper, holding

nothing back. Telling the truth is a brave act, but with our faith and trust in the God of our understanding, we find the courage we need to be searching and fearless. With our courage, we are able to put on paper those things we thought we'd never tell.

What is meant by a "searching and fearless moral inventory?" We take stock of our assets and liabilities. We try to get at the bottom of who we are, to expose the lies we have told ourselves about ourselves. For years, we became whoever we needed to be to survive our addiction. After living a lifetime of lies, we began to believe those lies. The Fourth Step ^{for this} separates fantasy from reality. We can begin to stop being the person we have invented and find the freedom to be who we are.

If the word "moral" bothers us, we have found that talking with our sponsors about our reservations can ease our discomfort. A moral inventory doesn't mean that we will condemn ourselves. In reality, the inventory process is one of the most loving things we can do for ourselves. We simply look at our instincts, our desires, our motives, our tendencies, our likes and dislikes as they relate to others, and the compulsive routines that kept us trapped in our addiction. No matter how many days or how many years we have been clean, we are still human and subject to defects and failings. An inventory allows us to look at our basic nature with its flaws and its strengths. We look not only at our imperfections, but also at our hopes, our dreams, our aspirations, and where they may have gone astray. Step Four is a big step forward on the path toward becoming a whole, functional human being. [Our booklet, *Working Step Four in Narcotics Anonymous*, can provide more avenues to explore.]

59 Some of us may want to write our inventory all at once; others spend some
70 time writing each day. Any time we sit down to write, we ask our Higher Power for
71 the courage and honesty we need to be thorough. We ask the God of our
72 understanding to reveal what we are searching for. In most cases, we are relieved to
73 find that once we begin, the words seem to flow naturally. We need not worry about
74 what we are writing. Our Higher Power will reveal no more to us than we can
75 handle.

76 Most of us don't have much experience with the type of self-appraisal we are
77 about to do, and we must have the guidance and support of our sponsors in order to
78 understand what we're doing. They may give us a format to follow, certain subjects
79 or points to concentrate on, or just general guidance. Not only can our sponsors
80 provide direction for the actual inventory, they can encourage us to be courageous,
81 remind us to pray, and be emotionally supportive throughout this process. We often
82 strengthen our relationship with our sponsor by relying on his or her experience at
83 this time.

84 Consistent action on our Fourth Step is important. We can't afford to delay
85 work on our inventory. There is no right or wrong way to proceed, except *not* to
86 proceed. If we have a tendency to procrastinate, it is a good idea to set aside a
87 certain amount of time each day to work on our inventory. Such a routine
88 establishes our inventory as a high priority in our lives. If we put our Fourth Step
89 away once we have begun, we run the risk of never returning to it. Once we begin
90 writing, we need to continue our inventory until we are done.

91 We are painstaking and detail-oriented in our inventory. We systematically
92 examine all aspects of our lives. We begin to see and understand the truth about
93 ourselves, our motives, and our patterns. It is important that we look at more than
94 one dimension of our experience. What motivated us to act the way we did? What
95 repercussions did our behavior have in our lives? How did our behavior affect those
96 around us? How did we harm others? How did our actions, and others reactions,
97 make us feel? While these are only a few of the points we address in our
98 inventories, we have found them and others issues like them to be inherent parts of
99 our addiction.

100 In the Fourth Step, it is important to take a good hard look at how fear has
101 worked in our lives. Our experience tells us that self-centered fear is the root of our
102 disease. Many of us have put on a facade of fearlessness, when, in fact, we were
103 terrified. Fear has driven us to act rashly in trying to protect ourselves. We have
104 often been paralyzed into inaction because of our fears. We may have resorted to
105 scheming and manipulating because we feared the future. We went to extremes to
106 protect ourselves from what we saw as potential loss, disaster, and a constant lack of
107 what we needed. Not having faith in a Power that we believed would provide for us,
108 we stepped out and took control. We used people, we manipulated, we lied, we
109 plotted, we planned, we stole, we cheated, then we lied more to cover up our
110 schemes. From these actions, we experienced envy, jealousy, and deep, gut-
111 wrenching insecurities. We were alone. As we drove away the people who cared
112 about us, we used more drugs, trying to cover up our feelings. The lonelier we felt,
113 the more we tried to control everything and everybody. We suffered when things

14 didn't go our way, but so strong was our desire for power and control that we
15 couldn't see the futility of our efforts to manage events. In our new lives, we have
16 faith in a loving God whose will for us is better than anything we could manipulate
17 or control for ourselves. We need not fear what might happen.

18 We assess the emotional effects of our addiction. Some of us became so
19 skilled at shutting down our feelings with drugs or other distractions, that by the
20 time we came to our first meeting, we had lost touch with our own emotions. In
21 recovery, we learn to identify what we are feeling. Naming our feelings is important,
22 for once we can label them we don't need to be afraid of them. Rather than
23 panicking over how we feel, we can say "I'm angry," or "I'm sad." This gets us away
24 from the "good" or "bad" way in which we are so accustomed to viewing things.

25 We make a list of our resentments, for they often play a large part in making
26 our recovery uncomfortable. We cannot allow ourselves to be obsessed with
27 hostility toward others. We look at the institutions that may have affected us: our
28 families, schools, employers, organized religion, the law, or jails. We list the people,
29 places, social values, institutions, and situations against which we bear anger. We
30 examine not only the circumstances surrounding these resentments, but we look at
31 the part we played in them. What in us was so threatened that we experienced such
32 deep emotional torment? Often, we will see that the same areas of our lives were
33 affected again and again.

34 We look at our relationships as well, particularly the manner in which we
35 related to our families. We don't do this to place blame for our addiction on our
36 families. We keep in mind that we are writing an inventory of *ourselves*. We write

137 about how we felt about our families and the way we acted on our feelings. In most
138 cases, we'll find that patterns of behavior we established early in life are what we've
139 carried with us up to the present. Some of our patterns and choices have served us
140 well, while others have not. Through the inventory, we search for the patterns we
141 want to continue and those we want to change.

142 Writing about all of our relationships is very important, and we'll want to pay
143 particular attention to our friendships. If we gloss over our platonic friendships in
144 favor of focusing on romantic relationships, our inventories will be incomplete.
145 Many of us come to N.A. never having had a long-term friendship because of basic
146 conflicts within our own personalities. Those conflicts were the real grounds for the
147 arguments we started with our friends, and our ensuing refusal to work through the
148 disagreement and continue the friendship. Some of us felt that we would end up
149 getting hurt in any close friendship, so before that happened, we set up the end of
150 the friendship ourselves. We may have feared intimacy to such a degree that we
151 never revealed anything about ourselves to our friends. We may have induced guilt
152 in our friends to ensure their loyalty, or indulged in other forms of emotional
153 blackmail. If our friends had other friends, we may have felt so jealous and insecure
154 that we tried to remove the threat of other friends. Our behavior ran the gamut
155 from taking our friends hostage to taking them for granted. We may find several
156 instances where we sacrificed our friendships for romantic relationships.

157 We will probably find identical conflicts and behaviors in our romantic
158 relationships. We'll see the same difficulties with trust, refusals to be vulnerable,
159 and perhaps a lifelong pattern of inability to make commitments. As we write, we'll

160 most likely see fear of intimacy rearing its ugly head in each relationship, or discover
161 that we've never understood the difference between intimacy and sex. Whether we
162 ran from close relationships because of fear or because we had been hurt over and
163 over again, we search out the common threads that appear in all of our
164 relationships.

65 We may find that our sexual beliefs and behavior have caused problems in our
166 relationships. We may have used sex to get something we wanted or believed that
167 by having sex, we could extract a commitment from an unwilling partner. We ask
168 ourselves if our sexual behavior has been based in selfishness or in love. We may
169 have used sex to fill the spiritual void we felt inside. Some of us felt that our sexual
170 practices were out of the norm and were ashamed as a result. After years of
171 compulsively acting on our fears and misguided beliefs about sex, we want to be
172 comfortable with our own sexuality. This is a very uncomfortable topic for most of
173 us. However, if we want something different than what we've had, it's necessary that
174 we begin the process of change by writing about it.

75 Some of us were actually abused. We may have been victims of incest or rape.
76 We had terrible childhoods of deprivation and neglect. Experiences like these may
77 have led us to inflict the same abuse on others. We may have prostituted ourselves
78 in adulthood or allowed other ^{things} forms of degradation because we didn't feel that we
79 deserved anything better. However painful and sad, the past cannot be changed.
80 However, the warped beliefs we have developed about ourselves and others ^{can} be
81 changed with the help of our Higher Power. We write about events like these

182 that we can be free of our most painful secrets and get on with our lives. We don't
183 have to be the lifelong victims of our past.

184 To experience serenity, we must begin to alter the self-defeating patterns that
185 have prevailed in our lives. The Fourth Step helps us identify those patterns. We
186 begin to see how we have maneuvered through life, perhaps not consciously
187 planning our own misery but setting ourselves up for it nevertheless. Most of us
188 have blamed various people for the prices we paid for our addiction. We didn't
189 want to accept that our addiction had a negative impact that we alone were
190 responsible for. Some of us committed crimes and then complained about the
191 consequences the law imposed. Some of us were irresponsible at work and then
192 objected loudly when we were held accountable. We beat a hasty retreat whenever
193 life caught up with us. Our inventories will help us identify our responsibility for our
194 actions and find those circumstances where we tend to place blame elsewhere.

195 The quality of our lives depends, to a large degree, on the results of our
196 decisions. As we write our inventory, we look for the times when we made decisions
197 that hurt us, and also for those times when we made decisions that worked out well.
198 If we lived our lives by default, refusing to make any choices, we write about that,
199 too. Those times when we procrastinated until opportunities were missed and gone,
200 the times when we abdicated all responsibility, the times when we withdrew and
201 refused to participate in life--all are inventory material. Most of us had hopes and
202 dreams for ourselves at some point in our lives, but we abandoned those in the
203 pursuit of our addiction. In our inventory, we try to recall those lost dreams and
204 find out how our choices ruined our chances of having our dreams come true. We

ask ourselves when we stopped believing in ourselves. Through this process, our lost dreams may reawaken.

We dig deep to learn how we lived in conflict with our own morals and values. If we believed it was wrong to steal and we were stealing everything we could get our hands on anyway, what did we do to quiet our anguish? If we believed in monogamy but were unfaithful to our partners, what did we do so that we could live with our compromised principles? Certainly we used more drugs, but what else? We explore how we felt about ignoring our deepest beliefs. In the process, we discover our lost values so we can begin to rebuild them.

Often, our sponsors will direct us to look at our assets. With most of us being unaccustomed to looking for our character strengths, we might have some trouble with this task. But if we examine our behavior with an open mind, we're sure to find situations where we persevered in the face of adversity, or showed a concern for others, or even where our spirit triumphed over our addiction. We begin to uncover the pure and loving spirit that lies at the core of our being as we look for our character assets. We begin to shape strong values. We learn what we can do and, more importantly, what we can't do if we want to lead productive and fulfilling lives. What we did in our active addiction will not work for us in recovery. Step Four allows us to chart a new course for our lives.

The Fourth Step provides us with the initial insight we need to grow. Whether we are writing our first inventory or our tenth, we are starting a process that takes us from confusion to clarity, from resentment to forgiveness, from spiritual confinement to spiritual freedom. We can turn to this process again and again.

228 When we are confused, when we are angry, when we have problems that don't seem
229 to disappear, an inventory is a good way to take stock of just where we stand on the
230 path to recovery. After we have written a number of inventories, we may discover
231 that our first Fourth Step merely scratched the surface. As different attitudes and
232 behaviors become apparent to us in later recovery, we'll want to renew the process
233 of change by taking the Fourth Step again.

234 The steps are tools we use over and over on our spiritual path. In the process
235 of our recovery, God will reveal more to us as we have the maturity and the spiritual
236 strength to understand it. Over time, the nature of the work we have to do is
237 disclosed to us. As we continue in recovery, we begin to resolve some of the basic
238 conflicts contributing to our addiction. As the pain of old wounds begins to fade, we
239 begin to live more fully in the present.

240 The Fourth Steps allows us to identify the patterns, behaviors, and beliefs that
241 show us the exact nature of our wrongs. We have written an inventory of ourselves,
242 which revealed what we can change with God's help. To continue the process of
243 change, we move on, making our admissions in Step Five.

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1 **STEP FIVE**

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

4 Now that we have completed our written inventory, it is essential that we share
5 it promptly. The sooner we work our Fifth Step, the stronger the foundation of our
6 recovery will be. We've built this foundation on surrender, honesty, trust,
7 willingness, and courage, and with each step forward in our recovery, we
8 strengthen our commitment to these principles. We reaffirm our commitment to
9 recovery by immediately working Step Five.

10 Despite our desire to recover, we may find that we're feeling pretty frightened
11 at this point. This fear is only natural. After all, we're about to confront the exact
12 nature of our wrongs, candidly admitting our secrets to our Higher Power and
13 another human being. If we allow our feelings of shame or our fears of change
14 and rejection to stop our progress, our problems will only be compounded. If we
15 stop moving forward in our recovery, if we cease making every possible effort to
16 recover from our addiction, we will start slipping backward. If we abandon our
17 search for recovery, we will have given in to the disease of addiction.

18 We must overcome our fear and work the Fifth Step if we are to make any
19 significant changes in the way we live. We gather our courage and go on. We
20 may call our sponsors for reassurance. Usually, a reminder that we don't have to
21 face our feelings alone makes all the difference in easing our fears. Taking this
22 step with the support of our sponsors and a loving God is a way of putting into
23 practice our decision to allow God to care for our will and our lives. That decision,
24 like most other decisions we make, must be followed with action. For instance, if

25 we've made a decision to go on vacation, we would follow that decision by
26 making travel arrangements, setting an itinerary, and packing for the trip.
27 Following our Third Step decision with action will lead to a closer relationship with
28 our Higher Power.

29 Our understanding of the spiritual principles we have practiced in the first four
30 steps will be enhanced by taking the Fifth Step. We experience honesty by
31 making an admission just as we did in Step One, but we experience it on a deeper
32 level. The admission we are about to make in Step Five is especially important.
33 Not only do we open up and tell the truth about ourselves, we also hear this
34 admission from our own lips, breaking the pattern of denial that has plagued us
35 for so long. We find new levels of honesty, especially self-honesty, when we
36 squarely face the results of our addiction and see the reality of our lives. The risk
37 we take in this step increases our trust in God, nourishing the faith and hope we
38 first experienced in Step Two. We take our willingness a step further, thereby
39 renewing the decision we made in Step Three. We draw on the courage we
40 acquired in Step Four and find that we are capable of demonstrating more
41 bravery than we ever dreamed possible. This bravery is demonstrated not by our
42 lack of fear but by the action we take in spite of our fear. We set a time to share
43 our inventory; then, we show up and share at the scheduled time. The principles
44 in the previous steps provide us with the foundation we need to work the Fifth
45 Step.

46 We gain a new understanding of the principle of humility as we work this step.
47 We've most likely been under the impression that we are somehow bigger or
48 more visible than other people. Through working the Fifth Step, we find that few

49 of our actions deserve exaggerated attention. Through our self-disclosure, we
50 feel connected with humanity, perhaps for the first time in our lives.

51 As we share our most personal feelings and our most carefully guarded
52 secrets, we may experience anguish. However, many of us have looked up and
53 seen unconditional love in the eyes of the person hearing our Fifth Step. The
54 feelings of acceptance and belonging we experienced at that moment warmed us
55 to the bottoms of our hearts.

56 The knowledge that we are about to face feelings we have avoided for a long
57 time may cause a rise in our anxiety level, but we go on, encouraged by our
58 sponsors to trust in God. The first thing we must realize is that the Fifth Step is
59 not a quick fix for a painful situation. If we work this step expecting our feelings to
60 go away, we are expecting the steps to numb us the way drugs did. We review
61 our first four steps and see that their purpose is to awaken our spirits, not deaden
62 our feelings. We will need support and understanding to cope with our feelings. If
63 we choose an understanding individual to make our admissions to, we will have
64 all the support we need.

65 Although there is no requirement that the listener must be our sponsor, most
66 of us choose to share our inventory with him or her. We are most likely to benefit
67 from the full range of experience that another recovering addict has to share.
68 After all, who can better understand what we are attempting than those who have
69 done it for themselves? Addicts more experienced in recovery than we are will
70 already have dealt with the matters we are just beginning to face. Such people
71 can share with us their experience and the solutions they have found through
72 working this step. The bond we share with another member of Narcotics

73 Anonymous will strengthen our connection with the program and increase our
74 sense of belonging.

75 The person who is to listen to our Fifth Step should be someone who
76 understands the process of recovery we are involved in and is willing to help us
77 through it. An ideal listener will have enough compassion to honor our feelings,
78 enough integrity to respect our confidences, and enough insight to help us keep
79 the exact nature of our wrongs within our field of vision. Knowing that we are
80 reading *our* inventory, he or she will help us not to get sidetracked by blaming
81 others for the things we've written about in our Fourth Step.

82 Although we know we are going to derive meaningful benefits from taking this
83 step, we may still need a sort of "spiritual boost" before we actually begin this
84 process. Immediately before we sit down to share, we take a moment to reaffirm
85 our surrender and the decision we made in the Third Step. We ask a Power
86 greater than ourselves for the honesty, courage and willingness to work this step.
87 To invite God into this process, we may want to say a prayer. The prayer can be
88 anything that reaffirms our commitment to recovery. Praying with the person
89 hearing our Fifth Step can be a profoundly intimate experience.

90 Not only do we pray to ask for strength and courage, many of us also ask our
91 Higher Power to listen as we make our admission. Why is it so important that we
92 that we also make our admission to God? Because this is a spiritual program and
93 our whole purpose is to awaken spiritually. Our willingness to approach our
94 Higher Power openly with our past and who we are is central to our recovery. In
95 the past, some of us have felt that we weren't worthy of a relationship with God.
96 Our secrets kept us apart from God, and blocked our ability to feel any

97 acceptance or love from that Power. When we reveal something about ourselves,
98 we draw closer to our Higher Power and experience the unconditional love and
99 acceptance which springs from that Power. The feeling that the God of our
100 understanding accepts us no matter what we've done enhances our acceptance
101 of ourselves. The positive relationship we are building with our Higher Power
102 carries over into our relationships with others as well.

103 We may be surprised by the intensity of the partnership we are developing
104 with our sponsors as we share our inventory. If we've never really been listened
105 to before, we may be startled to discover that we are being asked questions
106 about some fine point of our personal history, or that our sponsors are jotting
107 down notes while we read. Our self-esteem increases as we realize that what we
108 have to share is worth another's attention. If we happen to look up, we may see
109 tears in our listener's eyes, telling us that they share our pain. That kind of
110 compassion is one more assurance of the presence of a Power greater than
111 ourselves.

112 Looking at and sharing the *exact nature* of our wrongs is not likely to be a
113 comfortable activity. We have looked back and seen how repeating the same
114 patterns over and over again has kept us stuck in the same place. And we
115 haven't just seen the surface behavior; we've seen the defects of character that
116 have been behind our behavior all along. We realize that there is a difference
117 between our actions and the exact nature of our wrongs. For instance, we may
118 see example after example of situations where we lied in a vain attempt to make
119 everyone like us. But those examples aren't the nature of our wrongs. The
120 nature of our wrongs is the dishonesty and manipulation we were demonstrating

each time we lied. If we look beyond the dishonesty and manipulation, we'll most likely find that we were afraid no one would like us if we told the truth.

As we share our inventory, our sponsors will sometimes share some of their own experience with us. He or she may cry with us or smile in recognition at some of the struggles we are now sharing. We may laugh together as we share some of the more comical aspects of our addiction and the ridiculous lies we told ourselves so that we could continue to live as we were living. As we see how similar our feelings are to our sponsors' feelings, we realize that there are other people like us. We're human beings, nothing more, nothing less. Our self-obsession blinded us to this, making us feel unique. Suddenly we understand that other people have painful problems too, and that ours are no more significant than anyone else's. Healing takes place when we see a glimpse of ourselves in the eyes of another. We find humility in that moment and a reason to hope that the serenity and peace we have been striving for are within our reach at last.

Our feelings of alienation fade as we experience an emotional connection with another human being. We are allowing someone entry to those places we've never before opened to another person. This may be the first time we've ever trusted another person enough to tell him or her about ourselves and allow that person to get to know us. We may be surprised at the closeness that develops between us and our sponsors. We're developing a give-and-take relationship based on equality and mutual respect, the kind that can last for a lifetime.

After taking our Fifth Step, we may feel a little raw or emotionally tender. We've taken a major step in the healing process of recovery. What we've done could easily be thought of as "surgery of the spirit." We've opened up old

145 wounds. We've exposed our most carefully constructed lies for the deceptions
146 they were, and we've told ourselves some painful truths. We've dropped our
147 masks in the presence of another person.

148 At this point, we may experience a dangerous urge to run from our new
149 awareness and return to the safe misery of the past. We may feel tempted to
150 avoid our sponsors because they know all about us now. It is very important that
151 we resist such impulses. We must talk with other recovering addicts about our
152 fears and feelings so we can hear the experience they have to share. We'll find
153 that what we're going through is not unique, and feel relieved when others tell us
154 they went through the very same struggles after they took their Fifth Step.

155 Our awareness of our patterns of relating with others, and the risk we have just
156 taken in admitting them to another, brings about a momentous breakthrough in
157 our relationships. Not only do we form a close bond with our listener, but the risk
158 we take in trusting this person will help us develop close relationships with others
159 as well. We've risked trusting one person with our secrets and our feelings, and
160 we haven't been rejected. We begin to have the freedom to risk trusting others.
161 Not only do we find out that others are trustworthy and deserve our friendship, we
162 find that we are trustworthy and deserving, too. We may have thought we were
163 incapable of loving or being loved or ever having friends. We discover that these
164 beliefs were unfounded. We learn, from the example of our sponsors, how to be
165 a more caring friend.

166 All of our relationships may begin to change after this step, including the one
167 we have with the God of our understanding. Throughout the process of the Fifth
168 Step, we turned to that Power when we were fearful, and we received the courage

we needed to complete the step. Our belief and our faith grew as a result. Because of this, we're willing to put more of ourselves into building a relationship with God. Just like any other relationship, the one we develop with our Higher Power calls for openness and trust on our part. When we share our most personal thoughts and feelings with our Higher Power, letting down our walls and admitting we are less than perfect, intimacy develops. We develop a certainty that our Higher Power is always with us and that we are being cared for.

The process we have undertaken so far has made us aware of the exact nature of our wrongs. The *exact nature* of those wrongs is our character defects. We now know that the patterns of our lives were rooted in dishonesty, fear, selfishness, and many other defects of character. We've seen the whole spectrum of our defects, and are ready for something new. With this readiness, we move on to Step Six.

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1 **STEP SIX**

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

4 The insight we gained in Step Five as to the exact nature of our wrongs, while
5 valuable, is only the beginning of the striking changes that take place in our lives
6 as we move into Step Six. The admission we made of the nature of our wrongs,
7 our character defects, is a necessary prerequisite for our readiness to have them
8 removed. Profoundly shaken by our part in the past, we can expect our attitudes
9 to be profoundly changed by working the Sixth Step.

10 Although some of us have not understood the critical importance of the Sixth
11 and Seventh Steps, they are essential actions that must be taken if we expect to
12 make any significant and lasting changes in our lives. We cannot simply say,
13 "Yes, I'm ready. God, please remove my defects" and go on to Step Eight. If we
14 gloss over the Sixth and Seventh Steps and go on to make our amends, we will
15 only wind up owing more amends by repeating the same destructive patterns as
16 before.

17 The lifelong process of the Sixth Step is just that--a process. We've started the
18 process of becoming entirely ready, and we will strive to increase our readiness
19 throughout our lifetime. Our job is to become entirely ready, and to open our
20 hearts and minds to the deep internal changes that can only be brought about by
21 the touch of a loving God.

22 We've already had experience, in the Third Step, with what we must do now in
23 the Sixth Step. Just as we surrendered our will and lives to the care of a Power
24 greater than ourselves because we could no longer go on managing our own

25 lives, we now prepare to surrender our defects of character to a loving God
26 because we have exhausted our attempts to change on our own willpower. This
27 process is difficult and often painful.

28 Our growing awareness of our defects often causes us pain. We've all heard
29 the expression "ignorance is bliss," but we're no longer ignorant of our character
30 defects, and awareness hurts. All of a sudden, we'll notice a wounded look in the
31 eyes of a friend after we've acted on one of our less endearing traits. We'll hang
32 our heads in shame, mumble an apology, and probably beat ourselves inwardly
33 for being so callous one more time. We feel sick inside, knowing how our actions
34 adversely affect the people in our lives. We are sick and tired of being the people
35 we have been, but this feeling compels us to change and grow. We want to be
36 different, and the good news is that we already are. Being able to see beyond our
37 own interests and being concerned about the feelings of others are striking
38 changes, considering that the core of our disease is our raging self-obsession.

39 We are likely to feel very frustrated as we notice that our defects are getting in
40 the way of our recovery. We may attempt to suppress them ourselves by either
41 denying their existence or hiding them from others. We may think that if no one
42 knows about our more unattractive characteristics they'll go away. What we must
43 do, rather than try to exert power and control over our defects, is step out of the
44 way and allow a loving God to work in our lives. One part of this process involves
45 becoming responsible for our behavior.

46 When we are confronted with our character defects, either by our own insight
47 or by someone we hurt, we begin by taking complete responsibility for our
48 actions. We don't avoid responsibility by saying something like, "Well, God hasn't

49 removed that defect yet" or "I'm powerless over my defects and that's just the way
50 I'm going to be." We accept responsibility for our behavior--good, bad, or
51 indifferent. We no longer have our drug use or our ignorance as an excuse to be
52 irresponsible.

53 When we honestly admit our wrongs, we find humility. The humility we
54 experienced in Step Five grows as we again sense our humanness and realize
55 that we are never going to be perfect. We accept ourselves a little bit more, we
56 surrender, and our willingness to change increases dramatically. We have
57 already experienced remarkable changes in our emotional and spiritual nature
58 through our continuous efforts to live by the principles contained in the previous
59 steps. Despite our lack of familiarity with the realm of the spirit, we must
60 remember that, in Steps One through Three, we were given the basic tools we
61 need to negotiate the path of recovery. We carry within us the honesty it took to
62 make our initial surrender, the faith and hope we developed in coming to believe
63 in a Power greater than ourselves, and the trust and willingness required from us
64 when we made our decision to turn our will and lives over to the care of that
65 Power. Our spirits were touched by the humility of believing in that Power. Our
66 courage grew with the knowledge that our desire to fulfill God's will protected us
67 from the destructiveness of self-will.

68 On this spiritual foundation we lay the principles of commitment and
69 perseverance as we work the Sixth Step. We need the willingness to make a
70 commitment to pursue our recovery despite the continued presence of character
71 defects in our lives. We mustn't give up, even when we think no change has
72 taken place. We are often blind to our own internal changes, but we can rest

73 assured that what's happening inside us is evident on the outside to others. We
74 trust that even though our vision may be blocked by the disease of addiction, God
75 is hard at work on our spirits. Our job is to keep on walking, even though it may
76 feel as though each step requires more strength than we can muster. No matter
77 how difficult our progress, we must persevere. We can make use of the sheer grit
78 and tenacity it took to maintain our ^{addict} addiction by applying them to our recovery.

79 Having written our inventory and shared it with ourselves, the God of our
80 understanding, and another human being, we've become aware of our defects of
81 character. With the help of our sponsors, we write a list of those defects and
82 focus on how they manifest themselves in our lives. Our character defects are
83 basic human traits that have been distorted all out of proportion by our self-
84 centeredness, causing enormous pain to us and those around us.

85 Take a defect such as self-righteousness, for example, and imagine it in its
86 normal, uninflated state--confident belief in one's own values. Strong, confident,
87 and well-rounded people have formed values and principles to live by and believe
88 deeply in their rightness. Such people live what they believe, and share those
89 beliefs with others in a non-critical way when asked. Confidence in our beliefs is
90 essential. Without it, we would be wishy-washy, unsure of our decisions, and
91 probably somewhat ^{immature} childlike in our dealings with the world. Confident belief
92 becomes ugly self-righteousness when we insist that others live by our values.
93 Attempting to enforce our insistence by manipulating or exploiting others makes
94 this defect even uglier.

95 Or consider fear. The absence of fear in the face of a personal attack,
96 catastrophic illness, or potential injury would signal insanity rather than serenity!

97 We all have fears--of being alone, of not having enough money, of dying, and
98 many others. But when our fears become obsessively self-centered, when we
99 spend all of our time protecting ourselves from what *might* happen, we can no
100 longer deal effectively with life.

101 As we work Step Six, traversing the vast gulf that lies between fear and
102 courage requires a great deal of willingness and trust on our part. Our fears of
103 what we will be like without relying on the destructive behavior of our past must be
104 overcome. We'll have to trust our Higher Power to do a good job on our
105 character. We'll have to believe that God knows best what we need. We must be
106 willing to take a chance that what lies beyond the Sixth Step is going to be better
107 than our current stock of fears, resentments, and spiritual anguish. When the
108 pain of remaining the same becomes greater than our fear of change, we will
109 surely let go.

110 We may wonder what will happen to us without the use of what we may see as
111 survival skills. After all, in our active addiction, our self-centeredness protected us
112 from feeling guilt and enabled us to continue our drug use without regard for
113 those around us. Our denial protected us from seeing the wreckage of our lives.
114 Our selfishness made it possible for us to do whatever it took to continue on our
115 path of madness. But we no longer need these "skills." We have a set of
116 principles to practice that are much more appropriate to our new way of life.

117 As we write our list of defects and see how they have been at the root of our
118 troubles, we need to be open-minded about how our lives would be without these
119 defects. If one of our character defects is dishonesty, we can think about
120 situations in our lives where we normally lie and imagine how it would feel to tell

121 the truth for a change. If we put some effort into this exercise, we may feel a
122 sense of relief at the possibility of a life free from having to cover small deceits with
123 major fabrications and all the complications inherent in dishonesty. Or, if we find
124 defects based in laziness and procrastination, we can visualize leaving behind our
125 marginal existence and trading up to a life of ^{newly} ambition, new horizons, and
126 unlimited possibilities.

127 In addition to our hopes and dreams for the future, we might find a more
128 concrete example of what we are striving for in our sponsors or others whose
129 recovery we admire. If we know a member who is exhibiting the spiritual assets
130 we want to attain, we can use them as an example for ourselves. What we hope
131 to become is evidenced all around us in recovering addicts living by spiritual
132 principles. Our sponsors share the freedom they have found from their defects of
133 character, and we have faith that what happened for them will also happen for us.

134 Even so, we may still go through a period of mourning over the loss of our
135 illusions and old ways. Sometimes giving up those outdated survival skills feels
136 like giving up our best friend. We do, however, need to surrender our
137 reservations, excuses, rationalizations, and self-deceptions, and go forward into
138 recovery with our eyes wide open. We are completely aware that there's no
139 turning back because we can never forget the miracle that's begun to happen to
140 us. Our bruised and battered spirits have started to heal in the course of working
141 the steps.

142 Part of the process of becoming entirely ready involves practicing constructive
143 behavior. Because we now understand and recognize our destructive behaviors,
144 we'll find the willingness to practice constructive behaviors instead. For instance,

145 if we're hurt somehow, we don't have to curl up in a ball of self-pity, complaining
146 about what a rotten deal we got. Instead, we can accept what is and work toward
147 finding solutions. The more we do this, the more we form a habit of thinking
148 constructively. It becomes natural to begin examining alternatives, setting goals,
149 and following through in the face of adversity. Hardly a minute do we have to
150 spend sulking or pointlessly complaining about circumstances beyond our
151 control. We may even surprise ourselves with our cheer and optimism at times
152 and it's no wonder, considering how foreign such attitudes have been to most of
153 us!

154 There may still be times when we feel that entirely too much is being asked of
155 us. Many of us have exclaimed, "You mean I even have to tell the truth about
156 *that?*" or "If only I could still lie, steal, or cheat, it would be so much easier to get
157 what I want." We're torn between the unprincipled ways of our addiction and the
158 character-building principles of recovery. While, at first glance, it may seem easier
159 to manipulate outcomes or avoid consequences, we know that we cannot afford
160 the price we would have to pay. The resulting shame, regret, and loss of spiritual
161 contentment would far outweigh anything we might possibly gain by
162 compromising our principles.

163 Through upholding the principles of recovery, we seek a life of harmony and
164 peace. The energy we once put into the care and feeding of our character
165 defects can now be put into nurturing our spiritual goals. The more attention we
166 focus on our spiritual nature, the more it will unfold in our lives.

167 We will not, however, achieve a state of spiritual perfection, regardless of how
168 diligently we apply the Sixth Step to our lives. We will most likely see the defects

we deal with today crop up in a myriad of manifestations throughout our lifetimes. Even after years of recovery, we may feel devastated at the reappearance of some old defect we thought had been removed. We are humbled by our imperfection--but let there be no mistake, humility is the ideal state for an addict to be in. Humility brings us back down to earth and plants our feet firmly on the spiritual path we are walking. We smile ruefully at our delusions of perfection, and keep on walking. We're on the right path, headed in the right direction, and each step we take brings progress.

We gain more tolerance for the defects of those around us as we work this step. When we see someone acting in one of the ways that has caused us to feel pain ourselves, we feel compassionate rather than judgmental, for we know just exactly how much pain such behavior causes. Rather than condemning the behavior of another, we look at ourselves. Having experience in accepting ourselves, we can extend compassion and tolerance to others.

We ask ourselves if we are entirely ready to have God remove all of our defects--every single one. If any reservation exists, if we feel the need to cling to any defect, we pray for willingness. We set our sights on our path, open our spirits to the healing Power we've found in Narcotics Anonymous, and use the resources of our recovery to do our best each moment. Although the process lasts a lifetime, we only live in the present day. We've taken a giant step forward in the process of recovery, but it must be followed with another to be truly lasting. With the readiness we have at hand today, we go on to Step Seven.

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STEP SEVEN

"We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."

In Step Four, we uncovered the basic defects of our character. In Step Five, we admitted their existence. In Step Six, we became entirely ready to have God remove them all so that we could experience continued spiritual growth and recovery. Now, in Step Seven, we humbly ask our Higher Power to remove our shortcomings. When we ask our Higher Power to remove these shortcomings, we ask for freedom from anything which limits our recovery or prevents us from experiencing God's love and understanding. We ask for help because we cannot do it alone.

Through working the previous steps, we see that attaining humility is necessary if we are going to live a clean life and walk a spiritual path. An attitude of humility, however, doesn't mean we need to be humiliated, nor is it a denial of our good qualities. On the contrary, ~~an attitude of humility means that we have a~~ *Chapin* realistic view of ourselves and our place in the world. In the Seventh Step, humility means understanding our role in our own recovery, appreciating our limitations and having faith in the God we've come to understand. To work the Seventh Step, we must get out of the way so that God can do God's work. Humbly asking for the removal of our shortcomings means we are giving complete license to ^{that love power} ~~God~~ to work in our lives. ~~We are giving permission to that~~ *may* loving Power, believing God's wisdom far exceeds our own.

Even though we now possess some measure of humility, many of us ~~were~~ *may* somewhat confused by the word "humbly." We may have taken it for granted that

24 God would remove our shortcomings immediately upon request. Those of us
25 with this attitude may have been surprised when our Higher Power didn't comply
26 with our request. On the other hand, some of us tried begging God to remove
27 our shortcomings, guessing that would be a demonstration of humility.

28 We tried so hard to get it right. We were tired of our shortcomings. We were
29 worn out from trying to manage and control them, and we wanted some relief.
30 Oddly enough, this is precisely the attitude we hope to demonstrate in Step
31 Seven, the attitude of humility. We admit defeat, recognize our limitations, and
32 ask for help from a loving God.

33 Asking God to remove our shortcomings requires a surrender of a more
34 pronounced nature than our initial surrender. That surrender, born of sheer
35 despair over our powerlessness and inability to manage our lives, moves into an
36 entirely new realm in the Seventh Step. In this new level of surrender, we accept
37 not only our addiction, we also accept the shortcomings related to our addiction.
38 Accepting our addiction was the first move in the direction of accepting ourselves.
39 We know something about ourselves because of our work in the previous steps,
40 and our illusions of uniqueness have been overcome in the process. We know
41 that we are neither more nor less important than anyone else. Understanding that
42 we are not unique is a good indication of humility.

43 Patience is an essential ingredient of working this step. We may have difficulty
44 with the notion of patience, because our addiction accustomed us to instant
45 gratification. But we've already been practicing the principles that make it
46 possible for us to be patient. We simply need to expand on our Third Step
47 decision to trust God with our will and our lives. If we only trusted that Power to a

certain extent in Step Three, it's time to increase our trust. Because our view of what we can hope for may be limited, many of us can't even begin to fathom what our Higher Power has in store for us. If this is the case for us, we must rely on blind faith. As in the previous steps, we simply have to believe that God's will for us is good. Our faith gives us reason to hope for the best.

In working this step, we move away from intellectualizing the recovery process. Our concern is not to determine exactly how or when God will remove our shortcomings. It's not our job to analyze this step. This step is a spiritual choice. To choose to bypass it would leave us with only a heightened awareness of our character defects and no hope for relief from those shortcomings. The resulting pain might well be unbearable.

We've seen our character defects, our faulty belief systems, and our unhealthy patterns of behavior. We've seen that we need to change, but may not be aware that we've been changing since we first came to Narcotics Anonymous for help. We walked into our first meeting with a spiritual void. People looked into our eyes and had trouble seeing ~~the human being~~ behind the blank gaze. Some essential ray of spiritual light had been cut off. We had lost the ability to love, to laugh, and to feel. Now, we are beginning to come back to life. What we are in the midst of experiencing is an awakening of the spirit--no less dramatic than it sounds. This awakening has been evident to those around us for quite some time, but the change is now so obvious that even we can't miss it.

One of the changes we see is in our relationship with the God of our understanding. Previously, we may have felt that God was powerful but far removed and not having much to do with us on a personal level. We may have

72 had trouble grasping the fact that each one of us could have a personal Higher
73 Power--a Power always available to us. Prayer may have felt artificial for quite a
74 while, but we may now sense that we are being listened to and loved when we
75 pray.

76 Still, we must rely on the experience of others in recovery. Regardless of how
77 secure we feel in our relationship with the God of our understanding, we should
78 remain open to our sponsor's suggestions. Our sponsor will guide us through
79 ^{work} taking the Seventh Step just as he or she has guided us through the previous
80 steps. Our sponsor may help us with our understanding of humility, or help us
81 find a way of communicating with God that feels right.

82 Developing a ~~personal~~ relationship with the God of our understanding goes a
83 long way toward increasing our level of comfort when we ask to have our
84 shortcomings removed. The work we've done in the previous steps has furthered
85 that relationship. We've asked our Higher Power for honesty, open-mindedness,
86 and willingness and have been provided with those attributes that are so vital to
87 our recovery.

88 Each time we come up short in any of the qualities we are trying to attain or
89 when we have difficulty practicing spiritual principles, we turn to the God of our
90 understanding. In this step, we ask God to remove our impatience, our
91 intolerance, our dishonesty, or whatever shortcoming is currently in the way. We
92 find that our Higher Power always provides us with what we need and our faith
93 grows as a result. When we ask God to remove our shortcomings, we may see
94 little bits of them removed, they may simply be shoved out of the way for a time so
95 we can move forward on the path of recovery, or we may attain complete freedom

from having to act on those shortcomings. The point is that we have come to believe that only the God of our understanding has the power to remove our shortcomings. We can actually ask our Higher Power to remove our shortcomings in good faith, knowing that it will happen in God's time. The infinite wisdom and love of God goes far beyond our own ideas of what we need and think we should have.

We need to remember that we are praying to a Power greater than ourselves. We ask humbly, knowing that, of ourselves, we are powerless. Some of us will recite a formal prayer that demonstrates humility when we ask God to help us. Some of us will pray in a more casual manner, just as humbly but using words that feel more natural and comfortable to us. Any communication with our Higher Power is prayer. However we choose to communicate with God, we feel a certain comfort come over us as we pray. We know that we are being taken of.

With this knowledge comes freedom. Though not a cure by any means, working the Seventh Step gives us the freedom to choose. We know that if we live by the spiritual principles of recovery, ~~we have nothing to worry about~~. We no longer need to wear ourselves out trying to arrange situations and outcomes, ~~because we trust God completely~~ with our lives. We may still be fearful from time to time, but we no longer have to react to fear in destructive ways. We have the freedom to choose to act constructively or, when appropriate, do nothing at all. Knowing that we are being cared for is a result of developing a relationship with God. We are in the process of developing a conscious contact with a Higher Power which we will strive to improve throughout our lives. We are conscious of the God of our understanding and feel that Power's presence.

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God's
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120 This certainty, beyond all doubt, brings about a peace of mind that we never
121 dreamed possible. We are now free to dream beyond our wildest imaginings. We
122 sense that what lies at the end of our search for spiritual growth is our ability to
123 feel God's love for us. We glimpse a vision of complete freedom from our
124 shortcomings. It doesn't matter that we will not attain a state of perfection or
125 complete humility in our lifetimes. The ability to contemplate this grand vision and
126 meditate upon it are rare and priceless gifts in their own right and don't require
127 fruition to be complete.

128 We are being changed. We've not only heard about the miracle of recovery,
129 we are becoming living, breathing examples of what the power of God can do.
130 The spiritual life has ceased to be a theory we hear about in meetings--it is now
131 becoming a tangible reality. We can witness a miracle simply by looking in the
132 mirror. God has taken us from spiritually unconscious, hopeless addicts to
133 spiritually aware, recovering addicts eager to get on with our new lives. Although
134 we've reached this point, the damage we've done by living out our shortcomings
135 needs to be addressed. Before we can hope to have the lasting peace that is
136 God's will for us and be spiritually fit to carry the message of recovery, we must
137 begin the process of repairing the path of destruction we have left behind us.
138 Desiring continued recovery and freedom, we go on to Step Eight.

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STEP EIGHT

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

In the previous steps, we began to make peace with God and with ourselves. In the Eighth Step, we begin the process of making peace with others.

By acting on our character defects, we inflicted harm on ourselves and those around us. In the Seventh Step, we asked our Higher Power to remove our shortcomings. However, in order to gain true freedom from our defects, we need to accept responsibility for them. We need to do whatever we can to make up for our mistakes. Steps Eight and Nine--the "amends steps"--give us a chance to rectify our wrongs. We begin to accept responsibility for our actions by listing all the people we have harmed, and becoming willing to make amends to them all.

Our efforts to make amends will certainly make a difference in the lives of those we have harmed. However, this process has its greatest impact in our own lives. Our objective is to begin clearing away the damage we've done so that we can continue with our spiritual awakening. By the time we work our way through the process of making amends, we will surely be astounded by the level of freedom we feel.

We are involved in a process designed to free us from our past so that we are able to live fully in the present. Many of us are haunted by memories of our mistreatment of others. Those memories can creep up on us without warning. Our shame and remorse over our past actions are so deep that these recollections can cause us to feel unbearable guilt. We want to be free of such guilt. We begin by making a list of the people we've harmed.

25 Just thinking about our list may frighten us. We may be afraid that we've done
26 so much damage that we can never repair it, or we may be afraid of facing the
27 people we've harmed. We find ourselves wondering how our amends will be
28 received. Our most hopeful projections probably entail being absolved of any
29 wrongdoing. Or, our most nightmarish expectations may involve someone
30 refusing to accept our amends, preferring instead to take revenge. Most of us
31 have fairly vivid imaginations, but this is not the time to get ahead of ourselves.
32 We must avoid making projections, either negative or positive, about how it will
33 actually be to make our amends. We are on the Eighth Step, not the Ninth Step.
34 At this point, making a list and becoming willing to make amends are our only
35 concerns.

36 Working the previous steps has prepared us for the willingness we need to
37 begin the Eighth Step. We've honestly assessed the exact nature of our wrongs
38 and examined how our actions affected others. It was not easy to admit our
39 wrongs. We had to believe in a Power that would supply us with courage, and
40 love us through the pain involved in reviewing the results of our addiction. The
41 same honesty and courage we called upon as we wrote our inventory and shared
42 it are just as vital in making our amends list. We've been practicing these
43 principles all along and are quite familiar with them. The Eighth Step is simply a
44 continuation of our efforts to find freedom by applying spiritual principles.

45 Making the list and becoming willing may be difficult unless we overcome our
46 resentments. Most of us owe amends to at least one person who had also
47 harmed us. Perhaps we haven't truly forgiven that person yet and find we are
48 very reluctant to put his or her name on our list. However, we must. Why?

49 Because we are responsible for our actions. We make amends because we owe
50 them. We must let go of long-standing grudges and focus on our part in the
51 conflicts in our lives. We won't get better and be able to live the spiritual life we
52 are seeking if we are still in the grip of self-obsession. We let go of our
53 expectations, and we let go of blaming anyone for our actions. Our idea that we
54 have been a victim must go. In the Eighth Step, we are not concerned with what
55 others have done to us. We are concerned only with accepting responsibility for
56 what we've done to others.

57 If we still bear anger toward some of the people in our pasts, we will need to
58 practice the spiritual principle of forgiveness. Our ability to forgive comes from
59 our ability to accept and be compassionate with ourselves. However, if we have
60 difficulty, we can ask our Higher Power for help. We pray for whatever it takes to
61 become willing to forgive. We've begun to accept ourselves as we are. Now, we
62 begin to accept others as they are.

63 We go through our Fourth Step and list all the people, places, and institutions
64 to whom we owe amends. If we've done a thorough Fourth Step, it should clearly
65 outline our part in the conflicts in our lives and show how we harmed others by
66 acting on our faults. We find the people we wounded with our dishonesty, the
67 people we stole from or cheated, the people who were on the receiving end of our
68 wrongs. We also take note of how we harmed society as a whole and add that to
69 our list. We drained community resources, exhibited offensive behavior in public,
70 refused to contribute to the general welfare. Although we may find the majority of
71 our amends list from reviewing our Fourth Step, Step Eight isn't simply a
72 reiteration of our inventory. We are now looking for the people, places, and

*word
Substitution*

73 institutions we harmed, not just the types of harm we inflicted. We didn't just lie;
74 we lied to *someone*. We didn't just steal; we stole from various *people*.

75 The writing we did on our Fourth Step is not the only source of help we will be
76 given in compiling our amends list. Our sponsor will also help us. When we
77 shared our inventory, our sponsor helped us see the exact nature of our wrongs.
78 Our sponsor's insight showed us how we had wounded people by acting on our
79 character defects, and will now help us determine who actually belongs on our
80 amends list. Many of us have gone to extremes in matters of accepting
81 responsibility for ourselves. Some of us have had a tendency to deny any
82 responsibility, while others have shouldered total blame for every disagreement.
83 Many of us also had trouble seeing how we had harmed ourselves, and may have
84 been surprised when our sponsor suggested that we add our own name to the
85 list. Our flawed perceptions begin to fall away as we talk with our sponsor, and
86 we find the clarity we need to take the Eighth Step. With the help of our sponsor,
87 we have started to develop a realistic view of where our responsibility truly began
88 and ended.

89 Before we proceed in making a list, it is important that we understand what the
90 word "harm" means in the context of the Eighth Step. We may be inclined to think
91 of harm only in terms of physical suffering. However, there are many different
92 forms of harm: causing mental anguish, property damage or loss, inflicting long-
93 lasting emotional scars, betraying trust, and so forth. Though we may exclaim,
94 "but I never meant to hurt anyone!," this is beside the point. We are responsible
95 for the harm we caused no matter what our intentions were. Any time that people
96 were hurt, in any way, because of something we did, they were harmed. To gain

97 a better understanding of how we may have harmed people, we may want to "put
98 ourselves in their shoes." If we can imagine what it felt like to be the victim of our
99 reckless disregard for those around us, we shouldn't have any trouble adding
100 those names to our list.

101 In addition to understanding what harm means, we also need to understand
102 what "make amends" means. This step does not say that we become willing to
103 say we're sorry, although that may be a part of our amends. Most of the people
104 we've hurt have probably heard us say "I'm sorry" enough to last a lifetime. In
105 truth, we are becoming willing to do anything possible to set right the wrongs
106 we've done, including changing our behavior.

107 There may be instances in which we inflicted harm so severe that the situation
108 simply can't be set right. This may be readily apparent as we look at our
109 relationships with those who have been in our lives for quite some time. Over the
110 years, we have given our families, partners, and long-term friends one painful
111 situation after another. Even though we can't undo the past, our experience has
112 shown that we still need to look at what we've done, acknowledge the damage
113 we've caused, and become willing to make reparations, despite the impossibility
114 of changing what happened.

115 Accepting the harm we caused, being truly sorry, and becoming willing to go
116 to any lengths to change is a painful process. But we need not fear our growing
117 pains, for our acknowledgment of these truths helps us continue our spiritual
118 awakening. Simply accepting the harm we caused increases our humility. Being
119 truly sorry is a clear indication that our self-centeredness has diminished and that

we are availing ourselves of our Higher Power's love. Willing to go to any lengths to change, we are newly inspired.

Some of our willingness will come about simply by writing our list. We will have the opportunity to face the harm we've done. Some of us, after writing the name of a person to whom we owe amends and what we did to harm that person, have added plans for how we intend to make the amends. Planning how we are going to make our amends may help increase our willingness as we see that we do have the potential to correct our past mistakes.

We want to become willing to make the amends we owe, and we do whatever it takes to bring that willingness about. If we find ourselves engaging in debates with ourselves, or getting caught up in assessing the exact level of willingness we need, we can lay these non-productive thoughts aside by making a conscious decision to pray for willingness. We may still be slightly hesitant, but we do the best we can. Our recovery is at stake. If we want to continue with our recovery, we must make amends.

We ask a loving God to help us find the willingness to make our amends. Praying for willingness takes our relationship with God a step further. In the Seventh Step, we furthered our personal relationship with our Higher Power by asking for freedom from our shortcomings. Now, we trust that Power to provide us with whatever we need to work the Eighth Step. Our commitment to recovery includes becoming ready to go as far as we must.

A Higher Power is working in our lives, preparing us to be of service to others. The changes brought about by that Power are evidenced by our changing attitudes and actions. We are developing the ability to choose spiritual principles

over character defects, and recovery over addiction. We have a fresh outlook on life, and we know that we are responsible for what we do. We no longer feel constant regret over the harm we've caused in the past. Simply understanding how badly we've hurt people, being truly sorry for the pain we've caused, and becoming willing to let them know of our desire to make things right are the keys to freedom from our past. Though we have yet to make peace with others, we've come a long way toward making peace with ourselves. With our new perspective, our trust in God, and our willingness, we go on to Step Nine.

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1 **STEP NINE**

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

5 Now that we are willing to make amends to all the people we've harmed, we
6 put our willingness into action by working the Ninth Step. We're involved in a
7 process that takes us from awareness of our wrongs and the conflicts they've
8 caused to a growing freedom from those conflicts and the serenity we've sought.
9 This process has called on us to examine our lives, identify our character defects,
10 and become aware of how we harmed others when we acted on those defects.
11 Now, we must do everything we can to repair the harm we've caused.

12 We have our Eighth Step list, and we know what we have to do; however,
13 knowing and doing are two different things. We may have a perfectly good plan
14 for making our amends but, when the moment arrives, find ourselves
15 overwhelmed by fear and feel unable to go on. We may be afraid of how our
16 amends will be received. We may be worried that someone will retaliate. On the
17 other hand, we may be harboring a secret hope that we will be excused from our
18 responsibilities. We cannot base our willingness on the expectation that we won't
19 actually have to make restitution. For each of our amends, every possibility
20 exists, from being held fully accountable to being completely excused. We must
21 be willing to follow through, regardless of the potential outcome. One more time,
22 with the help of our Higher Power, we simply have to walk through our fear and
23 go on.

We must be courageous when we work this step. Though the prospect of making amends may frighten us, we turn to God for strength, just as we always have. Our Higher Power is with us as we make each of our amends. We rely on the presence of that Power, no matter how scared we are about approaching the people we have harmed.

We may hesitate, fearing other people won't accept us as readily as our fellow NA members have. However, we have found that recovering addicts don't hold a monopoly on kindness or forgiveness. Other people are capable of accepting us as we are and understanding our problems. But whether they are willing to accept us or not, we must go on with making our amends to them. The risk we take is sure to be rewarded with increased personal freedom.

The spiritual principles of honesty and humility that we've learned in earlier steps are invaluable to us in the Ninth Step. We would never be able to approach the people to whom we owe amends in the spirit of humility if we hadn't been practicing these principles before now. The honest examination we used to write our inventory and make our admissions, the ego-deflation brought about by our work in the Sixth and Seventh Steps, and the realistic look at how we harmed others have all worked together to increase our humility and provide us with the impetus needed to work the Ninth Step. Our path has led us to humbly accept who we have been and who we are becoming resulting in a sincere desire to make amends to all those we have harmed.

This desire to make amends should be the primary motive for working the Ninth Step. Making amends isn't something we do simply because our program of recovery suggests it, nor can we make amends for self-serving reasons. To be

certain our motives are based in spiritual principles, we find it helpful to reaffirm our decision to turn our will over to the care of God before making each of our amends. A Power greater than ourselves will provide us with the guidance we need.

We should not expect a "pat on the back" or praise for living in accordance with the principles of recovery. People may respond to our amends in many different ways. They may or may not appreciate our amends. The relationships we have with those people may get better, or they may not. We may be thanked, or we may be told "It's about time you did this." We must let go of any expectations we have on how our amends will turn out and leave the results to the God of our understanding. It is very important that we do our absolute best to make amends. Once we have done that, however, our part is finished. We can't expect our amends to magically heal the hurt feelings of someone we have harmed. We may humbly ask for forgiveness, but if we don't receive it we let that expectation go, knowing we have done our best. As we are making amends, we ask ourselves if we are doing this because we are truly sorry and have a genuine desire to make reparations for what we've done. If we answer "yes" to this question, we can be assured we are approaching our amends in the true spirit of humility and love.

Handling difficult amends requires the assistance of our sponsor. Wherever possible, we should ask for guidance on *all* of our amends, discussing each one of them with our sponsor *before* we set out to make them. We tell our sponsor what we are making amends for, what we are planning to say, and what we intend to offer to set the situation right. What we intend to offer as amends should be

72 appropriate to the harm we caused. For instance, if we borrowed money from
73 someone and never paid it back, we don't merely apologize; we pay the money
74 back. We talk directly to the person we harmed and amend exactly what we did
75 wrong.

76 When we make amends to those we have held a resentment against in the
77 past, an attitude of forgiveness is imperative. We don't want to go to someone,
78 intent on making amends, and end up in a shouting match over who was injured
79 more severely. Even though we are sure to have amends to make to people who
80 have also harmed us, we must set our hurt feelings aside. Our responsibility is to
81 make amends for what we have done wrong, not to force others to admit how
82 they have wronged us--we need to forgive.

83 In our experience, making amends is a two-stage process. Not only do we
84 make amends to the person we've harmed, we follow up on those amends with a
85 serious change in our behavior. First, we mend our fences; then, we mend our
86 ways. For example, some of us may have destroyed someone's property while
87 we were angry. When we make our amends, we not only apologize to the person
88 and replace or repair the property, we follow that up by repairing our attitudes.
89 We amend our behavior, making a daily effort not to express our anger by
90 damaging property anymore.

91 Changing the way we live is a lifetime process, and is perhaps the most
92 significant amend we can make. Some of the people we've harmed, like our
93 families or others we've been close to for a long time, have suffered for years.
94 Amends of this nature can't be made in a five-minute apology, no matter how
95 heartfelt. Although an admission of wrong and an apology may be the starting

96 point, we need to go on by making a concerted daily effort to stop hurting our
97 loved ones. If we have neglected our families, we start spending time with them.
98 If we have been thoughtless, always forgetting birthdays and anniversaries, we
99 begin to be thoughtful instead, remembering those important events. If we have
100 been inconsiderate, always wrapped up in what we wanted and needed, we now
101 begin to be sensitive to the needs of others.

102 Of course, we may not have an ongoing relationship with some of the people
103 we have harmed. For instance, if we are divorced from a spouse with whom we
104 had children, we may owe child-support payments. Making such amends does
105 not require that we rekindle an emotional relationship with our ex-partner. We can
106 simply work out a mutually acceptable plan to fulfill our obligations to our children.

107 Because the action we take in this step can have a profound impact on other
108 people, we don't want to just blithely step out and start making our amends
109 without first discussing them in detail with our sponsor. Some of us have felt
110 compelled to make our amends on an impulse, just to ease our own conscience;
111 however, we usually ended up doing more harm than good. Suppose that, in our
112 Fourth Step, we wrote about people we had secretly resented for years.
113 Unbeknownst to those people, we had ridiculed them, judged and condemned
114 them, or otherwise defamed their character to others. Because all that character
115 assassination was taking place behind those people's backs, do we now go to
116 them and confess? Certainly not! The Ninth Step is not designed to clear our
117 conscience at the expense of someone else. Our sponsor will help us find a way
118 to make our amends without causing additional harm.

119 Though it seems obvious that we wouldn't make direct amends in a situation
120 where we would injure someone, we may find that we have questions about how
121 to make "direct" amends when the person to whom we owe them is deceased,
122 impossible to find, or lives thousands of miles away. There are many ways to
123 make effective "direct" amends without doing it in person. If someone to whom
124 we owe amends is deceased, we may find it very effective to write a letter saying
125 everything we would say if the person were still alive and perhaps reading that
126 letter to our sponsor. It may be a noble desire to want to make amends in person
127 to someone who lives thousands of miles away, but most of us lack the means to
128 travel great distances solely for that purpose. In situations such as these, a
129 telephone call or a letter could serve the same purpose as an amends made in
130 person. The people on our list who we can't find should remain on our list. An
131 opportunity to make amends may present itself later on, even years later. In the
132 meantime, we must remain willing to make amends should we ever have the
133 opportunity. Of course, we should never avoid making amends in person only
134 because we are afraid of facing the person we have harmed. We make every
135 effort to find the people we have harmed and make the best amends we can
136 make.

137 Choosing the best way to make amends requires careful consideration and
138 time spent searching our conscience for what is right. Some of us have to face
139 situations that can't be corrected. Our actions may have left permanent physical
140 or emotional scars, even caused someone's death. We must somehow learn to
141 live with such things. We live with indescribable remorse over acts such as these
142 and wonder what we could possibly do to make amends. This is where we have

143 no choice but to rely on our Higher Power. We may have difficulty in forgiving
144 ourselves, but we can ask for the forgiveness of a loving God. We sit down,
145 become quiet in the presence of our Higher Power, and ask for guidance in what
146 we should do. Many of us have found answers in dedicating our lives to helping
147 other addicts and other forms of service to humanity. There are no easy answers
148 for problems like these; we simply do the very best we can, relying on our
149 sponsor and the God of our understanding for guidance.

150 For many of us, the wreckage of our past includes such relatively minor things
151 as outstanding arrest warrants for traffic violations, while others have committed
152 crimes entailing very serious consequences. We may find ourselves in a
153 quandary over such issues. If we turn ourselves in to the authorities we may go
154 to jail, but if we don't we may live in fear of being caught and sent to jail anyway.
155 With the help of our sponsor and the God of our understanding, we are willing to
156 do whatever it takes to maintain our recovery. We may also have to rely on legal
157 advice before making such amends. Consulting an attorney about these
158 problems can be of great benefit.

159 Especially troublesome financial amends may also require professional advice.
160 Many of us have amassed debts at an alarming rate. We may owe financial
161 amends that are beyond our means to pay in the foreseeable future. Some of us
162 may owe medical bills that amount to more than we can conceivably earn in the
163 next several years. Some of us rarely paid our rent, utility bills, or phone bills. We
164 may have found it easier to uproot our lives and move rather than meet our
165 financial obligations.

166 Just as we do for all of our amends, we discuss our financial amends with our
167 sponsor first. Some of us have begun providing for our families since we've been
168 in recovery; they are dependent on us for their food and shelter. We usually find
169 that we have to budget our money very carefully in order to meet our current living
170 expenses while paying as much as possible on our old debts. We may resolve
171 such situations by contacting our creditors, explaining our situation, and
172 expressing our desire to settle our debts. We agree on a reasonable plan for
173 paying off our debts, and we stick to it. This is an example of how living our
174 amends is a process rather than a "once and for all" occurrence. It takes great
175 discipline, personal sacrifice, and commitment to continue to pay a bill for years
176 and years, but we can regain our self-respect only by following through.

177 Most of us find making amends for the damage we did in intimate relationships
178 to be extremely uncomfortable. As we wrote our Fourth Step, we realized that we
179 not only robbed ourselves of the chance for meaningful relationships, we also
180 caused deep emotional wounds in our partners. Our fears of intimacy or
181 commitment may have led us to use, be unfaithful to, or abandon the people who
182 loved us. We were generally unavailable to the people who loved us. While there
183 are times when we need to approach such people with our amends, there are
184 other times when it is best to leave them alone so as not to reopen old wounds.
185 Knowing the difference requires complete honesty on our part and open
186 communication with our sponsor. Whether or not we make direct amends to the
187 people we've harmed in relationships, we definitely need to change the way we
188 behave in our relationships today. If we ran from intimacy before, we need to sit

189 down and learn to communicate with our partners. We must become more
190 considerate, more sensitive, and more attentive to the needs of others.

191 Sometimes, the only way we can make amends is to change the way we live.
192 As discussed in the Eighth Step, we may owe amends to our community or
193 society as whole. Though this may seem to be an abstract concept, we must
194 make concrete amends by changing our behavior. If we harmed society, we start
195 to make amends by becoming a productive member of society. We contribute.
196 We look for ways to give, not take.

197 Our recovery is also a way of making amends to ourselves. We treated
198 ourselves horribly in our active addiction. The guilt and shame we felt each time
199 we harmed another human being took quite a toll on our self-respect. Our
200 addiction humiliated us in a thousand different ways. Now, in recovery, we learn
201 to treat ourselves in ways that demonstrate our self-respect.

202 The most important results of the Ninth Step will be found within. This step
203 teaches us a great deal about humility, love, selflessness, and forgiveness. We
204 begin to heal from our addiction and no longer live with as many regrets. We
205 grow spiritually and find that we are truly gaining a new level of freedom in our
206 lives. Our past is just that: the past. We have put it behind us so that it no longer
207 hovers on the edge of our thoughts, waiting for a chance to haunt our present.

208 One of the most wonderful gifts we derive from working the Ninth Step is the
209 knowledge that we are becoming better human beings. We realize how much we
210 have changed because we are no longer doing the things we are making amends
211 for. We may not have realized how much we had changed in our recovery until
212 now. The amends process drives home the knowledge that we are becoming

truly different people. The extended nightmare of our addiction is finally beginning to fade in the dawning light of our recovery.

Our humility increases as we face the people we have harmed. The impact of realizing how deeply our actions have affected other people shocks us out of our self-obsession. We begin to understand that other people have real feelings and that we are capable of hurting them if we are careless. We learn about being considerate of other people as we work this step, and what we learn is what we practice in our lives today. It becomes natural for us to think before we speak or act, keeping in mind that what we say or do is going to affect our friends, our families, and our fellow NA members. We approach people with love and kindness, carrying within ourselves a deep and abiding respect for the feelings of others.

Because of the humility and selflessness so necessary to making our amends, we may be surprised at the way Step Nine enhances our self-esteem. One of the most paradoxical aspects of our recovery is that by thinking of ourselves less, we learn to love ourselves more. We may not have expected our spiritual journey to lead to a fresh appreciation of ourselves, but it does. Because of the love we extend to others, we realize our own value. We learn that what we contribute makes a difference, not just in NA but in the world at large.

As a result of working the Ninth Step, we are free to live in the present, able to enjoy each moment and experience gratitude for the gift of recovery. Memories of the past no longer hold us back, and new possibilities appear. We are free to go in directions we never considered before. We are free to dream and to pursue the fulfillment of our dreams. Our lives stretch out before us like a limitless

237 horizon. We may stumble from time to time, but the Tenth Step gives us the
238 opportunity to pick ourselves up and keep walking forward. Our Higher Power
239 has given us an invitation to live, and we accept it with gratitude.

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because they have become complacent in recovery, allowing their resentments to build and refusing to acknowledge their wrongs. Little by little, those small hurts, half-truths, and "justified" grudges turn into deep disappointments, serious self-deceptions, and full-blown resentments. We can't afford to allow these threats to our recovery to go untended. We have to deal with situations such as these as soon as they arise.

In the Tenth Step, we use all the principles and actions we learned in the previous steps and apply them to our lives on a ^{continuous} regular basis. Beginning our days by reaffirming our decision to live life according to God's will has helped many of us keep spiritual ideals foremost in our minds throughout the day. Even so, we are bound to make mistakes that are very familiar to us. We can attribute virtually every wrongdoing to a character defect we identified in the Sixth Step. Humbly asking the God of our understanding to remove our shortcomings is just as necessary now as it was in the Seventh Step.

In the Tenth Step, we take such actions on a regular basis. Each day, we take our own inventory, look for those times when we fall short of our spiritual ideals, and renew our efforts to live a principle-centered life. For example, when we are faced with the tendency to behave compulsively, ignoring the consequences of our actions, we need to focus on spiritual principles, take prompt action, and continue forward in our recovery.

Although forming a habit of working this step may be difficult at first, we must persist. We can set aside some time during the day for focused self-appraisal while gradually moving toward a goal of being able to look at ourselves throughout the day. We need to develop self-discipline and the more effort we

49 put into doing so, the more we'll find that working the Tenth Step will become as
50 natural as breathing.

51 Some of us wondered how often we were supposed to work the Tenth Step.
52 We may find a very good clue to how often we practice this step in the phrase,
53 "we continued." To *continue* to do something implies that we go on with
54 something we've already been doing. We keep going forward, striving each
55 moment to become ever more aware of ourselves.

56 Not that we should be hard on ourselves, picking at our every motive and
57 looking for problems where none exist. We need to stay in tune with the voice of
58 our conscience and listen to what it's telling us. When we get a nagging feeling
59 that something isn't quite right, we should pay attention to it. If our feelings of guilt
60 or anger seem to go on for a long time, we can do something about it. We know
61 when something is bothering us--perhaps not immediately, but usually not too
62 long after the fact. As soon as we become aware that we're feeling out of sorts,
63 we search out the cause and deal with it as soon as possible.

64 While we strive to maintain ongoing awareness throughout the day, it is also
65 helpful to sit down at the end of each day and quietly reflect on what has
66 happened and how we responded to it. Sometimes, our sponsor will suggest that
67 we write out our Tenth Step. In this step, we ask ourselves the same types of
68 questions we asked in the Fourth Step; the only difference is that the emphasis is
69 on *today*. We look at our current behavior and ask ourselves if we are living by
70 our newfound values. Am I being honest today? Am I maintaining personal
71 integrity in my relations with others? Am I growing, or am I slipping back into old

72 patterns? We avoid labelling ourselves and our actions as "good" or "bad,"
73 concentrating instead on the overall picture.

74 In order to examine our day--or our life for that matter--in its entirety, we have
75 to draw on the humility we've acquired in the previous steps. We have learned
76 quite a bit about ourselves: how we've responded to life in the past, and how we
77 want to respond to life now. It takes a great deal of awareness to humbly
78 acknowledge our part in our own lives.

79 We may have trouble knowing when we're wrong, simply because we usually
80 intend to be right. For instance, at some point in our recovery, we may attend a
81 group business meeting firmly convinced that we know what the group should do.
82 We've studied all sides of the issues. We forcefully share our views at the
83 meeting. We're so convinced of our rightness that we fail to recognize our self-
84 righteousness. We are blind to the harm we're causing others by not respecting
85 their views as much as our own.

86 Often, we act in ways that are contrary to our values, yet we expect others to
87 live up to our standards. For instance, we may find ourselves flinching when we
88 hear others gossiping about someone. Following such an occurrence, we are
89 likely to be self-righteous--until we catch ourselves doing the very same thing.
90 Another common situation that occurs when we become super-critical is a
91 tendency to expect everyone around us to be unfailingly honest; however, we
92 have a variety of excuses at hand for why this standard doesn't apply to us! If we
93 find ourselves in the midst of such moral ambiguity, we can use the principles of
94 the Tenth Step to provide more clarity.

95 There may be other times in our lives when we find ourselves in a situation that
96 seems to require a compromise of our personal beliefs and values. For instance,
97 if we had gained employment at a company only to discover that our employer
98 expected us to indulge in questionable business practices, we could reasonably
99 expect to feel confused about the choices available to us. Deciding what to do
100 about such a difficult dilemma would be a tough decision for any one of us. It
101 may be tempting to make a snap judgment or ask our sponsor to provide our
102 answer; however, we have found that no one can solve such a dilemma for us.
103 We must apply the principles of the program for ourselves and arrive at our own
104 decision. In the end, we are the ones who must live with our conscience. In order
105 to do so comfortably, we must decide what is, and what is not, morally acceptable
106 in our lives.

107 It can be very confusing to determine when we were wrong, especially when
108 we're right in the middle of a conflict. When our emotions are running high, we
109 may not be able to take an honest look at ourselves. We can see only our
110 immediate wants and needs. At such times, our sponsor may suggest that we
111 take a personal inventory on a particular area of our lives so that we can see our
112 part with more clarity. If our friends notice that we're acting on a character defect,
113 they may suggest that we talk to our sponsor about it. Being open-minded to the
114 suggestions of our sponsor and our NA friends, paying attention to what our
115 conscience is telling us, spending some quiet time with the God of our
116 understanding--all these things will lead us to greater clarity.

117 Once we're aware that we've been wrong--whether it's five minutes, five hours,
118 or five days after the fact--we need to admit our error as soon as possible and

correct any harm we've caused. As in the Ninth Step, we find that the process of admitting our mistakes and changing our behavior brings about tremendous freedom.

Of course, we must be just as careful when amending our current behavior as we were when we made amends in the Ninth Step. For instance, if we find that we were wrong because we sat in a meeting silently judging someone who shared, we certainly don't need to go tell that person what we were thinking. Instead, we can make an effort to be more tolerant.

We must remember that the Tenth Step isn't a one-sided endeavor, only for us to note what we do wrong. We must resist any urge to become obsessive with this step, ruthlessly searching out every flaw in our character. The point of the Tenth Step is for us to be willing to pay attention to our thoughts, behaviors, and values, and work on what we need to change. We should acknowledge that, quite often, our motives are good and we do things right. Character defects and character assets are not mutually exclusive, and we are sure to find both on any given day.

We develop recovery-oriented goals for ourselves as we work this step. When we see that we've been afraid to go forward in a particular area of our lives, we can resolve to take a few risks, drawing our courage from our Higher Power. When we see that we've been selfish, we can strive to become more generous in the future. When we realize today that we've fallen short in any area of our lives, we don't have to be overwhelmed by feelings of dread and fear of failure. Instead, we can be grateful for our self-awareness and begin to feel a sense of hope. We

142 know that, by applying our program of recovery to our shortcomings, we will
143 change and grow.

144 We begin to see ourselves more realistically as a result of working the Tenth
145 Step. Many of us have remarked on the freedom we experienced through freely
146 admitting our mistakes and releasing ourselves from unrealistic expectations.
147 Where before we went from one extreme to another, either feeling better than
148 everyone else or feeling worthless, we now find the middle ground where true
149 self-worth can flourish. We see ourselves as we really are, accepting our good
150 qualities along with our defects, knowing we can change with God's help. We are
151 becoming what we were meant to be all along: whole human beings.

152 Although none of us is without the need of love and attention from others, we
153 can stop depending on people to provide what we can only find within ourselves.
154 We can stop making unreasonable demands on others and begin to give of
155 ourselves in relationships. Our romantic relationships, our friendships, and our
156 interactions with family members, co-workers, and casual acquaintances are
157 undergoing an astounding change. We are free to enjoy another's
158 companionship because we're no longer so obsessed with ourselves. We finally
159 see that all the devices we've used to keep other people away were unnecessary
160 at best, and more often than not were the underlying cause of the pain we
161 suffered in past relationships.

162 Healthier relationships are just one indication that the quality of our lives has
163 improved dramatically. Such indications merely reflect the intangible, but very
164 real, changes that have taken place inside us. Our entire outlook has changed.
165 Compared to the spiritual values we hold dear today, concerns such as "looking

good" or amassing material wealth pale in significance. By accepting the challenge of self-appraisal called for in the Tenth Step, we've discovered that we value our recovery and our relationship with God above all else.

As the inner chaos that we lived with for so long subsides, we begin to experience long periods of serenity. During these times, we experience the powerful presence of a loving God in our lives. We are increasingly conscious of that Power and are ready to search for ways to improve and maintain our contact with it. Seeking direction and meaning for our lives, we go on to the Eleventh Step.

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Step, we now seek to *improve* our conscious contact with God through prayer and meditation.

Many of us had trouble understanding the meaning of "praying for power" in the Eleventh Step. At first glance, this seemed to contradict the most basic aspect of our recovery program: our admission of powerlessness. But if we take another look at the First Step, we'll see that it says we are powerless over our addiction, not that we won't be given the power to carry out God's will. We did begin at a point of powerlessness in the First Step; we were powerless over our addiction and incapable of carrying out God's will. This doesn't mean we gain power over our addiction in the Eleventh Step. In the Eleventh Step, we pray for a particular kind of power: the power to carry out God's will.

We no longer shy away from spiritual growth, because it has become so essential to maintaining the peace of mind we've found. Perhaps at the beginning of our recovery we worked the steps because we were in pain and afraid we would relapse if we didn't. But today we are motivated less by pain and fear, driven more by our longing for continued recovery.

This leaning toward recovery reveals that we've surrendered more completely. We've reached a state where we actually believe that God's will for us is better than our own. It has become second nature for us to ask ourselves what our Higher Power would have us do in our lives rather than attempting to manipulate situations so they happen according to our ideas of what's best. We no longer see God's will for us as something we have to *survive*. On the contrary, we strive to align our will with God's, believing that we'll gain more happiness and peace of mind by doing so. This is what surrender is: a heartfelt belief in our own fallibility

49 as human beings and an equally heartfelt decision to rely on a Power greater than
50 our own. Surrender, the stumbling block of our addiction, has become the
51 cornerstone of our recovery.

52 However, we cannot recover on surrender alone. We must build on our
53 surrender by taking action, just as we have in the previous steps. In the Tenth
54 Step, we began to practice the discipline required to live spiritually on a daily
55 basis. We continue practicing this principle in the Eleventh Step by persisting in
56 our efforts to take action each day. We place prayer and meditation high on our
57 priority list. We resolve to make prayer and meditation as much a part of our daily
58 routine as eating and sleeping, and then we employ the necessary self-discipline
59 to achieve our resolve.

60 To work this step, we must also increase the courage we've developed in the
61 previous steps. Though the courage we demonstrated when we honestly and
62 thoroughly examined ourselves was beyond anything we had previously
63 experienced, we now need to develop a markedly different form of courage. We
64 need the courage to live according to spiritual principles, even when we are afraid
65 of the results. Despite our fear, we do what's necessary and draw on the endless
66 well of courage we can find by tapping into a Power greater than ourselves.

67 With all this discussion of God, we may again find ourselves growing
68 uncomfortable, perhaps wondering if this is where the "religious catch" we've
69 anticipated is going to be revealed. We may wonder if our sponsor is now going
70 to inform us that we must pray or meditate in a particular way. Before we get
71 carried away with such fears, we would do well to remember one of the basic
72 tenets of recovery in Narcotics Anonymous: our absolute and unconditional

73 freedom to believe in any Higher Power we choose and, of course, our right to
74 communicate with our Higher Power in whatever way conforms to our individual
75 beliefs. Although some of us practice a traditional religion, only rarely do we hear
76 specific religious beliefs discussed in our meetings. Our members respect the
77 rights of other members to form their own spiritual beliefs and tend to frown on
78 anything with the potential to dilute the spiritual, ~~not religious~~ message of
79 recovery.

80 In this encouraging atmosphere, most of us find it relatively easy to discard
81 our preconceived ideas of the "right" way to pray or meditate. Finding our own
82 way is another matter. We may have only a basic understanding of what prayer
83 and meditation are, prayer being the times we talk to God and meditation the
84 times we listen. We may not be aware of the many options that are open to us.
85 Searching those options out and exploring their usefulness to us can be
86 uncomfortable and time-consuming. It is only by being open-minded, and by
87 taking action, that we are likely to find what is right for us as individuals. We may
88 experiment with a whole assortment of practices until we find something that
89 doesn't feel foreign or contrived. If we have found that *everything* feels strange,
90 then we stick with a particular form of prayer and meditation until it no longer
91 seems unnatural. Many of us have adopted an eclectic approach, borrowing our
92 practices from a variety of sources and combining those which provide us the
93 greatest comfort and enlightenment.

94 We are on a spiritual path which will lead us to a God of our own
95 understanding. Many of us have remarked on the great joy we find along the
96 way. We are sure to get help from our fellow members, or perhaps even from

97 others who are also walking a spiritual path. Seeking out these individuals and
98 asking for their guidance can help us find our own answers; however, sharing in
99 another's experience does not excuse us from the need to seek our own. Others
100 may be able to show us the path they walked, sharing with us the joy and insight
101 they found along the way; nevertheless, we may find our spiritual paths taking a
102 different turn and have to adjust our method of travel accordingly. In the end, we
103 find what's true for us in moments of personal contact with our Higher Power.
104 The experience shared by others is just that: *experience*, not ultimate answers to
105 the mysteries of life.

106 Our understanding of God grows and changes through prayer and meditation.
107 We find that it is too limiting to define God in such a way that our understanding is
108 set in stone once and for all. An interesting parallel can be drawn if we remember
109 the times we've thoughtlessly tossed other human beings into categories and
110 forgotten about them. We deprived ourselves of an opportunity to know
111 someone else on a deeper level. Treating our Higher Power as something to be
112 defined absolutely will rob us on a grand scale, halting further spiritual growth the
113 minute we arrive at a ~~flat~~ ^{flat} definition.

114 In addition to the open-mindedness so necessary to working the Eleventh
115 Step, it is vital that we actively pursue knowledge of God's will for us and the
116 power to carry it out. This knowledge is what we are searching for when we pray,
117 whether our prayers are desperate pleas or calm requests for guidance. Though
118 it seems we would be more open to acknowledging God's will when we're
119 desperate, our routine requests for knowledge also have a significant effect in our
120 lives.

121 We should remember that Step Eleven asks us to pray *only* for the knowledge
122 of God's will and the power to carry that out. Just as we opened our minds and
123 avoided restricting our understanding of our Higher Power, we avoid placing
124 limitations on what God's will for us can be. Though the temptation to pray for a
125 particular result in a relationship or ^{Gov.} monetary success may be great, we must
126 resist the urge to do so if we want to experience the rewards of the Eleventh Step.
127 This is not to say that we must sacrifice relationships and success if we want to
128 live according to God's will. Praying for specific solutions to specific problems
129 may not be the answer. As ideas come to us, it may seem as though we've been
130 provided with an answer to what's bothering us; we may even go to great lengths
131 to convince ourselves that our idea was divinely inspired.

132 For instance, at some time in our lives, we may feel unhappy but not know
133 exactly what is causing such unhappiness. After spending a few minutes in
134 prayer, seeking a solution to our unhappiness, we may suddenly get an idea that
135 all our problems are caused by our boring job and demanding boss. We, as
136 addicts, are subject to take such random thoughts and run with them, impulsively
137 quitting our jobs. This scenario may seem extreme, but its point is that by praying
138 only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out, we can
139 avoid our former tendency to allow fleeting whims and superstition to dictate the
140 course of our lives. Knowledge of God's will does not usually come in a
141 momentary blinding flash.

142 Practicing the Eleventh Step involves a daily discipline of prayer and
143 meditation. This discipline reinforces our commitment to recovery, to living a new
144 way of life, and to developing further our relationship with our Higher Power. This

relationship reaches fruition through this daily practice, and we begin to glimpse the limitless freedom we can be afforded through God's love. We have found that following such a discipline also results in a firm belief in our own right to happiness and peace of mind.

We see that, regardless of the presence or absence of material success in our lives, we can be content. We can be happy and fulfilled with or without money, with or without a partner, with or without the approval of others. We've begun to see that God's will for us is the ability to live with dignity, to love ourselves and others, to laugh, and to find great joy and beauty in our surroundings. Our most heartfelt longings and dreams for our lives are coming true. These priceless gifts are no longer beyond our reach. They are, in fact, the very essence of God's will for us.

In our gratitude, we go beyond merely asking for the power to live up to God's plan for our own lives and begin to seek out ways to be of service, to make a difference in the life of another addict, to carry the message of recovery. Our spiritual awakening has opened us up to spiritual contentment, unconditional love, and personal freedom. Knowing that we can only keep this precious gift by sharing it with others, we go on to Step Twelve.

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STEP TWELVE

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

In a sense, Step Twelve encompasses *all* the steps. We must make use of what we've learned in the previous eleven as we carry the message and practice the principles of recovery in all our affairs. Individually and collectively, each step has contributed to the extraordinary transformation which we know as a spiritual awakening.

Many of us have wondered how this spiritual awakening comes about. Does it happen all at once or does it occur slowly, over a long period of time? While there may be great variances within our experience about this awakening of the spirit, we all agree that it results from working the steps.

Our awakening has been progressive, beginning with a spark of awareness in the First Step. Before we admitted the truth about our addiction, we knew only the darkness of denial. But when we surrendered, acknowledging that we couldn't arrest our addiction or hope for a better life on our own, a ray of light broke through the darkness, beginning our spiritual awakening.

Though each individual's experience of a spiritual awakening varies, some experiences are so common as to be almost universal. Humility is one of these common factors. We first began to experience humility when we opened our minds to the possibility that a Power greater than ourselves existed. For some of us, this experience was so astounding that we received an almost physical jolt from the knowledge that we weren't alone in our struggle for recovery. Step Two

25 allowed us our first glimpse of hope. That hope had an immediate and powerful
26 effect on our despairing spirit, providing us with a reason to go on.

27 Our desire for something different prompted us to a deeper level of surrender.
28 In the Third Step, we gave up more. Not only did we admit that we couldn't
29 control our addiction, we went on to recognize that our will and lives would be
30 better left to the care of our Higher Power. Paradoxically, in this admission we
31 found our greatest strength. As we worked the Third Step, we began to
32 understand that we could tap the limitless resource of our Higher Power for
33 everything needed to heal us spiritually.

34 This included the courage we knew we would need to work the Fourth Step.
35 Many of us dreaded the process of self-appraisal called for in Step Four, despite
36 the gentle assurances of our fellow NA members that we would find spiritual
37 rewards in the process. Though we were afraid, we went forward, somehow
38 believing in the experience of other recovering addicts. Once our inventory was
39 completed, we no longer needed convincing. In the process, we had
40 experienced spiritual growth for ourselves. Our spirits were strengthened by our
41 emerging integrity. The shaping of values, so essential to our character, was just
42 one of the positive results we found in the Fourth Step.

43 Unlike the admission we made in the First Step, which was made in
44 desperation, the admission we made in Step Five was voluntary. This complete
45 disclosure of our innermost selves, made without reservation, resulted in a
46 breakthrough in our ability to accept ourselves and trust others. The acceptance
47 of our sponsor and the unconditional love of our Higher Power made it possible
48 for us to judge ourselves less harshly. We developed a little more humility with the

49 awareness of the exact nature of our wrongs. We began to understand that
50 humility and self-loathing are generally incompatible, unlikely to exist at the same
51 time.

52 With our awareness of the exact nature of our wrongs--our character defects--
53 and the humility inherent in that awareness, our desire to change increased
54 dramatically. Though we may have experienced some trepidation about
55 surrendering our character defects, we overcame our fears by drawing on the
56 trust and faith we had developed in a loving God. Trust and faith, two important
57 elements of a spiritual awakening, made it possible for us to become entirely
58 ready to allow God to work in our lives.

59 Consciously asking God to help us was an important development in the
60 awakening of our spirit. That request was tangible evidence of how much we had
61 changed spiritually. This was the point where many of us began to sense just
62 how powerful God is and just how powerful God's love could be in our lives.
63 Because we had asked for and been granted some freedom from having to act
64 on our shortcomings, we finally began to grasp what the miracle of recovery
65 offers us.

66 Carried along by the promise of continued freedom in our lives, we proceeded
67 to make ourselves aware of what we had done to others in our active addiction.
68 Again, we saw how the spiritual preparation of the previous steps made it possible
69 for us to withstand the pain and remorse of listing the people we harmed. Our
70 willingness to make amends to them all brought us further away from the grip of
71 self-obsession. Our search for recovery was no longer focused on what we could
72 get out of it for ourselves. We saw beyond the confines of our own lives and our

73 efforts in recovery began to be more generous. We developed the ability to feel
74 empathy for others.

75 Once we had engaged in the process of making amends in the Ninth Step, we
76 could see how it contributed to our spiritual growth. Our humility was enhanced
77 by our newfound appreciation of others' feelings. Our self-esteem grew along
78 with our increased capacity to forgive both ourselves and others. We were able
79 to give of ourselves. Most of all, we gained freedom--freedom to live in the
80 present and to feel that we belonged in the world.

81 The discipline we practiced in the Tenth Step insured that we continued to
82 breathe new life into our awakening spirits. We practiced ongoing adherence to
83 our newfound values, thereby strengthening their importance in our lives. We
84 saw that, by making our spiritual development our primary focus, other aspects of
85 our lives would progress naturally as they were meant to all along.

86 Focusing our attention on our spiritual development brought us to the
87 Eleventh Step. We had already become increasingly conscious of a powerful
88 presence operating in our lives: a Power that could restore our sanity and remove
89 our shortcomings. Through recognizing the love inherent in a Power capable of
90 doing such things for us, we were able to better understand the loving nature of
91 God. The spiritual void we felt at the beginning of our recovery had been filled
92 with gratitude, unconditional love, and a desire to be of service to God and others.
93 Undeniably, we have experienced a spiritual awakening.

94 In order to cultivate this awakening, we have found it essential to express our
95 gratitude and practice the principles of recovery in every area of our lives.
96 However, this isn't something we do only to insure that our own recovery

continues. Narcotics Anonymous is not a selfish program. In fact, the spirit of the Twelfth Step is grounded in the principle of selfless service. Upholding this principle in our efforts to carry the message is of the utmost importance, both to our own spiritual state and to those to whom we are trying to carry the message.

Step Twelve has a paradoxical aspect in that the more we help others, the more we help ourselves. For instance, if we find ourselves troubled and our faith wavering, there are very few actions that have such an immediate uplifting effect on us as helping a newcomer will. One small act of generosity can work wonders; our self-absorption diminishes and we end up with a better perspective on what previously seemed like overwhelming problems. Every time we tell someone else that Narcotics Anonymous works, we reinforce our belief in the program.

Now we must ask ourselves, just what *is* "the message" we are trying to carry? Is it that we never have to use drugs again? Is it that, through recovery, we cease being likely candidates for jails, institutions, and an early death? Is it the hope that an addict, any addict, can recover from the disease of addiction? Well, it's all of this and more. The message we carry is that, by practicing the principles contained within the Twelve Steps, we have had a spiritual awakening. Whatever that means for each one of us is the message we carry to those seeking recovery.

The ways in which we carry the message are as varied as our members. There are, however, some basic guidelines that we, as a fellowship, have found to be helpful. First and foremost, we share our experience, strength, and hope. This means that we share our experience, not the theories we have heard from other sources. This also means that we share our *own* experience, not someone else's. It is not our job to tell someone seeking recovery where to work, who to

live with, how to raise their children, or anything else outside the realm of our experience with recovery. Someone we are trying to help may have problems in these areas; we can help best not by managing that person's life, but by sharing our own experience in those areas.

Developing a personal style for carrying the message rests on a simple requirement: we must be ourselves. We each have a special, one-of-a-kind personality that is sure to be an attraction to many. Some of us have a sparkling sense of humor which may reach someone in despair. Some of us are especially warm and compassionate, able to reach an addict who has rarely been the recipient of kindness. Some of us have a remarkable talent for telling the truth, in no uncertain terms, to an addict literally dying to hear it. Some of us are a valuable asset on any service committee, while others do better working one-on-one with a suffering addict. Whatever our own personality makeup, we can be assured that when we sincerely try to carry the message, we will reach the addict we are trying to help.

Yet there are limits to what we can do to help another addict. We cannot force anyone to stop using. We cannot "give" someone the results of working the steps nor can we grow for them. We cannot magically remove someone's loneliness or pain. Not only are we powerless over our own addiction, we are powerless over everyone else's. We can only carry the message; we cannot determine who will receive it.

It is absolutely none of our business to decide who is ready to hear the message of recovery and who is not. Many of us have formed such a judgment, and have been sorely mistaken, about an addict's desire for recovery. Multiple

145 relapses do not necessarily signify a lack of interest in recovery, nor does the
146 "model newcomer" demonstrate, without a doubt, a certainty of "making it." On
147 the other hand, it is our business, and our privilege, to share the message of
148 recovery unconditionally.

149 The principle of unconditional love is expressed in our attitude. Anyone who
150 reaches out for help is entitled to our compassion, our attention, and our
151 unconditional acceptance. Any addict, regardless of clean time, should be able to
152 pour out his or her pain in an atmosphere free of judgments. Most of us have
153 found that we are able to feel great empathy for those who suffer from our
154 disease precisely because it is *our* disease. Our empathy isn't abstract, nor is our
155 understanding. Instead, it is born in shared experience. We greet each other with
156 the recognition reserved for survivors of the same nearly fatal catastrophe. This
157 shared experience, more than anything else, contributes to the atmosphere of
158 unconditional love in our meetings.

159 Helping others is perhaps the highest aspiration of the human heart, and
160 something we have been entrusted with as a result of God working in our lives.
161 We would do well to remember to ask our Higher Power to continue working
162 through us in our efforts to carry the message. Diligently practicing the principles
163 of recovery will insure that the connection between ourselves and our Higher
164 Power remains open and that our service to others is firmly rooted in spirituality.

165 Spirituality becomes a way of life for us as we live by the principles of recovery.
166 The example of a life lived according to these principles is potentially the most
167 powerful message we can carry. We don't need to wait until we're "on" the
168 Second Step to practice the principle of open-mindedness. Courage and honesty

have a place in our lives even when we aren't writing an inventory. Humility is always a desirable state, whether we are asking God to remove our shortcomings, conducting business with a co-worker, or talking to a friend.

To practice the principles of recovery "in all our affairs" is what we strive for. Both in and out of meetings, no matter who is involved, no matter how difficult it may seem, we make the principles of recovery the guides by which we live. Only through the practice of these principles in our daily life can we hope to achieve the state of grace necessary to maintain our reprieve from the disease of addiction. Though this may seem a lofty goal, we have found it attainable. Our gratitude for the gift of recovery becomes the underlying force in all we do, motivating our most altruistic intentions and weaving its way through our lives and the lives of those around us.

Even in silence, the voice of our gratitude does not go unheard. It speaks most clearly as we walk the path of recovery, selflessly giving to those we meet along the way. We venture forth on our spiritual journey, our lives enriched, our spirits filled with love, and our horizons ever-expanding. The quintessential spirit that lies inside each one of us, the spark of life that was almost extinguished by our disease, has been renewed through working the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous. And it is on the path paved with these steps that our future journey begins.

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