

# Our Symbol

Our Symbol - submitted to WSC April 23rd, 1988 by Greg Pierce

## Introduction:

We're going to do a NA Symbol Workshop. The first time I heard this done was at a GRCNA a few years ago. The room was overfull. And what I heard was, uh, real powerful. I have it on a tape and listened to it several times. I get a good message out of it every time. The fellow who is going to do it for us is from Tennessee, and his name is Greg P. Come on up here Greg.

Greg P: My name is Greg, and I'm an addict. Hello, hello, hello. I haven't done this in a long time. I did a couple of workshops on the Symbol, what, almost ten years ago now? And it's a strange topic for a workshop because most of us skip over that page and we look at the Steps. And if we try to read it, we get confused because it's written in a manner that is confusing. I know it was confusing for me when I first saw that material. If you don't know what were talking about, this is what we're talking about right here. (Holds up copy of the Basic Text) This Symbol right here, of course, with the words Self, Society, Service, and God on it. That's the NA Symbol. It's been called our Service Symbol. There are two registered marks that we have. We have that mark and we have the logo that has the NA in it. and this symbol was designed - I guess talk a little bit about where it came from first of all - was designed in the late 60's. One of the people who helped start NA as we know it came down with tuberculosis and he was hospitalized several years as a result of the TB. At the time he had been clean 17 - 18 years, something like that. He is the one that designed this symbol and the first time it was produced as part of his physical therapy. One of the things they taught in the hospital was tooling leather. He had been a roofer. He would never again be able to work in that trade, at least not to any degree because of his physical health. And part of the hospital therapeutic process was some return. And our symbol comes right out of that - nothing any more complicated or bizarre than that. I suspect although I do not know that since not long before that there had been a lot of discussion in Alcoholics Anonymous about the three legacies of Alcoholics Anonymous, and their three sided symbol was developed; each side representing one of the three legacies of Alcoholics Anonymous: Recovery, Unity and Service are what's written on the three sides of their triangle in a circle. Ours grew out of that idea and a fourth side was added to become: Self, Society, Service and God. I personally believe and I believed for a long time that there aren't a lot of accidents when things like that happen, that there are reasons for stuff like that. And perhaps, perhaps, one of the opportunities we as a Fellowship have failed for a 4th legacy of this 12 Step movement that we are all a part of before we can even talk it, talk about it. It may be part of what NA is about. The symbol itself really kind of laid in dormancy for a long time after that. The next time the design was used, that I know of, was in the mid-1970 where it was modified to be part of an approved literature stamp. When we first started having approved literature, and we stamped the little IPs cause all it was, was the Little White Booklet. We'd stamp the stamp and it said "approved literature" and that meant that was material that the Fellowship had approved for publication. It was "official" NA literature. And that was the next time that the symbol was used that I know of. Um, it was public - the description that you see was published in 1976 as the beginning of the booklet, The NA Tree which was the first service structure document that we had. It was a thing that described a representative system that allows you to participate in NA as a whole. To be represented, to have a voice in Narcotics Anonymous, to be part of the conscience of a worldwide Fellowship. It is the service structure that makes that possible. Let me read what it says there. I believe it is almost identical to what exists today in our literature. I don't believe there are many changes in that like appeared in the Basic Text when it came out. "Our NA Symbol" "Simplicity is the keynote of our symbol; it follows the simplicity of our Fellowship. We could find all sorts of occult and esoteric connotations in the simple outlines, but foremost in our minds were easily understood meanings and relationships. "The outer circle denotes a universal and total

program that has room within for all manifestations of the recovering and wholly recovered person." The square, whose lines are defined, is easily seen and understood; but there are other unseen parts of the symbol. The square base denotes Goodwill, the ground of both the Fellowship and the member of our society. Actually, it is the four pyramid sides which rise from this base in a three dimensional figure that are the Self, Society, Service and God. All rise to the point of Freedom. "All Parts thus far are closely related to the needs and aims of the addict seeking recovery and the purpose of the Fellowship seeking to make recovery available to all." The greater the base, as we grow in unity, in number and in Fellowship, the broader the sides and the higher the point of freedom. Probably the last to be lost to freedom will be the stigma of being an addict. Goodwill is best exemplified in service and proper service is "Doing the right thing for the right reason." When this supports and motivates both the individual and the Fellowship, we are fully whole and wholly free." And that was the first description of this symbol and I had to translate that a little bit in order for it to make sense to me. And for me, this whole thing represents the Fellowship. That's us. As we grow in the Fellowship, our circle gets bigger and bigger and bigger. When I came to Narcotics Anonymous in 1970, there were perhaps 200 NA members, 2000 actively going to NA and there were 20 groups. When Vito first appeared on the scene five, six years before that, there were maybe a hundred and people would come and go. And there was not a whole lot of Fellowship. And we are talking about a Fellowship the size of the people in this room. What is that? There are a hundred chairs set up here? There were not many more NA members when I came around than can fit in this room right now. And there are meetings like this that happen on a weekly basis in cities all over the world. There are this many people getting together on any given night of the week, how many times every day? That is part of the idea that success is about this (the bottom circle in our symbol) growing. And the description talks about the relationship as the base grows - you got a little tiny base down here - you got a base here that comes up here, you got a base here that comes up here, (describing each of the four bases coming up to the point of the pyramid) As we grow in numbers, and that's what that phrase in there means, the sides of the pyramid get bigger and the point of freedom which is the top of the pyramid, gets higher and higher. So, as we grow and as we share and as we participate in this thing called Narcotics Anonymous, we contribute to each others recovery. We grow as individuals; we grow as a Fellowship. As that happens, the result is freedom and it's from that idea that we take our promise of freedom. You know, it says in our Basic Text that our promise is freedom. First of all, freedom from self, and then freedom from that part of ourselves that would destroy us. That idea is parallel to what we are talking about here, freedom as we grow. Personally and as a Fellowship, our freedom increases. The sides get stronger - Self, Society, Service and God -and those are four key relationships. One of the... I'm trying to think of when it was. I believe, in 19... I might be able to tell you, no I can't. Somewhere in late 80's, 1986 I believe, but I'm not sure. About ten years ago, might have been 1987. I was at that time involved in World Services on the Board of Trustees. I was waiting to come to a World Service Conference. (Unclear), and I woke up the morning I was supposed to fly to California with a thought about the relationship of our symbol to our Steps and Traditions. There had been talk around the Fellowship recently at that point about developing some principles of service. And this has grown into what you guys know as the Concepts of Service. And that fleshed out a third part. Actually, what has happened was somebody had taken AAs 12 Concepts of World Service and did a word substitution and passed out copies and of course that was hailed by many and objected to by many, just like everything that happens in our Fellowship. It seems like so the issue of something like the Steps and Traditions revolving around service was an issue of the times. And I had awareness about how the four relationships that it describes might relate to this thing. And the Steps are about us. It says that in our readings on the Traditions. The Steps are for the individuals. So, self relates to 12 Steps. It says in our literature when it's talking about the Traditions - we read it today. It started talking about our Society, our relationship with Society at large. It says Society has to do with our Traditions. Service, the issue at hand was service. I personally think that, and this is a very personal opinion, that the 12 Concepts that we approved in our World Service Conference, a few years ago, although they contained some very good advice and suggestions for how to do service and how to do business in Narcotics Anonymous, that they missed the point as far

as capturing the basic spiritual ideas that we have about service. There are some things in Narcotics Anonymous that I think are unique to us concerning service that to me are true principles of service that are not really covered in the 12 Concepts. And perhaps there is a 4th area that we have to look at as a Fellowship and that comes under the heading of God. And it's our unique approach to spirituality. Uh, three special were a relation to reality, each other and God. That, of course, has been mirrored, described in different places, and it is our unique approach to spirituality. Uh, there is a special way of relating to reality, each other and God. That, of course, has been mirrored, described in many different places but we have a real experience that maybe we have a responsibility one day to share. I hope we as a Fellowship can take up that challenge that perhaps there is a 4th area that needs to be explored and developed. As I went through and became more and more aware of the Steps, I felt part of the symbol. My understanding has grown and changed just like all of us happened. I don't know about you but when I first came around, I was convinced that I was messed up because of the drugs and my life was messed up because of all the weird stuff I did and was strung out and if I could just kick and clean up, then everything would be ok. Also, like most of us, shortly thereafter, I learned it wasn't true because I kicked and cleaned up and everything wasn't ok. I learned a little bit more about that thing we call the powerlessness of addiction and our lives having become unmanageable.

## **SELF: THE TWELVE STEPS OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS**

The Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous are a specific method of recovery from the disease of addiction; they are our philosophy of personal recovery. They are the basis of our program; "a set of principles written so simply that we can follow them in our daily lives". As N.A. members, we strive to follow this way of life, and in so doing find freedom from active addiction. By living the Steps we tap into and unleash a power greater than ourselves that transforms our lives.

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

Addiction is a disease that we can either die from, or learn to live with; the choice is ours. This disease is one of obsessiveness and compulsivity; it is physical, mental and spiritual in nature. We don't have to accept anything on blind faith or in theory to work this Step; we only have to be honest, accept the reality of our lives, what our drug use has done to us, and the impact we have had on the world around us. We are addicts and we have addiction, this creates contradiction and unmanageability in our lives. Addiction implies a distorted perception of reality and an abnormal reaction to people, places, and things. We are never cured, but we can recover, "Just for Today".

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

All our great ideas and all our best efforts to moderate, abstain from using, or get help for our problem eventually failed; we found no lasting relief from our addiction, no cure. Our basic approach to living was by manipulation, control, and "Self-will"; these not only failed, but usually made things worse. We realized that we could "no longer function as a human being, either with or without drugs". At this point we can only seek help from beyond ourselves, from something greater than ourselves, from some spiritual power. Most of us begin by realizing that Narcotics Anonymous is a power greater than ourselves; in time, our concept and understanding of a Higher Power grows. We learn that every recovery is a miracle; and that only a spiritual awakening can give us balance in our lives and a healthy relationship with reality.

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

Our pasts show that we have been unable to care for ourselves and that "self-will" only ends in disaster; now we begin to depend on a loving God. We start by simply making a commitment to live the N.A. way, rather than the way we have been living. As our recovery unfolds, we are confronted with mounting evidence that there is a spiritual power working in our lives, and in the lives of other N.A. members. Our understanding of reality and our place in the universe changes; we begin to develop an awareness of a loving God. Our concept of god changes from "general" to "personal". As our acceptance of a Higher Power grows, our decision and commitment to trust in God also grows; it eventually encompasses every area of our lives. The result is freedom.

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

Two things that are clear are that we don't know who we really are and we don't know how to live successfully. Much of our pain comes as a direct result of living a life in contradiction to our moral values and in conflict with the world around us. Unless we can gain some insight into our living patterns and our morality we are destined to continue to violate ourselves and suffer. The fourth Step is an assessment of our morality and our actions; its purpose is to show us who we are, teach us what's right and wrong for us, and help us develop valid rules for living. The things we learn through the inventory process can become an important part of our new way of life, if we are willing to give up our destructive concepts and patterns; and have the desire to change.

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

Some members question the necessity for this Step after having taken a written inventory; after all, "God already knows all this stuff, I've just written it all down, and no one else can really understand because they haven't had the same experiences that I have". This Step shows us that we are not unique and teaches us about forgiveness and acceptance; from God, of ourselves, and from another human being. It removes the rationalizations and prejudices we have about ourselves and we gain additional understanding, insight, and clarity about our lives. By formally admitting the exact nature of our wrongs we are acknowledging the reality of our past and committing ourselves to a new way of life.

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

Knowing about ourselves and how we relate to the world around us is just the beginning; we now need to begin to integrate this information into our daily life. For many of us this is a difficult process. We find ourselves continuing to make the same mistakes, but now we are much more aware of the problems we are creating for ourselves. It seems that our instinctive reactions to people, places, and things, are somehow distorted, and often inappropriate. "Defective" instincts are part of the disease of addiction; we need to stop acting on impulse, but we can't do it on our own. Being powerless over our defects is very frustrating until we, once again, seek help from the loving God we have come to believe in and trust.

**7. "We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."**

Our shortcomings are the manifestations of our defects; they are the actions that are dictated by our defects. Although we are powerless over our defects; we can, with the help of God, control our actions. Humility means knowing who and what we really are and acting accordingly; not trying to be someone who we're not, and not trying to exert power and control over things beyond our power and

control. Most of us ask for God's help by praying for the removal of our shortcomings or for the strength and courage not to act on our defects. Each time we can abstain from taking defective action (shortcomings) our defective instincts (defects of character) lose a little of their power. With time, this new way of responding becomes more natural and our instincts become more spiritually correct.

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

An important part of the recovery process is gaining freedom from our pasts. We carry a burden of the harm we've done, our past misdeeds, and the wrongs we've done to others into our recovery. In order to stop paying for our pasts in guilt, remorse, and low self-esteem, we need to take positive action; we need to make amends. We begin by putting down on paper all those we have wronged, including ourselves, and specifically stating the harm we've done to them. This helps us acknowledge and take responsibility for our past actions. For most of us, it is difficult to find the motivation to actually make the amends; after all this can be very humbling. In order to find the willingness we call upon our need to change the way we live, our commitment to recovery, and our desire to be free.

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

This is one of the Steps that we should not attempt alone; we have found that it is extremely important to get guidance before we make any amends. There are times when amends are inappropriate, there are times when they do additional harm, and there are times when an amends might be motivated by our own selfish needs rather than a desire to take responsibility for the harm that we have done. Amends can come in many forms, the most important of which is changing the way we live. With the advice of our sponsor, we attempt to make our most pressing amends first. If we trust in God, opportunities will be given to us when we need them, and the results of our efforts will be fruitful. Amends are made in order to find freedom, not to make the person we have harmed feel better or so they will forgive us. Amends are not just words or deeds they represent an active change in us and a commitment to recovery.

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

Self-awareness is a very important part of recovery; it helps us stop creating problems in our lives. Most of us approach this Step in three ways; one is by taking time at the end of the day to review what has occurred during the day, another is by writing about a specific aspect of life or recovery, and a third is by monitoring ourselves throughout the course of the day. We look at our motives, our actions, our reactions, our focus (past, present, future), and our relationship with our Higher Power and the world around us. Most of us, in learning about ourselves, develop a set of criteria with which to measure these things. When we find that we are drifting away from "recovery oriented living" we quickly take corrective action to avoid accumulating "wreckage in the present". We stop living in the problem and start living in the solution.

**11. "We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out."**

Pivotal to our new way of life is our relationship with God; ongoing recovery requires ongoing spiritual growth. This Step describes the basis of N.A. spirituality: an active, God centered, approach to living. We have found that we can only focus on our Higher Power in the present; if we are obsessed with the past or the future there is no room for God. With practice, prayer and meditation link us with our Higher Power. We consciously orient ourselves toward God and learn to depend on

spiritual guidance and direction rather than our own intelligence. N.A. does not prescribe any specific rituals or methods to make contact with God, we encourage each member to find and practice whatever works the best for them. Awareness is also a form of spiritual communication; we speak to God through our actions, and God's will for us can be revealed by other people and by the events which occur in our lives. We believe that our lives get better as true spirituality awakens, evolves, and grows in us.

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

Our steps are a spiritually based formula for living that allows us to be free from active addiction and the bondage of self. They assault all three aspects of our disease; the physical, the mental, and the spiritual. The key is the awakening of spirituality within us; this can only occur in the absence of obsession and compulsion. "There is no freedom without responsibility", and ours is to carry our message of hope and deliverance to others who suffer from this disease. Recovery is what we try to express in our words and our actions; but the strongest statement that we make is the way we live. We can only present what we have found for ourselves. Every aspect of our lives is a statement about our recovery; as our ability to apply these Steps improves, the message of our recovery grows richer and stronger. We are the message of recovery from the disease of addiction.

### **SOCIETY: "THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS"**

"We keep what we have only with vigilance, and just as freedom for the individual comes from the Twelve Steps, so freedom for the group springs from our Traditions." Although the Traditions were designed as guides for our groups, the principles underlying them are applicable to the individual in their search for spiritual growth. The Traditions express the basic philosophy of our society; how we, as N.A. members, relate to each other within our groups; how N.A. groups relate to each other and to N.A. as a whole; and how we, as a fellowship of members and groups, relate to the world around us. They are not rules; but rather, expressions of spiritual principles which by their very nature are immutable and nonnegotiable. They are the ties that bind us together.

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

Concerns about what's best for "us" instead of what's best for "me" are foreign to most addicts. We know that our lives depend on changing "I" oriented thinking into "we" oriented thinking. We will need to set aside "I want", "I will", and "I won't"; and accept the unmanageability of our lives. The group is precious to the individual and the individual is precious to the group. The welfare of the group is essential, since without fellow addicts to identify with, learn from, and share with very few of us could find or maintain recovery. We escape the isolation of our addiction by becoming a part of a greater whole. Our concern for the welfare of our group springs from the simple fact that "I can't, we can".

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

In recovery, we develop morality and a conscience; we use these as a guide for our actions and help us make our decisions. We utilize this same principle when we gather together in the group setting. Group conscience is the collective understanding of, awareness of, and surrender to spiritual principles within the group; it is the basis of our decision making process. As individuals we are many things; as members of an N.A. group we are all equal. The idea of personal power contradicts our principles. We each have an equal voice in our group decisions, no one member is more important

than any other member. To be considered special, better than, or more important is a "death sentence" for an addict; it feeds our self obsession and separates us from the group. In N.A., leadership comes from within the group; we are all leaders when we serve.

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

Addicts come to Narcotics Anonymous for many reasons; those who stay have, or develop, a desire to stop using and live "drug free". Just being an addict, wanting to be clean or attending N.A. meetings is not enough to make someone a member of our program. An N.A. member is an addict, who demonstrates a desire to stop using "drugs", and who has chosen to recover in Narcotics Anonymous. We say that "an addict is a man or a woman whose life is controlled by drugs". We demonstrate our desire to stop using by making an active effort to abstain. For our purposes, we define "drugs" to be any substances which we consciously ingest because we want to change our perceptions or alter our mood. Specific "drugs" are not our problem; we suffer from the disease of addiction. Our first Step says "powerless over our addiction"; not powerless over drugs, or just powerless over addiction. Our lives are proof that the N.A. program is a power greater than addiction.

**4. "Each Group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other Groups, or N.A. as a whole."**

Autonomy protects our fellowship and our groups; it means to be independent and free from outside influences or entanglements. Each N.A. group is a unit unto itself, and can survive on its own. The problems that face one group should not be a threat to, or have a major impact on, other groups. A group should exercise their autonomy by seeking ways to better fulfill their primary purpose, but not as an excuse to do whatever we want. There are limits to our autonomy; it is not a license to deviate from the principles of Narcotics Anonymous; any actions that compromise our Traditions affect the rest of our Fellowship. We are linked together by principle; autonomy is the basis for creative freedom, it should never be used to separate us from each other.

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

Whenever we come together as a group, we each have a responsibility to help maintain the integrity of our purpose. There is great power in purity of purpose, it binds us together; without it we would splinter into many isolated subgroups and lose the unity upon which our lives depend. In N.A., we say that "we get what we come for". This means that if we come to N.A. to please someone, get out of trouble, find a job, socialize, find friendship or a lover, find a place to stay, or whatever, we are likely to get these things; however, implied in this saying is the warning that unless we come to N.A. for recovery we will not get recovery. As individuals we may have many personal causes, opinions, projects, prejudices, and purposes; but as N.A. members, we set these things aside and focus our efforts on helping the newcomer find recovery from the disease of addiction.

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

We are Narcotics anonymous and if we are to survive we must maintain our integrity. Our principles come from many sources, both recent and ancient; however, our application of those principles and our approach to recovery is unique. Early in our recovery we learn that we must identify ourselves and commit ourselves to what we believe in; principles and recovery. This is true for the individual and this is true for the group. Our Fellowship needs to avoid becoming entangled in the affairs of others, aligning ourselves with others, and being dependent on others; we must "stand

on our own". This Tradition has been a source of controversy between those who are fully committed to Narcotics Anonymous and those who are not; it describes actions which could easily degrade our autonomy, and the consequences that are likely to occur if we do.

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

N.A. members support Narcotics Anonymous; it is a right, a privilege, and a responsibility of membership. Support comes in many forms, including cash donations, personal effort, active participation, and emotional commitment. Giving of ourselves without selfish motives is a new experience for most of us; self-sacrifice is foreign to addiction. By contributing to our Fellowship, in any way that we can, we begin to feel like and really be a part of Narcotics Anonymous. This feeling of belonging is precious to us, who have always felt separate. By financially supporting our services, we can both fulfill our personal programs, and insure direct responsibility. Being autonomous means being self-supporting; if we accepted outside contributions we would entangle ourselves in the affairs of others. The Seventh Tradition is part of the promise of freedom that is our heritage as N.A. members.

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

Narcotics Anonymous works because of one addict helping another, in anonymity and empathy. There can be no "professional" N.A. members; we are not specialists and do not get paid for caring about each other. N.A. can never be, and should never be a business; however, within our services there is a need for workers with special skills and abilities. This Tradition provides that we may employ professionals in our service centers, working on the behalf of Narcotics Anonymous, but separate from Narcotics Anonymous. Special workers do for us what we are unable to do for ourselves; they are necessary but, in terms of recovery, they can never take the place of the individual N.A. member. It is absolutely essential that we maintain the spiritual integrity of our fellowship and our groups; if we fail to do this, then many addicts will die needlessly and Narcotics Anonymous, as we know it, will cease to exist.

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

Recovery is a spiritual experience, with its foundation in surrender. Organization implies management and control; the antithesis of surrender. The Tradition makes it possible for us to take care of our "organizational needs" without losing our focus on recovery. It allows us to establish a "service structure", made up of working boards and committees, to help us communicate and function more successfully. The purpose of our "service structure" is to do those things for our groups which would disrupt their "atmosphere of recovery" or distract them from their "primary purpose". We create and direct our services, our boards and committees exist only to serve us, and are strictly accountable and responsible to us. When we provide the physical, financial, and emotional resources necessary to fuel our "service structure", it takes care of our "business" so we can concentrate on recovery.

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

Unlike most programs designed to help addicts, Narcotics Anonymous believes that the only way that we can learn to live with the pressures of society is by remaining within society. The "real world" issues, causes, prejudices, and concerns; for each of these there are different points of view and



different sides. If we align ourselves with any particular position, regardless of its merit, we automatically alienate ourselves from part of society and enter into controversy. Controversy breeds closed mindedness, and alienation is a symptom of our disease. We must avoid any action or statement that would make it more difficult for any addict to find freedom from addiction. We can not afford to become involved in outside issues, they separate us from society, and could divide us or distract us from our purpose; we must maintain our unity and continue to be a haven for the addict seeking recovery.

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

We say, "This is a program for people who want it, not for people who need it". This relationship extends into our relationship with society. There are many addicts in society who desperately need recovery, and it would be wonderful if we could bottle, package, and sell it to them all. However, recovery is not a tangible thing. It is, instead, a spiritual experience, an awakening, surrender, and an acceptance of spiritual principles in our lives; it can never be marketed or sold. Our way of life speaks for itself, freedom from addiction is something that the addict who still suffers dreams about in secret. None of us is a perfect example of recovery; "I" can never clearly or fully represent our message, but "we" can. By not individually identifying ourselves to the general public we protect the integrity of our message of recovery, we protect ourselves from the trap of false pride, and we protect our Fellowship from being perceived as the extension of one personality.

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

The principle of anonymity is part of the foundation that Narcotics Anonymous has been built upon. It literally means "without name" or "without identity and personality". We practice anonymity by setting aside all those things that we use to judge, discriminate, and separate ourselves from each other. In N.A., we are all equals and welcome one another as "family". This is the only place in the world where people love and accept us because of who we are, rather than in spite of who we are. We believe that there is God in each of us, and that this is the anonymity. When we can recognize this and act accordingly we demonstrate respect. When we push each other away we're really pushing God away, and when we don't respect each other we're really showing disrespect for God. Anonymity protects us from this, takes the focus off our differences, and lets us see the similarities. "I" has a personality, but "we" have principles; "I can't, we can".

## **SERVICE: THE CONCEPTS OF SERVICE OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS**

This "Concepts of Service" is a statement of fundamental principles that we rely on as the basis of our efforts to provide service and support for our groups, as they strive to fulfill their primary purpose; and for our members, as they strive for personal recovery. They are drawn from experience and the verbal tradition that has grown over the years. They express the principles that should guide our service boards and committees and the ideal relationship between service boards, service committees and N.A. members.

**1. "Service is a Spiritual Principle."**

It is through giving freely of ourselves that we receive. In N.A. we believe that service does not equal recovery, but rather that service is an integral part of personal recovery. It is one of the ways that we fulfill our ninth, eleventh, and twelfth Steps. We have established a participatory service structure where the opportunity to serve is both a privilege and right of Membership. The right to

serve is guaranteed to each of us; however, the way we choose to serve depends on our desire and abilities. Some members are wonderful as trusted servants, while others flourish best in the one-to-one services we give each other. Through service, we begin to feel better about ourselves and find meaning for our lives.

**2. "Service should be inclusive not exclusive."**

We believe that all N.A. members have a responsibility to serve in some way and something positive to offer the addict who still suffers. There are many ways to serve; they include carrying the message, sponsoring, setting up a meeting hall, being a group officer, being part of a committee, chairing a conference or convention, and everything in between. We actively strive to involve as many members as possible in our service efforts. Individually, we do not claim credit for the results of our service, each of us contributes our small part; we understand that, ultimately, it is a loving God working through us that makes it possible for us to achieve our goals. God makes the results of our service greater than our individual efforts.

**3. "Our services are initiated and completed by our members."**

Part of being an N.A. member is being of service, our program is based on this. When we find a service beyond our individual ability we pool our efforts and our resources. Members, aware of a need beyond their combined ability, establish service boards or committees to fulfill that need. Our service structure, therefore, begins and ends with the member; it is a closed loop. Our members begin the process with an idea of what needs to be done, or could be done to help fulfill our primary purpose. Our service boards and committees are responsible for implementation of the idea, which is finally achieved by members working directly with the addict who still suffers. Without the member there would be no service and no need for service.

**4. "Our service is for the addict who still suffers."**

We believe that the N.A. member is the most important part of our service structure. "The therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel." The N.A. group provides an "Atmosphere of Recovery" where the N.A. message is manifest. All the other elements of our service structure have been created to assist, support, and serve our groups and members in the fulfillment of our primary purpose, and are directly responsible to our groups and members. We believe that the "point of delivery" of our service structure should be as close to the recipient as possible; our service structure was designed to reflect this principle.

**5. "Our Service Structure is only a tool."**

Our Ninth Tradition tells us that we create service boards or committees; we call these boards and committees, and the way that they relate to each other, our "service structure". Its purpose is to do those things for our members and Groups which might compromise their spiritual integrity or distract them from their primary purpose. We try to keep the "recovery" aspects of N.A. separate from the "business" aspects of N.A. The "business" of N.A. begins in the Group and is carried through the rest of our service structure, which is neither separate from nor strictly a part of the Narcotics Anonymous program. Because our service structure is only a tool, it is only as effective as the members who use it and take care of it. A tool does not work by itself, and only has meaning in relationship to the job it is designed to do.

**6. "The principle of Practical Spirituality is at the heart of our service."**

Spirituality is not theoretical; spiritual principles only work for us when we accept them and apply them. Our eleventh Step teaches us to seek knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry

that out. We discriminate between "self-will" and "God's will" by applying this principle. We believe that if it is not practical then it is not spiritual; "self-will" is like swimming upstream and "God's will" is like swimming downstream. When our service efforts encounter significant problems or resistance, they are usually based on "self-will"; when they proceed smoothly and naturally, they are usually "God's will". A loving God is at the center of our service and this God has the power to make all things possible and practical.

**7. "The resources we need to fulfill our service projects will always be available when the time is right."**

We believe that God gives us opportunities when the time is right. If a service project is spiritually correct then the finances, manpower, and emotional support necessary to complete the task will be available. These things have never been a problem for us when the service project we were working on was in keeping with God's will for us as expressed in our group conscience. It is only when we try to make things happen the way we want that we experience failure; when we let them happen in their own way and in their own time, we succeed. Our service is like our recovery; dependent on the same spiritual principles and the same loving God.

**8. "Our service should be simple and straightforward."**

Ongoing recovery is a process of simplification and likewise in our services we should strive for simplicity. "This is a simple program for complicated people." Our natural inclination seems to be to complicate any project, think it to death, get overwhelmed, and give up. If our service efforts are in tune with God's will then they do not need to be complicated. When service is in harmony with God's will it is automatically in tune with reality and there is no need for secrecy, dishonesty, manipulation, or complicated schemes; the spiritual correctness of the service and our willingness to follow through is all that is necessary for success.

**9. "All service should be open and aboveboard."**

Communication is inherent in the principle of direct responsibility; open information and full accountability are implicit in our approach to service. Secrecy is part of our disease, when we were active in our addiction it seemed necessary; but in recovery, it is a contradiction to our principles. "In our secrets, lies our sickness." In order to maintain the integrity of our services we openly monitor our motives and inventory our methods. When we maintain our focus on our "primary purpose" and keep our actions consistent with spiritual principles then we have nothing to fear, and nothing to hide from each other.

**10. "The services we provide within our Service Structure should always be guided by principle."**

"True spiritual principles are never in conflict" and the spiritual principles embodied in our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions should be respected and maintained throughout our services. Our Twelve Steps literally apply to the member seeking recovery, our Twelve Traditions literally apply to our Groups, these Concepts of Service literally apply to our Service Structure, and our Spiritual Tenets literally apply to our relationship with reality. However, the "spirit" of the Steps, Traditions, Concepts of Service, and Spiritual Tenets apply universally. Surrender to, awareness of, and application of spiritual principles are necessary for us to survive, grow, and provide service based on God's will.

**11. "Selfless service is our ideal."**

The disease of addiction is our greatest strength because it brings us together, it is also our greatest weakness because it tends to tear us apart. Our disease is one of obsessiveness and compulsivity; it is physical, mental, and spiritual in nature. We recognize that there is a direct relationship between quality of service and personal recovery. We stress the need for each member involved in service to keep their personal recovery (physical, mental, and spiritual) as their first priority. When individuals get distracted by their disease, fail, or fall short in their service we treat them with compassion and love rather than rejection, exclusion, or punitive action. We strive for progress and do not demand perfection of each other.

**12. "Ultimately, our service projects are in God's hands."**

We trust in God. Trust is a key principle for us, and essential in our service efforts. The trust that N.A. members give those who serve is equal to the trust that those who serve have in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous, in spiritual principles, and in God. As individuals, we trust our will and our lives to the care of a loving God. Our Groups trust in a loving God as their ultimate authority. Likewise, in our Service Structure we trust a loving God as the source and strength of our service. Trusting in God does not relieve us of the responsibility to take appropriate action. God gives us opportunities, we follow through with our effort, and God takes care of the results. All we are, all we have, and all we do is in God's care.

**GOD: THE SPIRITUAL TENETS OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS**

Recovery depends on the awakening and growth of spirituality, and our lives depend on our relationship with what we believe is the source. The Spiritual Tenets express some of our most basic ideas about spirituality in Narcotics Anonymous. They are the foundation upon which our Steps, Traditions, and Concepts of Service are built. They make possible our individual and collective surrender to, and dependence on a loving God of our own understanding. They are the keys to our freedom.

**1. "There are no "Good days" or "Bad days" there are just days."**

In Narcotics Anonymous we live "Just for Today"; we acknowledge, and let go of, our painful pasts and trust the future to the care of a loving God. In recovery, absolutes lose their meaning; we find that all things in life are a mixture of good and bad, of positive and negative. We begin to look at the events and situations in our lives as opportunities or gifts from God; each one is of value and provides a chance for us to learn and grow. We believe that each day we are given a reprieve from our active addiction; and that it is only our attitudes and our actions that limit our recovery.

**2. "There is a spiritual power greater than any individual."**

Personal power has proven to be a complete failure for us, human effort has not been able to cure our addiction or keep us from destroying ourselves, and our only hope for salvation seems to lie in a spiritual power. Our Steps are designed to awaken, develop, and maintain a relationship between us and a Higher Power. When we use the term "God" we are referring to a spiritual power that is loving, caring, and greater than ourselves. This power has the ability to care for us, restore us to

sanity, and set us free. We also believe that there is a "God of our Fellowship" that we each personalize according to our perceptions and beliefs; it is this God that protects our fellowship, helps it grow, and makes recovery possible for the addict who still suffers.

### **3. "Faith is the key to our new way of life."**

In recovery, we come to depend on a power greater than ourselves rather than our own resources. Faith is composed of belief, trust, and acceptance. Belief is the lowest form of faith, it is conceptualization. Trust is the application of belief in our lives, it is action based on what we believe. Acceptance is the highest form of faith; it is instinctive rather than conceptual. In recovery we reach a point where we no longer need to know the "why's" and "wherefore's"; our actions become appropriate without the need for conscious thought. Our instincts change from destructive and misguided to constructive and spiritually correct. Recovery is a natural way of life.

### **4. "Narcotics Anonymous is a spiritual program, not a religion."**

Spirituality is the relationship a person has with what they believe in. A religion presents a specific concept of a deity, a specific code of ethics, and a specific method. In N.A. we believe, unconditionally, that all members have a right to their own religious beliefs and concept of a higher power. N.A. is inclusive rather than exclusive. Each of us follows our own path based in spiritual principles; we believe in believing and have faith in faith. Our fellowship is based on learning how to apply spiritual principles in our daily lives; coming together for mutual support and care; and one addict helping another through sharing, sponsorship and service. Narcotics Anonymous recovery is something that happens within the individual; it is the way we live; we are Narcotics Anonymous.

### **5. "Narcotics Anonymous is based on spiritual principles."**

There are basic spiritual truths that are universally correct; they are not dependent on time, place, personality, or circumstance. "Our program is a set of principles, written so simply that we can follow them in our daily lives." There are many spiritual principles expressed in our literature; honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness are the most basic and make change and growth possible for us. The active application of spiritual principles is the basis of recovery from the disease of addiction. "There is one thing more than anything else that will defeat us in our recovery that is an attitude of indifference or intolerance towards spiritual principles."

### **6. "True spiritual principles are never in conflict."**

We believe in a loving God as our ultimate authority and as the source of spiritual principles. By definition, something that is universally correct can not be true sometimes and false at other times. One aspect of God is harmony, and there can be no disharmony or contradiction between principles that are spiritually centered or "God centered". Actions that are spiritually correct can not violate any spiritual principle; when our actions violate any spiritual principles, they are not spiritually correct. We utilize this basic truth as a guide for appropriate action and decision making in Narcotics Anonymous.

### **7. "What goes around comes around."**

This program saying is an expression of the principle of reciprocity and is fundamental in our way of life. Recovery is a reciprocal experience: we get out of it what we put into it, we reap what we sow, people treat us the way we treat them, and the way we live determines the way we live. If we base our lives on dishonesty, disrespect, destructiveness, closed mindedness, negativity, and selfishness then we will be miserable; if, on the other hand, we base our lives on honesty, respect, caring,

willingness, open-mindedness, positive action, constructive effort, and love then we will be happy and at peace. A life based on the active application of spiritual principles is its own reward; we become part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

#### **8. "Recovery is a spiritual journey."**

"We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection." The purpose of our way of life is recovery from the disease of addiction. In order to achieve this we must grow spiritually. We often say "Work the Steps", by this we mean live the N.A. way; approach life by utilizing a set of directions based on spiritual principles. We change the way we live by following a new set of instructions, we do not change the instructions to fit the way we want to behave. We believe that we never fully complete the steps and that "Living the Program" means we apply the principles of recovery to every area of our lives on an ongoing basis.

#### **9. "Recovery is based on Divine Intervention."**

When we share our experience, most of us relate a series of unplanned events that led us to find recovery in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. We believe that these events did not happen by chance; but rather that they represent evidence of a loving God intervening in our lives. If we live by spiritual principles we are always given what we need and never given more than we can handle. This happens with such consistency that, in time, most of us find it hard to deny the presence of a Higher Power working in our lives, and in the lives of other N.A. Members. As our ability to depend on God increases, God's presence in our lives increases. The degree to which we surrender our will and our life to the care of a loving God is equal to the extent to which we are freed of our disease and our self-destruction.

#### **10. God works through people: "I can't, we can".**

We call Narcotics Anonymous a "we" program, and believe that if we are left to our own devices we will continue to destroy ourselves. According to our literature, addiction is progressive, incurable, and fatal. We are powerless over our addiction; we cannot recover simply by our own power of will, we need each other. "An addict alone is in bad company" and isolation is a symptom of our disease; only by mutual support and interdependence do we recover. God works through each one of us once we surrender. We find we are given words beyond our understanding and talents beyond our ability. We express our trust in God by depending on each other; and by caring for each other we are offering ourselves as an extension of God's grace and love. "One addict can best understand and help another addict."

#### **11. "Recovery is a series of surrenders."**

"Surrender means that we do not have to fight anymore." The internal battles that have raged within us for many years are set aside in our recovery. We are free to become who we are and no longer have to live in contradiction to our inner nature. We begin to recover by letting go of the contradiction between the reality of our addiction and the illusion that we are in control of our using and our lives. Surrender is inherent in each of our Steps; and each time we consciously work a Step we make another surrender. Each time we surrender it goes a little deeper and the burden is lightened a little bit; ongoing spiritual growth implies an ongoing series of surrenders and the search for a better relationship with God.

**12. "The promise of recovery is freedom."**

In Narcotics Anonymous we are given a choice and a chance to be free of active addiction and the limitations of self obsession, self-hate, and self-destruction. We often talk about a choice, but sometimes forget that there is more than one choice. When we deny an addict the right to reject our way of life, then we also deny them the opportunity to choose our way of life and have a chance to recover. Recovery and freedom are not automatic; they are contingent on our choice, our commitment, our courage, our willingness, and our ability to apply spiritual principles in our daily lives. We never have to use again against our will; we can be free. Thank You for My Life!