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THE BASIC TEXT OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

"ALTERNATIVE VERSION"

Second Draft

June 1993

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About this book...

This second draft of the Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text "Alternative Version" is only the beginning of the process by which we write recovery literature within our Fellowship. Eventually, we hope that the "Alternative Version" of the Basic Text will be introduced to the W.S.C. Literature Committee via the World Service Conference by one or more Region(s).

Those members of N.A. who have accumulated various lengths of clean time and do not believe in the existence of "GOD" or a similar supernatural entity know the need for this version of the Basic Text. We know that every lost addict is a tragedy and understand that many of our members who are atheists, deists, agnostics or "undecided" would benefit from alternative recovery literature. Although some N.A. members may not understand our purely spiritual path, we share a common bond and know many have been lost due to the unavailability of recovery literature which is free from both theism and sexism. While there is truly only "one" N.A., the diversity of our membership is an asset which can provide a gateway for an expanded library of N.A. recovery literature.

Don't forget that this is a draft! If you are recovering in N.A. your help is greatly needed! Please review this book and submit your input to the address below. Even if you do not have input, please submit your name to be included on our mailing list. You may copy this book yourself! In the U.S.A., the book can be ordered by writing to the address below (a suggested donation of \$3.00 for book rate mail delivery or a \$5.00 donation for two-day priority mail delivery will help keep this important project alive). For orders outside of the U.S.A., please write for specific instructions. If you are in an institution, you may write for a free copy.

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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 was centered in drugs in one form or another - the getting and using and finding ways and means to get more. We lived to use and used to live. 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.

Those of us who have found the Program of Narcotics Anonymous do not have to think twice about the question: Who is an addict? We Know! The following is our experience.

As addicts, we are people whose use of mind-altering, mood-changing substances will cause problems in every area of our lives. Addiction is a disease that involves more than the use of drugs. Many of us believe that our disease was present long before the first time we used.

Most of us did not consider ourselves addicts before coming to the Narcotics Anonymous Program. The information available to us came from misinformed people. As long as we could stop using for awhile, we thought of stopping less and less. Only in desperation did we ask ourselves, "Could it be the drugs?"

We did not choose to become addicts. We suffer from addiction - a disease that expresses itself in ways that are anti-social and that makes detection, diagnosis and treatment difficult.

Our disease isolated us from people, except when we were getting, using and finding ways and means to get more drugs. Hostile, resentful, self-centered and self-seeking, we cut ourselves off from the outside world. Anything not completely familiar became alien and dangerous. Our world shrank and isolation became our life. We used in order to survive. It was the only way of life that we knew.

Some of us used, misused and abused drugs and still did not consider ourselves addicts. Through all of this, we kept telling ourselves, "I can handle it." Our misconceptions about the nature of addiction included visions of violence, street crime, dirty needles and jail.

When our addiction was treated as a crime or moral deficiency, we became rebellious and were driven deeper into isolation. Some of the highs felt great, but eventually the things that we had to do to continue using reflected desperation. We were caught in the grip of

our disease. We were forced to survive any way that we could. We manipulated people and tried to control everything around us. We lied, stole, cheated and sold ourselves. We had to have drugs regardless of the cost. Failure and fear began to invade our lives.

One aspect of our addiction was our inability to deal with life on life's terms. We dreamed of finding a magic formula that would solve our ultimate problem - ourselves. The fact was that we could not use any mind-altering or mood-changing substance, including marijuana and alcohol, successfully. Drugs ceased to make us feel good.

At times, we were defensive about our addiction and justified our right to use, especially when we had legal prescriptions. We were proud of the sometimes illegal and often bizarre behavior that typified our using. We "forgot" about the times when we sat alone and were consumed by fear and self-pity. We fell into a pattern of selective thinking. We only remembered the good drug experiences. We justified and rationalized the things that we did to keep from being sick or going crazy. We ignored the times when life seemed to be a nightmare. We avoided the reality of our addiction.

Higher mental and emotional functions, such as conscience and the ability to love, were sharply affected by our use of drugs. Living skills were reduced to the animal level. Our spirit was broken. The capacity to feel human was lost. This seems extreme, but many of us have been in this state of mind.

We were constantly searching for the answer - that person, place or thing that would make everything all right. We lacked the ability to cope with daily living. As our addiction progressed, many of us found ourselves in and out of institutions.

These experiences indicated that there was something wrong with our lives. We wanted an easy way out. Some of us thought of suicide. Our attempts were feeble and only helped to contribute to our feelings of worthlessness. We were trapped in the illusion of "what if," "if only" and "just one more time." When we did seek help, we were only looking for the absence of pain.

We had regained good physical health many times, only to lose it by using again. Our track record shows that it is impossible for us to use successfully. No matter how well we may appear to be in control, using drugs always brings us to our knees.

Like other incurable diseases, addiction can be arrested. We agree that there is nothing shameful about being an addict, provided we accept our dilemma honestly and take positive 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.

Although physical and mental tolerance play a role, many drugs . require no extended period of use to trigger allergic reactions. Our reaction to drugs is what makes us addicts, not what or how much we use.

Many of us did not think that we had a problem with drugs until the drugs ran out. Even when others told us that we had a problem, we were convinced that we were right and the world was wrong. We used this belief to justify our self-destructive behavior. We developed a point of view that enabled us to pursue our addiction without concern for our own well-being or the well-being of others. We began to feel that the drugs were killing us long before we could ever admit it to anyone else. We noticed that if we tried to stop using, we couldn't. We suspected that we had lost control over the drugs and had no power to stop.

Certain things followed as we continued to use. We became accustomed to a state of mind that is common to addicts. We forgot what it was like before we started using; we forgot about social graces. We acquired strange habits and mannerisms. We forgot how to work; we forgot how to play; we forgot how to express ourselves and how to show concern for others. We forgot how to feel.

While using, we lived in another world. We experienced only periodic jolts of reality or self-awareness. It seemed that we were two people instead of one. We ran around and tried to get our lives together before our next run. Sometimes we could do this very well, but later, it was less important and more impossible.

Each of us has a few things that we never did. We cannot let these things become excuses to use again. Some of us feel lonely because of differences between us and other members. This feeling makes it difficult to give up old connections and old habits.

We all have different tolerances for pain. Some addicts needed to go to greater extremes than others. Some of us found that we had enough when we realized that we were getting high too often and it was affecting our daily lives.

At first, we were using in a manner that seemed to be social or at least controllable. We had little indication of the disaster that the future held for us. At some point, our using became uncontrollable and anti-social. This began when things were going well, and we were in situations that allowed us to use frequently. This was usually the end of the good times. We may have tried to moderate, substitute or even stop using, but we went from a state of drugged success and well-being to complete spiritual, mental and emotional bankruptcy. This rate of decline varies from addict to addict. Whether it occurs in years or days, it is all downhill. Those of us who don't die from the disease will go on to prison, mental institutions or complete demoralization as the disease progresses. Drugs had given us the feeling that we could handle whatever situation might develop. We became aware, however, that

drug usage was largely responsible for some of our worst predicaments. Some of us may spend the rest of our lives in jail for a drug-related crime.

We had to reach our bottom, before we were willing to stop. We were finally motivated to seek help in the latter stage of our addiction. Then it was easier for us to see the destruction, disaster and delusion of our using. It was harder to deny our addiction when problems were staring us in the face.

Some of us first saw the effect of addiction on the people closest to us. We were very dependent on them to carry us through life. We felt angry, disappointed and hurt when they found other interests, friends and loved ones. We regretted the past, dreaded the future, and we weren't too thrilled about the present. After years of searching, we were more unhappy and less satisfied than when it all began.

Our addiction enslaved us. We were prisoners of our own mind and were condemned by our own guilt. We gave up the hope that we would ever stop using drugs. Our attempts to stay clean always failed, causing us pain and misery.

As addicts, we have an incurable disease called addiction. The disease is chronic, progressive and fatal. However, it is a treatable disease. We feel that each individual has to answer the question "Am I an addict?" for themselves. How we got the disease is of no immediate importance to us. We are concerned with recovery.

We begin to treat our addiction by not using. Many of us sought answers but failed to find any workable solution until we found each other. Once we identify ourselves as addicts, help becomes possible. We can see a little of ourselves in every addict and see a little of them in us. This insight lets us help one another. Our future seemed hopeless until we found clean addicts who were willing to share with us. Denial of our addiction kept us sick, but our honest admission of addiction enabled us to stop using. The people of Narcotics Anonymous told us that they were recovering addicts who had learned to live without drugs. If they could do it, so could we.

The only alternatives to recovery are jails, institutions, dereliction and death. Unfortunately, our disease makes us deny our addiction. If you are an addict, you can find a new way of life through the N.A. Program. We have become very grateful in the course of our recovery. Through abstinence and through practicing the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous, our lives have become useful.

We realize that we are never cured, and that we carry the disease within us for the rest of our lives. We have a disease, but we do recover. Each day we are given another chance. We are convinced that there is only one way for us to live, and that is the N.A. way.

CHAPTER TWO

WHAT IS THE NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS PROGRAM?

N.A. is a nonprofit Fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean. This is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs. There is only one requirement for membership, the desire to stop using. We suggest that you keep an open mind and give yourself a break. Our program is a set of principles written so simply that we can follow them in our daily lives. The most important thing about them is that they work.

There are no strings attached to N.A. We are not affiliated with any other organizations, we have no initiation fees or dues, no pledges to sign, no promises to make to anyone. We are not connected with any political, religious or law enforcement groups, and are under no surveillance at any time. Anyone may join us, regardless of age, race, sexual identity, creed, religion or lack of religion.

We are not interested in what or how much you used or who your connections were, what you have done in the past, how much or how little you have, but only in what you want to do about your problem and how we can help. The newcomer is the most important person at any meeting, because we can only keep what we have by giving it away. We have learned from our group experience that those who keep coming to our meetings regularly stay clean.

Narcotics Anonymous is a Fellowship of men and women who are learning to live without drugs. We are a nonprofit society and have no dues or fees of any kind. Each of us has paid the price of membership. We have paid for the right to recover with our pain.

Surviving against all odds, we are addicts who meet regularly. We respond to honest sharing and listen to the stories of our members for the message of recovery. We realize that there is hope for us at last.

We make use of the tools that have worked for other recovering addicts who have learned in N.A. to live without drugs. The Twelve Steps are positive tools that make our recovery possible. Our primary purpose is to stay clean and to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. We are united by our common problem

of addiction. By meeting, talking, and helping other addicts, we are able to stay clean. The newcomer is the most important person at any meeting, because we can only keep what we have by giving it away.

Narcotics Anonymous has many years of experience with literally hundreds of thousands of addicts. This first hand experience in all phases of illness and recovery is of unparalleled, therapeutic value. We are here to share freely with any addict who wants to recover.

Our message of recovery is based on our experience. Before coming to the Fellowship, we exhausted ourselves by trying to use successfully, and wondering what was wrong with us. After coming to N.A., we found ourselves among a very special group of people who have suffered like us and found recovery. In their experiences, freely shared, we found hope for ourselves. If the program worked for them, it would work for us.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using. We have seen the program work for any addict who honestly and sincerely wants to stop. We don't have to be clean when we get here, but after the first meeting, we suggest that newcomers keep coming back and come back clean. We don't have to wait for an overdose or a jail sentence to get help from Narcotics Anonymous. Addiction is not a hopeless condition from which there is no recovery.

We meet addicts like ourselves who are clean. We watch, listen and realize that they have found a way to live and enjoy life without drugs. We don't have to settle for the limitations of the past. We can examine and re-examine our old ideas. We can constantly improve our old ideas or replace them with new ones. We are men and women who have discovered and admitted that we are powerless over our addiction. When we use, we lose.

When we discovered that we could not live with or without drugs, we sought help through N.A. rather than prolong our suffering. The program works in our lives. We become different people. Practicing the steps and maintaining abstinence give us a daily reprieve from our self-imposed life sentences. We become free to live.

We want our place of recovery to be a safe place, free from outside influences. For the protection of the Fellowship, we insist that no drugs or paraphernalia be brought to any meeting.

We feel totally free to express ourselves within the Fellowship because law enforcement agencies are not involved. Our meetings have an atmosphere of empathy. In accordance with the principles of recovery, we try not to judge, stereotype or moralize with each other. We are not recruited and membership does not cost anything. N.A. does not provide counseling or social services.