

(1)

CHAPTER ONE  
WHO IS AN ADDICT?

Most of us do not have to think twice about this question. WE KNOW. Our whole life and thinking is centered in drugs in one form or another; the getting and using and finding ways and means to get more. We use to live and live to use. Very simply, an addict is a man or woman whose life is controlled by drugs. We are people in the grip of a continuing and progressive illness, whose ends are always the same; jails, institutions, and death.

~~xxxxxxA drug addict may be unaware that a problem exists until something-- happens in his life that-- shows him--~~

~~-----A drug addict may be unaware that there is a problem in~~

As practicing drug addicts, we may be unaware our drug using is a problem for us, until certain things happen to force us into seeing the problem. The drugs run out, and we begin to feel the early stages of withdrawal. We notice that if we try to stop using, we cannot, or we realize that we have lost control over the amount of drugs we use. All these things help to force us to recognize our illness.

One of the major symptoms of the disease of addiction is denial. Many of us were convinced that we were right and the world was wrong, and we used this belief to justify our destructive behavior. ~~Many of~~ We developed a point of view which enabled us to pursue our addiction without concern about our own well-being, or anyone else's. ~~Simply,~~ Our point of view becomes focused on the negative aspects of all things. Of course, we realized that our record had not been good, but we blamed circumstances around us, saying that we must be in the wrong places at the wrong times. We accused other people of causing us to use, and we thought that fate was against us. It took a long time for us to realize that our "bad luck" was ~~caused by situation~~ a direct result of our drug use.

While we were still using, we lived in another world. If we did experience a periodic jolt of reality or self-awareness, it seemed to us as if we were ~~two~~ people instead of one, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. When we were temporarily clean, we ran around trying to get everything all squared away before our next run. Sometimes, we could do this very well, but later, it seemed less important to us, and at the same time, more impossible. After years of trying to make our-

## chapter one (2)

Some of us were very dependent of people and things outside of ourselves. We tried to make ourselves happy by seeking instant gratification, or perfection in our surroundings and companions. We used people to carry us through life, but usually, these people would disapoint us by finding other interests and other friends. After years of living this way, we found that we were even more unhappy and unsatisfied than we had been at the beginning. And, we found that we were still not mature enough to cope with simple problems of daily living on our own.

As our addiction caught up with us, some of us found ourselves going in and out of institutions, like hospitals, jails, and treatment centers. ~~Because-of~~ We did frightening things, like wrecking cars, embarrassing things, like urinating in public places, silly things that we tried to laugh off. Because of these experiences, we began to realize just how messed up our lives really were.

Drugs could no longer hide our pain. We regretted the past; we dreaded the future. For a long time, we searched everywhere for "the answer"--that certain person, place, or thing that would make everything alright. We used phrases like "what if," or "if only," and "just one more time." Part of ourselves could sometimes see what was happening; another part would not accept it. Eventually, we just wanted an easy way out, and suicide was frequently on our minds. Our suicide attempts were usually feeble , and so they only helped to contribute to our feelings of worthlessness.

We remember going through a lot of pain and despair before we made any connection between our drug use and our misery. We used all sorts of drugs, and experienced numerous living problems as a result, and yet, most of us did not consider ourselves addicts. One problem was that most of the information available to us about addiction came to us from misinformed people, and from people who also used ~~heavily~~ drugs, but did-not-consider- were probably not addicted. As long as we could periodically stop using , even for short periods of time, we did not consider ourselves addicted. We looked at the stopping, not the using. Of course, as our addiction progressed, we thought about stopping less and less. Only at the point of hopeless deterioration did we finally ask ourselves, "Could it be the drugs that are causing all this?"

Things did not get quite this bad for all of us, at least not on the outside, and so we had trouble accepting our addiction. We had preconceived ideas about the nature of addiction which prevented us from seeing ourselves clearly. The term "drug addict" conjured up visions of violence, street life, dirty needles and jail. Even though we had used for years, we looked at the differences rather than the similarities between us and the other addicts. For the young people who come to NA, it may be especially difficult to see our addiction. We strongly suggest that you do not compare yourselves to others. We all have different tolerances for pain, ~~and~~ some addicts needed to go to greater extremes and some of us may find we have had enough when we realize we are getting high too often and it's affecting our daily lives.

Every addict has a few things <sup>we</sup> ~~they~~ can say <sup>we</sup> ~~they~~ never did: Some of us have never used the needle. Some of us have never been in any kind of institution. Some of us have never had any trouble with the law. Many addicts, young and old, have used these things as excuses to deny their addiction and keep using. Whatever our experiences may be, we all have one thing in common: the disease of addiction.

We began to have silent thoughts that maybe the drugs were killing us. In a rare moment of clarity, we were able to see the whole scene in all its insanity. Something inside said "NO MORE"

We realized drugs were enslaving us instead of setting us free. We were prisoners in our own minds, condemned by guilty feelings to slow execution. We gave up on ever getting well. Our

4  
previous attempts to stay clean had always failed in the end, causing us more pain and misery.

Our futures seemed hopelesss until we found clean addicts who were willing to share with us. In the fellowship of NA, the desire to stop using was all that we needed. Our recovery began with our first admission that we needed help. Denial of our addiction was what had kept us sick, and the honest admission of our addiction allowed us to stop using. We were eventually able to open up and ask for help by attending meetings of Narcotics Anonymous. There we found other addicts who were ~~clean~~ <sup>recovered</sup> talking about their feelings and experiences. We realized that we had felt and done many of the same things, and we no longer felt alone. We feel that each individual has to answer for themselves the question; "Am I an addict?"

We began to accept ourselves as addicts when we made the connection between our drug use and our problems. More important than any differences that we see are the many similarities.

Addiction is a state of mind which relies on convincing ourselves that drugs are necessary to maintain our sense of well-being. An addict is a person who uses drugs, in any form, to the extent that they can no longer live normally with or without them. We are men and women whose lives were controlled by drugs. We were caught in the cycle of getting and using, and finding ways and means to get more. On one hand we had feelings of superiority, and on the other, we accepted the most intolerable existence on earth.

Our addiction invloved more than simple drug abuse. In the beginning, some of the highs felt great, but eventually the things we had to do to support our habits reflected desperation. We were



95  
caught in the grip of addiction and were forced to survive any way we could.

We manipulated people and tried to control everything around us. We stole, cheated friends, conned our families, and sold ourselves. We had to have drugs, regardless of the cost. Failure and fear began to invade every area of our lives.

Our character defects and personality disorders prevented us from making meaningful choices.

~~We didn't think about the times when we had to use but didn't want to.~~

~~We didn't think about the things we had to do to keep from being sick or going crazy.~~

~~We didn't think about the times when our lives seemed to be a horrible sequence of all-consuming bits and pieces that we couldn't put together, we forgot, or simply ignored the reality (maybe facts) of our addiction.~~

If you think you might have a drug problem, you probably do. Addicts come from all levels of society, and from every walk of life. We have a disease that tells us we're not sick. Few of us set out to become addicted. We used drugs to feel good; as a cure-all and as a means of escape. In the beginning drugs were an answer; in the end they were a curse.

Through all of this, we kept telling ourselves, "I can handle it."

In the end we avoided people and places that did not condone our using. We assumed everyone else was crazy, and we were the only sane ones. The thought of running out of drugs left us with a sense of impending doom. Peace of mind was non-existent. The only relief, if any, was a comparatively short-lived "high." We were driven to consume drugs beyond our capacity to control them. Our using defied all rules of common sense. We not only had an abnormal craving for drugs, but we yielded to it at the worst possible times. We did not have sense enough to know when not to begin. We went through stages of dark despair and we were sure that there was something wrong with us. Other times, we were under the illusion that we had things under control. We came to hate ourselves for wasting the talents with which we had been endowed and for the trouble we were causing our families and friends. Frequently, we indulged in self-pity and

P6

proclaimed that nothing could help us.

One aspect of our addiction was our inability to deal with life on its own terms. We tried drugs and combinations of drugs in an effort to cope with a seemingly hostile world. We dreamed of finding a magic elixir that would solve our ultimate problem--ourselves. The fact was that we could not successfully use any mind-changing or mood altering substance. An addict who only smoked pot or used non-narcotic drugs was in as much danger as the "junkie."

Drugs ceased to make us feel good. We lost the ability to find the euphoria we craved. Our thrills turned on us, almost killing us. When we did seek help, we were really looking for the absence of pain.

Movies, TV, books and songs have made a social anti-hero of the addict. At times, some of us took pride in our addiction and defended our right to use. We were proud of the illegal, criminal, and bizarre behavior that typified our using. We fell into a pattern of thinking in which we only remembered our "good" drug experiences, and the times when drugs had made us feel "great", or not at all. We didn't think about the times we sat alone consumed by fear and self-pity. We didn't think about the times when we had to use when we didn't want to. We didn't think about the things we had to do to keep from being sick or going crazy. We didn't think about the times when our lives seemed to be a horrible sequence of all consuming bits and pieces that we couldn't put together. We forgot, or simply ignored the reality of our addiction.

Addiction isolated us from people except for the getting, using, and finding ways and means to get more. Hostile, resentful, self-centered and self-seeking, we cut off all outside interests from our lives. Anything not completely familiar became alien and dangerous. Our world shrank and isolation became our life.

We used in order to survive, and because it was the only way of life we knew.

Non-addicts have great trouble understanding our dilemma. It is often nearly impossible to make sense of our behavior and the consuming drive to use,

even after repeated efforts to stay clean. They may see it as a moral deficiency on our part. They may see it as a lack of "willpower" and think us weak. We may even believe this ourselves. This is not the case.

Addicts are sick people. We have a disease called addiction. It is a treatable disease: as soon as we begin to treat our addiction by working the Twelve Steps and going to meetings, we experience very positive

Begin PPh

Although some of us were not street addicts, many of us were, and we consider the street addict to be vulnerable to the abuses which have resulted the stigma with which addiction is branded. In many places street addicts are processed as habitual offenders when treatment of their disease could restore them to productive lives.

~~see a little of ourselves in every addict.~~

We have no choice except to help one another, for the strength of our own recovery lies in helping of other addicts.

The disease of addiction also has its social aspects. Addiction, in its broadest sense, is a disease of our times. It embraces all our social ills. The development of new drugs in modern times has provided a greater number of potentially addictive drugs than ever before. One of the ancient dreams of man seems to be coming true; the ability of modern drug technology to combat disease and alleviate human suffering. Hidden in this blessing, however, is a cruel reversal of effect which is our addiction.

Our innate susceptibility to addiction and complete knowledge of the sources of our behavior is of little concern in our recovery through N.A. The "why" is not important; the "what to do" is our chief question. We feel it is important to share our experience, strength and hope with others who may suffer from our disease, letting them know what they can do, if they want to recover.

We have been addicted to thousands of drugs and know first hand how they feel and what the initial abstinence is like. We can reassure each

other and the newcomer that it will get better if they don't use. We know that addiction is chronic, progressive and fatal. The cycle can be broken by not taking that first fix, pill, drink, or token.

Like other incurable diseases, addiction can be arrested. We agree that there is nothing shameful about being an addict provided we accept our dilemma and honestly take action. We are willing to admit without reservation that we are "allergic" to drugs. Common sense tells us that it would be insane to go back to the source of our "allergy." Our experience indicates that medicine cannot "cure" our illness. We have regained good physical health many times only to relapse. Our track records show that it is impossible for us to use successfully no matter how well we may appear to be in control of our lives.

Social adjustments failed to bring about recovery. We thought a suitable job or social relationship could be the answer to our dilemma. Addiction, in its progression, causes us to flounder and fail, consuming us with anger and fear.

Higher mental and emotional functions, such as our conscience and our ability to love were sharply affected by our use of drugs. Our living skills were reduced to the animal level.. The person within was submerged and the capacity to be human was lost. This seems extreme, but most of us have been in this state. Many of us came into the Fellowship with an attitude of denial, regardless of the fact that we had often been devastated by our disease to the point where denial was futile. Part of the risk run by society in keeping the lid on our addiction is the stigma that prevents the addict who might seek help from seeking it. Many addicts continue to use ~~even-if-they-clean-up-they-will-never-~~ because of a fear that even if they clean up they will never be able to live down their past.

Addiction is the disease and Narcotics Anonymous is a proven path of on-going recovery. Our experience shows that those who keep coming to meetings regularly, stay clean. We continue in our recovery on a daily



basis until we die. In our addiction, we practiced dying. In our recovery, we practice living. We can feel, care, love and be loved. We no longer have to be isolated, and in time, can feel free to go anywhere and do almost anything except use. The program gave us a choice and today we don't use because we don't want to.

Many of us sought answers but failed to find any we could use until we found each other. Most of us have become very grateful in the course of our recovery. We have a disease that we can recover from. Our lives can return to being useful, through abstinence and through working the Twelve Steps of N.A.

Who is an addict? All of the medical, psychological and social commentary ever written on this subject has failed to answer this question thoroughly. Rather than enter the area of medical theory and legalities, we feel that it is more worthwhile to discuss the answers we have found. Instead of concentrating on the problem, let's look at the solution.

Narcotics Anonymous concerns itself with recovery. We all know how to use drugs. We know the effect they have had on us. The primary thing we are interested in is how to stay clean, how to cope with life without using, how to handle unpleasant feelings and emotions--in other words, how to recover. It was conceivable in our addictive thinking that something would work for us without any work on our part. That was how the drugs worked. How wrong we were. It has been our experience that the program works as long as we work it, just for today, to the best of our ability.

The mind begins to accept new ideas which lead to a new way of life as the grip of drugs and our past way of thinking and doing begin to relax. Our world constantly expands to include new associations and eventually we become productive members of society. Problems that had no solutions become transparent and insignificant in the light of our new understanding.

Old grudges and resentments fade. A warm feeling of belonging replaces the hole in the gut left by our addiction. It is no accident--it's the way the program works. A miracle takes place as the drugs are washed from our bodies and our minds begin to clear from the effects of our using. We come to understand that our recovery is a gift from a power greater than ourselves. We are made aware of this gift in a thousand ways. This power wants only that we realize ourselves as much as possible. The longer we stay clean, the more we will want to clear away the shame and falseness of our lives. It is a great gift to be a human being.

What we have just been describing are some of the benefits involved in recovery. There is only one alternative to recovery and that is the progression of our disease which is comparable to an elevator going down. We have found that we can get clean at any level we want. Unfortunately, the nature of our disease makes us susceptible to rationalizing our addiction instead of dealing with it.

If you are an addict, you can find a new life through the N.A. program that would not otherwise be possible.

Although physical and mental tolerance play a role, many drugs require no extended period of use to trigger allergic reactions. The effect *is what counts* not how much we *took*. Certain things follow as usage continues. Setting aside the physical effects of addiction, as the regularity of usage increases, we become accustomed to the state of mind common to addicts' we forget what it was like before we started using. We forget the social graces, acquire strange habits and mannerisms, forget how to work, forget how to express ourselves and show concern for others. We forget how to feel. We, as recovering addicts, have to relearn the things forgotten and learn from scratch what we have missed, while under the influence.

Addiction is a disease which manifested in us at an inceterminable point in our lives. Some of us believe that the disease was present long

11

before the first pill, fix, drink or toke. Some of us believe that the disease is hereditary, due to parents, grandparents or other relatives who are or were addicted. How we got the disease, however, is of no immediate importance to us. What concerns us at present is how we can continue our own recovery while helping the addict who still suffers.

We value personal freedom highly. Perhaps because we want it so much and experience it so seldom in the progression of our illness. Even in periods of abstinence, freedom is curtailed. In recovery, we can still never be quite sure that our choice of action is based on a conscious desire for continued abstinence or on an unconscious wish to return to using.

We have found through our experiences that our addiction had three major phases. At first we were using in a manner which seemed to be social or at least controllable with little indication of the disaster which the future held for us. This phase varies in duration from addict to addict and we have found that it is very difficult to help anyone in this phase. We are usually one of the last people who realize that we need help.

At some point, our using became uncontrollable and definitely anti-social. This phase of uncontrollable using usually began when things were going well and we were in situations that allowed us to use as frequently as we wanted. It was marked by a decline and usually the end of good living as we knew it. We went from a state of drugged success and well-being to complete spiritual, mental and emotional bankruptcy. This state of decline also varies in length from addict to addict. We can only say that for some it was a matter of months or even days and for others it was a matter of years. We tried to moderate, substitute, or even stop using. Those of us who didn't die from the disease, went to prison, or were committed to mental institutions as hopelessly insane. Through the grace of a Higher Power, many of us found the N.A. program.

It was when we reached a bottom that we became willing to stop using. We were much more motivated to seek help when we were in the latter part of the suffering. It was easier for us to see the destruction, disaster and delusion of our using. It was harder to deny our addiction when the problems caused by drug usage were staring us in the face; when we had reached our bottoms.

Incarceration and institutionalization sometimes led us to the realization that the drugs were letting us down. Where drugs had given us the feeling that we could handle whatever situation that might come down, we became aware that these same drugs were largely responsible for our having gotten into our very worse predicaments. Some of us may spend the rest of our lives in jail for a drug related crime or a crime committed under the influence.

The third major phase is our recovery. We, as recovering addicts in the N.A. Fellowship, live and enjoy life on a day to day basis by following the Twelve Steps. We realize that we are never cured and carry the disease within us to the grave. We are convinced that there is only one way for us to live, and that is the N.A. way.

We will die from untreated addiction. But before we die, the disease takes from us our pride, our self-esteem, our families and loved ones. And finally, it takes our very will to live. We of Narcotics Anonymous were raised from hell to find a program and a way of life. We were given a reprieve from our destruction. We have been given a new beginning every day if we want it and don't use. A new place awaits us in the society that, during our using, offered only misgivings. We have come to know success. We have found all this through dependence on a Power greater than ourselves, a group of our fellow addicts, and spiritual principles.